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The needs of play in children with disabilities. An Italian research

Tamara ZAPPATERRA*, Paola PISANO**

Abstract

The article presents a research developed collaterally within the framework of the European research project “LUDI. Play for Children with Disabilities” (<http://ludi-network.eu/>, 2014-2018). One goal of the project is to provide guidelines on play for children with disabilities. To reach this goal, first of all the needs of users have been investigated through an empirical research conducted by two semi-structured questionnaire addressed to representatives of disability associations and parents of children with disabilities. The article reports briefly the theoretical framework of the research, the results of the survey at european level, and more in- depth the results of a research conducted by the Special Education group of research at University of Florence with the same methodology at disability associations of Livorno, in Tuscany (Italy). The results are similar to those of European research: it emerges that the needs on play of children with disabilities are the same regardless of the type of disability and the context in which the children live.

Keywords: Play, Disability Play, Users' Needs, Parents, Association.

1. Main concepts of Cost Action “LUDI. Play for Children with Disabilities”

The European research project “LUDI. Play for Children with Disabilities” (<http://ludi-network.eu/>, 2014-2018) is a Cost Action that integrates 100 researches, professionals and users from 32 European countries, who come from different research areas: education, psychology, sociology, engineering, occupational therapy, speech therapy. The final goal of

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the Action is actually to create a common perception and knowledge of widespread practices on the theme of play for children with disabilities (COST, 2013).

But the innovative part of the project concerns its main concept: the play for the sake of the play, that is an end in itself, according to Garvey (1990, p. 4) "Play is a range of voluntary, intrinsically motivated activities normally associated with recreational pleasure and enjoyment"; not the play used for educational, rehabilitative or therapeutic purposes, as we usually mean for the children with disabilities.

We start as well from the assumption that all children have the right to play and that the play of children with disabilities is a right enshrined in the UN "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (CRPD, 2006, art. 30). In order to see this right realized, it is necessary to systematize theoretical and methodological aspects of the play for children with disabilities. This is why the researches and professionals of the project was organized into specific Working Groups (WGs):

Working Group 1 - Children's play in relation to the types of disabilities

Working Group 2 - Tools and technologies for the play of children with disabilities

Working Group 3 - Contexts for play of children with disabilities

Working Group 4 - Methods, tools and frameworks for the development of the child with disabilities' play.

At the moment the Action produced:

- a theoretical study of the characteristics of the play in relation to the different types of disability (Besio, Bulgarelli & Stancheva-Popkostadinova, Eds., 2017);
- a systematic review of literature concerning the barriers in playing, with an analysis of the environments in which they can arise: home environment, educational settings, the built environment, the natural environment (Barron, *et al.*, 2017);
- an users' needs report on play for children with disabilities, with the non-mediated opinions of representatives of the associations for disability, and parents of children with disabilities, and, to a lesser extent, the children themselves (Allodi Westling & Zappaterra T., Eds., 2018, *in print*).

In the article we present one of the tasks managed by Working Group 4 that is to gather information about the children's experiences and needs concerning play. In the European

research the survey was the aim to have a snapshot of the needs, disregarding the type of disability, about the wishes, constraints, suggestions, challenges that the users' needs perceive.

2. Methodology and main results in European research

The survey on user needs on play for children with disabilities at European level was conducted by members of “LUDI. Play for Children with Disabilities”, Working Group 4, under the supervision of Serenella Besio (University of Bergamo), Chair of the Action, Pedro Encarnação (*Catholic University of Portugal*), Vice-chair, and Mara Westling Allodi, Leader of WG4 (*Stockholm University*). The WG4 Deliverable has been published: Allodi Westling M. & Zappaterra T. (Eds., 2018, *in print*). *Users' Needs Report on Play for Children with Disabilities. Parents' and children's views*. Berlin/Warsaw, De Gruyter.

Through an empirical research conducted by two semi-structured questionnaires we investigated the needs of children with disabilities in the play. One questionnaire was addressed to the representatives of the most important associations of disability, or family associations of disability; the other was addressed to parents of children with disabilities.

The structure and issues of the questionnaires are similar, but the version for the parents contained more open questions. The identification of questions to ask the representatives and parents has been driven by the knowledge that the Action “LUDI” wants to have a large and triple impact:

- scientific, on the recognition of the right to play for children with disabilities, and on the adoption of measures to allow the exercise of this right;
- societal, training parents and professionals to become proficient at interacting with children with disabilities in order to give them the chance to learn and grow through play;
- technological, planning and designing technology products and tools for play by expanding the number of people able to use them and also improving their competence.

From Associations of families 75 questionnaires were collected in 24 countries and from parents of children with disabilities 129 questionnaires in 26 countries. The

responses were analyzed by detecting the percentages in the closed questions and by a content analysis in the open-ended questions.

The answers of Association's representatives indicate what is most important are peers, societal attitudes and behaviours and supportive adults. And then, for quantity of responses, more time, adapted or special environments, policy measures and financial resources, outdoors environments, indoor environments, toys, improved skill of children, high tech tools.

The children with disabilities do not have the same opportunity to play: in terms of relationship: the playmates, peers, friends are the need largest reported in the questionnaire of both Associations and parents; in terms of toys and spaces: they reported need to adapted toys, accessible toys to loan, association resources that have appropriate spaces; in terms of cultural and educational perspectives: facilities and trained staff, parents' creativity, purposeful planning. They emphasize the importance of a more general educational training about the play of both parents and professionals.

We have cataloged the needs in terms of facilitators and barriers, according with World Health Organization (ICF, 2001):

- *facilitators*: adapted toys, association resources, accessible toys, parents' creativity, purposeful planning;
- *barriers*: children's characteristics, physical barriers: accessibility and usability, the lack of toys and the lack of not specifically adapted games, natural and structured environments.

Very similarly, the parent's view of child's needs about play indicates what is most important are peers, and then, for quantity of responses, adapted toys, high tech toys, a competent adults (facilitator, mediator, model, with skills), to have fun, improved skills, outdoors environment of play, time to play, societal attitudes and behaviours, policy and resources.

The children's experiences of play were as well reported by the parents when possible, by mean of an interview with their child. The direct voice of users has been thematised as activities and events; partners in play; emotional states; agency in play; evaluations; places. From this part of the research briefly the results are as follows:

Play emerges in the children’s’ experiences as meaningful and pleasant activities that they can engage with, in which they observe, communicate, share and experience participation in social relationships.

Play is an activity in which they feel positive emotions as joy, happiness, relax, fun, excitement.

Play is also empowerment for the children: they may also experience agency as they can decide and have power when they play. In the evaluation theme, several children expressed that they wanted to play for more time, to have more options and adaptations, and to overcome barriers and limitations.

3. The Italian research about users' needs on play for children with disabilities

The survey about users' needs in play for children with disabilities is addressed in Italy especially to four different associations in the city of Livorno: “AIPD Livorno”, “Autismo Livorno”, “Volare Senz’Ali”, “Disabilandia”.

The survey covers a heterogeneous field of disabilities: in this way we permit to give importance to each disability, examining a larger panorama.

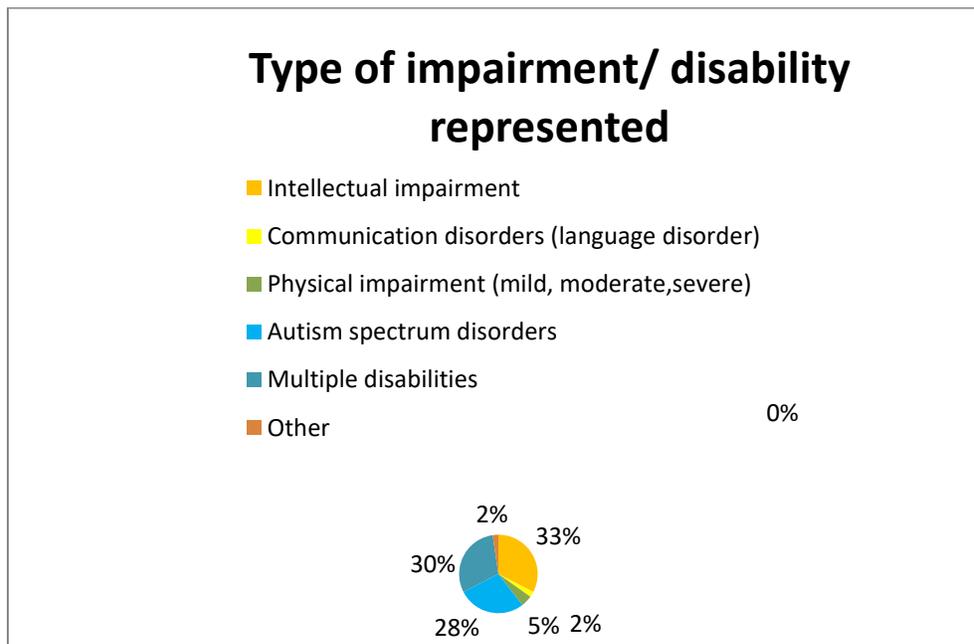


Fig. 1: Types of disability (percent) reported by the Parents’ Association that participated in the survey (N=43).

Result from the research among Representatives of Association

It is possible to understand the play's importance in the disabled child's life, analysing the results emerged from the research of the representatives of the associations.

The first question asks the referent if children with disabilities have enough opportunities to play, according to their special needs: no representative answered "Yes, a lot". This data clearly represents the conditions of the disabled child's play, which is not fully developed as it should. One of the representative underlines that often a child needs an adult for playing, and usually the parent has not got the possibility to prepare an adequate context to play, so frequently the time spent in the association is the only one in which the child can play.

In response to the second question, the survey asks if the representative thinks that parents are happy with their children's play. Only one representative out of four answers "Yes", the other representatives reveal that problems of inclusion still exist, and they reveal that it's easier to organise activities within the association rather than in another setting, because professional figures and special environments are needed to take care of disabled children in the best way possible.

At the third question, every representatives answer that the play "for play sake" is very important because it consist in building up relationship and developing contact to other people. This is a right of every child because it increases the quality of life, it makes humans alive.

The fourth question asks to fill a table asking what could help a child with disabilities with the play. Eleven different needs have been reported (toys, high tech tools, peers, time, adapted or special environments, indoor environments, outdoor environments, a knowledgeable adult, policy measures, financial resources, improved skills needed for play, social attitudes and behaviours, other), in which each Representative expresses the degree of importance correlated to the disabled child play.

The needs underlined as "very important" are the following: peers, adapted or special environments (to share with peers and usable by disabled children), a knowledgeable adult, policy measures, financial resources, improved social skills.

The need underlined as "important" are the following: special toys, time (referred to parents' time to play, or referred to the time that the child needs for a specific activity, that

can be more than the time used by a child with a typical development), adapted or special environments, indoor environments, improved skills needed for play.

The fifth question asks to the representative where and with whom usually the children of the association play. The table considers several contexts to complete, divided in indoor environment and outdoor environment and different categories to evidence with whom the child usually plays (alone, alone in presence with peers, peers, parents, family members, other adult).

The representatives of the association answer that in the indoor environments children usually play with peers (for example at the school with classmates), with parents, or with other adults (educator), in the outdoor environments children usually play with parents.

The last question asks to the representatives of the association if during their experience they found improvements within the last five years in the play of children with disabilities, as changes in toys, high-tech tools, indoors environment, outdoor environment, educator, rehabilitators, adult, peers, society in general.

The survey underlines that there are been lots of changes in these fields: high-tech tools, behavior of the educators and rehabilitators, behavior of peers.

4. Results from the research among parents of children

The second part of the survey is addressed to parents of children with disabilities. The parents answer to several descriptive questions about the disabled child's play.

The parents, who answer to the Ludi Cost survey, are 43. This number is significant to immortalize the needs and the habits of the children with disability of the city of Livorno.

Every parent that answered to the questionnaire has got Italian nationality. The 84% of the children are boys, the 16% of the children are girls. This data is interesting, because it makes us reflect about gender differentiation in boys and girls' play, since most of the reviews are based on data prevalently coming from males.

The age of the sample is twelve years and half. The first question requests the parent to write three thoughts/words that come to his mind when thinking about the play of his child. Parents describe the main play activity of the children (water, amusement park, constructions) or the quality that characterize the play (speedy, creative, bizarre). Later the questionnaire invites parents to give a motivation about their choice. In this field, the

importance of the play in the children's life clearly appears: the parents are aware about the fundamental role of the play moment. The questionnaire asks then where and with whom the children generally play. At this question half of the parents answer that their children play indoor (at home or at school), the 42% of the children plays both indoor and outdoor, only the 7% plays mainly outdoor. The children's company is heterogeneous: the 39% plays with parents or other adults, the 35% plays with peers (friends, brother/sister), the 26% plays alone.

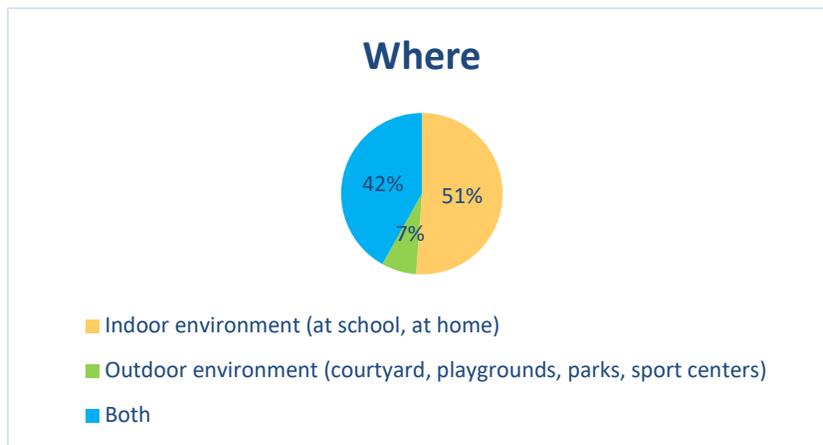


Fig 2: Types of place (percent) reported by the Parents' Association (N=43)

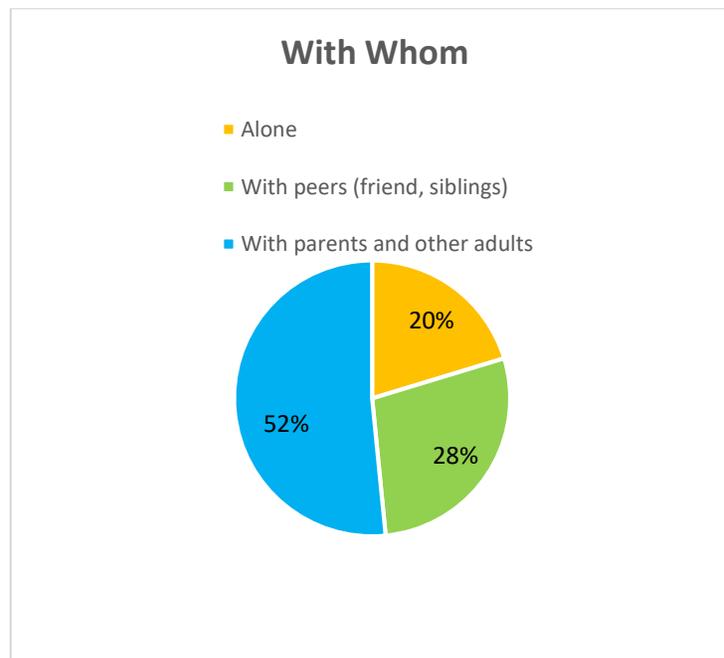


Fig 3: Types of company (percent) reported by the Parents' Association (N=43).

The fourth question asks which are the needs of children so as to play better. This question represents the heart of the research and gives the possibility to make reflections, and it gives the possibility to suggest potential change on the thematic of play and disability.

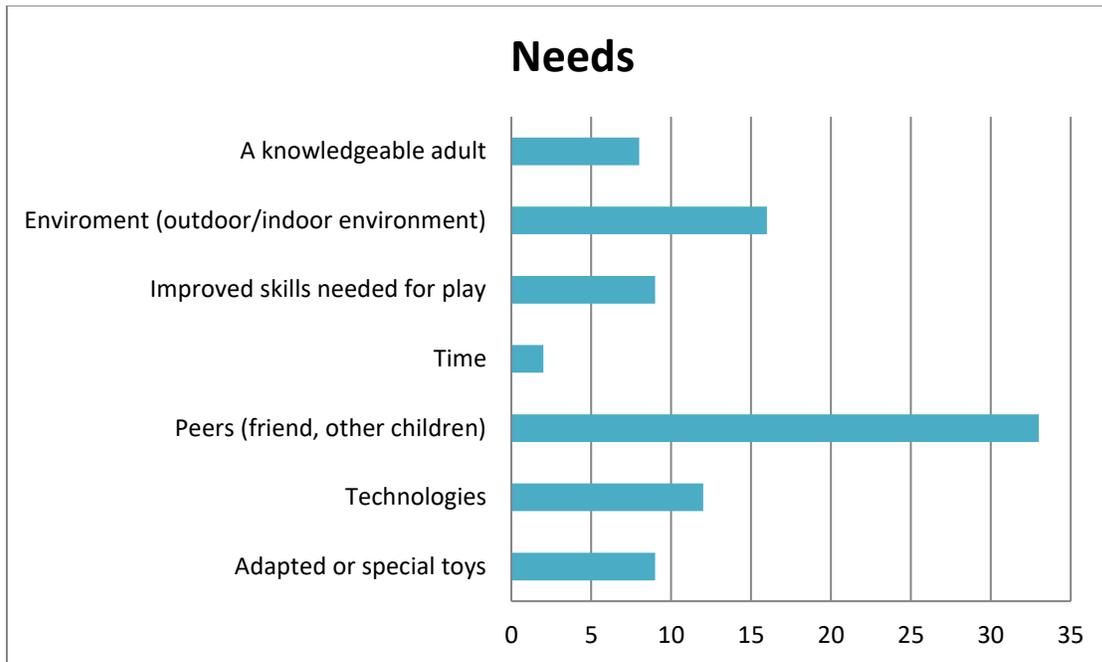


Fig 4: Need (percent) of children with disability in order to play more or better reported by the Parents' Association (N=43).

Most parents say that, in order to play better, children would need playmates. This need can shed light upon a current lack of awareness of disability, although there have been considerable changes compared to the past. The importance of a playmate, of a friend with whom they share the precious playful moment, makes us reflect on how much sociality and relationship with the other are basic needs of the human being, who feels completely alive together with the other.

Other important needs that have been recorded include: spaces and technologies.

Regarding the spaces, a new awareness of the construction of environments without architectural barriers developed (which allows everyone to access to public areas), while about the technologies, significant benefits, derived from the potential of this tool, has emerged and, in some cases, they are able to compensate or minimize deficits or limitations of the child.

Furthermore, the need of special or adapted games and the improvement of skills and trained personnel is reported by the parents, to improve the game of their child. Special toys, since they guarantee special care and attention to details (for example, safe toys, easily manipulated and hardly destructible). Improvement of the skills of the child towards the playmates, respecting the rules, permits a better inclusion in the play. Finally, the need of trained personnel who accompanies the child, a person who pays attention and care, and who creates the social context close to the child himself.

Only 2 parents out of 43 reported the need of more time on their part, because they, submerged by the daily routines between work and therapy, have little time to devote themselves to play with their child. In the cases presented, children with disabilities have a lot of time available and this is often used in anything concrete. The present comment is emblematic in explaining this phenomenon: "Time is just what the disabled child does not need. The disabled child is bored!! Surely there are no internal or external spaces designed to fit him, to make the game and the meeting with the other easier. If it wasn't so, the social inclusion, at the present moment delegated in large part only to the school, would benefit greatly. Special technologies and adapted games are welcomed. There is also a lack of trained/specialized personnel who facilitate the approach to play and to relationships".

It is then asked how much time the child dedicates to the game: 43% plays more than two hours a day, 23% between an hour and two hours, 34% less than an hour.

Finally, the last question in the questionnaire aims directly to children and questions them on the subject of the game: what they like to play, where, with whom, how, how they choose their toys, how they feel when they play, how important it is to play, what they would need to play better. This section is also very important since it gives a voice to the young to express their needs and what they feel about this issue.

37% of the children represented is not verbal and could not answer this question. The children who answered the last question represent the game as a very important activity of their life, which gives color and fun. There are different answers but they all let us understand how the play is fundamental for their life, because it makes them feel alive and allows them to free their passions and their beings, far from moments of rehabilitative care or school learning, but with the only purpose of feeling good in the here and now.

Conclusions

It was interesting and useful to investigate the results that emerged from the completed questionnaires because, although they do not reflect the global reality in its entirety, they represent a minimal, but precious photograph of the context of a circumscribed reality. It allows us to highlight how, how much and when the children with different disabilities benefit from the play and which needs are essential to develop it in a more appropriate way.

In the analysis of the “Ludi” questionnaires, the inclusion of playmates is the pivotal need that has been reported by parents and referents.

Sociality in the activity of playing is one of the indispensable factors that cannot be forgotten, since play consists also in relationship with others.

The crucial role reported by parents and referents regarding the sharing of the play with the *au-pair* reminds us how much it is necessary today to promote inclusive way of thinking, which will be essential to allow the child with disabilities to play, an aspect of life of central meaning, in which differences are welcomed and appreciated.

The results of Italian research coincide with that conducted by Ludi at the European level: the needs in play of children with disabilities are the same and there are no differences compared to the types of disability and the national context of life.

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Therapeutic Fairytales or the Way to Find (Again) our Smile by ... “the tomcat’s eyes”

Adia CHERMELEU*

Abstract:

The hermeneutics of fairytales, understood as a new way to get their deep significances and therapeutic effects on children by the process of psychic conflicts awareness, represents a frequent topic in the current researches, a real source of inspiration for those delivering literature for children or for those using fairytales for therapeutic purposes, either in case the children with special problems, or in individual or group psychotherapy of adults. Based on the experience in teaching fairytales at the specialization Pedagogy of Elementary and Preschool Education, and at two of the activities of the reading group, Books Mirrors, of the Department of Science of Education within the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology of the West University from Timișoara, this article is a reflection on the therapeutic size of fairytales and of the didactic implications arisen.

Keywords: imaginary, imagination, metaphor, unconsciousness, therapeutic fairytales, logotherapy, identity construction

One upon a time...

Many years ago, we had neighbours two students who were living with their grandfather, already quite old. Every time I met him, we used to chat for a while, he answered me reverently, with a good-natured smile, always asking me if students “today” learn anything at all. One morning, I asked him how he spent his time, what he was doing up to the time his grandchildren come home from college. He answered in a good vibe tone: “I read stories every day”. “Do you reread your childhood stories?”, I wondered, knowing him to be a cultivated man, with many and various readings. “Yes, but I get them differently now”, my neighbour told me, looking at me serenely – *significance* of which I would only

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understand much later. In years, when I started teaching literature for children at the West University, I noticed the special interest my students had for stories, that each of them had a story from their childhood awaking emotions in them, they identified, telling it as their own life story.

The imaginary – the shadow meeting place

The current interest for fairytales continues a long literary tradition, seeing that almost all the great writers of the world, from Goethe, to contemporary authors, inspired in their works from the universal thesaurus of the folkloric fairytales or were seduced by the idea to create themselves *stories for children* of all ages, therefore contributing to the thematic and artistic diversity of the genre. Considering fairytales superior to other genres, the Romantics are the first to have underlined the modern features of such literary genre: getting away from reality by beginning phrases transposing us in a magical universe, as well as referring and coming back to reality by breaking the illusion operated by the ending phrases, the ambivalence of the characters, going against banality and standardization of everyday, begun by the reign of *figures and numbers*, Novalis used to impose to poetry and love.“ Additionally, due to the world we live in, with many ecological threats and standardization, with a life rhythm pushing us further and further away from nature, harmony and interiorizing, in the western freedom of the last two decades, the interest for fairytale seems to have become therapeutic. Therefore, we explain the success of Michael Ende’s books or of the Harry Potter series, which come back to traditional moral ideas, not didactically, but committed, by combining witchcraftery with the state of the art technique” (Ana StancaTabarasi, 2006, p.51).

The fantastic, miraculous and magic are the features of the universe of fairytales. Pedagogically speaking, Jean Piaget has already shown that the borders of the children’s universe are vague, uncertain, oscillating between the real and the imaginary, between animated and unanimated, among people, animals and supernatural characters, due to such reason, fairytales represent a cross-border vehicle in time and space, in a world speaking a special language, addressing not only to the reason, but also to intuition, Onirism, imagination, a world of fiction by which the child starts understanding the family relations or discovering the world around them. the profound symbolism of fairytales regards first of all the dimension of the human affectivity, the unconsciousness, where many hopes,

dreams, with fears and anxiety come from. Fairytales have greatly answered all the human hopes and fears: tenderness, love, longing, fear of the dark, abandon, mourning, envy, evil, cruelty. "All children have felt such fears, ever since the world existed. They live them day by day and, little by little, learn how to deal with them and to overstep them, understanding that life can be loved beyond them" (Dr. Alain Brochard, 2016, p.2). Starting with oral tradition and up to the modern era, adults and children have discovered the world and with the help of fairytales, of narration, in general. In its own way, the little school age child related to the world of the adults, to family and to the people around them by fairytales and are easily identified with the characters in the stories told by adults. By the fairytales told by adults or read by themselves later on, the evil of the world is bearable more easily, as the good, even long-term, has always defeated the evil, familial tensions find easier their settlement, and interior conflicts fade away or disappear by the richness of reflection topics offered by the fantastic narration, so similar but also different from the real world. Not least, the pleasure felt by the child "breathlessly" following the development of the events from the fairytales makes them sensitive to the music of the language of a "fairy tale" world, where dragons, griffins or monsters starts being similar to the favourite toy, they can handle, dismantle or even make it disappear, like the hero they identify themselves with, most of the times. This is how they explain the fact that in the last two-three decades, along philologists, more attracted to the intertextuality of fairytales, specialists in pedagogy, psychologists and psychiatrists, philosophers and anthropologists, individually or in interdisciplinary teams, have studied the beneficial effects of fairytales on the cognitive, social or behavioural development of children and not only.

Fairytales hermeneutics, understood as a new method to understand their deep significances and therapeutic effects on children by the raising awareness process of psychic conflicts, represents a frequent topic in the current researches, a true source of inspiration for those teaching literature for children or for those using fairy tale for therapeutic purpose, either in the case of children with special needs, or in individual or group psychotherapy for adults. The work having generated this new approach of fairytales seems to have been the book of the American psychologist B. Bettelheim, *Psychoanalysis of Fairy Tales* (1978), translated in many languages. According to the trend initiated by S. Freud and continued by many contemporary or post-Freudian psychoanalysis experts, the

central idea of the analysis of fairy tales in B. Bettelheim's vision, is that, in a precise moment in his or her life, the "patient" will find in the fairytales he or she fed his or her imaginary, *his own solutions*. "The therapeutic effect consists of a process of reconstruction, of imagination, not transposition. Therefore, there is no need for a child to be made attentive on the similitude of his or her situation to that in the fairytale, on the contrary, we noticed a need to put down such defence processes, in order to allow things to act in the shadow, without over-explaining the truth"(B.Bettelheim, 1976, p. 49).Even if he was reproached a certain anachronic vision on fairytales and their educative value, by the fact that, up to the 17th century, they addressed to adults, "Bettelheim's merit is to have popularized their pedagogical and therapeutic values, having shown the way how fairytales help the child *give a meaning to life*, by directing acceptable representations of the anxieties containing them"(Catherine Picard, 2017, p.7).

Sheldon Cashdan, psychology professor at the Massachusetts University, Amherst, continues the road opened by Bettelheim by an inedited book, by his "deep and fun style": *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales* (2009), translated in Romanian and printed by the Trei Printing House. Using the "seven sins of childhood", as unifying topic of fairytales, Cashdan shows the "way fairytales help children face envy, greed, vanity and other annoying tendencies" (2009, p.11).The Trei Printing House has also published in Romanian two books belonging to one of the most famous authors in the field of therapeutic stories, George W. Burns, clinician psychologist, manager of Milton Erikson Institute of Western Australia, trainer and conference speaker and associate professor: *101 Healing Stories for Children and Teens* (2011) and *Healign with Stories* (2016). Burns' books are based on cases retold by some of the best contemporary psychotherapists, who describe fairytales role as a change vehicle, the way metaphor can "short-circuit"the psychic resorts of adults or children suffering from depressions, anxiety, panic attacks etc.

Humanitas Printing House published in 2008 *How to Heal with a Story*, book signed by Paola Santagostino. Not only listening or reading stories is a self-knowledge and healing instrument, the idea of the book is centred on *creating stories*, therapeutic act one can get out in the light ideas from his or her unconsciousness generating solutions to problems impossible to settle reasonably. The unconsciousness, this mysterious baggage of the human being, can hide as many monsters as heroes. As we know it, the topic of any

fairytale is the fight between good and evil, where heroes are presented in clear tones, no grey nuances, or at least, this is the way they are perceived at a first reading. The protagonist– Făt-Frumos, Prince Charming, Snow White, Harap-Alb – represents the ideal image of the author, in the case of that inventing a story, the aware self. The one opposing the good character is as well part of the author, representing, in Jung's term, the *shadow*, aspects they are less aware or they do not desire / cannot admit. The author, the one writing / creating a story, child or adult, gets separated by fiction from the unwanted elements of their personality, elements they may notice, detached, later and get beyond them in real life.

Without being so didactic in his analyses, Sheldon Cashdan tells us the same thing: “An evidence that the dwarfs actually represent a part of Snow White is shown by the objects in their household. Not only the table is covered by a *white* tablecloth, but the beds are also covered by *snow-white* blankets. It is as if Snow White had arrived, in the little house, to a manifestation of herself” (Sheldon Cashdon, 2009, p.80). even more, we know that Snow White does not take into account the advice of the dwarfs – maternal models, symbols of the good mother. “Do not talk to strangers!”, they tell the child, “Do not let anyone unknown enter the house!”, that is, the type of things mothers tell their children when left home by themselves. As most of the children, she ignores their advice every time she lets her step mother enter the house, therefore undergoing terrible danger, from the same reason she fed her queen mother's criminal intent: vanity. The cord for the corset she wants needs to make her look better. “One of the ways fairytales amplify the psychological impact is that localizing the “sin” from the story both in the person of the witch, and in that of the main character. For a fairytale to have a durable effect on the young readers, the hero and the heroine need to undergo the same feelings like the witch: they need to be tempted by the same temptations. Otherwise, the “sin” from the story may be interpreted as alien to the child, something only the witch is suffering from. Feeding the reader's identification with Snow White and showing her preoccupation for her looks, *Snow White* leads the reader face his or her own inclinations towards vanity” (Sheldon Cashdon, 2009, p.82-83).

The books described above, especially Sheldon Cashdan's book, *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales* were object of several debates with my students, within one of the activities of the reading group of the Department of Sciences of Education. My

students' interest for the psychological approach of fairytales with therapeutic valences was seen by original comments and a deep understanding of the multiple possibilities to capitalize the fairytale in educative activities. Most of the students said they were very surprised at the beginning of the reading of the "courage and inedited" of the analyses from a psychological and psychoanalytical perspective, in order to understand, while reading on, the actuality of the fairytales, the capacity of the fantastic to generate the understanding of reality and the overriding of psychic conflicts. Below, for such purpose, only one of my students' conclusions: "Hope lightened us today, discussing about why and how "the witch must die". The author, Sheldon Casgdan, has the epiphany of the initiated one, who warns that the language of any fairytale contains multiple meanings, the hermeneutics of stories talks about the labyrinth of reality, giving the read an unexpected Ariadne's thread. Every man has a witchcraft (fear, envy, hate, laziness, greed, vanity etc.) which needs to die. *The Books Mirrors* look at us once more the way we look at the world" (Iulia Sârbu, student in her 2nd year, PIPP).

Therapeutic Fairytale – Language Development and Identity (Re)Construction

In Romania as well, more and more psychologists and psychotherapists use therapeutic fairytales for children and teens in order to improve, together with their parents and teachers, some of their light behaviours or disorders. Laura Jacan, psychologist-psychotherapist within the Adorcopiii – Comunitatea Familiilor Adoptive Association (<http://adorcopiii.ro>) says that the role of therapeutic stories is to put the child in touch with his or her own problems, by identifying him or her with certain characters and by transposing the solution from the story in his or her own situation, which process does not occur in the very first moment, but after interiorizing and processing. By the magic of metaphor from the world full of colours and imagination of the stories, the child will know what to take out of it, without feeling criticised, corrected or summoned to change. Revealing and mediator of psychic life, by simplifying the situations, the fairytale allows access to the unconscious primary processes, having the capacity of "transition space" between inner and outer reality, a life creating space which "communicates, suggests, but does not name" (Winnicott, 1971, p.6). For all the children, but especially for those inner world of which is not sufficiently structured or "suffering from important symbolizing difficulties", the fairytale acts on the preconsciousness, a bridge between the

unconsciousness and the consciousness, allowing the subject to think and dream, to find imaginary answers to the questions asked, related to his or her origins or future (Catherine Picard, 2017, p.2). Like any literary-artistic work, fairytale is the expression of human imagination, of the creation and representation capacity. Psychology proved, related to disharmonic, psychotic, faulty children that they often suffer from an imagination fault and from figurability which can be reinstated in movement by the fairytale specific fantastic narration: "Fairytale is the representation and narration of the processes of psychic reality; the material operating with includes dream, phantasms, familial novel, representation of psychotic and neurotic mechanisms for defence, conflicts related to the understanding of gender differences, of painful passing rites of birth, childhood and adult age, up to the death of parents and children" (R.Kaës, 1999, p.3).

The passing rites are presented in all the fairytales. Symbolically crossing the forest, as sacred space, metaphor of the unknown and of the dangers hidden, the evidence the main characters are subject of, condition of the initiation and acquirement, usually, at the end of the fairytale, of the kingdom or hand of the emperor's girl represents the compulsory steps of any initiation. In many fairytales – *The Story of the Pig*, *Jacques and the Beanstalk*, *Little Thumb* – even the weakest or less endowed with exceptional qualities can succeed, and their success will inspire successes in the real world of those having been informed on such space of fiction. Cognitive psychology and neurosciences showed that imagination, considered as opposed to the reason for a long time, does not only limit to the capacity to create images, on the contrary, it is a faculty of the mental allowing it to issue reasoning and reflections on the world. This mysterious power of the human nature "is a human faculty acting every moment of our lives, starting on the moment the brain becomes active. Due to imagination, the people were able to create language, to appoint and describe the world (...) Imagination can be defined like an intermediary faculty between feeling and thinking, statute allowing us to connect objects and consciousness" (Orane Bischof, apud Yves Chazeau, 2009, p.3).

The access to imagination makes possible the meaning construction and the freedom of language, topics which generated a series of psycholinguistics studies and logotherapy methods, having the purpose to develop the thinking of children suffering from language and communication problems. Some studies underlined the higher efficiency of these

methods at the level of the group of children which, as related to relations and affections, show a higher mobility in the game of interactions. Within group logotherapy, “children may experiment a *passive statute* or an *active statute*. Therefore, an inhibited child shall not be all the time front and centre. On the other hand, a very confident child may face the need to respect others’ space (...) More, at cognitive and social level, the group allows the children to think together with the others, to exchange ideas which can be approved, nuanced or contested”(Sandrine PrazPetteloud, 2008, p. 155).

The narrative structure of fairytales follows a coherent organizing of the content, by placing the action in time and space, by describing a conflict between imaginary characters, a rigorous chronology of the development of events and finding solutions to settle conflicts. By listening and then telling a fairytale, the child interiorizes this structure, faces communicational situations and syntactic structures – verbal times, types of phrases –more and more complex, memorize words, phrases and new expressions, discovers the pleasure to listen to stories, developing as well the representation and imagination capacity, by detachment from reality, symbolization of space and time, verbalizing emotions. Meanwhile, the fairytale stimulates “the child’s decentration, creating a game of perspectives which can make him or her get in other’s shoes and find something of themselves in another being”(Elena OtiliaVladislav, 2015, p.25). Most psychotherapists recommend the child to be encouraged to create his or her own fairytale, to allow them to see symbolic elements which describe the child’s difficulties, conflicts and the latent potential to settle them.

Conclusions:

Without setting up to be a psychologist or therapist, the activity to teach fairytales at the literature classes in the academic education, the philologist professor cannot ignore the therapeutic size of fairytales and their role in the development of children. The main feature making a story be therapeutic is that it transmits behavioural models and values, by symbolically representing the self-fulfilment, an archetypal content with obvious effects at the level of the unconsciousness. MirceaEliadewas talking about the *myth of initiation* developed by the narrative structure of stories, Bettelheim analyses the *maturation* process, making stories, while newer studies prefer the Jungian concept of *individuation*, when related to the essence of fairytales(PompiliuAlexandru, 2016, p.154).

Karl Gustav Jung “describes individuation as the individual process by which the individual creates him or herself and gets distinguished. It is a *participation*–Plato style– of the self to the Self archetype (...) “a mystery we shall never find, a suite of successive deaths binding the person in *limit* situations leading at the end towards a *self fulfilment*” (C.G. Jung, 2001, p. 115). Anthropologically speaking, we need to deal with a cultural process of *identity reconstruction*, for each and every fairytale, like legends and myths, belongs to the cultural patrimony of a continent, of a country, of a region or era. Either it’s about adults, children, in general, or children with special problems, the fairytale is a cultural mediator and a catalyser of the human being becoming in the world, always looking for the meaning of their existence, with the others.

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Education of young people and children as a way of fighting against Internet hate, a form of cyber violence

Marek GÓRKA*

Abstract

Due to highly innovative technologies such as the smart phone, cyberbullying and on-line aggression have increasingly affected individuals across the world. Cyberbullying is defined as repeated unwanted, hurtful, harassing, and threatening interaction through electronic communication media. The anonymity and mobility afforded by the Internet has made harassment and expressions of hate effortless in a landscape that is abstract and beyond the realms of traditional law enforcement. Further, it argues that a broad coalition of government, schools, police and citizenry is likely to be most effective in reducing the harm caused by hate speech. The study discusses the targets of hate on the Internet, provides a framework within which problems can be identified and resolved by accentuating moral and social responsibility, and articulates possible solutions to combat this increasing problem.

Keywords: cyber bullying, digital aggression, Internet, online bullying, online protection, young people.

1. Introduction

The e-world of many opinions is expanding more and more, just as the access to the Internet is. Unfortunately, this world of electronic opinion is the so-called e-world of hate, which is being used by almost all social groups, regardless of age, level of education, sex or place of residence. Hate appears in every field of life; it is present not only on gossip websites but also in politics. It has also forced its way into scientific and literary discourse.

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It is present in comments on human tragedy, where one would expect serious behavior and being compassionate towards others. It is worth mentioning that the Polish society is not much different in such behavior as it is not a matter of a specific country. Hate is visible almost worldwide. Verbal aggression in cyberspace is also used by young people (Whittaker, Kowalski, 2015).

Most Internet users encounter hate, i.e. malicious, unfair, often vulgar language. More and more cases of hate-based offences are reported to the police. According to police statistics, these offences very often meet the criteria of a prohibited act – stalking (harassment, sometimes even threats, sometimes insults). The police seizes given websites and data carriers in order to present the evidence in court. Virtual hate is aimed not only at politicians, celebrities, journalists, bloggers, public figures but also at average Internet users (Olweus, 2012).

2. The aims of analytical research as a part of cyber safety education

On the basis of discussion, also present in mass media, a question arises: which institutions should deal with this problem? Should these be the police, the prosecutor's office or maybe the educational facilities or perhaps the academic world? How to react to these hate phenomena? When might a young person become a victim of hate? What form of schooling and social education can help minimize this phenomenon? This paper shall try to answer the questions stated above.

The article comments upon a part of the results of a project entitled „Education for cyber safety” introduced in upper-secondary schools. The analytical research dealt with a wide notion of cyber threats present in a group of pupils and students learning in West Pomerania Province schools in Poland, and was also part of cooperation of many public institutions. The interaction of academic society, the police and school employees is an opportunity to compare and exchange information about the efficiency of actions for minimizing threats in cyberspace.

Apart from many dangers which appear in cyberspace, the results of research have shown the presence of aggressive and hateful content used by young people on the Internet. This research is, therefore, an attempt at reaching young people's minds

(especially those people who experienced hate both as victims and assaulters). The knowledge gained (especially from the latter group) is a result of various surveys and individual interviews conducted. The friendly and open cooperation of school employees has proven to be very helpful as they shared their knowledge about victims of hate in cyberspace and they let them be interviewed. A vital part of research is the contact with young assaulters who were putting aggressive content on the Internet. The information on those people was handed in via school counselors; the assaulters were also interviewed and surveyed. The feedback obtained allows building up a certain motivation background which made those young people use Internet aggression and it helps selecting the main causes of this phenomenon.

Education for cyber safety plays a major role in prevention. Its aim is to make young people aware of how malicious Internet hate is. Of course, it is not the only element enhancing education for cyber safety and acting against Internet hate. Education for tolerance is also important, because people who are in some ways different than others are most often subject of hate (Gradinger, Yanagida, Strohmeier, Spiel, 2015).

The goal of classes conducted in schools was making young people aware of what hate is and how they should react if they experience it. This kind of knowledge might be of help for the teachers who prepare various classes on cyber safety.

As the statistics show, 40 percent of students claim to have observed hate online; massive hate seems to be especially dangerous. We may speak of cyber violence when a young person is attacked, particularly by his or her peers, and when his or her appearance or skills are negatively judged. Young people see themselves through the eyes of their peers and that is the problem which sometimes leads to tragic consequences.

Hate on the Internet is an issue which the state has not dealt completely with. Prosecutors happen to react on various occasions, especially when there are cases of racial hatred. Monitoring the Internet is very difficult, though.

In the fight against hate speech on the Internet, close cooperation between Internet users and the state is necessary. With today's technical possibilities, locating the offender is not an issue. The data gathered at the county police headquarters in West Pomerania Province show that the number of reported cases and „guilty” verdicts increases. This fact might be treated as a positive sign that the social feeling of impunity among Internet users

will be less intense and that the arrogance allowing certain individuals write virtually everything on the web will be gone (Banks, 2010).

3. Definition of hate on the Internet

Hate is a universal problem among all humans and it evolves in a very dangerous way. Just a few years ago it was something embarrassing. It was believed that people express their extreme opinions on the World Wide Web because of its anonymity; nowadays people do that not only under their real names but they add and expose their real photos, too. Hate became completely open. The line of embarrassment, which surrounded extremely hateful opinions, was crossed (Rafferty, Vander Ven, 2014). It is worth considering when and why this line was crossed. One could see the gradual process of social assent to hateful behavior on the Internet, thus making it „legitimate”. Victims of Internet hate are unable to defend themselves which leads to expansion of hate over the Internet.

But hate came out on streets, too. What seemed to go unpunished on the Net (even if haters would put their real names under their posts), now found its ground in the real world. Therefore, expressing extreme and aggressive views on the Internet encourages people to use hate in reality (Jaishankar, 2008).

People who express their extreme opinions and find their own followers on the Internet are able to see more of their kind; they are able to channel their hatred towards one, common direction. World Wide Web facilitates communication making it easier to gather and demonstrate while using hateful slogans prohibited by Polish law. The Internet constitutes a kind of a network for such behaviors. It is also worth mentioning that through expressing hatred people satisfy one of their basic needs – the need of being accepted. The innate element of human nature is the fact that negative messages draw people’s attention more (Perry, Olsson, 2009). What also needs to be said aside is the fact that political campaigns are great examples of how easy it is to gather citizens „against” rather than „for” a given cause.

Social networks form groups of people whose main idea is to show and prove their own superiority over others. The other factor – following the efforts of boosting their self-esteem – is conformism which comes from the need of being accepted by people of similar views and interests. Therefore, hate is not just a fad. This phenomenon is quite deeply

rooted in culture and in human way of reacting to the environment. For if a man feels helpless, he searches for a way of venting his frustration, anger and dissent from the current reality. Hate is a typical social phenomenon; it is a group process, because the man is a social animal. Hatred is present where groups of people are, or where people try to find out who is „one of us” and who is „one of them”. It is natural for dislike to appear, but it may take the pathological form of hate (Guichard, 2009).

If a group of people agrees (one way or another) they do not like somebody or something, it is very probable that their lack of acceptance will lead to hate. The final stage of each process of hating is the desire to annihilate the hated person. Fortunately, the Internet-based hate is rather far from exercising that final stage most of times, but there are cases of suicides resulting from being hated (Campos, 2013).

The fight against negative phenomena on the Internet is a question of managing groups in such a way they would not base their actions on negative attitudes and reactions. Criticizing is not wrong as long as the expressed opinion is not a hotbed of a group process. If that happens, though, there may appear a group which has its own symbols, identity and is almost sure to attack verbally. Then, from the verbal and symbolic stage it may move forward to the physical attack stage. The result of such situation is a very strong group which finds a very weak victim and, one way or another, destroys the victim ultimately. And the Internet only facilitates that because anyone can influence the content shown on websites (texts, movie clips or cartoons). Thus, hate may take the form of images (these can be memes, pictures) or movie clips with appropriate commentary. It appears, then, that when it comes to hate, only the sky's the limit (Cohen-Almagor, 2011).

Internet hate can be an introduction to hate speech, which is understood as a way of promoting or justifying certain content towards a given person or group of people as far as race, color of skin, nationality or ethnic background is concerned (Meddaugh, Kay, 2009; Klein, 2012). Thus, this phenomenon concerns certain groups or social categories. Those two aspects, hate and cyber violence, can be linked together as more and more frequently there appear in Polish schools students of different color of skin or ethnic background. It may appear that such people can be more prone to hate as they are more distinctive, focus aggressive behavior and become scapegoats. The roots of hate may also be found in

attitudes presented by adults – children hear how their parents talk about people of e.g. different race and simply repeat what they have been taught.

Hate can be perceived by its victim in many different ways – for a given person these can be vulgar insults, for another a single, negative comment on a social network website. Where is the difference between criticism and hate, then? Is all criticism hate? Criticism is expressing one's opinion with the use of arguments, while hate is plain judging with the use of insults. The results of commentary analysis on the Internet show that there is a relation between calling something „criticism” or „hate”, depending on who is judging – if we are being criticized by „them” then it is „hate”, and if we are being openly hateful towards „them”, we usually call that „criticism”.

4. Causes of hate

The recent flood of hate is clearly visible. A dozen or so years ago the Internet content was not as full of hate and violence as today. Discussion beneath the articles was substantive and significant, message boards were friendly, but nowadays there are more users who criticize the authors of given pieces of news. Hate is nothing new, it was present in public life long before the Internet was born. Such hateful way of expressing one's opinion became easier because users think they can remain anonymous on the Internet (Brown, Bellinger, 2000).

What is the main cause of hate? As the survey shows, the main motive (7 out of 10 people) for hating is the opportunity to relieve the tension and getting rid of frustration. Half of cases of aggressive behavior is aimed at random people. The other reason for hate speech in cyber space is the desire to hurt and humiliate people. We need to mention the so-called „cockpit effect” while we talk about such mechanisms of hating. The person hating other people cannot see the victim and his/her reactions; 6 out of 10 haters said they would have stopped their assaulting, if they had seen the suffering of their victims. A similar effect can be observed in the case of a car driver who would insult other drivers more, if he/she sat inside the car rather than do it face to face. It appears that cyberbullies are not aware of the consequences of their actions and thus they feel even more motivated.

Four answers by ex-haters are especially disturbing. It seems that inability to see the victim's reactions is not the only reason why hate spreads throughout the Internet. On the

contrary; in the case of the above mentioned four assaulters, research shows that they feed on reactions and suffering of their victims. They do it to get satisfaction which appears when they know their victim is hurt.

The increase in verbal violence also results from haters' helplessness. It is, thus, a way of fighting for being respected in their environment. This can be done in a face to face confrontation or in a safer way – via the Internet, where they cannot get hurt physically.

In a way we can observe a similar phenomenon among adults. A group of frustrated people is getting bigger, they cannot cope with the pace of life and the goals life sets for them. These are not people worse-off or poorly educated – they are only, for some reason, dissatisfied with their lives. They try to make their personal images better by hurting other people, so those other people are weaker too and do not stand out from their „crowd” (O'Dea, 2013).

If hate speech is aimed at ethnic minorities, then some people start to believe that the language mirrors thoughts and social attitudes of a given group. Sometimes hate is a way of gaining power over the other group of people, a form of justifying their worse position (on ethnic or religious grounds). Lack of control over the course of actions and the feeling of helplessness may strengthen some biases against certain groups hence making the desire to use insulting language stronger (Awan, 2016; Awan, 2012). The reason why we are dealing with such amount of verbal violence on the Internet might be quite puzzling. It is the result of people's emotional state but also of the feeling of being anonymous (Hicks, Clair, Berry, 2016).

Hate results not only from the Internet's nature; the Internet tends to be less anonymous nowadays. There are social network websites where users have their own names; more and more news bulletins use comments which are put via social network websites, so being anonymous is probably not the main reason. Hating uses the so-called „snowball effect” which fights aggression with aggression, and as it often seems, this is exactly what haters want and need.

Offensive posts were always present in public life, but with the change in mass media and the way information became available to people, they reach everyone much faster now. The media often tend to transform pieces of news on cyberbullying into a sensational, tabloid form making thus hate even more popular.

5. Hate speech

The thesis stating that today's vulgar and offensive Internet language affects its victims more than the insulting language present a decade ago on city walls or in school bathrooms is worth considering. Insults are a kind of a symbol of violence subject to interpretation. The Internet, however, makes insults more accurate and intense, because it is a great source of information. A survey carried out on ex-haters showed that 7 out of 10 haters gathered and used personal information found on social network websites. In other words, these were not just random insults but carefully selected blows aimed at the victim.

There is also a problem with the victim's interpretation, because the electronic content usually lacks context, causes fear of further attacks, and one cannot see the opponent's face (unlike the real world quarrels). On the Internet one cannot be sure whether hate speech is articulated on the spur of the moment or it is just the beginning of a longer hate process and a kind of a strategy.

Should we want to look at how hate speech works, we need to think about its driving force – does the way we speak, words we use influence our behavior and what we think and how we interact with others? On the one hand, the language we use tells much about us; on the other hand, very often we tend to behave according to the language we use. For instance, a person behaves differently, walks differently when wearing smart clothes and work clothes respectively. We can assume that a similar process takes place in language terms. Do specific environments and their lingos require their members to behave in a specific way, then? We function in a world which communicates with us in a given manner, so even smart clothes can be sometimes inappropriate.

6. The haters

There is a lot of tragic news in the media on the victims, but it is worth giving some thought to who the haters are or whom they might be. They are not a large group among schoolchildren. Only 10 out of 920 students admitted to have been posting hate on the Internet. Of course, there are probably more people like those – they might not have admitted to or are unaware of posting hate messages. Nevertheless, we can say that such people are overrepresented in places where hate speech appears.

Who are the haters? How old are they? What kind of people are they most often? Apparently anyone can be a hater, sometimes even without realizing it. The moment when a malicious comment is sent or liked is crucial here – it is when a user, unconsciously, becomes a passive participant of hating. It is difficult to say who the haters are; they are hard to identify because they do not want to reveal their identities to researchers. If around a negative attitude there appears a group of people, it is almost sure that, in a course of group processes, that negative attitude will turn into hate. On the Internet, it can be easily observed among teenagers.

7. The importance of parents

Social campaigns and classes in schools are of great help in education for cyber safety project. These are only elements of the whole process; parents and institutions (the police, organizations and foundations dealing with cyber safety, as well as the academic world) play also a major role in understanding processes of cyberspace (Wong-Lo, Bullock, Gable, 2011).

The Internet has become a medium widely used by young people and, probably, that is why many dangerous things happen there (even more dangerous than in reality). In reality, parents have more influence on their children's safety, whereas in virtual world they are unable to control their children's actions.

Surveys show that almost three fourths of parents think they are able to control what their children do on the Net. Those parents are satisfied with their children sitting at home, not having to worry that their kids will end up run over by a car. It is, obviously, an illusion which many institutions have been trying to fight with for years, because we never know what content the child is exposed to, and people on the Internet not always mean no harm.

There are a lot of threats on the Internet which a young person may encounter: cyberbullying or malicious content which can leave mental scars. Research shows that almost 90 percent of young people under 18 visit websites which are clearly labeled „adults only”. It appears that the forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest. That is, probably, the reason why so many young people under 18 are addicted to pornography. Over half of young people, that is 60 percent of the polled, admitted to have been visiting porn sites at least three times a week. Young people look for information on their sexuality and the Net is a

convenient source of information for them; they do not have to ask their parents personally, especially when the topic is quite embarrassing.

If a computer is not protected with „parental controls”, and the parents do not know what their children do exactly, then there is a great probability that children might get exposed to malicious content (violence, pornography). The parents can try to control what their children do on the Internet, but that is quite challenging because nowadays every smartphone can go on-line almost instantly. Turning the computer off is the fastest way of dealing with the problem but it does not solve its cause. What has been sent on-line stays on-line (including comments and images), so going off-line is not a permanent solution.

In both virtual and real life it is impossible to protect children from everything. What can be done, though, is to give children the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, how to behave to avoid dangers and where to look for help (Wellner, 2015). So when it comes to young people’s safety education and talking to children are crucial. Also, cooperation between parents, teachers, NGOs, the police and academic institutions is important.

8. Methods of protection against hate

There is a popular belief that says not to fight fire with fire, i.e. not to react aggressively when attacked. However, some kind of reaction is necessary. The question is: what kind of reaction? The knowledge about methods and ways of reacting to hateful comments has been gathered with the use of information obtained from surveys conducted on students who experienced hate, and teachers as well. Thus checked and confronted method of reacting shows the efficiency of certain reactions to specific social behaviors in cyberspace.

- One of the methods is ignoring the haters, because they want confrontation and discussing with them is futile. Among the polled, 40 percent of those who tried this method said it was the most efficient and hurt haters the most.
- Another method is answering without personal engagement in discussion. It is important that there are some other people who would clearly make their stand against the hater. Almost all respondents who experienced cyberbullying highlighted the importance of peer support on social network websites. It appears,

then, that leaving hate without any reaction is not the best way of fighting against this phenomenon. It is a good idea, in some instances, to draw the line and say: „I do not wish to have such comments” and „you can’t talk to me like that”; sometimes ignoring the problem does not work. All school counselors pointed that reporting the problem and looking for help is usually the best solution. Reacting emotionally is natural in this kind of situation, but it does not deal with the problem. It is very important not to be left with emotions alone but talk to a friend or a person close to us or even use a help line.

- What can be done if other users behave too aggressive and overwhelming? Research shows that the above mentioned method is effective, i.e. the attacked person needs to set a limit in his/her cyberpersonal space and say „no”, „I don’t like that”, „I don’t want that”, „what has been shown was not meant for your eyes”.
- NGOs, schools, the police and the prosecutor’s office should treat the problem seriously and support victims of hate making them stronger so they can be a match for the haters.
- Police officers who deal with cyberbullying say that most social network websites allow reporting inappropriate comments. It is important to let the site administrator know about the problem because if it is not done, nobody will be able to react properly. The need of registering user accounts on various websites is a way of protecting against hate but most of times it is not a good way to stop hate speech in cyberspace.
- It is possible to avoid hate but you need to use one method of protection which is simply not visiting certain websites because some of them promote or were created to voice hateful content. Of course it does not guarantee us being free from insulting comments whatsoever.

Appropriate institutions should monitor cyberspace content and impose adequate pressure on perpetrators. There are certain rules and regulations but, in practice, they do not always work and apply. Research shows that sometimes government officials do not understand the case fully and treat Internet hate as inoffensive jokes. They admit they are often flooded with reports on hateful comments. Lawyers, in a way, might feel the same

way as they have to deal with more drastic cases. Thus a kind of indifference towards these forms of aggression is created.

People who are better-off are able to get help from lawyers and even politicians to fight against hate on the Internet. An average citizen has it more difficult, no matter if the arguments are strong enough to start reacting seriously or not.

9. Conclusion

On the basis of research and talking to school employees directly it can be concluded that although teachers and school counselors see the problem, they do not cope with it completely. However, they express a great readiness and will to cooperate with various public institutions as far as cyber safety is concerned. Hate in schools is not a new phenomenon. But in today's global society some negative behaviors are transformed from virtual life into reality and very often victims of cyberbullying experience similar violence in school (Schultze-Krumbholz, et. al., 2015; L. Mark, Ratliffe, 2011).

The hating process begins with „stigmatizing” a person. Very often this is a new, weaker student or a person who looks different than others and who is unable to face the crowd. School employees noticed the lack of openness from groups of students who do not accept any new members and do not cooperate with school authorities. This is a challenge for the researchers as understanding how such groups function is the key to understanding hate speech mechanisms.

Convincing young people that hate is wrong is very difficult. Indifference is quite noticeable, just as adults seem to tolerate drunk drivers or ignore people lying on the streets. It appears that teaching responsibility and empathy needs to be a part of citizenship education process.

Unfortunately, hate is continuing in adult life. That is why education for cyber safety is so important as far as citizenship education is concerned. School counselors stress the role of the „eyewitness” who can do much because, on the one hand, he/she can join in hating unconsciously and play the role of a passive aggressor; on the other hand, he/she is afraid of being rejected by the group and joins the stronger ones. But such a „witness” can also say „no” and report the situation to real or virtual authorities. The victim, whereas, should get support from „peer-witnesses”, parents and school employees.

Is looking for help telling on someone, is it informing against somebody? The answer is not so obvious because the victims fear their peer-aggressors the most. Victims tend to think that they will never be able to have friends at school. Victims of hate, in surveys, said that they had such fears at the beginning. That is why they could not see any hope for resolving the problem and the matter was getting even worse.

It can be said that young people have much sensitivity. They pay a lot of attention to what their image on the Internet is; the Net plays a major role in their lives. They cannot distance themselves from virtual content, because their presence in cyberspace is more emotional and intense than their parents or their grandparents. Young people share a lot of their privacy: photos, movies – they treat these as their real life. They tend to believe more what is said in the comments below a given article if they know less about the article itself. It turns out that every fifth comment on social network websites or web chats where young people dominate is an insult.

A young person does not have his/her own opinion or adequate self-esteem. Therefore, violent cyberspace attacks hurt young people the most. The polled pointed to aggressive feedback, concerning things which young people think of as their creation, as most damaging. If a student is insulted in school and rejected by his/her peers, then he/she becomes a „scapegoat”. The ostracism follows him/her to the Internet and then waves of hate really hit social network websites (Altobelli, 2010).

The worst you can do is give hate feedback (i.e. like and share hateful comments). No reaction from other users is also bad attitude. A real problem lies in understanding how young people perceive and use the Internet, because older generations did not grow up with it and had some time to have their social life formed. Young people do not divide their life into „online” and „offline” so it is harder to educate them, nor can the Internet be taken away from them as it is part of their environment. They do not understand that it is the real human being who types and who reads comments facing the consequences in real life.

It is crucial to convince young people that hate does do harm. Young people do not realize that what they do brings consequences, because this phenomenon begins with a harmless joke. Young people do not realize that it may turn into a bigger conflict and then escalate. It turns out that giving tragic and straightforward stories (told by former victims) as examples, and also trying to empathize with the victims, brings good results.

10. Summary

Internet hate is equal to traditional hate present in schools and at the playgrounds. It differs from the traditional bullying because of lack of boundaries and because of the level of anonymity and dynamics. Cyberbullying goes far beyond face-to-face aggression which we can observe in schools because thanks to mobile phones it can be performed at home. Social cruelty of children, so present in text messages, e-mails, messengers and web chats, has become too widespread. Education seems to be the key to solving the problem of Internet hate.

There is much to do as far as education for functioning in cyberspace of young people is concerned. Carrying out the education for cyber safety project is aimed at making young people aware that even if today somebody else is a victim of cyberbullying, the other day this can be any of us. So, can we influence the society in any way and prevent this negative phenomenon? What prevents us from hating the others is the awareness of the fact that expressing hate makes people bad and that hate is the worst of all feelings a man can share.

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Special Education for the social competences in Autism Spectrum Disorders. The role of the Pivotal Response Training

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Abstract

The Pivotal Response Training (PRT) is currently one of the most effective models for the educational evidence-based interventions in Autism Spectrum Disorders. The model is based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), and represents a naturalistic child-centered intervention for the development of appropriate social interactions. This paper presents the theoretical background and the relative implications for the inclusive educational intervention in the Primary School.

Keywords: special education, autism spectrum disorders, Pivotal Response Training, social competences, applied behavior analysis.

1. Introduction

The *Pivotal Response Training (PRT)* by Koegel & Koegel, (1988; 2006) represent one of the most effective models for the development of social competences in the Autism Spectrum Disorders (Schreibman, 2005; Steiner et al., 2013; Genc & Vuhran, 2013).

The model is strictly derived from the perspective of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), the most effective approach for the educational intervention in students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Particularly, the ABA approach can to be considered as those characterized from high levels of effectiveness in promoting adaptive behaviors and social competences in child with ASD (Remington et al., 2007; Whalen, 2009). The validation of effectiveness of the PRT is derived from randomized studies on individual cases (Anagnostou et al., 2014; Cottini & Morganti, 2015). For this reason, the model is universally acknowledged as one of the most effectives for the development of social and

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adaptive skills in students with ASD (Schreibman, 2005; Randolph et al., 2011; Fein et al., 2013). These considerations could lead to reflections on the introduction of knowledge of the PRT-derived training in the formative processes for the Special Support Teachers and for the educators involved in the answer to special educational needs of students with ASD (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Anagnostou et al., 2014; Tyson et al., 2014). In this paper, the typical social and behavioral profile of Autism Spectrum Disorders is briefly described and the implications of the PRT for the educational interventions are discussed.

2. Social and cognitive profile of the Autism Spectrum Disorders

The ASD represent complex developmental disabilities, and the recent increases of his incidence (CDCP, 2014) justified the need for a deeper knowledge of the disorder and more effective models for the educational intervention systems. In the ASD the special education interventions play a significant role for the development of adaptive behaviors and, consequently, for the improvement of the Quality of Life (Smith et al., 2010; Minjarez et al., 2011; Fein et al., 2013).

The recent restructuring of the diagnostic criteria conducted in the *Diagnostic and statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5, APA, 2013) have produced a simplification of the indicators for the ASD and the specification of levels of his severity as a function of the quantity of the support requested by the environment.

In the DSM-5 the ASD are currently considered as a diagnostic macrocategory, which includes subjects with low or high cognitive functioning, specified by a series of eight criteria. The diagnostic criteria are divided in two categories: Deficits in Social Communication and Restriction-Repetition of the behaviors. The criteria are described in the tab. 1.

Tab. 1. Diagnostic criteria for the Autism Spectrum Disorders. Adapted from: APA, 2013.

Deficits of Social Communication

- 1) Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity. Abnormal social approach. Reduced interest in the sharing of interests and emotions.
- 2) Deficits in nonverbal behaviors used for the social interaction: Abnormalities in eye contact and body language. Deficits in the understanding and use of nonverbal communication. Lack of facial expression and gestures.

3) Deficit in developing and maintaining appropriate relationships. Difficulty in adapting behavior to different social contexts. Difficulties in sharing imaginative play and making friends. Apparent lack of interest for other people.

Restriction and Repetition of behaviors and interests

- 1) Language, motor movements or stereotyped or repetitive use of objects. Presence of motor stereotypies, echolalia or repetitive use of objects.
- 2) Adherence to the routine with excessive resistance to change.
- 3) Implications in abnormal interests with unusual intensity. Excessive interest in unusual objects.
- 4) Anomalous Interest with pervasive manipulation of objects and attraction to lights or rotating objects.
- 5) Impairment of responsiveness to sensory stimuli, with apparent indifference to hot, cold and pain.

Three levels of severity (*Relevant, Mild, Moderate,*) indicate the impairment of the social skills and of behavioral restriction, based on the quantity of support required to environment from the profile of the subject (APA, 2013).

The diagnostic criteria show the pervasiveness of the disorder on the children's social skills. The social profile ASD-related is profoundly influenced by the impairment of communication skills (Anagnostou et al., 2014). The most effective models of intervention, validated according to the perspective of the Evidence Based Education, present as a common denominator the early intervention on the deficit of communication (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006; early intervention on the deficit of communication skills and the development of skills of self-regulation of behavior; Anagnostou et al., 2014). Similarly, others common denominators of the more accredited models are those represented from the development of spontaneous communication skills and from the development of the understanding of environmental requests (Schreibman, 2005; Tyson et al., 2014). A similar emphasis on the need of educational interventions for the development of social skills is actually confirmed by the presence of explicit references to intervention on social deficit in the international Systems of Guidelines for the child (SIGN, 2007; ISS, 2011) and for the adult with ASD (BPS, 2012). These considerations can justify recourse to effective educational interventions models based on early intervention for the deficit of communication skills (Bishop-Fitzpatrick, Minshew & Eack, 2013).

The Pivotal Response Training, in this view, is an effective model for the development of communication skills and for the competences of self-regulation of behavior (Genc & Vuhran, 2013; Anagnostou et al., 2014). For a better understanding of the educational potential of the PRT, it seems appropriate to outline the theoretical background of the model.

3. The perspective of the Applied Behaviour Analysis

The Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) should not be considered as a specific model of intervention, but rather as a widely used approach to research in the intervention of ASD (Lovaas, 1993). This approach currently represents the most effective educational intervention for the treatment of ASD (Schreibman, 2005; Anagnostou et al., 2014; Tyson et al., 2014; Fontani, 2017).

An historical review of this approach must necessarily start from the pioneering contributions by Lovaas (Lovaas, 1987; 1993). These research lines developed the awareness that the best results in the intervention on autistic children can be prosecuted only if it is conducted in a *natural environment*, such as that represented by school or domestic context. The educational intervention must involve all the contexts of student life, and must to be conducted daily and sustained over time (Remington et al., 2007; Whalen, 2009). The ABA perspective present evident points of contact with the approach of *Operant Conditioning* by Skinner. The role of reinforcement is central for ABA perspective, because it provides the identification of most effective reinforcements for each student with ASD, according to his interests and his preferences (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Remington, 2007; Whalen, 2009). The most used reinforcements in the ABA approach are represented from those social and material (Lovaas, 1987; 1993). While the social reinforcements are commonly represented from clear behaviors of approval, the material reinforcement's results closely related to objects or activities of specific interest for the child (Remington, 2007).

The *Modeling*, widely used in the ABA approach, is a concept connected to Skinner's theory. The Modeling is based on imitative processes provided by the observation of a model's behaviour. In the Modeling, the student is invited to observe and imitate the behavior pattern presented by the teacher, which supplies adequate reinforcements when

the attempts of imitation are successful (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Whalen, 2009). Another characteristic of ABA perspective is represented from the *naturalness* of the educational intervention (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006; Randolph et al., 2011). The generalization of learning, in particular, is facilitated by the use of reinforcements typical of the child's natural environment (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006). The use of materials that are part of the daily teaching context, like those present in a class, could facilitate the generalizations of the desired behavior in different situations (Koegel & Koegel, 2006). The development of Pivotal Response Training was determined precisely by such considerations. The perspective of *naturalistic teaching* provides from the educational settings play in fact a significant role in the development of this model (Schreibman, 2005; Koegel & Koegel, 2006).

4. The Pivotal Response Training: historical foundations

We can consider like the precursor of the PRT the Discrete Trial Training (DTT, Lovaas, 1987), a model developed for to enhance the learning of adaptive skills in children with ASD. The DTT was one of the first developments of ABA perspective, and was specifically developed for students with ASD associated to low cognitive functioning (Remington, 2007). The DTT is based on the needs of repetitiveness and predictability associated with the cognitive profile of the ASD (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Randolph et al., 2011; BPS, 2012). In DTT are presents learning modules that must be imitated by the child and properly reinforced by the teacher (Lovaas, 1987; 1993; Bogin, Sullivan, Rogers & Stabel, 2010). The basilar learning sequences of this model are reported in the tab. 2.

Tab. 2. The basilar Learning Sequences of DTT. Adapted from: Bogin, Sullivan, Rogers & Stabel, 2010.

Learning Sequences	Examples of contents
Cognitive	Reading learning; learning to count
Social	To greeting; to say his name; face recognition
Autonomy areas	Learning of personal hygiene routines; use of cutlery

Each sequence of behavior starts with the instruction, which corresponds to the request of the task and represents the *discriminative stimulus*, to signal the type of the request. The answer of the child can be considered as correct or inadequate. If the answer is not performed properly, it is corrected using the teacher's prompts, verbal, gestural or physical (Holding, Kehle & Bray, 2011; Steiner et al., 2013). If the response is adequate it is immediately reinforced with the social or materials reinforcements preferred by the student, such as the approval or the possibilities of playing with his favorite toys. For the adequate acquisition of the correct sequence of learning, it is crucial to have an *immediate reinforcement* of the correct or inadequate response (Bogin, Sullivan, Rogers & Stabel, 2010; Holding, Kehle & Bray, 2011). The DTT is actually considered as one of the most effective methodologies for the early educational intervention in ASD according to the perspective of the Evidence Based Education (Schreibman, 2005; Steiner et al., 2013). It can however be considered as a model, while the PRT is definable like an ecological approach of *second generation* (Bogin, Sullivan, Rogers & Stabel, 2010).

The PRT developed by Koegel is representative for the naturalistic approaches, characterized by a higher adherence to the natural characteristics of the student's living context (Koegel & Koegel, 2006). The second generations models are always derived from the ABA approach, but they differ from those of first generation for differs from belong to this second area. The approaches always represent teaching models based on the ABA perspective, but are characterized by a greater use of reinforcements related to components of the everyday life, and for. The PRT is also characterized by the higher level of personal initiative conferred to child (Schreibman, 2005; Schreibman & Koegel, 2006).

5. The active role of the student in the PRT

The structured approaches of first generation, like the DTT, are effectives for the development of adaptive behaviors, but they have been criticized for the risk of dependence on environmental support offered by the teacher (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006). For this reasons, the use of ecological approaches has gradually become larger because the advantage offered by the progressive inclusion of the teacher in the activities initiated by the child. The ecological approaches of second generation enhance instead the development of the spontaneous initiative of the student (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006;

Smith et al., 2010; Holding, Bray & Kehle, 2011; Steiner et al., 2013; Tyson et al., 2014; Fontani, 2017). This naturalistic evolution of the ABA perspective is represented from the development of the Pivotal Response Training (Koegel & Koegel, 1987; Koegel, 2000; Schreibman & Koegel, 2006). The development of the training was determined by Koegel's observations (Koegel & Koegel, 1987) on educational interventions conducted in more naturalistic contexts than those proposed by the Discrete Trial Training (Koegel & Koegel, 2006). The PRT is based on the selection of the *emergent behaviors* that can to direct towards further learning (Koegel & Koegel, 1987). The emergent behaviors are called *pivotal behaviors*, because they are considered as basic areas on which they can develop other learning (Koegel, Openden, Fredeen & Koegel, 2006). The pivotal areas of greatest importance to the implementation of the PRT are represented by four areas of behavior, summarized in the tab. 3.

Tab. 3. Pivotal Areas of the PRT. Adapted from: Koegel & Koegel, 2006.

Responding to multiple cues and stimuli;
 Increasing spontaneous initiative;
 Improving the motivation;
 Increasing the skills of self-regulation.

The first area refers to *response to multiple stimuli*: the student must be oriented towards the sensitization to multiple features of stimuli for to compensate the typical *overselectivity* on irrelevant aspects of the stimulation (Lovaas, 1993). The second area concerns instead the need of development of the child's *spontaneous initiative*. In this pivotal area the student, is invited to develop ways to express his needs and to request information on the environment. The pivotal area of *improving of the motivation* is crucial, because the lack of motivation is responsible for the lack of development of adaptive behaviors (Koegel, Koegel & Carter, 1999; Koegel, Openden, Fredeen & Koegel, 2006). The development of the motivation is fostered by the possibility of independent choice of materials and themes during the learning session. The use of natural reinforcements, such as the objects and the student's favorite activities, allows the development of motivation to

the task. This area is characterized by immediate reinforcement of all attempts aimed at achieving the objective. The maintaining of the motivation is closely related to the provision of adequate reinforcements (Koegel, Openden, Fredeen & Koegel, 2006).

The pivotal area for the compensation of the deficit of *self-regulationskills* is another crucial area in the PRT. This deficit is responsible of many maladaptive behaviors, which may impede the adaptation to the environment (Koegel & Koegel, 2006). The student must to develop the awareness on his inappropriate behavior, as well as his capacity of *self-monitoring*, essential for the management of maladaptive behaviors typical of the profile commonly associated to ASD (Schreibman & Koegel, 2006). The constant reference, during the intervention, to these pivotal areas, can give more space to the student's personal initiative during the interaction with the teacher or with his peers.

The naturalistic approach enables to teach the adaptive behavior in the environment in which they are usually developed. The opportunities presented by the natural and spontaneous behavior can be used for learning through their immediate reinforcement. The teacher, for example, could reinforce in a massive way the child's choice of a theme or an activity (Koegel, Openden, Fredeen & Koegel, 2006). When the child has started the selected activity, the teacher can gradually join in the activity, imitating the child's behavior. Through this way, the teacher can offer experiences of *sharing attention*. Deficits in these processes are typical in the ASD, and this aspect is probably responsible for the deficit in social communication (Whalen, 2009). The PRT explicitly provides the use of naturalistic materials as reinforcement like those available in the school context. The sharing reading of a picture book together with the child, the vision a of a movie, the exchange of symbols of Augmentative Alternative Communication they are all examples of sharing activities between teacher and student with ASD.

In the naturalistic approach like the PRT, the task is chosen by the child according to his preferences, while in the approaches of structured teaching of the first generation, like the DTT, the task was imposed by the teacher. For these reasons, the PRT is based on the concept of *gratification intrinsic to the performance of the task* (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Steiner, et al., 2013). Similarly, the ability to perform behaviors central to the development of entire areas of behavioral repertoires, is illustrate from the concept of Pivotal Behavior. It defines the prototypical behavior for the development of other areas of behavioral

repertoires. The sequence of actions needed for hand washing, for example, could represent a pivotal behavior for learning other areas of personal hygiene. The use of the pivotal areas would allow simultaneous learning in other similar behaviors (Koegel et al., 2006). The teaching conducted in the context of the student's natural life, like that represented by the classroom, could encourage the spontaneous production of behaviors that belong to the same category (Schreibman, 2005; Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Steiner et al., 2013).

This active role of the student is likely one of main factors responsible of the high levels of effectiveness for the educational interventions in the ASD. This data is confirmed by the recent analysis of randomized studies on the results of implementation of the PRT (Randolph et al., 2011; Genc & Vuhran, 2013). The results of the studies confirmed the effectiveness of the PRT for the generalization of the learned competences and for the reduction of maladaptive behaviors (Schreibman, 2005; Koegel et al., 2006; Randolph et al., 2011; Genc & Vuhran, 2013).

6. Educational implications related to PRT

The gratification implicit to the communicative context and the interactive features of the PRT appears as particularly appropriate for students with low cognitive functioning associated with deficit of self-regulation, and particularly for the child in the age range of the Primary School. We must also consider the possibility of teaching the guidelines of training to the student's family members, who can be thus involved in the intervention for the generalization of learned skills also in the domestic context (Coolican, Smith & Bryson, 2010).

The multicontextual intervention in the various domains of life is considered crucial for any educational intervention modeled based on educational special needs commonly associated with the ASD profile, as confirmed by the most recent developments in the ABA perspective (Anagnostou et al., 2014; Tyson et al., 2014). The implementation of the PRT allows the transformation of the student's favorite activities in opportunities of learning, which can provide the basis for further learning, (Koegel et al., 2006). The opportunities provided by the model in the promotion of the motivation are evident, because the

experiences conducted stimulates the emergent behaviors, which reflect the interests and preferences of the child.

Despite the higher effectiveness levels, not all the students with ASD are ideal candidates for training. Children who respond best to the educational implementation of the PRT are those that are clearly interested in the objects or toys, and which are able to tolerate a possible contact with the teacher (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Koegel et al., 2006). The students with massive presence of stereotyped and repetitive behaviors and those of significant deficit in verbal communication, instead, do not respond to training optimally, (Koegel et al., 2006; Nefdt et al., 2010). These considerations, derived from randomized studies on single cases, should orient towards a preliminary selection of the students candidate for a possible implementation of the PRT (Randolph et al., 2011; Genc & Vuhran, 2013; Tyson et al., 2014)

A preliminary training to improve the communicative competences could represent a possible sensitization mode for the students with behavioral profiles characterized by verbal deficit and repetitive behaviors (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Koegel et al., 2006; Nefdt et al., 2010; Tyson et al., 2014). An effective preliminary training for the PRT it could be founded on the communicative exchanges of symbols derived from PECS (*Picture Exchange Communication System*, Bondy & Frost, 2002). The PECS training could promote the development of communication skills and facilitate the reduction of stereotypies, given the decreasing of maladaptive behaviors associated with the development of communicative skills (Bondy & Frost, 2002; Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Koegel et al., 2006).

Further educative implications for the preliminary training are derivable from the use of *Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems- AAC* (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). The development of communication skills, based on the symbolic codes of the AAC, may similarly have a positive effect on the decreasing of repetitive behaviors and on the development of verbal skills. These skills, in turn, can constitute a background for the implementation of the PRT (Koegel & Koegel, 2006; Mirenda & Iacono, 2009).

Conclusive remarks

The considerations on the effectiveness of the PRT training for the learning of the basic behaviors and for the development of autonomy skills could induce reflections on the

opportunity of including him in the educational relationship oriented towards the response to special needs of the student with ASD (Whalen, 2009; Steiner et al., 2013; Tyson et al., 2014). Similar considerations can be expressed in relation to training for the teachers. The inclusion of guidelines of the PRT in the course of study for the Special Support Teacher, in this perspective, could represent an opportunity for the implementation in the educational context of an effective and validated model, specifically designed for the student with ASD.

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Innovative Academic Course on Integrative Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Abstract

This article will present an ongoing Erasmus + Innovative Academic Course on Integrative Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, IACIIC-ASD, implemented between 2017/2019 by the West University of Timisoara (WUT) Department of Educational Sciences, in partnership with Università degli studi di Firenze (UNIFI), Universitatea Lucian Blaga din Sibiu (ULBS) and Sveuciliste u Zagrebu Edukacijsko-Rehabilitacijski Fakultet (ERF). The need for an internationally developed course in autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is high because all of us must stay in tune with current theoretical and methodological approaches to provide best quality training for the future specialists. The ASD is one of the most researched domain in special education and related fields and the parents and specialists feel a constant need to find new solutions and modern therapeutic methods for best addressing the children needs. By proposing a course that will present the most recent theories and findings in the field and will discuss the best options in educating the children with ASD we aim to train better professionals and increase the future specialists' competence. Also, this course will be accessible via an on-line platform so becoming an open/course for all interested parties. The virtual clinic for ASD will be a virtual scientific environment where students, academics, specialist and parents can exchange knowledge, expertise, experiences and good practices.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorders, Erasmus – Program, academic course

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of complex neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by repetitive and characteristic patterns of behavior and difficulties with social communication and interaction. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Even we do not have yet a final statistic for UE (<http://asdeu.eu/>) the prevalence rate of ASD it is assumed at about 1% (<http://www.autismeurope.org/activities/news/the-european-parliament-hosts-a-conference-on-the-call-for-a-european-strategy-for-autism-5.html>) and increasing (<https://www.eu-aims.eu/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd/>). The socio-economic impact of the disorders is high, not only due to costs related to treatment, but because individuals with ASD need permanent care and also fail to pursue an occupational career as adults and because the most severely affected individuals are often institutionalized (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0636>), the social inclusion and educational integration of ASD children are still a challenge for all EU countries. There are still big differences "in the state of affairs" in the field of ASD in different countries.

West University of Timisoara (WUT) conducted two focus groups: the parents and the professionals focus group. Correlated with a revision of the literature and of the ongoing European projects results on ASD, some common needs of our target groups can be identified:

- In some UE countries, the number of ASD exclusively dedicated courses in universities is reduced or missing completely. Where the formation is offered by private training/education providers, the fees for certified continuing education programs are sometimes prohibitive.

- In schools: there is a gap between mainstream schools teachers' knowledge and how to realize this in practice (which leads to anxiety or even rejecting working with autistic pupils; the lack of professionals properly trained to work with children with ASD; the lack of support staff in schools.

- For the parents, often they must seek support for their child by themselves, and find the best methods of intervention. Parents encourages a more child focused approach of intervention instead a medical approach of ASD. They expressed their needs to be more involved in therapeutical intervention as active participants. Also they stressed that they should be involved in all the phases of interventions, including assessment. Finally, they

emphasized the fact that most advocacy actions are made by parents with little support from professionals.

- An increasing need for high qualified practitioners in outpatient centers/clinics. In some UE countries (Romania among them) the number of ASD masterprograms is reduced or missing completely (<https://bacb.com/>). The fees for some certified continuing education programs can be sometime excessive. (<https://bacb.com/>)

- The scientific research suggest that students with autism progress much better when autism-specific educational support is provided (Parsons, Charman, and Faulkner, 2013). This has been argued to put unfair pressure on teachers and for the child with ASD to experience "integration without social inclusion"

(<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/transform-autism-education/progress/index.aspx>).

- The deployment of school staff or the gap between mainstream schools teacher knowledge and how to realize this in practice lead to anxiety or even rejecting working with autistic pupils (Mesibov and Howley, 2003).

Our answer to these matters is that the parents and the professionals must act together as a team where each member must understand the role he has, the relationship between therapy, education and family life. So it is very important that all future professionals working with children with ASD to speak a common language either they act as educators, a therapist for the child or as counselor for the parents. In order to achieve this language, they must be trained equally in assessment (A), therapy (T), education (E), family counseling (F) and advocacy (A) (either they are preparing to become educators for the mainstream or special education, psycho-pedagogues working in specialized centers/clinics, psychologists in private practice- therapists or counselors). We strongly believe that this quadridimensional (A-T-E-F-A) integrative approach is the best approach and that it is necessary to be taught to students in universities. Further, these professionals must teach the parents how to deal with all the aspects that ASD involves but also how to adapt their parenting styles in order to become a "therapeutic parenting". This is what we aim to do proposing an improved curriculum with new course modules which will enhance the skills, knowledge, and understanding of these future professionals in the field of ASD.

Different countries in Europe have different approaches of the ASD child. Because there are variations in policy and practice among EU countries-there are similarities but also points of divergence, different perspectives on the relationship between therapy and education, and the professionals are trained differently from country to country-we think the best manner to address the common issue of autism is transnational, 1) in order to unify the practice and 2) because Romanian universities do not have any ASD master programs or postgraduate studies although in Romania there are NGOs functioning as Continuing Education Providers or independent psychologists offering courses on ASD based on their own practice but not always "the established practices are the best practices".

In time, participating universities involved in the project will strengthen their contact with educators and therapists (through the online platform but not only) integrating research with practice, to diminish the "persistent disconnect between research and practice"

The primary beneficiary of the project will be the students from Special Education, Educational Sciences, Psychology, Sociology and Social work specializations from partners Universities. For them, we will develop a course that will have an integrative view on ASD intervention and that will present the most current trends in the field. By this course we aim to increase the quality of the educational offer and to improve their competences in the field, according to the ECTS.

The indirect beneficiaries will be the parents and the teachers of children with ASD. They will have access to a MOOC course that will be available on the European Virtual University Clinic for ASD (EVUCASD) platform and can seek counseling through it. The ultimate beneficiaries will be the children with ASD that will be addressed by more competent specialists, in an interdisciplinary team, with up to date techniques.

The project objectives are:

- To develop an innovative academic course on ASD, based on the integrative view of case management

- To create a European Virtual University Clinic for ASD (EVUCASD) which will host the Open Educational Resources developed in the project (including a MOOC on ASD)

-To share the curriculum model developed in the project, tools and materials with other universities, private education/training providers, stakeholders, practitioners, to improve the educational offer at National and European levels.

The number of students participants in testing activities will be 160. The students will participate in the course materials development, in course testing (including the MOOC), in EVUCASD development and in the multiplier events

In the course materials development the student participants will be involved in the first phase of designing. Before the student's manual will be developed one focus group with 15 students will be conducted.

In the activities of course testing they will be participating in the summer and winter schools in which the course will be tested in an intensive manner. At the four schools will participate a number of 40 students each, a total of 160 participants from all partner universities.

Also, the student participants will be involved in the development of the EVUCASD, in the first phase of designing. Before the EVUCASD will be developed one focus group with 15 students will be conducted. The students will express their needs in the platform structure, mode of operation, content, communication and on/line-assessment. We aim that the EVUCASD will have at least 1000 unique visitors at the end of the project. At least 220 will enroll on the platform to visualize MOOC. The platform will incorporate all the elements required by us, including disclaimers, logos, and link to ERASMUS.

The students will participate in the multiplier events: one conference, seminars on the EVUCASD, and workshops in integrative approach to ASD.

Our approach has three starting points. The ASD is a complex issue that needs multidisciplinary approach, the national practices are diverse, the potential users of our courses (future professionals, actual professionals, interested parents et al) have all a strong involvement with the subjects, are mature learners and they have distinct voices. Our main objective is to develop an innovative course on ASD that will be delivered in our universities.

From scientific point of view we propose a diamond approach ATEFA (a- assessment, t-therapy, e- education, f- family counseling, a-advocacy) that focuses on children with ASD in an ecological context. We will provide specific ways to bridge the gap between different

kinds of interventions (family centered, educational and therapeutically) in order to achieve a joint effort in educating and promoting the autonomy of ASD children.

From didactic point of view we will use blended learning as the way to deliver the course. Also the course (and all the materials) will be available through a MOOC course on the EVUCASD. As general pedagogical approach we will incorporate specific practices and elements of constructive learning, learning through expansion and transformative learning because we strongly believe in the social constructed understanding of ASD. Our courses will be both interactive and transformative in the sense that students will have the possibility to voice their experiences and to transform their views.

In a similar fashion we are intending to develop the course, based on the different expertise of each partner and on specific target to be reached. The course will have five major topics, each one coordinated by a partner. Each module, although focused on one topic, will provide clear ways to incorporate other perspectives in intervention. All the courses should be interactive and based on case studies or hard data.

We consider the implementation a scientific and academic journey, and we will make effort to document this journey into dissemination products, including scientific articles and presentation in conferences.

During the project several materials will be developed: teacher and student manual, an academic book, the on-line platform for the European Virtual University Clinic for ASD EVUCASD and a MOOC course on ASD.

The teacher's manual will be developed by capitalizing the need of the end-users. For each of the material there will be a focus-group with students, conducted by the coordinating partner in order to capture their voice, needs and preferences in designing the products. All the partner will contribute to the development of the teacher's manual and for quality assurance reasons, the teacher's manual will be sent for reviewing to at least six specialists in the field. The beneficiaries will be the academics that will lecture the course. The teacher's manual will cover the content of 125 teaching hours, and is addressed to the undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The teacher's manual will be structured in five modules: assessment, therapy, education for children with ASD, family counseling and autism advocacy. For each module

two partners will be responsible in writing it: one coordinator and principal writer and an assistant.

All the partner will contribute to the development of the student`s manual and for quality assurance reasons, the student`s manual will be sent for reviewing to at least six specialists in the field. The student`s manual will cover the content of 125 learning hours, and is addressed to the undergraduate and postgraduate students. The student`s manual will reflect the structure and content of the teacher`s manual. The structure will also be developed in five modules: assessment, therapy, education for children with ASD, family counseling and autism advocacy, reflecting the teacher`s manual. The content of the student`s manual will be similar with the teacher`s manual, but presented in an interactive manner, adapted for learning for adult learners. The student`s manual will have in addition an introductory part in which will be presented the course objectives, covered skills and expected results. Each module will include in addition to the content, learning tasks, key concepts, quizzes, practical examples, resources and a brief summary.

The academic book will reflect the theoretical approach into integrative interdisciplinary case management for children with ASD and the newest scientific evidence in the field. The book will consist from approximately 150 pages with a theoretical-centered approach. All partners will contribute equally to the writing process, each of them will develop approximately 40 pages. The book will be structured in three main chapters: introduction, interdisciplinary approach to case management in ASD and research, and testing results. In the introduction, information about the importance of the integrative, interdisciplinary approach and the family/centered ecological model in addressing the child with ASD will be presented. Also, a comprehensive review on the current scientific literature in the field, with an analytical dimension will be presented. In the second chapter a review on interdisciplinary approach to case management in ASD will be advanced. The procedures, activities, management and communication will be addressed. The third chapter will present the results obtained in our project and in similar European projects. Also, the current significant data from international research will be analytically presented. The novelty of the academic book will be the integrative approach that will be analyzed and the benefits obtained from this model of intervention.

The UVCASD will be design as a virtual space for learning, practice exchange, and communication for students, academics and in future for teachers and parents. The platform will be different from the project site. The EVUCASD platform will be divided in two sections: the learning and mentoring one, accessible only by ID during the project, and the section for open/acces course (MOOC) and debate forum. The learning section of the platform will be designed exclusively for students and experts and will host the on-line section of the course, practical video examples, practical assignments realized by students and the feedback from the mentors, the course materials, the mentoring section for students. The open/access section of the platform will host the MOOC course and the on-line forum, which will offer everyone the possibility to interact, exchange ideas and practice. It will give students, academics and in the future parents and teachers of children with ASD the possibility to seek support from European specialists and the students to practice their acquired skills in a supervised virtual environment. The platform will also develop the transversal skills of the students` : to enroll at the platform and take advantage of all the opportunities it offers they must practice the TIC and English skills. The beneficiary will be students that take the “Integrative interventions for children with ASD” course from all partner universities as direct beneficiary, academics interested in the ASD problematic, and in future teachers and parents of children with ASD.

The new course, entitled “Integrative interventions for children with ASD is designed as a blended learning experience. The on-line part of the course will take place on the MOOC course. The MOCC will be hosted by the EVUCASD. The MOOC course is an on/line course that will respect de structure of the proposed course. For each module and chapter the adapted on-line version of the student`s manual will be uploaded. The students will find for each module video demonstrations and tasks that must be completed by a dead line. They will benefit from the teachers feed-back and supervision.

The developed course in ASD will be tested in four sesions, each hold by one of the partners. he course will be tested by implement it in an intensive manner (ISP). The course implementation will allow the validation of the concept, materials and delivering them in a relevant form. Also, the implementation will allow the development of new skills and knowledge (including transversal ones, IT and English).

In all implementation of the learning activities we will have teachers from each partner and students will work in mixed nationality groups. In this way we will add a transnational dimension of training allowing students to experiment a multinational learning experience. The whole course will be tested in an intensive manner in four winter and summer schools hosted by each partner. The school is a 5 course days which will reflect the 5 course modules: assessment, therapy, training, family counseling and autism advocacy.

The course will be taught in English and will be delivered in blended learning program. There will be 8 hours of face-to face training in two daily sessions (a total of 40 hours). The course will continue on the virtual platform in MOOC format (including the assessment) for another 80 hours (1 month).

The purpose of the course has several aims. First, it will provide the students new competencies in working with ASD children. These competencies will be recognized by issuing a certificate with descriptive supplement, that will be credited with 5 ECTS. Second, it will develop the ICT competency and will enable them to use MOOC and blended format to develop their knowledge and skills. Thirdly, it will allow to test all our products in real educational context, including the functioning of platform and the usefulness of study guide and teacher`s manual. Not least, it will allow the interaction between students and allow them to exchange and share their knowledge and skills.

The course will allow a quality check of our products. The courses will be delivered by participants from each country (1 for each partner except Romanian partner with 2 teachers).

the course will also be audited in order to assess both the quality of materials and the quality of teaching. Necessary revisions will be made after the course.

The project will be disseminated through a series of workshops and a conference. The workshops will be hold by each partner will disseminate the European University Virtual Clinic on ASD (EVUCASD) among interest parties: students, academics, teachers, parents, stakeholders. In this seminar, the EVUCASD will be presented, with all its futures, and a session on the platform will be demonstrated. All information about enrollment, sections and activities will be offered. Also, it will be a presentation of the MOOC course, hosted by the EVUCASD, the modalities to access it, structure, and practical information about navigating inside the course. The conference will have two aims: to disseminate the project

results and to put the basis for an international network of specialists interested in ASD intervention. In addressing the specialists we are referring to all factors involved in ASD intervention: experts, psychologists, psycho/pedagogues, teachers including parents, the supreme specialists in their child.

The conference will be a one day event, structured in 2 parts: in the morning the plenary section, in which will be presented the project results and all partners will make a short review of the project. In the afternoon a seminar about collaboration between all specialists will take place, an opportunity for all parties to meet face to face: specialists, parents, teachers, students. The platform EVUCASD will be presented and all participants invited to enroll, in order to create a “therapeutic community”.

By the project objectives we aim to determine sustainable results and create an educational climate that supports a sustainable professional development for students. We advance that the number of students that will take this course in each partner University will be equal each year with the initial number of students participating in the course testing (25).

Also, we propose to disseminate this course to other universities. Each partner will present the course to at least 2 Universities from their country and will provide for them any information and course materials requested. So, in total, the developed course will be disseminated in minimum 8 Universities from 4 European countries.

We intend to make a protocol with local educational authorities that they will guide the teachers that have autistic children in classroom to take the MOOC course, hosted by the EVUCASD platform. So, in three years interval, a number of 100 teachers will take the MOOC course.

We intend to make a protocol with local NGOs on ASD that they will guide the parents of children with ASD to visit the EVUCASD platform and choose the right activities for them: take the MOOC course, relate with specialists in the field or seek support. We aim that in three years time a number of 50 parents will take the MOOC course.

In the matter of the EVUCASD we intend to gradually increase the number of visitors and users, in order to reach a number of 500 users.

Also, we propose to post announcements every three month in the social media pages of the Faculties or Departments to promote the services of the EVUCASD and invite students, academics, alumni to visit and enroll in the MOOC course.

Conclusions

The proposed project is innovative for:

-The integrative five-dimension (A-T-E-F-A) course concept. The course will be design based on integrative interdisciplinary case management view in approaching the children with ASD. All the partner Universities bring their specific expertise (in assessment, education, therapy, counseling and advocacy) into a joint view on integrative interventions in ASD. The expected impact will be that the innovative course concept will be implemented in an innovative University course that will empower students with up to date and trans-national knowledge in the field of ASD. The course materials will be uploaded on the on-line platform in a form of a MOOC course. For Romania, for the first time, through each module comprised, we aim to develop to our students a specific set of competences: assessment, therapy, educational, family counseling, autism advocacy.

-Another aspect that we consider to be innovative is that professionals will not only teach parents how to deal with all the aspects that ASD involves but to collaborate with the specialists; will not only offer counseling for the family, but they will be able to teach the parents how to adapt their parenting styles in order to become "therapeutic parents". This is a role the parent can ask for or assume and he can be succesful or not. Our aim is not only to transform the parent into a (co-) therapist for his child by teaching him methods and techniques used in therapy. Our aim is to make the parents aware of their parenting styles, on their ways to communicate with the child, on the time they spend with the child, and how to make the most of all the aspects that being a partent involves, according to the age of the child, the severity and evolution of his/her condition.

-The European Virtual University Clinic is a platform where students and staff (from the partner university first and then from allover EU) can meet, interact, exchange ideas and practice. This platform is also innovative for the fact that our students gain acces to a set of activities supported by ICT, including e-learning, that realise or facilitate European/international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching, training or learning (virtual mobility). The practical activities that students must carry (in

CUTCP/Special Needs Institutes/schools) will be recorded and the most relevant of them will be uploaded on the platform, with subtitles and comments from the supervisors. The platform has a dedicated section where supervisors can actually see the interventions performed by the students and give feedback directly on what they saw and not on what the students stated that they have accomplished.

The platform will also develop the transversal skills of the students: to enroll at the platform and take advantage of all the opportunities it offers they must practice the TIC and English skills

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LSCI-fidelity: how to keep LSCI as a central method in an organization

Gerrit De MOOR*

Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate what kind of actions and initiatives that have been taken in the organization KOC St.-Gregorius in Gentbrugge, Belgium that helped to keep professional adults loyal to the method of LSCI. KOC St.-Gregorius was chosen as a model for good practice because of several reasons: The organization was involved with LSCI from the start of LSCI in Belgium and in Europe, starting with the initiative of OC Nieuwe Vaart in Ghent which is now a National Training Site (D'Oosterlinck, 2005). We speak about 2002. It is a huge organization. Huge organizations frequently struggle with implementation of new methods and with change in general; more than smaller organizations. The organization treats and takes care of children and youth from 3 to 21 years old with a wide range of handicaps or disorders. Regardless the type of disorder, LSCI is the main method for professionals to deal with children and youth in conflict or crisis (Long et al., 2001; Fecser, 2009, Darjan et al., 2014). The research aims to find out which actions towards fidelity have been taken so far; what is important for an action, activity or initiative to lead to LSCI-fidelity and which opportunities still have to be taken in the future. For this purpose, we used a questionnaire with both closed-ended and opened-ended responses. There were investigated the opinions of 59 members of the personnel. The findings and the conclusions of this study offer suggestions on how to stimulate the dedication for change and improvement, and the fidelity for proven efficient method in approaching troubled children and the youth.

Keywords: LSCI,

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1. Enthusiasm and fidelity versus resistance to change

Schools and educational and re-educational facilities have an important role in socialization of the children and youth. They have to ensure the optimum conditions for effective education and personal growth of the students. For attaining this objective, schools and therapeutic milieus have to systematically improve their practices and to adjust the changes to school's culture. Schools and their personnel should be flexible and creative, to continuously learn and evolve (D'Oosterlinck et al., 2008; Soenen et al., 2013). As a living system, schools are put under a lot of stress in the process of transformation, and there are a lot of divergent forces, ones that solicit the changes, and ones that try to preserve the old structures and relations. The desirable outcomes of the transformative process should be a new educational and disciplinary philosophy, improved socio-emotional context and relations, and more efficient educational and therapeutic strategies (Broekaert, 2009; Darjan, 2017). Along this road, it is important to identify and to address those factors that might sustain the enthusiasm for new and for change, and to overpass the inertia and the resistance to change.

In this paper we present the findings of a research that investigate this forces and motives in the particular case of our institution: KOC St.-Gregorius.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design and instrument of the research

The research design are investigative. As instrument, we developed a questionnaire, with both closed-ended and opened-ended responses. In order to get as much information as possible, the questions were open-ended. But the questionnaire starts with a few closed-ended questions about professional identity. The answers to these questions are not taken in account, but it could give important information to know how to connect as much staff as possible to the method of LSCI. The questionnaires were taken anonymously.

The extensive information from the answers of the open-ended questions were processed per question. From all answers, keywords were chosen. Next, the keywords were clustered – similar words were grouped and named. Then the original answers were re-read and categorized into a cluster and counted. With this method I could find out what was important for the staff in connection with LSCI-fidelity.

The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail to the professional e-mail addresses. The employees had about a month to answer. During that month, people were reminded to the questionnaire several times by e-mail and by means of the internal newsletter.

Finally, 59 people responded to the questionnaire. This is a low number, compared by the total of employees in our organization and compared by the number of employees that have been trained in LSCI.

This can be explained by the fact that people in our organization frequently are invited to fill in questionnaires.

2.2 The results

The first question about professional identity shows us a job function ratio as shown in figure 1: special educators – 47.46%, teamleaders – 22.03%, management staff – 16.95%, therapists – 13.56%.

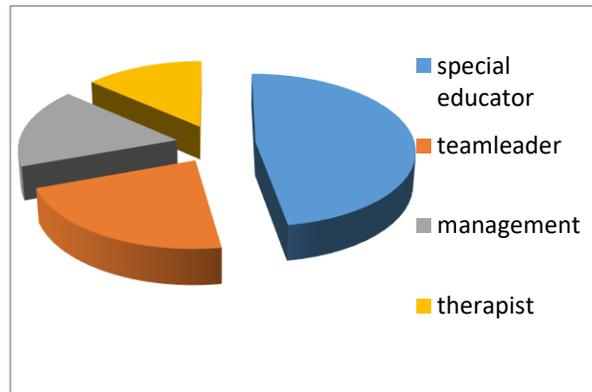


Figure 1: Professions

This is a realistic view on the real situation in our institution.

The second question asks for the years in service of the people who answered the questionnaire. It shows that 47.46% of the people is working in our organization for more than 10 years. This means that nearly 50% of the employees witnessed most of the process we ran with LSCI. This is an interesting thought.

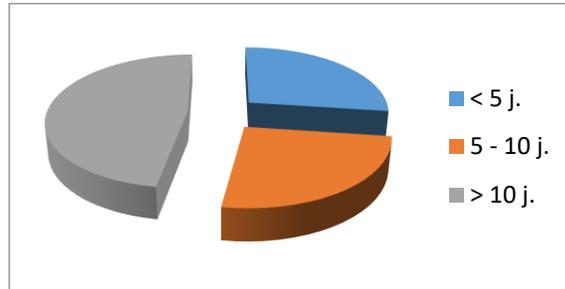


Figure 2: years in service

The third question learns us that 83,05 % of the respondents work directly with children and youth. They are the special educators, teamleaders and therapists from the first question.

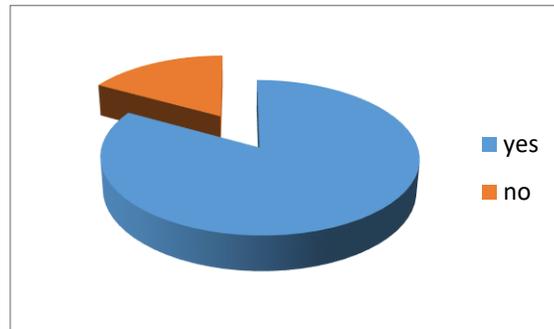


Figure 3: working directly with children

And finally, the fourth closed-ended question helps us to find out that 91.53% of the respondents have taken the 5-day course of LSCI. This is not a surprise, because, from the very start our pedagogical director has taken the decision that everyone who works directly with children must take the course; together with their management.

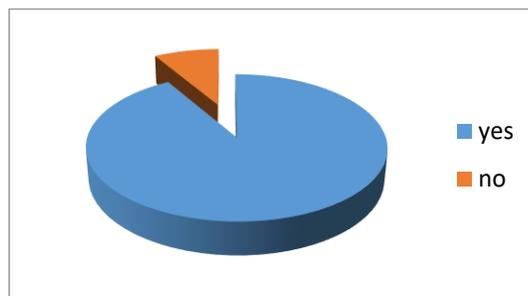


Figure 4: LSCI trained personnel

Next, we are looking to the information that comes from the open-ended questions.

The first questions aims to find out which actions and initiatives for keeping LSCI 'alive' in our organization are remembered by the respondents.

The answers need to be divided in two main groups and then answers are clustered in one group or the other. actions taken in connection with other organizations and actions within our own organization.

1. Actions taken in connection with other organizations (Fig. 5). This type of actions were mentioned 12 times by the respondents and they consist in support from scientific researches (41,67%), the insights and suggestions provided by other collaborative organizations (25%;), and being part of organizations such as EFeCT (European Federation of Conflict Management and Treatment in Education and Care) and MIGES (Minors with emotional and behavioral disorder) (33,33%).

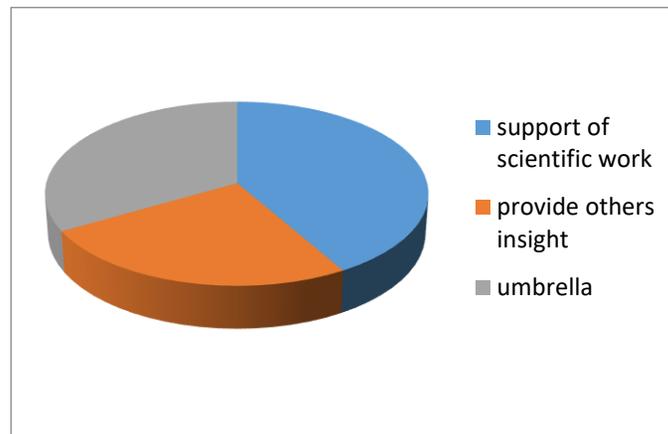


Figure 5: Actions taken outside the organization

2. Actions taken within the organization (Fig. 6). The main actions within the organization that keeps LSCI alive and assure the use of this method as the primary strategy are: the training in LSCI method (31,25 %), follow-ups (23,86%), registration (10,80%), the use of the correspondent materials (2,72%), daily work and procedures (11,36%), and out of the box actions (20,45%).

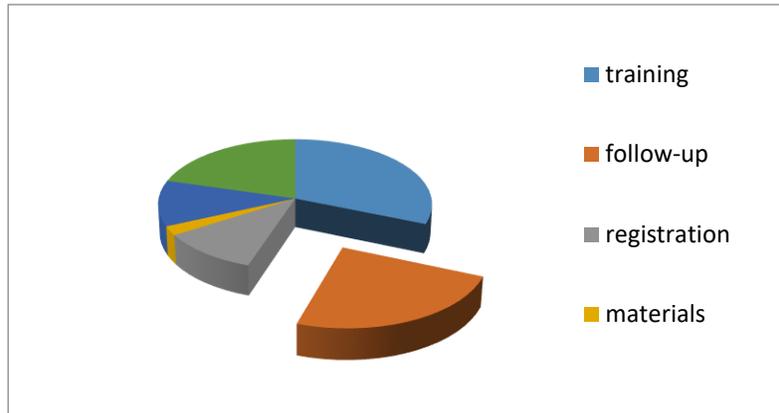


Figure 6: Actions taken within the organization

The second questions aims to find out why actions to keep LSCI 'alive' are appealing to employees.

The answers can be divided in two clusters: characteristics of the actions (Fig. 7) and effect of the actions (Fig. 8).

The characteristics of the actions mentioned were: variation in actions (29,23%), the link with the daily practices (20%), the lesser duration of the actions (13,85%), the frequency of the actions (12,31%), low threshold, attractiveness, clarity, and the visually presentation availability.

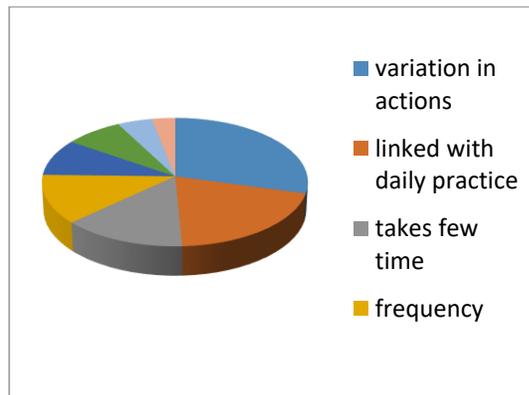


Figure 7: Characteristics of the actions.

The effects of the actions mentioned were: the prompt to open debates (28,83%), the improvement of personnel's self-confidence (28,83%), the feeling of appartenance to a community (16,67%), the efficacy on working with children and youth(12,50%), positive reinforcing, stimulation, and supportive effects.

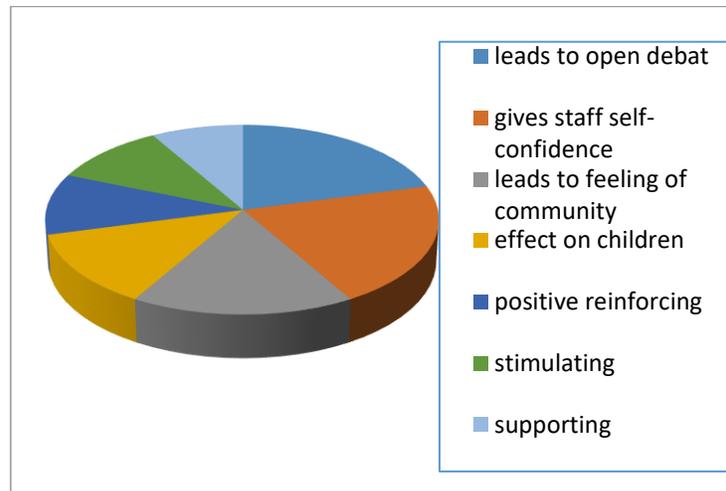


Figure 8: Effects of the actions

The last questions is concerned with identifying possible missed opportunities. This questions offers two types of suggestions: the actions that functions and should be continued (Fig. 9), and, also, some propositions and suggestions for further development and refinement (Fig. 10).

The respondents consider some actions that are relevant and useful and need to be carried out in the future: the trainings (basic and refresh courses) (26.14%), the supervision/intervision sessions (24.62%), the persistence in applying LSCI on a daily base (12.31%), the necessity of variation and creativity in working with LSCI (10.77%), the importance of working and discussing based on case studies (10.77%), the importance to embed LSCI in group plan, to develop and strengthen the LSCI community, to develop task force, to have common meetings, and so on.

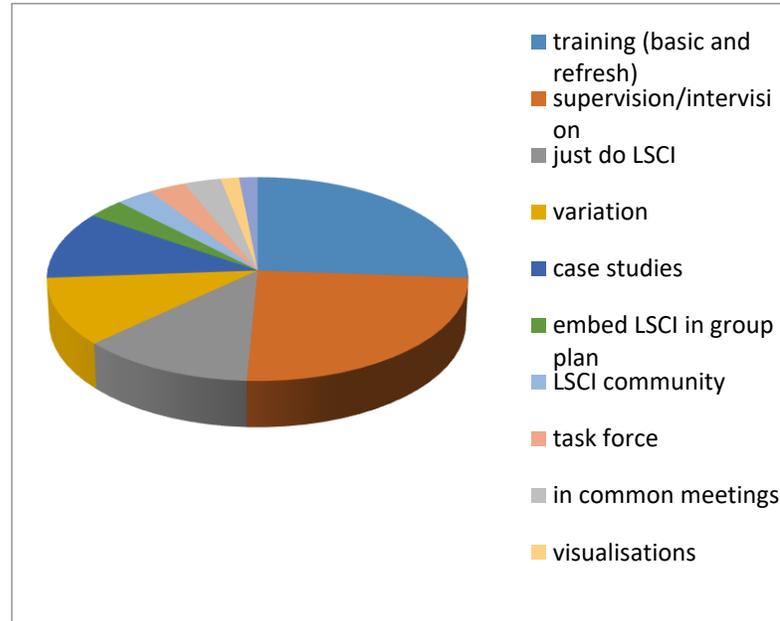


Figure 9: Actions to hold on to.

Also, there were some interested new ideas and suggestions mentioned:

- Regarding the foundations of LSCI, 6 respondents indicated that it is also important to pay attention to the theoretical foundations of LSCI, to broaden the framework of the method (22.22%);
- setting LSCI as high profile: 18.52% of the respondents emphasize that we should see and present LSCI as a high profile technique;
- 14.81% express the need for adaptation of LSCI for children that are less verbal; while LSCI is a verbal strategy
- the importance of connecting and correlate the LSCI theories and strategies with other theories and pedagogical frameworks is a need of 11.11% of the respondents.
- 11.11% indicate that it would be useful to have a LSCI-representative in each team; “a super-trained colleague that can be addressed anytime.”

Further on, there are some other ideas which are mentioned one or two times: the necessity and utility of training parents in LSCI method, the relevance of developing and stating the long term goals of the LSCI method, the usefulness of systematically measure the effects of interventions and to adapt the strategies (RtI).

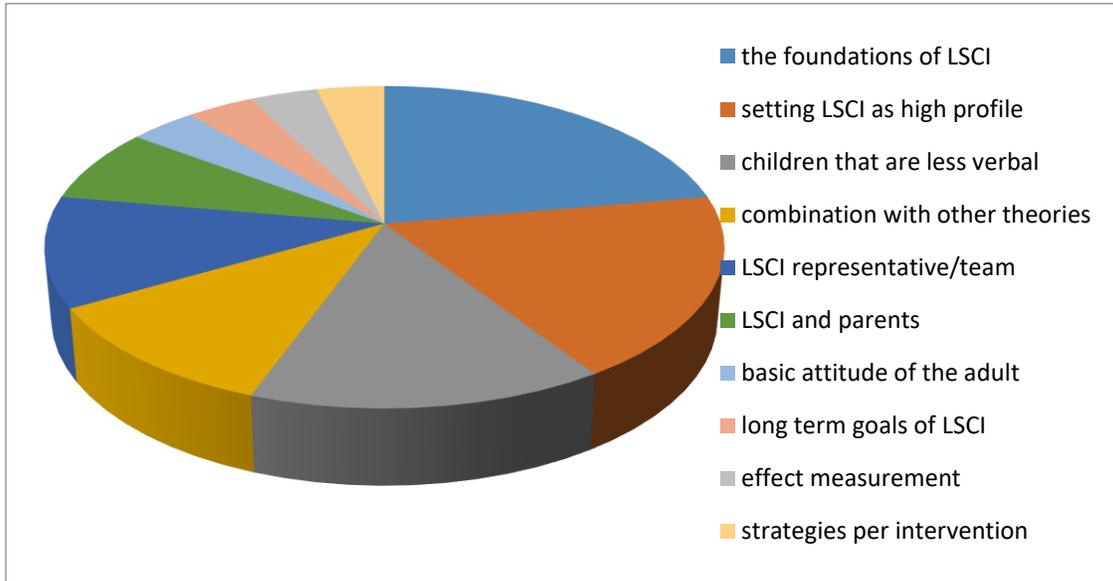


Figure 10: New ideas

2.3 Discussion

The most relevant and insightful ideas were obtained via the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. These questions assessed three main topics: the supplementary, outside the organization actions that promote fidelity for LSCI method, their appealing and valuable characteristics, and the suggestions for future developments and actions that could keep the enthusiasm for LSCI method alive. We will present the conclusions of these open-ended questions.

Relevant and fidelity-promoting actions

The actions outside the organizations seems of minor importance compared to the actions taken within the organization since these actions are fewer mentioned. But although these action are fewer in number, they always give a boost for the actions within the organization. So a few actions in connection with other organizations boost and support the internal actions. Therefore, even few in number, they are important.

For the inside actions, training and follow-ups are the foundation of the LSCI fidelity. Here we are talking about initial training and refresh courses. Follow-up actions lead to implementation into daily work and procedures. Registration should be a standard procedure too, but it is not for the moment.

The out-of-the-box actions are important because it holds something for everyone. It keeps the professional actions fun, light and creative. The use of LSCI-materials such as the book and manual seem of less importance for LSCI-fidelity. But they can be a back-up and reference for other actions or for difficult situations.

It is important to emphasize that it is the decision of the pedagogical director to obligate all employees, from management to field workers and therapists, to attend the 5-day LSCI course.

Other actions or initiatives are taken by a variety of employees: management, team leaders, special educators and therapists can bring in ideas or actions to keep LSCI 'alive'. This way of working helps to keep fidelity to the method high for everyone.

Why actions are appealing?

It is remarkable that respondents indicate the characteristics of the actions to point out why something is appealing; but they also see effects of the actions that have been taken as important to be appealing.

For the characteristics, the variety in actions is very important. It makes that some actions appeal to some people; other actions appeal to others. That is why we reach many employees. Also the frequency of the different actions plays its role for LSCI fidelity.

Also the fact that LSCI is linked with the daily practice, is important. People experience that many aspects of LSCI have an influence how to work with children and youth; so 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating' and if it tastes well, it leads to fidelity for the method.

For the effects of the actions, it strikes that bringing in LSCI as a method leads to open discussions; the perspective of the professional adults is broadened. Together with a increase of self-confidence of the staff and the effect on the children's behavior, the employees start believing in the power of LSCI.

The common language to define behavioral patterns and to frame certain behavior, the sharing of experiences and the idea that LSCI transcend the organizational hierarchy leads to a feeling of community; belonging to a larger LSCI-world.

Ideas for the future

When we ask people for ideas for the future, it strikes that they have a need to stick to actions and initiatives that occurred in the past. Not only people refer to what they know,

but it emphasizes the impact of earlier actions. The training, follow-up and the variety of actions are the main backbone.

Nevertheless, we missed some opportunities in the past. People not only need a good method, but have also a need to know the foundations of the method. It makes the practice of the method more profound. And it helps to link LSCI to other methods.

The respondents also see a need to define LSCI as a high profile method and a way to identify our organization.

Adaptation of a verbal strategy for children that are less verbal is another challenge for the future.

Furthermore, there are some more different ideas that need to be investigated for their importance towards LSCI fidelity.

Conclusion

KOC St.-Gregorius in Gentbrugge, Belgium was chosen as an example for good practice in the field of LSCI fidelity for a number of reasons.

The first one was to identify what are the memorable and relevant actions and initiatives that keep LSCI 'alive' in the organization? What makes such an action appealing for the employees? What opportunities did we miss in the past and are important for the future?

The fact that all employees are obligated to attend the training, together with refresh courses and follow-ups is the backbone of the LSCI-fidelity.

All along this backbone, there are a number of important preconditions that ensure the fidelity for LSCI.

First of all, LSCI is a strong method that is directly linked to the daily work and brings changes in the children, the staff and the organization.

Besides training, refresh courses and follow-ups, there are wide variety of actions that aim for LSCI fidelity; formal and informal. The method of LSCI is embedded in the daily work procedures, but there are also a lot of actions that have, in origin, nothing to do with LSCI, but are informally linked with LSCI in a creative way. This helps to make LSCI more than a method, but also a way of thinking and forming community.

This wide variety of actions is the main fact when it comes to be appealing; certainly when there is a high frequency of appearance of LSCI actions. The link with the daily work makes an action also appealing, certainly when it takes few time.

Furthermore there are some important effects of LSCI actions and initiatives that makes it appealing; such as the increase of the staff's self-confidence, the effect on the children's behavior, the feeling of community and open communication that will bring the organizational hierarchy in another perspective.

The respondents highlight the need to keep up this way of working and they point out some ideas and challenges for the future. Especially the foundations of LSCI and the compatibility with other methods is an important issue for the future, together with the challenge to adapt LSCI so it could be of more importance for children that are less verbal. This way of working leads to fidelity toward the LSCI method, and this fidelity is boosted from time to time by actions that transcend the boundaries of our own organization.

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The social skills of children with disabilities

Claudia - Vasilica BORCA*

Abstract

Starting from the premise that academic and professional success is based mainly on the development of social competences, we are proposing to find out whether, as a result of the existence of a sensory and intellectual disability, can we talk about the different development of social skills? We seek an answer to this question by carrying out a research on a group of 153 children with sensory and intellectual disabilities aged between 9 and 15, coming from four special schools in Timisoara. We set ourselves as a general objective of research: identifying possible statistically significant differences that arise between the level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired children and those with hearing disability. Analysing and interpreting the results confirms the two hypotheses formulated.

Keywords: *social competencies, social skills, sensory disabilities, intellectual disability.*

1. Introduction

Understanding the concept of social competence involves clarifying the concept of social knowledge. Social knowledge is "the set of thoughts, neural processes, behaviours and social interaction skills; It is how a child interprets the behaviour of others, nonverbal processes of perception, memory, and understanding are the intuitive or logical representation of others by the child. The behaviours and skills learned through these processes result in performance in social competence."(Newton, M.A. &Carroll M.)

The difference between the term of social skills and social competence has been clarified more than three decades ago by Dodge and Murphy (1984), which considered "social skills to refer to specific abilities or behaviors that allow an effective response to a task (eg,

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Cavell, 1990; Gambrill & Ritchey, 1986). Social competence, on the other hand, usually refers to a judgment of external observers on the adequacy of performance in a social task (McFall, 1982). Thus, social skills are the sum of responses that underlie socially competent performance.” (Douglas W. Nangle & al., 2010).

Bierman (2004) defined social competence as "the ability to coordinate adaptive responses to various interpersonal demands and to organize social behaviour in different social contexts in a beneficial way for oneself and in accordance with social and moral conventions" (apud Satici, S. A & al., 2014)

Broderick and Blewitt (2010) identify four categories of fundamental social competencies:

1. emotional processes (empathy, valorisation of relationships and feelings);
2. cognitive processes (cognitive skills, perspectives on ideas and moral judgments);
3. social skills (use of appropriate language and appropriate questions);
4. social concept.

In order for personal development to take place, another five basic social competencies are needed: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, linking skills and responsible decisions.

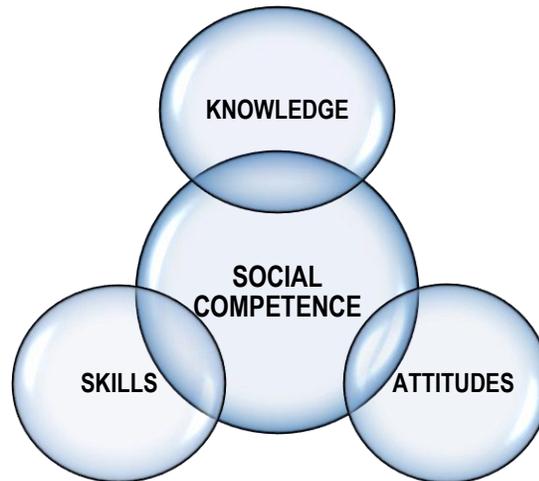


Figure 1. The components of social competence

A comprehensive definition of social competence includes the knowledge, attitudes and skills of a person (Fig. no. 1), referring to at least six elements (Fig. no. 2):

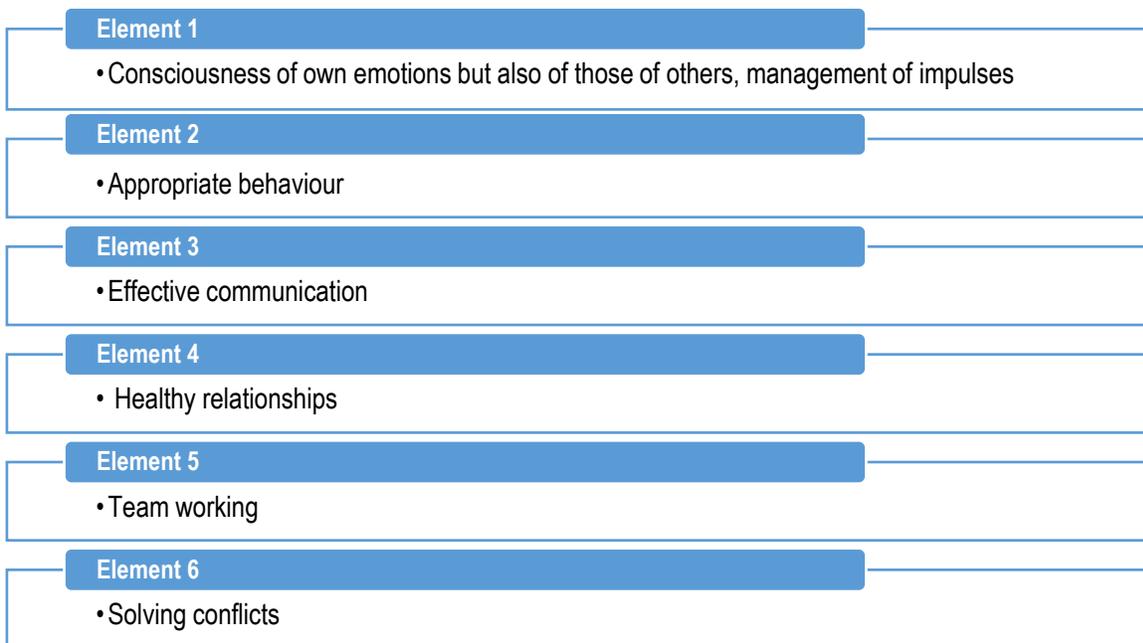


Figure 2. The six elements of social competence

Academic and professional success is based mainly on the development of social skills.

2.Developing social skills in conditions of disability

If we refer to the development of social abilities in children with disabilities, studies have been carried out demonstrating that in school, the acceptance of children with disabilities is lower (Estell et al., 2008; Nowicki, 2003), encounter difficulties in making friends (Estell et al., 2009; Wiener & Schneider, 2002), "and are more often victims of bullying" (Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993 "They are also more anxious (Nelson & Harwood, 2011a) and prone to depression (Nelson & Harwood, 2011b) than students without LDs.)" (apud Mansour, M. & Wiener, J.<https://www.ldatschool.ca/social-skills-training/>)

However, the results of a comparative analysis of the social skills that children with intellectual disabilities (ID) from inclusive schools have compared with other children with moderate intellectual disabilities (ID) from segregated school showed "that children in

inclusive schools did not significantly differ from children in segregated schools.”(Hardiman et al., 2009).

According to Spitzberg (2003), social competence cannot be considered independent of the physical and mental state of a person (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).

The acquisition of social skills by visually impaired students is not learned naturally, but by the significant support provided by people in the pupil's life. Family members of visually impaired students should look at acquiring and maintaining equally important social skills and promote competent social behaviour in all environments where the pupil participates. Families and educators need to work together to achieve socially responsible behaviour in visually impaired students.

As a homogeneous group, children with hearing impairment demonstrate low levels of social skills, as shown by some studies, and therefore have an increased risk of unsatisfactory academic outcomes, high unemployment rates, high rates of social non-adjustment (violence, problems with substance abuse), a higher incidence of stress. However, not all deaf children develop these problems, and the impact of deafness on general development is influenced by several important factors such as the quality of the family environment, the adaptation of parents to deafness, the quality and permissiveness of the educational environment, the presence of community resources as well as their own characteristics of the child.

Many people with intellectual disabilities have underdeveloped social skills. This is due to the fact that the development of social skills relies heavily on certain intellectual capacities. "The development of an individual with intellectual disability depends on the type and severity of disorder that underlies associated disabilities, environmental factors, psychological factors and cognitive abilities.”(Ludwik, et al., 2001)”For people with mental disabilities, their level of social development has implications for the degree of support needed in their literacy and community integration with a focus on integrating competencies into personal, internal and community functioning. It also contributes considerably to the quality of life. Thus, investigating factors that can facilitate or inhibit social development is of particular importance.” (Kumar, I; Singh, A; Akhtar, S., 2009).

3. Method

To answer the **main research question**– *as a result of the existence of a sensory and intellectual disability, can we talk about the different development of social skills?* we have established the following research assumptions.

Hypothesis 1: Developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disabilities compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disabilities.

Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences in the level of development of social skills in pupils with intellectual, hearing and hearing disabilities.

Research objectives

- 1.1. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities
- 1.2. Determining the level of development of social skills in visually impaired students
- 1.3. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with hearing impairment
- 1.4. Identify the possible differences that arise between the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities in relation to visually impaired students and those with hearing impairment.
- 2.1. Identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social competence development.

Participants and sampling

A sample of 153 subjects participated in this research, students with sensory and intellectual disabilities, with aged between 9 and 15 years. The sampling criteria were: type of deficiency and age of subjects, distributed as follows:

Table 1. Sample

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	intellectual disabilities	51	33,3
	visual impairment	51	33,3
	hearing impairment	51	33,3
	Total	153	100,0

Measures

The Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment I (ACLSA-I) – Youth is a scale aims at identifying social development specific behaviours.

Description:

- The ACLSA is a measure of life skills acquisition, available in youth self-report
- The assessment consists of four developmental levels: ACLSA-I (ages 8-9), ACLSA-II (ages 10-12), ACLSA-III (ages 13-15), and ACSLA-IV (ages 16 and older).
- The youth format contains items to measure self-reported knowledge and behaviours, as well as a brief performance section to test actual knowledge of life skills.

Items for ages 8 -9:

1. *I ask for help when I need it.*
2. *I tell my problems to an adult.*
3. *I use good manners when I eat.*
4. *I pay attention when others talk.*
5. *I am polite to adults.*
6. *I tell others how I feel.*
7. *I return what I borrow.*
8. *I stay out of trouble.*
9. *I help others.*
10. *I can get mad without hurting others.*

Items for ages 10 – 12:

1. *I ask for help when I need it.*
2. *I explain how I am feeling (like angry, happy, worried or depressed).*
3. *I get help if my feelings bother me.*
4. *I clearly present my ideas to others.*
5. *I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.*
6. *When I disagree with someone, I try to find a compromise.*
7. *I accept compliments or praise without feeling embarrassed.*
8. *I talk over problems with a friend.*
9. *I talk with an adult I feel close to.*

Items for ages 13 - 15:

Communication:

1. *I get help if my feelings bother me.*

2. *I can explain how I am feeling (like angry, happy, worried, or depressed).*
3. *I ask for help when I need it.*
4. *I talk with an adult I feel close to.*
5. *I talk over problems with a friend.*
6. *I accept compliments or praise without feeling embarrassed.*
7. *I clearly present my ideas to others.*
8. *I ask questions to make sure I understand something someone has said.*
9. *When I disagree with someone, I try to find a compromise.*
10. *I am polite to others.*
11. *I respect other people's things.*

Social Skills:

12. *I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyles and their attitudes.*
13. *I show appreciation for things others do for me.*
14. *I deal with anger without using violence.*
15. *I think about how my choices affect others.*
16. *I can safely interact with others on the internet.*

4. Results

To verify the first hypothesis, *developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disability*, we proposed the following objectives:

- 1.1. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities
- 1.2. Determining the level of development of social skills in visually impaired students
- 1.3. Determining the level of development of social skills in students with hearing impairment
- 1.4. Identify the possible differences that occur between the level of development of social skills in students with intellectual disabilities in relation to visually impaired students and those with hearing impairment.

The cross tabulation analysis below provides us with the necessary information on which to verify this hypothesis. Only 7 intellectual disabled students have a high level of

social competence development, compared with 16 visually impaired students and 20 pupils with hearing impairment.

Table 2. Cross tabulation analysis of social skills

		Disabilities			Total
		intellectual disabilities	visual impairment	hearing impairment	
Social skills	<i>very low level</i>	10	3	3	16
	<i>low level</i>	22	8	9	39
	<i>medium level</i>	12	24	19	55
	<i>high level</i>	7	16	20	43
Total		51	51	51	153

Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed: *developing social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disability compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disability.*

To verify the second hypothesis, *there are statistically significant differences in the level of development of social skills in pupils with intellectual, hearing and hearing disabilities*, we proposed the following objective: Identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social skills development.

For this aim, we will perform a comparative analysis using the *t* pairs test. The analysis has three pairs:

Pair no. 1: The level of development of social competences in intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with visual disability (analysis in Table 3) at a $p = .017$, at 50 degrees of freedom (df), we have a $t = 2,472$. By comparing this value with the standardized values of the *t* test, we find that our value is higher, so it is statistically significant. We can say that there are significant differences between the level of development of social skills to intellectual disabled children and the level of development of social skills in children visually disabled.

Pair no. 2: The level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability. At a significance threshold $p = .171$, at 50 degrees of freedom (df), the value of the test *t* is 1.389. By comparing this value with the standardized values of the *t* test ($t = 1.303$), we find that our value is higher, so it is statistically significant. We can say that there are significant

differences between the level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - The level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability.

Pair no. 3: The level of development of social skills for visually impaired people - The level of development of social skills for hearing impaired. In the case of this pair, we cannot speak of a statistical significance because the significance threshold has the value of .417, a value outside the admissible limits. Therefore, we cannot talk about statistically significant differences between the level of development of social skills in pupils with visual disabilities - the level of development of social skills in pupils with hearing disability.

Table 3. Comparative analysis - *t* pairs test

		Paired Samples Test					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair	Level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - Level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1	Level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - Level of development of social skills in children with visual disability	,372	1,076	,150	,069	,675	2,472	50	,017
2	Level of development of social skills in children with intellectual disability - Level of development of social skills in children with hearing disability	,235	1,209	,1694	-,104	,575	1,389	50	,171
3	Level of development of social skills in children with visual disabilities - Level of development of social skills in children with hearing disabilities	-,137	1,200	,168	-,474	,200	-,817	50	,418

As a result of the statistical analysis we can affirm that the second hypothesis is partially confirmed, there are statistically significant differences between the level of development of the social skills of the children with intellectual disabilities compared to the children with sensory disabilities, but we cannot talk about the differences between the subjects with disabilities visual and hearing impaired subjects.

Conclusions

The two aims of the present study were to compare the social skills in students with intellectual, hearing and visually disabilities and to identify the possible differences (statistically significant) between the three categories of disabilities in the area of social skills development.

Development of social skills has lower values for students with intellectual disabilities compared to visually impaired students and those with hearing disabilities. There are statistically significant differences between the level of development of the social skills of the children with intellectual disabilities compared to the children with sensory disabilities, but we cannot talk about the differences between the subjects with disabilities visual and hearing impaired subjects.

Development of social skills of students with disabilities may be possible if teachers will make teaching of social skills a priority, as important as learning reading. The disability pupil's family needs to look at acquiring and maintaining social skills as a very important stage in the formation of social autonomy. It is recommended that the family and educators work together to develop a socially expected behaviour in the disability student.

Many people with intellectual disabilities have underdeveloped social skills. This is due to the fact that the development of social competences is based on certain intellectual capacities.

For people with intellectual disabilities, academic achievements are relatively devoid of importance when compared to personal autonomy, social adaptation, and vocational training.

Students with intellectual disabilities should be taught to understand the context of the social situation, to determine alternative social behaviours, to choose the most desirable behaviour and to evaluate the effectiveness of the behaviour.

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Educational communication and support technologies for deaf students

Anca LUȘTREA*

Abstract

Support technologies are a key concept that refers to the technical tools helpful in recovery, rehabilitation and education of people with disabilities. They play an important role in achieving effective communication with others and especially in schools, in educational communication. This study examine the main support technologies used with hearing impaired students in order to enable them to communicate effectively in school and successfully participate in educational programs. Also, in relation to the use of supportive technologies the teacher's scientific beliefs about the best educational communication approach (gestural, oral or total) is examined. In order to assess the study variables two questionnaires was administrated to 20 teachers for deaf from CSEI C-tin Pufan Timisoara. Results revealed that the teachers adopt the total communication model, with accent on bilingualism, and except hearing aids, they do not use other communication support technologies.

Keywords: educational communication, support technologies, deaf students

1. Introduction

Educational communication facilitates the educational achievement, regardless of content, levels, forms and parameters involved. Compared to this, classroom communication appears as a particular form, binding, determined in the transmission of the curriculum and the specific act of learning. Communication, as a form of interaction and activation, involves gaining communicative competence. Its absence often explains the failure or the difficulties that highly trained teachers meet in their direct work with the

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students. To make educational communication effective for hearing impaired teachers must know the characteristics of the communication and its specific in the context of deafness.

Communication is a process of transmitting information. The simplest scheme of communication between two people includes the following components: sender, code, communication channel, message, communication recipient and the feed-back. In the communication with the deaf student the sender is a hearing teacher and the communication recipient is a deaf student. The code is a system of signs that mean something, Typically, the code is the language, important are knowing and understanding the code by both sides. Therefore the teacher for the deaf must master a common code with his students.

Understanding deaf children language and communicational experiences in different life environments is a complex process (Allen, Anderson, 2010). There are three main approaches to language acquisition and also to the method used in educational communication: the oral, the bilingual/bicultural and the total communication approach (Luștrea, 2017).

The oral approach focus on verbalization, on acquisition of the oral (or phonetic) form of the language, the sign language is excluded from communication. In the classroom the teacher communicates with the students only in the oral form of language and demand from the students to communicate between themselves only orally. The code is in that case the Romanian language, the channel of communication is auditory and visual (in speechreading).

On the other side is the bilingual/bicultural approach. In this philosophy, the child is valued as deaf, and allowed to speak and learn in Romanian Sign Language (RSL). In the classroom the teacher communicate with the students and the students between themselves in sign language. The code is in that case is the RSL and the channel of communication is visual (in perceiving the signs).

Those two antagonistic approaches to language acquisition and communication do not exist in the Romanian special school system, only the third one, the total communication philosophy. In the total approach any mean of communication is accepted as valid, as long as it can improve human interaction. In the classroom the teacher communicate with the

students and the students between themselves both in Romanian and in RSL. The code is in that case is the Romanian language and in parallel the RSL and the channel of communication is both auditory and visual (in speechreading and perceiving of signs). All the Romanians special schools for deaf are total communication schools, but put more emphasis on oral or on bilingual methods.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the code and thus of communication, in the schools for deaf support technologies are used. Support technologies are used as compensatory tools for disabilities in question, providing greater independence in everyday life and technical support for specialists in the recovery and education of deaf students. The term support technologies means any item or piece of equipment acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (Robitaille, 2010). There are three main types of support technologies: low-tech (the ones that don't require electricity to function), mid-tech (use batteries or have electronic circuits) and high-tech tools (complex electronic devices) (Bugaj, Norton-Darr, 2011).

Support technologies have played an important role in the lives of the deaf for a long time, especially in terms of distance communication. The first system used for this purpose was the text phone, which communicate via text messages. The advancement of new informational technologies has facilitated distance communication for deaf, first via mobile (text messaging), and then through written or video communication via the Internet.

Support technologies used in education refers specifically to support communication technology equipment (hearing aids, cochlear implant) and to group technologies (FM systems) and the technologies used to support recovery of individual communication refers to hearing aids, cochlear implant voice amplifiers, audiometer and polidactilograf. Hearing aids are electronic devices that constitute as an aid in perceiving the sounds and the opportunity to learn verbal communication. In classroom situation, in addition to hearing aids/cochlear implant, the FM systems or infrared systems may also be used. FM systems are collective tools for amplification and transmission of sound to the group. The teacher and students are wearing a microphone that captures and amplifies the voice, transmitted by radio to a certain frequency to individual student's aids. Infrared systems use light waves to transmit sound from a transmitter to a special receiver that can

be individual or for a group. “Specialized hearing technologies may reduce the impact of barriers that deaf students experience in schools, such as classroom noise, rapid rate of discussion, rapid change of topics, and large numbers of people engaged in conversation, all of which can prevent deaf students from participating in teacher–student and student–student communication.” (Rekkedal, 2012, p.499)

It is also possible to use assisted note taking, computer-assisted note taking, hand writing recognition, digital pen, SMART tables, iCommunicator and Video Remote Interpreter. Assisted note taking and computer-assisted note taking requires the help of a support teacher to take notes in real time in pen paper or electronic format. Handwriting recognition systems and digital pen are systems that convert handwriting in to electronic documents. SMART interactive white boards are devices that via a USB connection are connected to the computer, with all its benefits. For deaf students they are particularly useful because they can provide visual support for understanding and learning new knowledge. iCommunicator is a digital tool that converts the spoken word into written electronic or video-sign language (Hersh, 2003). Video Remote Interpreter is a device that transmits video images of an sign language interpreter located in another place, which translates into sign language teacher’s message (Robitaille, 2010). Unfortunately, iCommunicator and Video Remote Interpreter is not available in our country.

In recent years support technologies for deaf relies mainly in advance electronics and virtual technology (Sullivan, Sahasrabudhe, 2017). New online applications and virtual communications tools (Abdallah, Fayyumi, 2016; Martins et al., 2015) or sensory substitution aids (Sorgini, Calio, Carrozza, 2017) are developed customized to different needs, including the ones related to deafness. The rapid development of research on assistive technologies (Kbar, Bhatia, Abidi, Alsharawy, 2017) reflect the shift the accent from the product to a user-centered approach (Abbott, Brown, Evett, Standen, 2013).

Assistive technologies are a defining component of deaf culture (Eckert, 2010), but in recent years the new technology of cochlear implantation introduced a new element in the deaf culture. More and more deaf children are implanted in a young age, preferring to attend mainstream schools and missing the experience of creating a deaf identity in the special schools, the impact of this development being yet unknown (Marschark, Zettler, Dammeyer, 2017). However, deaf technologies and especially cochlear implants have an

impact on psychosocial functioning and quality of life but yet unknown in relation to deaf culture (Marschark et al., 2017).

In this research we want to determine the types of support technologies used in schools for the deaf and the link between the type of communication chosen by the teacher and support technologies used.

2. Specific aims

Given the important role of support technologies in educational communication and language acquisition, we sought to assess the type of educational communication model adopted by the teachers for deaf and the support technologies chosen to facilitate the educational process. We address this specific aims:

- Assess the model of educational communication and the type of language acquisition approach adopted by the teachers for the deaf.
- Assess the types of support technologies used in the educational process.
- Determine the link between the chosen educational model and the support technologies used.

3. Research hypothesis

We presume that:

1. The teachers for deaf adopt mostly the medical model of disability and the oral approach to language acquisition.
2. Due to low financial resources teachers have little support technologies at their disposal.
3. The support technologies used in the educational and rehabilitation process are limited to hearing aids and cochlear implants.
4. There is no differentiation in the choice of support technologies in relation to the degree of deafness.
5. There is no differentiation in the choice of support technologies in relation to the educational communication model adopted.

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

In the research group are included 20 teachers from CSEI "Constantin Pufan" Timisoara, aged between 25 and 44 years old, with a mean age of 35.8. Lot gender distribution reveals 19 women and 1 man, with a mean of teaching experience in schools for deaf of 11.7 years. The participants are 10 psychologists (50%), 9 special education specialists (45%) and 1 (5%) mathematics professor. The positions occupied in school are 7 teachers for deaf (35%), 5 educational teachers (25%), 2 kindergarten teachers (10%), 6 speech therapists (30%) and 1 mathematics teacher (5%).

4.2 Instruments

To assess the teacher's attitudes about educational approach, the "BADE" questionnaire was administrated. The BADE questionnaire assess the attitudes and beliefs about deaf education and was elaborated by Science of Learning Centre on Visual Language and Visual Learning. The questionnaire was translated and adapted to the Romanian cultural specific. The questionnaire was auto - administrated online and consisted of 26 questions, grouped in 4 subscales: subscale 1: Medical Model/Oral Language, 10 items, subscale 2: Social Model/perceived positive impact on bilingualism 10 items, subscale 3: perceived negative impact on bilingualism, 4 items and subscale 4: learnability of RSL for hearing parents, 2 items. Low scores mean that people disagree with this subscale (scores between 1 and 2.5); Scores of 2.5 to 3.5 mean that respondents neither disagree or agree with this subscale; Scores of 3.6 or above mean that people agree with the subscale. To the BADE questionnaire 8 more items were added, they refer to the types of support technologies used in educational context.

5. Results

In order to test null hypothesis 1, that states that "the teachers of deaf do not adopt mostly the medical model of disability and the oral approach to language acquisition" we compared the differences of means between the medical and social approach scales of BADE questionnaire completed by teachers.

Table 1: One-Sample Test for BADE scales, teachers responses

	Test Value = 3.5					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Medical model	3.791	19	.001	.51000	.2284	.7916
Social model	2.296	19	.033	.21000	.0186	.4014
Negative impact d/bibi	-9.293	19	.000	-1.25000	-1.5315	-.9685
Learnability RSL	-4.637	19	.000	-.95000	-1.3788	-.5212

In table 1 are presented the one-sample t test values for BADE scales, reported to 3.5 value, that is indicated in the questionnaire manual as the reference value for high scores per scale. The values higher than 3,5 indicated a positive approach towards that variable. So, in our case the teachers value both medical and social model (the t scores indicate that the difference of means is significant at $p < 0.05$). Also, they don't think that learning RSL in early childhood determine a negative impact on language acquisition or that the parents are willing and capable of learning RSL.

Table 2: Paired sample t test for medical vs social approach to language acquisition, teacher,,s responses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Medical model – social model	.30000	.50990	.11402	2.631	19	.016

In table 2 is presented the paired sample t test for medical versus social approach to language acquisition, the result indicate that medical model is significantly more valued and adopted than the social model ($t=2.63$ at $p < 0.05$). We can say that the null hypothesis was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 2, that states that „due to low financial resources teachers have a lot of support technologies at their disposal” we calculated the following frequencies:

Table 3: Who much is the amount of financial support offered by school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid None	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
below 25%	14	70.0	70.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

In table 3 are presented the teachers` opinions about the financial support offered by school for support technologies necessary in deaf education. The majority of teachers (70%) considers that the financial support is below 25% from necessity and 30% that the allocated funds are none. All the teachers perceived a very low financial support offered by school for support technologies.

Table 4:In teaching you use the following support technologies

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid hearing aids/cochlear implant	15	75.0	75.0	75.0
hearing aid, web cam, audiometer	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

In table 4 are presented the types of support technologies used by teachers in the educational and rehabilitation process. The majority of teachers (75%) use only hearing aids or cochlear implants, only 25% of them use in addition web cam and the audiometer as support technologies. The null hypothesis 2 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 3, that states that „the support technologies used in the educational and rehabilitation process are not limited to hearing aids and cochlear implants.” we calculated the following frequencies:

Table 5: The support technologies used in educational communication are

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid hearing aids/cochlear implant	15	75.0	75.0	75.0
web cam	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

In table 5 are presented the types of support technologies used by teachers in the educational communication. The majority of teachers (75%) use only hearing aids or cochlear implants, only 25% of them use in addition the web cam as support technology. The null hypothesis 3 was invalid, and the research hypothesis 3 does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 4, that states that „there is differentiation in the choice of support technologies in relation to the degree of deafness, we compared the differences in teachers beliefs about necessary support technologies for hearing impaired versus profoundly deaf students.

Table 6: Chi Square test

	Support technologies used for hearing impaired	Support technologies used for profoundly deaf
Chi-Square	9,100 ^a	5,200 ^a
df	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	,011	,074

0 cells (0,0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
The minimum expected cell frequency is 6,7.

In table 6 is presented the Chi-Square test between the teacher’s choice of support technologies for hearing impaired versus profoundly deaf. The results indicate that there are no differences in teacher’s choices for support technologies in relation with different levels of deafness. The null hypothesis 4 was invalid, and the research hypothesis 4 does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 5, that states that „there is differentiation in the choice of support technologies in relation to the educational communication model adopted,, we compared the differences of means between the support technologies adopted by oral approach teachers versus bilingual/bicultural approach teachers.

In table 7 is presented the independent sample t test for support technologies adopted by oral approach teachers versus bilingual/bicultural approach teachers. The scores obtained indicate that ($t=-7.01$ at $p<0.01$) the teachers who adopt the bilingual/bicultural approach tend to use more support technologies for their profoundly deaf students. The null hypothesis 5 was valid, and the research hypothesis 3 does not confirm.

Table 7: Independent sample t test for support technologies adopted by oral approach teachers versus bilingual/bicultural approach teachers

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
For profound deafness necessary support technologies are	Equal variances assumed	13.927	.002	-5.678	18	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.018	11.000	.000

6. Conclusions

This research focused on investigating the type of educational communication model adopted by the teachers for deaf and the support technologies chosen to facilitate the educational process. We aimed to determine the link between the chosen educational model and the support technologies used.

The results substantiate that the teachers value above average, both medical and social model. This dual attitude towards language acquisition demonstrates that they, in fact, adopt a total communication approach (in which both methods are accepted and valued). Also, teachers focus more on the medical model. In conclusion, teachers have a total communication approach to language acquisition, with more emphasis on the oral approach.

All the teachers perceived a very low financial support offered by school for support technologies. The majority of teachers (75%) use only hearing aids or cochlear implants, only 25% of them use in addition web cam and audiometer as support technologies. Because there are little support technologies at the teachers disposal, they cannot chose from a very large range of support technologies, the educational communication must take place without facilitating factors.

Also, because of the little support technologies at their disposal, there are no differences in teacher`s choices for support technologies in relation with different levels of deafness. The teachers who adopt the bilingual/bicultural approach tend to use more support technologies for their profoundly deaf students.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First of all the instruments used are not adapted for specialists. Secondly, the research groups are small and the effect of the findings cannot be generalized.

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Older people's education: the case of Poland

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Abstract

In Poland, as well as in many other European countries, the proportion of older people is steadily growing. This phenomenon is related to numerous challenges faced by the countries. It is also worth pointing out that there is an increasing interest in ageing subjects, especially education in late adulthood. The issues related to education of older people in Poland were discussed in the article. It presents an overview of rapid demographic changes, the situation of the elderly people and their educational needs. Moreover, the article also deals with institutional assistance and support for older people's education as well as the selected Polish research focusing on education in old age.

Keywords: older people education, Poland, aging research

1. The situation of elderly people in Poland

The population in Poland is getting older, as it is the case of other European countries. According to *the Polish Central Statistical Office* (Główny Urząd Statystyczny GUS 2016a), Poland's population was estimated to be 38 million people in 2015, including 8,8 million (nearly 23%) people aged 60 and over. By way of comparison, in 1989, the proportion of population aged 60 and over was 14,7%. The elderly population is projected to make up 40% of the total population in 2050. The ageing process results from the lifestyle extension phenomenon as well as low fertility rates. In Poland, women (59%) constitute the majority of the older population. The preponderance of women increases with moving through successive older age groups. Among people aged at least 85, 73% are women living in one-person households. Widowhood among women involves not only living alone for a considerable period of time, but also significantly lower incomes, which makes it difficult to

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satisfy needs independently (Błędowski et al. 2012). Polish seniors seem to have small social networks, consisting of a few persons, mostly family members (Kozerska 2015). The CBOS report (Omyłka-Rudzka, 2012), presenting the research results on ways of spending time in retirement, reveals that almost second woman (46%) tends to regularly or occasionally help care for their grandchildren or great-grandchildren, compared with 39% of men. Furthermore, it was noted that the level of biological disability in elderly people seems to be slightly higher in Poland than the EU average (GUS 2016b). According to the Eurostat methodology, every second person aged 60+ was considered disabled. Nearly 2/3 of the above mentioned population is made up of individuals with minor activity limitations that are not encountered by other people, whereas the remaining 1/3 of the population has more serious activity limitations. Nonetheless, the participation rate of biologically disabled older people appears to be much higher in a number of European countries than in Poland, for example, in Latvia and Slovakia, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the elderly (aged 65+) are biologically disabled, whereas the biologically disabled account for about 60-70% of the elderly population (aged 65+) in Estonia, Romania, Lithuania, Italy, Hungary, Greece and Germany (GUS 2016b). The results of report *Prognoza ludności na lata 2014-2050* (2014) indicate the deepening process of population ageing. Like Lithuania and Romania, Poland, in this regard, will have to face the most unfavourable situation in comparison to other European countries. The major issues and problems related to the phenomenon of population ageing still remain to be addressed. They include (Błędowski et al. 2012, p.28): 1) a decline in the care potential of families; 2) an increase in burdens of the pension system as a result of the necessity of a larger number of various benefit payments in the long term; 3) an increase in health care costs; 4) an increase in community care costs; 5) an increase in institutional care costs, particularly financial outlays associated with institutional forms of care for the elderly. Demographic changes pose numerous challenges for Poland regarding the policy-making process aiming at finding solutions to the issues highlighted above. In Europe, the Active Ageing Index (AAI) measures the potential of older people in terms of employment, participation in social activities, independent living and their capacity to active age. The index was launched by the European Commission in the context of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012. The index is made up of a set of indicators covering four domains: 1) Employment 2) Social

participation 3) Independent, healthy and secure living 4) Capacity for active ageing. Poland is the country which hardly scored 28,2 points in the AAI in 2014, assuming that the index value of 100 represents a perfect situation with a 100% task completion rate in each specific area and 100% participation of the elderly in all areas. When the overall ranking of 28 European countries is taken into account, Poland, which is ranked only above Greece, occupied the penultimate position (*Active Ageing ...* 2014). Slovakia, Hungary and Romania also became the bottom-ranked countries. In Poland, the active ageing policy, particularly since 2012, has aroused considerable interest designing and implementing the Government Programme for the Social Participation of Senior Citizens (ASOS): development of the Long-Term Senior Policy in Poland for the years 2014-2020; the programme Solidarity between Generations: Measures to Increase the Activity of People Aged 50+; and then introduction of the Senior-WIGOR multiannual programme for the years 2015-2020 (Perek-Białas 2016, p.23). All activities are carried out in compliance with the objectives of the European Social Fund for 2014-2020. Both investing in lifelong learning and promoting social inclusion are considered high priority. It is assumed that a significant contribution to achieving those objectives can be made by improving access to various forms of lifelong learning, the active social integration of individuals in every age group, striving to promote active and healthy ageing and improving access to high quality social services, including older people's services (*Rządowy Program ...*, p.21). According to papers related to promoting active ageing, "social policy towards old people cannot be exclusively policy in aid of old people but should be a policy of assistance in organising their lives" (Błędowski 2002, p.231).

2. Educational needs of older people

Educational needs of older people refer to "personality regulatory mechanisms with the particular emotional and motivational character helping individuals strive for things and situations, etc. (both tangible and intangible) which let experience significant educational value and satisfy their cognitive needs. The series of needs are fulfilled by broadly understood learning which takes place both in institutions and outside them by their own learning process or having a tutor, learning systematically or occasionally implementing in all aspects of life and all time perspectives (Dubas 2016, p.242). Older people's needs are influenced by their social and demographic characteristics, an economic

situation, health status broadly understood, including a sophisticated approach to the ageing process (Ziębińska 2007). This also relates to the educational needs. It is argued that maintaining independence is the purpose of older people's education (it is also one of the basic educational needs) (Halicki 2000, Leszczyńska-Rejchert 2010). For example, Halicki (2000, p.21) claims that "human life is understood as a task which needs independence required to perform the task (...) the independence is perceived as an important basis for competent behaviours characterised by taking responsibility for one's own actions. You cannot take responsibility for something that is not completely decided about on your own".

Educational needs of older people are somehow imposed by rapid changes and reality that surrounds us. It is also related to a fast development of technology, but also to some social changes which we are observing. Certain educational needs in elderly people are the result of not fulfilled desires (Sulik 2009). These needs may also appear in crisis situations, in case of illness or experienced disability. In such cases the aim of educational activity is to develop skills necessary to keep on living. Frequently these are totally new skills for an individual. A person's education has always something to do with one's activity, thus educational needs are in line with a person's fields of activity. Kargul (2005) distinguishes the following fields in which an average man's activity is showed: family life, working life, leisure time, corporeality or interpersonal relations. Dubas (2016) identifies four categories of educational needs of the elderly: conscious, unconscious, fulfilled, and unfulfilled.

3. Institutional support of learning of the elderly in Poland

The most common institutional form supporting education of the elderly in Poland is the idea of third age university. The first institution of this type was established in Warsaw in 1975, only two years after the first in the world third age university had been founded in France. In 2015 in Poland there were 575 TAUs (Polish Central Statistical Office/Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2016c). According to The Polish Central Statistical Office (2016c) a majority of third age universities functions as associations and foundations (57%). Almost every fourth entity (23%) is run by an academic institution (out of which 63% is run by non-public schools), and 55% out of entities not functioning as academic institutions has a

signed agreement with an academic institution concerning a cooperation or a patronage. The survey (Polish Central Statistical Office 2016c) revealed that a majority of TAUs indicated developing their students' interests, education, and broadening knowledge as the main aims of their activity. A priority is also to give participants a possibility of spending free time in an active way, to promote a healthy lifestyle, to give them a chance for socialization and to update the skills necessary to live an active life in the contemporary world. Those who take advantage of TAUs offer are characterized by a relatively high formal education. People with secondary education make almost a half of all participants (49%), and those with higher education make 39%.

Among organisations supporting older people, for instance when it comes to satisfying their educational needs, we can mention some non-governmental organisations. A characteristic feature of such organisations is their non-profit nature, independence from public institutions as well as being established and run by their own members (Zych 2001). According to Leszczyńska-Rejchert (2010, p. 176-177) non-governmental organisations supporting the elderly in Poland can be classified as follows: 1. Organisations supporting the elderly people in the sphere of health, 2. Organisations gathering older people and acting for the benefit of them (i.e. senior and veteran organisations, third age universities, senior clubs, and church organisations, as well as self-help groups), 3. Organisations supporting the elderly people as well as poor and lonely people, 4. Organisations supporting social assistance centres or centres for seniors, 5. Organisations promoting issues related to gerontology. It is worth mentioning that the elderly are quite socially active in the above institutions, they often act as volunteers there.

Talking about institutional support of education of older people it is worth mentioning that there are some differences between a city and countryside inhabitants (Leszczyńska-Rejchert 2010, p.109-111). Activities for those living in the village are less accessible to them because of a worse communication network, smaller number of cultural institutions, health centres or social assistance centres. People living in the countryside belong to the poorest group in our country. Family is the main source of support in this group, as well as religious organisations. The elderly people in Poland (both in towns and villages) can be distinguished by a higher level of religiousness measured by a frequency of religious practices, resorting to a prayer in difficult life situations and perceiving God as a source of a

happy life (Czapiński, Błędowski 2014). Religious and Catholic organisations constitute a very important element of educational support of older people, and for many seniors they seem to be the only place of social involvement. The scope of activity of those organisations is very wide, related to the interests of participants, for example social and cultural matters, educational and pedagogical issues, as well as charity and educational care matters (Kamiński 2008, p.8). 'Experiences which contribute to one's presence in a religious organisation go beyond a religious sphere, they regard a development in the cognitive and axiological sphere, acquisition of social competences, communication skills, co-organisation and co-decision. The potential of people and environments, being developed in such a way, can be generalized and transformed into a broader social sphere' (Szymczak 2010, p.116).

4. Polish research on education in late adulthood

Together with changes in the structure of Polish society there is an increase in the interest of issues related to ageing and old age. Gerontological research in Poland and the key issues related to senior policy in our country were presented to foreign readers, for instance, in *'The Gerontologist'* journal by Magdalena Leszko et al. (2016). At present there are three magazines being published in Poland which describe the issue of ageing: *Gerontologia Polska (Polish Gerontology)*, *Polish Journal of Geriatric and Psychiatry*, and *Geriatrics (Geriatrics)*. There is a series called EXLIBRIS. Biblioteka Gerontologii Społecznej (*EXLIBRIS. The Library of Social Gerontology*) that portrayals the sphere of educational and social gerontology. There is not, however, any journal that would fully present education of the elderly people. Articles dealing with such issues are often published in magazines discussing the problems of adult people. These are, for example, *Rocznik Andragogiczny (Andragogy Yearbook)*, *Edukacja Dorosłych (Journal of Adult Education)*, *Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych (Polish Journal of Continuing Education)* and *Społeczeństwo I Edukacja (Society and Education)*. Education of the elderly was identified by Polish authors with third age universities (Halicki 2013). The review of scientific research on the issue of older people by Halicki (2013) shows that in the years 2000-2013 a vast part of summaries was dedicated to issues regarding Third Age Universities, however the authors opt for the activity theory in their deliberations. The authors of articles regarding education in late

adulthood tend to be focused on health, activity of the elderly, and life satisfaction (Chabior 2000; Halicka 2004; Fabiś 2005, Orzechowska 2007, Zielińska-Więczkowska et al. 2008). On the grounds of my analysis including 105 scientific articles on educational issues, it can be concluded that activity theory is one of the theories on ageing most frequently referred to. In the articles in which the activity theory or a model of successful ageing constitutes a perspective of viewing reality, such values as self-reliance of the elderly, their productivity and health have been emphasized. Intentional educational activities taken up by the elderly people are perceived as a means of counteracting some negative phenomenon associated with ageing. Much attention in the texts has been paid to the issue of relations between the quality of life or life satisfaction of the elderly people and other variables. One of the determinants under analysis is often activity of seniors, their social involvement, and participation in TAU classes. Much room was left for the issue of institutional support of old people (Szarota 2004, 2010; Leszczyńska-Rejchert 2010). Analysing some research works, it can be observed that the authors' attention has to a greater extent been focused on the education of women rather than education of men. There are popular topics such as informal learning of women, though the analysis of components of research samples in the empirical articles dealing with the issues of senior learning (both women and men), show that women dominate there in an explicit way. Regularities observed there may arise from the fact that the population of the elderly people consists in majority of women (the phenomenon of feminisation of old age). Another reason for a bigger number of women participating in the groups which undergo some research on senior education is a little interest of men in educational offers targeted at the elderly by institutions, and that is an issue of interest for researchers to a great extent. A proportion of men at TAU is 15% (Gołdys et al. 2012). My analysis of collected articles in Polish journals shows a little interest of researchers in education of the older people struggling with health problems, socially inactive, and functioning in poorly developed social networks. A review of literature made by Halicki (2013) showed a clear advantage of research and diagnostic literature over practical literature in favour of the elderly.

Careful consideration should be given to research works discussing the issue of education of the elderly when it comes to some biographical research, Olga Czerniawska in the first place (2000, 2007). Biographical data refers to the literary output of Swiss, French

and Italian school of biographical research such as: Pierre Dominice, Martine Lani-Bayle, Ducio Demetrio, Laura Formenti or Gaston Pineau. The beginning of interest in this mainstream in Poland dates back to the 80s of XXth century. In the 90s of XXth century, in the school of andragogical research in Łódź, Olga Czerniawska and her students developed a context of biographical didactics as well as some research on memory of the school (Dubas 2014). There is an increase of interest in spirituality of the elderly people in the Polish literature. An example of work dedicated to a spiritual development in late adulthood can be a selection of articles edited by Artur Fabiś and Aleksandra Błachnio (2015). There have also been publications discussing gerotranscendental theory (Halicki 2006, Steuden 2011, Malec 2012, Muszyński 2016). The publication of Danuta Seredyńska (2013), based on analysis of publications from Polish conferences, makes an interesting compendium regarding educational discourse on old age in Poland. According to Seredyńska the pedagogical discourse, linking all the themes discussed by the conference participants, is mainly focused on: social and cultural activity, as well as the issue of subordination of the elderly to the rules set for seniors by society and family. The analysis of collected texts let the author observe that contemplations of the conference participants (educators and related sciences representatives) are often aimed at the theory of social life exclusion. On one hand it is presented as 'the requirement of meeting the younger generation expectations, and on the other hand it is seen as a re-definition of reality made by a senior on one's own initiative' (ibid. p.196). Seredyńska (2013, p. 195) is of opinion that the pedagogical discourse is of enlightening and positivist nature, favouring some effective and reliable educational solutions. There is hardly any discourse of critical nature, revealing a real social functioning of education.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis of published papers completely or partially dedicated to seniors' education in individual years, it can be stated that there is a considerable increase of interest in research on this area (cf. Halicki 2013). According to gerontological literature, activities aimed at supporting and facilitating older people's education in Poland focus, to a large extent, on promoting (external) activity, which may consequently improve their health status, as well as contribute to an increase in economic productivity among elderly

people. It is claimed that the successful ageing is based on Rowe and Kahn's biomedical model (1998). More recently (in the last few years), interest in other models of good old age has increased in scientific literature. Interestingly, the level of external activity tends to be lower in seniors compared to internal activity, spiritual development in this age group. However, it appears that, for a long time, there have been organizations and religious communities providing spiritual support and assistance in the educational process in Poland.

If we, like Kuchcińska (2004, p.152), Malewski (2010, p.17-32), Seredyńska (2013, p.66), hold the view that three approaches to seniors' education can be identified:

- a deterministic model focuses on the fundamental process of the internalisation of individuals' own needs and interests in order to fit into society and its own set of values and needs. The purpose of educations is to emphasise that individuals are considered to be subordinate to the interests of society and responsible for fulfilling social roles or to shape individuals' perceptions in accordance with a generally accepted model (e.g. a model of grandmother or a model of a health-conscious person).
- a humanistic model concentrates on meeting the needs of participants of the educational process. Education is regarded as the possibility of personal development or a tool for coping with today's changing world
- a critical model is based on transformation of the content of consciousness among participants of the educational process,

it must be stressed that both the humanistic and deterministic models reflect the approaches to older people's education in Poland.

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The impact of educational policies regarding the social dimension of Higher Education in Romania

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Abstract

This present study has as a starting point the dual responsibility that universities have nowadays and this refers to the university as a promoter for economic growth, but also as propeller for fostering social cohesion. In this sense, we can bring into discussion the steps that have been made at a legislative level by mentioning the Bologna process and all papers derived such as the Prague communiqué 2001, which emphasizes the need to start working towards the development of a more inclusive higher education system. In order to understand how the inclusion vision was implemented across Romanian universities, this paper focuses on data collected through a qualitative methodological approach, that relies on a semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with professionals from academia. The interview guide seeks to evaluate what was the impact of educational policies regarding the higher education social dimension in Romania and how do Romanian universities respond to the need to develop of more equitable and inclusive higher education system, with a focus on the support mechanisms developed by universities in order to grant students' access, retention and employability and on the opportunity of developing an Inclusion Index for higher education. Results show that progress in this view is constantly, but still the impact of educational policies is quite low and this is due to the absence of expertise in implementing the established indicators and to the absence of procedures related to the process of policy monitoring.

Keywords: social dimension; higher education; Romania.

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1. Introduction

Moving from a Humboldtian higher education system (HEs), the today`s university has to start engaging more in fostering social cohesion. Steps have been made, and in this sense it is mentioned the Bologna process that specifically mention the importance of the social dimension in the higher education systems, starting with the Prague communiqué in 2001, which emphasizes the need to start working towards the development of a more inclusive higher education system. The work hasn`t stopped here and the following declaration and communiqués (Berlin, 2003; Bergen, 2005; London, 2007; Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009; Budapest-Vienna, 2010; Bucharest, 2012; Yerevan, 2015) have continued to push forward the importance of the social dimension in constructing and consolidating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Another initiative worth mentioning is the European Council conclusions on the social dimension of higher education that underlines the main actions that can be implemented by member States. So, in order to increase access, participation and completion rates in higher education it is recommended to embark on mapping studies that present the relevance of policies on access and drop-out and completion rates in higher education with a view to analyzing the effectiveness of the national and institutional initiatives and actions that tackle how structural, institutional, personal, socio-cultural and socioeconomic factors influence drop-out and completion`. (Council of the European Union, 2017, p.4)

Moreover, in a recent UNESCO report it is presented the idea that inclusion and equity in educational policy should focus on a central message, the one that every learner matters and matters equally. The report agrees that, however, when trying to put this idea into practice a lot of issues will arise and they are related to difficulty on changing mentalities. This is the only way to trigger change in practice. (UNESCO, 2017)

2. The social dimension of Higher Education Systems

Even though the concept is not new, the literature mentions different definitions of the social dimension in higher education. Trying to understand the concept of social dimension, among the existing literature, a pattern was identified and it consists on following key words: the wellbeing of students (OECD, 2012; Margrove, 2015); authentic learning

experiences (Kearney, 2013; Iucu & Marin, 2014); highly prepared teaching and administrative staff (Sharma et. al., 2008; Marin, 2014, 2017); ergonomics of the classroom (Hanafin, et.al.,2007); developing a strong collaborations between specialists in order to create learning materials as for example braille textbooks, audiobook, etc. (Jones, 2013) and providing financial support for students (OECD, 2006; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, Roger, 2017). The main aspect all literature have in common is the fact that changes in the field should be focus on evidence based policy-making. This idea was developed during the European Network of Education Councils Conference held in Bucharest in May 2017 and expresses the fact that research needs to be conducted on how to implement inclusive education in order to guarantee maximum benefits, not only for students with disabilities or pupils at risk, but for all children, also those in situations of transitory needs. (EUNEC, 2017)

Another aspect identified in the literature is the fact that we should look closer at existing data that in, this case, shows us that many European countries have a significantly higher number of students that are enrolled in tertiary education compared to the previous generations. According to an OECD study, today, nearly twice as many young adults with an age of 25 to 34 are tertiaryeducated compared to their parents' generation 30 years ago (that are now aged 55-64). (OECD, 2014) This data shows us that the policy initiative implemented so far are relevant and have a positive impact.

Overall, the main goal of this article is to contribute to the literature in this field, following the recommendation of the Council of the European Union, that states that these of results and the outcomes of the studies and other work being carried out should be seen as a basis for further debate and policy consideration in examining issues of access, participation, completion and the impact of different funding models in relation to higher education. (Council of the European Union, 2017)

3. Methods

A qualitative methodological approach was used in order to better respond to this article objectives. Therefore, a semi-structured in-depth interview with professionals in academiawas conducted. The interview guide is structured so as to evaluate what is the impact of educational policies regarding the HE social dimension in Romanian universities,

more specifically on describing the changes that the existing policies have produced. Another center point is identifying existing support mechanisms developed by universities in order to grant students' access, retention and employability and on the opportunity of developing an Inclusion Index for higher education. The transcriptions resulted from this research are coded using line-by-line coding guidelines (Charmaz's, 2006) and these codes are developed based on the theoretical framework. The codes used refer to: educational policies, students' access, retention and employability, support mechanisms, and the inclusion index for higher education. When beginning the analysis, a series of significant fragments were identified as relevant and afterwards a code was allocated to each of these fragments. The identified fragments were listed and then compared in order to facilitate the process of identification of patterns and similarities between fragment/quotations. To respond to the qualitative data management system, the Maxqda 11 software was used in order to facilitate coding, as well as elements that are related to the management and transparency of data collected. The length of the interviews is situated between 40 to 60 minutes. The research is being carried out at the Center for Development and Training in Higher Education, University of Bucharest, and it is presently ongoing, but we can present some of the preliminary results.

3.1 Participants

Due to the fact that the research is ongoing the data presented hereby is generated after conducting a semi structured interviews with 4 university professors from the University of Bucharest. This research seeks to better understanding of the concept of social dimension across Romanian Higher Education Institutions (HEs).

3.2 Results

Taking into consideration that The Europe 2020 strategy targets the incensement of the proportion of 30 to 34 year old people to complete tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%, it is considered necessary to engage in a better understanding of what and how do the Romanian universities are doing in order to sustain the development of more equitable and inclusive HE system. The results are structured on three main topics of interest that aim at presenting the impact of educational policies at national level, at analyzing the support mechanisms developed by universities in order to grant students access, retention and employability and nonetheless present academics perception

towards the development of an Inclusion Index for higher education. These results will contribute to a better understanding of what has to be done in order to reduce national disparities in terms of access to university, active participation during their studies, and completion of a tertiary education.

The impact of educational policies at national level

The main documents brought into discussion when it comes to policies that aim the development of a more inclusive education system are The Romanian Law of Education, the National Reform Programme and the Methodology on allocating budget funds for basic and additional funding of higher education institutions in Romania for 2016 (OMEN No 3530/2016). The three documents have in common the concern for further development of an inclusive HEs focusing of identifying mechanisms and policy instruments meant to stimulate the access and participation. Other concern is related to the need of a clearer definition of the underrepresented groups that these policies aim to. According to the Law of National Education (Law no. 1/2011), the law that represents the legal framework that regulates the structure, positions, organization and operation of the higher education in Romania there are several underrepresented groups, such as: students with physical disabilities; students coming from low income families; orphan students or those coming from foster care; ethnic Romanians coming from abroad; students coming from environments with high socioeconomic risk or socially marginalized; Roma Students; and students from rural environment. Moreover the Law also states the existence of a set of instruments, such as: regulation for a loan system; procedures for scholarship allocation; procedures for funding of student dorms and canteens; public transport subsidies; and the possibility to distribute study grants on social criteria. When it comes to the National Reform Programme (2017) the main pillars that need development are related to: providing support for students from rural areas, as well as for students from disadvantaged groups and from those students that are considered to be non-traditional students so that they could participate in tertiary education; providing a more well developed education and research IT system; engaging more in increasing the number of international collaborations; creating a stronger collaboration with the labor market; and sustaining the development of an open lifelong learning framework. Another document

brought into discussion during the interviews is the Methodology on allocating budget funds for basic and additional funding of higher education institutions in Romania for 2016 (OMEN No 3530/2016). The present methodology includes a quality indicators on social equity with an emphasis on the needs to allocate funds for institutional development, more specifically it refers to the development of a financing line that targets the increase of the social equity, social inclusion and access to higher education.

Starting from these recent policy paper on the HEs that aim at the creation of a more favorable, a more open and flexible education systems, the respondents concluded that these documents are a first start that boost the development of the social dimension of the HEs, stating that:

'looking from a top - down decision making system, these documents are absolutely necessary because they gather at on place all the pillars of development that we must focus on...it provides a general overview of how our future actions must look like and also it creates the premises for initiating actions mechanisms that can put in practice the recommendations stated'. (I4)

Also, these documents ensure that there has been made a previous evaluation of our current education system, evaluation that brought into our attention the need to focus more on inclusiveness. One interviewer agrees that: *'if we look into the European context we shall see that the problem that we are facing is not unique at all...other countries have the same problems, but that doesn't mean we have to copy their problems and their solution...and I think that is why it is important to have our own reform programmes'. (I2)*

At the same time interviews brought into discussion some aspects related faults in writing these policy papers. One of the aspects is related to the fact that a more rigorous policy monitoring process and an evaluation plan must be developed in order to ensure that the policy will have the expected results:

'the problems identified and the recommendations presented are very relevant in our national context, but I am afraid that if we do not have a monitoring and an evaluation plan included in the strategy everything will be in vain'. (I1).

Other critical aspects underlined are the lack of comparative longitudinal studies that will allow a deeper understanding of the development, implementation and impact of a policy paper or recommendation that has been implemented. In the absence of such a

studies, one interview's opinion is that: *'we will never manage to close the circle and have a clear view of the accomplishments, to understand the effects of this policy on the HEs and to understand how can we further approach other aspects that appear'*. (I2)

Support mechanisms developed by universities in order to grant students' access, retention and employability

In order to better understand what initiative universities have already developed, a collection of different initiatives is seen as a most relevant action to do. Therefore, the focus was on presenting different actions developed within their universities that aim at supporting students before, along and after their study period. The actions mentioned address the need to create a department that is in responsible with understanding and meeting students' needs and expectations. Another action targets the development of a subdivision within a pre-existing departments or others have developed counselling centers that are responsible for fostering the dialogue between the university and their students so that they could play the role of mediators. Some of the initiatives are internal funded, but some are funded by external funds such as the SOCIUS project - Career Guidance, Counseling and Guidance Services in Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. The example of actions or *'in-house strategies'* (I3) have as a starting point the policy document recommendations, but the most important aspect is that these are personalized activities and this due to the fact that: *'the university is autonomous and can implement its own actions to support the transformation towards a more inclusive HEs'*. (I3)

Developing of an Inclusion Index for higher education – between opportunities and threats

Starting from the proposal of Booth and Ainscow (2002) of the Index for inclusion in schools, we thought it is relevant to see professionals' opinion towards the development of such an index for the higher education system. The proposal was debated from two main perspectives: opportunities brought by the implementation of this instrument and threats that may occur. Regarding the opportunities of the development and implementation of such an instrument within universities, professionals consider that it could be a good opportunity that will help mapping all the social dimensions of the HE and it also offers a real opportunity for universities to track their progress, assessing at the same time the level of satisfaction of the practices and support mechanisms already implemented that target students with special needs. In this regard, respondent agrees that:

'having such an instrument can help us to have a better understanding about two main aspects: if the support mechanism that we are already implementing are relevant for the students and therefore can help us assess the impact that this mechanisms; and also it can be used to predict future actions according to our students needs'. (I1)

Another opportunity that arose is related to the development of the literature within the field of social dimension in higher education. Doing so we will continue to draw the attention to the university responsibility towards sustaining the society development by providing access and retention to tertiary education for a wider population.

When talking about threats, respondents brought into the attention the difficulty in developing such an instrument and this concerns are related to the target group, mainly the fact that there is such a wide definition of the target group called 'vulnerable groups'. The recommendation was that before starting developing such an instrument it should be clarified the concept of vulnerable groups: *'setting a common language and what I mean is to clearly define the target group, understanding their needs in order to provide personalized assistance and support'. (I3)*

Moreover, among respondents there was a central aspect regarding threats and this is strictly related to their reluctance towards the way this instrument will be seen by other colleagues within universities. Mostly, they agree on the fact that this instrument is going to be seen as another standardized evaluation instrument used to formally assess the universities practices in terms of inclusiveness. Therefore, respondents brought into attention on the fact that this instrument won't trigger real and valuable changes and it will be seen as just another paper that has to be filled:

'if not understood properly by those who have to answer to the questions in this index, I am afraid that is going to be just a waste of time[...] first, the answers will not be relevant and the whole institutional evaluation process is going to be a failure; secondly, if the results, even though are relevant results, will not be seen as an important outcome and it will not be used in order to improve the support mechanism, everything will be in vain'. (I2)

Conclusion

Starting from the assumption that the social dimension as it is stipulated in the Bologna Process is generally associated to the need to ensure equal access to, progress in and

completion of higher education of all students (Clancy & Goastellec 2007, Kooij, 2015) we tried to better understand the impact of the policies in the field of social dimension across Romanian universities.

Even though the policy papers are considered absolutely relevant and needed, respondents consider that the lack of a more specific guidelines regarding the monitoring and evaluation process of the policy recommendation it brings great disadvantages, in term of not having a clear overview of what has been done, and what were the main accomplishments and limitations.

Still, data shows that a lot of progress has been made, but we still are far from reaching our objective. For example, the latest Education and Training Monitor, shows that the tertiary educational completion rate in Romania is one of the lowest in Europe. There isn't only one reason, but multiples ones that are related to high level of students that dropout before they could reach university, the significant low rate of students that pass the baccalaureate exam and also a low level of participation of students from disadvantaged groups. (EC, 2017)

In conclusion, process is still slow regarding the social dimension in higher education at national level, but actions are implemented and this is a good indicator that shows the interest of higher education institutions towards the social dimension by enabling all students, regarding their personal, social or economic backgrounds, to reach a set of key competences that are needed in their personal and professional life, supporting them to become active citizens. (Council conclusions, 2009)

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3rd International Conference on Communication and Education in Knowledge Society 2017 - Collective Capacity Building – Timișoara 9-10 November 2017

The *Conference on Communication and Education in Knowledge Society* has been developed in 2013 at the initiative of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, Philosophy and Communications Department and Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, Department of Educational Sciences. The CESC was branded as a interdisciplinary conference, aiming to be a platform for research, scientific meetings, discussions and communication about current problem and important trends. Between 9 and 10th of November 2017 the 3rd CESC edition took place, having as the main theme the concept of Collective Capacity Building. As it becomes increasingly evident that the challenges and problems in developing a knowledge based society are exponentially more resilient to traditional approaches to change focusing on regulating the skills and capacity set attributable to the individual, this conference proposed stimulating reflection and dialogue on how could collective capacity building increases the progress, in some of the most complex educational, social, cultural, geopolitical and economic issues today. The purpose of the conference was to address specific questions within the five main frames: communication, education, international relations, political sciences, and applied philosophy.

More than 140 participants attended and participated in plenary and section debates. CESC was honored with interventions by well known keynote speakers: *PhD. Professor Mircea Dumitru*, University of Bucharest, Romania, *PhD. Professor Rozmeri Basic*, The University of Oklahoma, USA, *Prof. dr. Emil Păun*, University of Bucharest, *PhD. Ciprian Fartușnic* Director, Institute of Educational Sciences, Romania, *PhD. Professor Laurentiu Șoitu*, "I. Cuza" University Iași, *PhD. Professor Georgeta Ion*, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, *PhD. Professor Dan Eugen Rațiu*, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, *Assoc. prof. PhD. Florin Lobonț* West University of Timisoara, *Prof. Dr. Ekkehard Nuissl von Rein*,

University of Kaiserslautern, Germany, Prof. dr. Liliana Donath West University of Timisoara, *Dr. habil. paed. Irina Maslo*, University of Latvia, *Prof. Dr. habil. Simona Sava*, West University of Timisoara, Educational Sciences Department` Director, *Professor PhD Habil. Gheorghe Clitan*, West University of Timisoara, Head of Philosophy and Communication Studies Department, West University of Timisoara (Romania).

There were nine sections of the conference:

- Section 1 Applied philosophy and the methodology of philosophical studies
- Section 2 Conceptualizing the educational system
- Section 3 Education and Social Inclusion
- Section 4 Policy, Image and Governance
- Section 5 Applied Didactics
- Section 6 Didactics in formal and non-formal contexts
- Section 7 Higher education teaching and research
- Section 8 New technologies for Communication and Education
- Section 9 Psychology of education and varia

In total more than 80 research and theoretic studies were presented, which represented a platform for debate, knowledge exchange, scientific interaction and establishing future collaborations.

In memoriam Mihai Predescu (1939-2017)

In this brief presentation we want to honor the work and life of Associate professor Mihai Predescu, the founder of Special Education Studies at the West University of Timisoara, a mentor, a great teacher and a true model for all who knew him: colleagues, students, specialists, children or parents.

Through his work as a psychologist, speech therapist and professor, he touched many lives, he influenced destinies and he mentored a lot of special education specialists.



His central values were the respect for others and altruism in helping the ones in need. He searched the humanity beyond appearances, and had a warm thought and advice for everyone.

In all his work he was an innovator, seeking the novelty and development of people and organizational structures. He developed the first master study program in the western region of Romania in school inclusion in 1996 and a year after he founded the Special Education Department of West University of Timisoara. Through these study programs many specialists were trained and now continue to promote his educational views and values.

Personally, for me, Professor Mihai Predescu was a mentor and a role model in the academic profession, an example of morality and understanding of the human nature and the important things in life. He invested trust in me and offered me the possibility to find and discover my true abilities and my career path.

Farewell, Professor!

Associate professor Anca Luștrea
Executive Editor for this issue

Recommendations for authors

The recommendations below are meant to clarify the expected quality of the journal and its articles.

The authors can send the electronic version of articles at: resjournal@e-uvv.ro

The sent papers shall be submitted under a peer-review from the members of our Editorial Board and beyond. The scientific criteria used by them are bellow.

Editing criteria:

1. The accepted publishing languages is English
2. The words and quotes in foreign languages are written in Italics. The quotes in Romanian are written normally.
3. Citations should be indicated in parentheses the author, year of publication, page, can be easily identified with a complete reference to the citation from the end of the article. For example, if references to an author who had two publications in the same year, 2010, will be written including one bibliography 2010b works, to be easily identified. Footnotes should be used only in exceptional cases, if necessary annotations by the author.
4. Every author shall insert his name below the title of the paper, upper right on the paper, with a foot note that shall stipulate: academical title, institution, city, country, e-mail.
5. Every text shall be preceded by an abstract; every abstract should be up to followed by the key-words section up to 5 key-words. The abstract and the key-words section should be up to 800 characters; the abstract and key-words shall be written both in Romanian and English.
6. Each abbreviation shall be explained only at first use.
7. The bibliographical references must include at least one author listed by ISI or quoted in ISI articles.
8. At least 30% of the references must include papers published in the last five years.

Technical criteria:

1. page - A4;
2. page setup: up – 2cm; down – 3 cm; left – 3 cm; right – 2 cm;
3. length of paper: 8-10 pages (max. 30 000 characters, including bibliography and abstract);
4. the abstract and key words shall be submitted in English (and Romanian, if possible);
5. page setup: justified, line spacing: 1,5;
6. title: aldine (bold), 14p;
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Scientific evaluation criteria for the journal of educational sciences articles

CRITERIA	1	2	3	0
A. Scientific merit of the paper				
A.1. The importance and the actuality of the discussed topic, as well as the relevance of the discussed question				
A.2. The level of information (e.g. actuality and relevance of the publications from the bibliography) and the quality of the description of the current progress of knowledge in the				
A.3 The argument and basis of the discussed problem are well clarified and defined (e.g. conceptual clarifications, separating the aspects which shall not be discussed); the				
B. Potential contributions to developing scientific				
B.1 The research question is adequately answered, raising conclusions related to the theoretical basis presented in the article and the shared new ideas.				
B. 2 The type and the authenticity level is achieved by the				
B.3 The set of conclusions represents a synthesis built on a personal interpretation of the prior exposed results, with references to further developments on the discussed				
C. Argumentative procedure				
C.1. The research design is correct, the hypothesis are relevant, the methods and empirical investigation instruments are transparent and the interpretation of data is				
C.2 The affirmations are sustained by credible data from research or current theoretical elaborations.				
D. Structure and presentation of the article				
D.1. A logic sequence/connection (the ideas are logically linked together, the transit from an idea to the other is easy to follow, the order in which the parts of the paper are				
D.2 The used language is coherent, grammatically correct, meeting the scientific standards of expression				
D.3 The imposed structure of the paper is respected: abstract of approximately				

800 characters, relevant

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I recommend the publishing of the article

I recommend the publishing of the article after revise of the author

I do not recommend the publishing of the article

Final comments:

Note: the evaluation scale of meeting the criteria presents itself as follows: 1 – done; 2 – partially done (requires further revise or annexation); 3- not done, does not fulfill the criterion; 0 – not the case, does not apply.

^h Please provide explanations regarding the reasons for rejecting the article or list (on a separate sheet) with the concrete revision requirements