School Segregation vs. Desegregation in Romania. Case Study

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Abstract: School desegregation can be identified as an educational objective for all. The problems of school segregation relate to aspects regarding student discrimination based on various criteria: the low socioeconomic status of the family of origin, belonging to a certain ethnic group, the criterion of disability or special educational needs. The present research aims to identify good practices carried out in schools in order to combat segregation. In this regard we formulated the following objectives: the analysis of the degree of impact of anti-segregationist educational practices with regard to students (Specific objective 1); measuring the degree of effectiveness of the anti-segregationist activities implemented in the school (Specific objective 2). The units of analysis are a sample of students from schools in urban and rural areas, and a sample of their teachers. The study has made use of an intentional, structured sample, with two variables (residence of the family of origin, ethnic membership), made up of 325 students, and their teachers. The following working hypothesis has been considered: if teachers are interested in anti-segregationist education in these schools, then no discriminatory behaviors will be identified. In conclusion, the problem of segregation in the European space remains a problem, especially as we are witnessing, within such a space, cross-border migration processes involving people of different ethnicities and cultures. This aspect, in particular, attracts the attention of schools which should produce models of education carried out in a context of desegregation, and keeping the principle of equal opportunities for all in the form of social desegregation.

Keywords: school segregation, desegregation, inclusion, ethnicity, poverty.

1. Introduction

The issue of social inclusion brings into question some aspects of combating social desegregation, discrimination, labeling processes, marginalization and social exclusion, ethnic groups, religion, race and more. In a study conducted in 2008 by UNICEF and Romani CRISS in Romania (UNICEF, 2008), in a group of 90 schools during the academic year 2007-2008, in 67%, forms of school segregation were detected. Also, a European

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Commission report published in 2015 mentioned that “26% of Romani students learn in separate classes in Romania, that in a school of five manifests at least one of the four forms of Romani students school segregation”. In accordance with Order No. 6134 of the Ministry of Education and Research published in 21st December 2016 regarding prohibiting school segregation in pre-university education in Romania, a great deal of importance was placed on the promotion of the inclusive school. This was seen as a “…democratic and friendly school, which leverages the socio-ethno-cultural diversity, a school where all children are respected and integrated without discrimination and without exclusion generated by ethnic origin or mother tongue, disability and/or special educational needs, socioeconomic status of families, residence or school performance of education primary beneficiaries” (Art. 1 (2)). In the same document, school segregation is seen as “…a serious form of discrimination and therefore has, as a consequence, the unequal access of children to a quality education, violating the conditions of equality in the exercise of the right to education, as well as human dignity.” Segregation draws to itself the physical separation of persons on the basis of certain criteria (race, ethnicity, disability, special educational requirements, socioeconomic status, school performance, the residential environment). It should be appreciated that, at each school level in Romania, there is a Commission whose aim is to prevent and eliminate acts of violence, corruption and discrimination within the school environment, and to promote intercultural exchanges, and the prevention and elimination of all forms of school segregation. In the Order No. 6134 in 2016, school segregation impacts upon students who become victims of this process, leading to a series of highly and negative diverse consequences such as educational and social (e.g., difficulty in attracting students into the educational system and the inability of schools to keep students in the educational system). This may lead to increased school drop-out rates, teachers refusing to work in the concerned schools which might affect the quality of education, low quality of school performance, prejudice and stereotypes at the level of the majority of the population, including labelling and social marginalization, the development of negative views concerning the school’s ability to generate social progress and equity.

Thus, the 1989 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, makes special reference, in article 23, to the requirement that “…to a child with physical or mental disabilities we should ensure a full and decent life in conditions that grant dignity, promote autonomy and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community” (Article 23 (1)). In this context, the importance of respect for children with disabilities in terms of their right to special care is stressed, as is the right to take up specialized support that is...
available to them. Such assistance concerns the issues relating to ensuring access to education, training, health services and rehabilitation in order to promote the child’s social integration and personal development. The document that underlines the importance of the right to education is the Salamanca Declaration (Declaraţia de la Salamanca (Spania) asupra ..., 1994) where it is stated that, “…every child has the fundamental right to education and special education requirements that arise from the presence of disabilities or learning difficulties”. The Salamanca Declaration emphasizes that children should enjoy the benefits of child-centered pedagogy, and those with disabilities should enjoy access to a school system, with inclusive orientation. The Declaration also assigns an important role with regard to the promotion and development of early education and preparation for school.

2. The theoretical framework of social integration

Psychologists have defined the process of social integration as the dynamic process of objectivating socialization and social learning results. Integration describes the processing and active pursuit of a system which encourages social statuses and activities corresponding to the obligations and rights deriving therefrom. The social integration process develops in the context of equal opportunities and rights for all people, so the purpose of the process is purely positive and requires acceptance of conformity. The social integration mechanism is described along with some integration models in which the integrated parts describe sets of specific activities involving the integration of groups, individuals and whole communities at the same level, and consequently becomes an end in itself. Social integration can be understood through the social interaction and the solidarity of the parties involved. In a broad sense, the issue of social integration focuses on the following aspects (Banciu, Rădulescu & Voicu, 1987, p. 30): it is a social process which is carried out through a permanent renewal of the social unit in the postulated conditions and the relatively functional equilibrium of the structural units, preventing the strengthening of its elements; designating a state of equilibrium through the absence of social marginality; Social integration postulates the membership and participation (not enforced) of an individual set of norms, values and attitudes on the part of the group which, once internalized, are outsourced by the individual in the form of explicit behavior, facilitating the strengthening of the functional solidarity of the group; it represents the result of a series of individual adaptations and adjustments to a normative field, defined by the relationships between groups that has, as a consequence, the elimination of conflict and tensions, and the establishment of cohesive and participatory relationships. The
typology of social integration is described in terms of a task objectivized as a goal. We talk about economic, social, cultural, educational, professional, political, and urban integration. Social integration represents a social process that develops as a result of the interactions that occur between parties which have a relationship of interdependence. Social integration is a step-by-step process of specific actions. Accommodating, modeling, adaptation, participation and successful integration describe the stages of social integration. Taking and developing a specific social role on the part of the parties becomes the condition of social integration without which it would not be possible. Each stage of the process of social integration corresponds to a set of specific activities. In the adjustment phase, the multiple determined relationships permit the integrating system to gain the necessary knowledge and skills needed to adjust to the environmental situation, and to respond positively to their requirements (Mezei, 1998, p. 300). Participation in the integration process is described by assuming the roles and the empowerment of the parties in the exercise thereof. The last stage corresponds to the moment in which the integrated person is identified within the organization’s subsystem. Within the group, the social integration of the parties involved is subject to their behavior under conditions of social norms. In this regard, integration is the product of successive cultural, normative, communication and functional integration. The process of social integration claims aspects of reintegration, identified as a result of repeated integration in society. For Durkheim, society exists if its members develop relationships of solidarity with each other. Solidarity implies the presence of a collective consciousness dimension. Durkheim reveals that individuality increases with the parties, and society becomes able to harmonize with the ensemble. According to this theorizing, the individual’s process of social integration is explained in terms of the consensual parameters of the social cohesion as resulting from individuals’ solidarity. The explanations of social integration are found within the framework of the organicist and contractual theory initiated by Durkheim and later developed by Parson (Marshall, 2003, p. 292). Under the first theory, society is compared to a body that functions through the relationship of its components. Although societies do take birth similar to bodies, the evolution of society is driven by an ideal conceived by the spirit. The spirit, in Worms’ conception, represents the factor which sets between individuals, in the form of a conscious, deliberate, contractual solidarity (Andrei, 1999, p. 225). In his famous work, “Le suicide”, Durkheim explains the theme of social integration which he analyzes depending on how the social implements the individuals’ behavior. The findings on suicide identified by Durkheim (2002) are closely related to
matters that are the subject of destructive values and social norms. These favor social decay or poor integration in the social space. The anomy represents a major cause of global imbalance, which generates individual natural processes of abnormality and social pathology successfully affecting social marginalization and isolation. Parsons insists on explanations related to social cohesion, by identifying the factors that foster this process. In that regard, Parsons is concerned with finding an explanation related to the following issue: in society there are independent, autonomous individuals, who nevertheless are integrated. The explanations he found are subject to the construction of the personality of the individual, in the organization of society. For the American sociologist, education has a social function, and from the mechanism’s point of view, an internalization. The internalization of norms and values that orient individual’s behavior is the result of a transfer process involving collective consciousness elements in the individual consciousness, as a source of social role. Therefore, socialization has two more functions: it prepares the individual to develop appropriate social roles of culturally assimilated valences, and ensures the transmission of cultural contents from one generation to the next. The concept of “social inclusion”, is a broad concept which, at the level of common sense, supports the explanation of the inclusion, insertion, acceptance, recognition and valorization of the person or social group of which it is a part. In general, the explanation of “social inclusion” is ranked in the register of assertions covered by a person’s integration and by the full recognition of the rights and freedoms in conditions concluding the process of socialization on three levels: primary, secondary, tertiary. The Romanian legislation operates with the concept of “inclusion”, which it defines as follows: “The process of social inclusion means the combination of multidimensional measures and actions in the areas of welfare, employment, housing, education, health, information-communication, mobility, security, justice and culture, aimed at combating social exclusion and ensure the active participation of people from all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political organization of society”. (according to article 6 of Law No. 292/2011-Social Welfare Law) (Legea asistenței sociale 292/2011).

3. Research methodology

The present research aims to identify good practices carried out in schools to fight segregation. In this regard, we formulated the following objectives: the analysis of the degree of impact of anti-segregationist educational practices on students (Specific objective 1); measuring the degree of effectiveness of the anti-segregationist activities implemented in schools (Specific objective 2). The units of analysis are: groups of V-VIII
degree students, ages 11-14 years old, who come from two schools (one of 230 students from an urban area, and the other of 95 students from a rural area) and their teachers. The selected schools are multi-ethnic, with Romani children, Bulgarian and Romanian children (Fig. 1). After the discussions we had with the teachers, regarding the types of interpersonal relationships existing between students, we noticed that there were no ethnic conflicts between them, a fact that weighted greatly in their selection for our research. The study involved an intentional sample, related to two variables (residence of the family of origin, ethnic membership).

![Fig. 1. Distribution of students on ethnic criteria](image)

The following working hypothesis was considered: if teachers are interested in anti-segregationist education in the schools under consideration, then no discriminatory behaviors will be identified. The data was gathered using questionnaire-based inquiry involving closed type questions (in the students’ case), and semi-structured interviews (in the teachers’ case). The students who completed the questionnaires have peers of other ethnicities in their classrooms. The survey was made after informing the parents about the purpose of the research. The information with regard to the children’s parents was provided during planned meetings in two multi-ethnic schools (one from an urban, and the other from a rural environment). During the encounters, the conditions in which the survey unfolded were detailed, together with information about the interview procedure, and the purpose and importance of the research. At the same time, the research instrument was presented. The parents were informed about the fact that if they didn’t agree to participate in the research, they could withdraw their child from the target sample. They were told, at the
same time, that the participation was deliberate, and that the presence of the student had to be made by the legal tutor. Subsequent to the provision of the information we obtained the consent of the children’s parents. Upon formulating the questions, we avoided any direct reference/mention of a particular ethnicity, thus avoiding discriminative type interpretations. The questions had a high degree of generality.

4. The analysis and interpretation of the results

Concerning “the analysis of the degree of impact of anti-segregationist educational practices on students (Specific objective 1)”, the questionnaire-based inquiry allowed the measurement of the students’ perceptions regarding the importance of the educational activities in which they were involved: intercultural education in a curricular context; participation in non-formal intercultural activities (Romani day, Bulgarians’ day, Romania’s day, Europe’s day); creating friendships with peers with other ethnicities; and accepting elements of the cultural identity of all peers (clothes, gastronomy, language, traditions, customs). The distribution of the answers, according to the school environment, is shown in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3:

![Fig. 2. Perception of the students from urban environment](image-url)
We observe that students identify with educational activities in which cultural values that are specific to the ethnicities in their classrooms are promoted. The distribution of the answers, according to each student’s ethnicity, is displayed in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5.
According to Specific objective 1, after the inquiry we noticed that students identify with the educational practices adopted by their teachers during the instructional activities. Understanding diversity in an intercultural context plays a key role in creating and developing social behaviors based on tolerance, equity and solidarity. The results of the research reflect the fact that friendships among students are not conditioned by ethnic criteria. At the same time, we observed that all students are aware of the fact that society is operating on the principle of equal opportunities, that educational provision is aimed at all, and that in the school space no forms of discriminatory behavior should manifest themselves. This leads to the formulation of the following conclusion: formal education focuses on the formation and development of social and civic powers, which confirms the working hypothesis according to which “if teachers are interested in anti-segregationist education in these schools, then no discriminatory behaviors will be identified”.

From the interviews with the mentor teachers we concluded that anti-segregationist education is done mainly within the curricular areas, in the disciplines, “Man and Society”, “Advice and Guidance”. It was also found that students easily describe the types of discriminatory behavior.

In terms of anti-segregation educational practices that exist within the school, we found that all students had participated at least once per semester in educational activities aimed at educational inclusion, and the development of social behavior based on respect for the principles of solidarity, dignity, and uniqueness of the person. From the interviews with
the school managers and mentor teachers, the identified educational practices can be described as follows: at the level of the educational process, the teachers take into account the need for integration in the context of learning the elements covered by the educational approach from a cultural perspective. Thus, successful models which belong to the ethnicity of students and groups are promoted. The cultural characteristics which are related to certain of social life practices, and elements of cultural identity (traditions, customs, clothing, culinary arts, religious holidays, religious identity) are mentioned. Most students mentioned the fact that they had witnessed such activities. In terms of the students perceptions regarding the cohesion of educational groups (students of several ethnicities, from families with a low economic status, and students with disabilities), they appreciate that the group’s functionality is likely to be conditional on how effective the coordinating teacher is in the management of activities at the class level. In this situation, we appreciate that the major role in the process of education is owed to the desegregating mentor, this individual having the main impact on the attitudes and behaviors of students in the school and in extra-curricular activities. In the opinion of the respondents, the family can meet the needs of the inclusive school on condition that it is properly informed in relation to the environment and climate of the school. In addition, the partnership between parents and students with regard to intercultural tolerance activities, cultivates and wakes everyone up to the need to be active in participation in their children’s education.

5. Conclusion

Segregation in the European space remains a problem, especially as we are currently witnessing, within the European space, the cross-border migration of people with different ethnicities and cultures. This aspect, in particular, alerts the school to the need to produce models of education which exist within the context of desegregation and of the need to support the principle of equal opportunities for all in the form of social desegregation.

Acknowledgement

I declare, with personal responsibility, that the research has respected ethical standards and responsibilities towards the. The participants gave their consent for participating in the research.
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References


Order No. 6134 of December 21st 2016 prohibiting school segregation in Pre-University Teaching Institutions.

