

# SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

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## Abstract

*The school is an institution which functions at a community level. When a true partnership between school, family and community exists, teachers can develop more effective ways of guiding students towards higher academic standards. Parents and family need to discuss with the teachers their children's behaviour, according to the standards imposed, in order to help them both in school and at home. This way, students will strive for achieving new standards in their studied disciplines (mathematics, sciences and language) and they will also be well-equipped to continue their studies in universities (here or abroad) in order to start a career with a bright future.*

*Schools and community improve the training, evaluation and professional development of teachers, the development of managerial skills of the principals and the involvement of parents and businessmen, in order for each aspect of education to work as a part of a whole system, which supports students to achieve their goals.*

**Keywords:** school, community, family, partnership

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## 1. Introduction

Given the context of globalization and other large phenomena, as well as the affiliation to the European Union, Romania has encountered a series of changes, both on the economic and social level.

In this fast-moving world, pressured by competition at all levels, parents, teachers, businessmen, local communities, states and governments, all work together to encourage the improvement of education, which helps children grow and develop. The school is one of the most important institutions of a community. However, schools cannot function or evolve without taking into consideration the specific features of the community. One of the means by which this goal can be attained, is the involvement of family in education.

Families need to be involved in their children's learning, both at home and in school, if we want them to be well-educated. Families can improve home-learning by taking interest in the activities offered by the schools, encouraging their children to actively participate in classes and arousing their interest towards exciting disciplines, along with broadening their own abilities, as parents.

Students must learn that society is driven by certain rules, which he needs to know, apply and respect in his behaviour, according to his age, and also by social values and moral attitudes, which lead to the consolidation and progress of the community. This can be attained by encouraging the emotional and active implication of the student in the school environment.

The role of school is to form and train individuals capable of using a large information basis, to make them adapt to new environments and conditions, to make them work effectively in a team, and to help them develop an empathetic attitude towards other groups or cultures which helps them act responsibly to new challenges and destructive influences.

No matter how well-trained a student is, he will never adapt to social life, unless he develops some kind of civic behaviour (active, responsible, open, tolerant, communicative, reflexive and self-evaluative) and certain moral attitudes and values (honesty, honor, sincerity, respect towards parents, friends, people, school and labour).

One of the most important requirements of proper educational activities, is the assurance of a unity between all educational agents: school, family, community. If we admit

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that schools have an overwhelming impact on the formation of the human personality, we must admit that proper education cannot be attained without recognising the role of the family in this relationship. School and family are both institutions which need one another.

## **2. Conceptual delimitations. School-community partnership**

The school is an institution which functions at a community level. When a true partnership between school, family and community exists, teachers can develop more effective ways of guiding students towards higher academic standards. Parents and family need to discuss with the teachers their children's behaviour, according to the standards imposed, in order to help them both in school and at home. This way, students will strive for achieving new standards in their studied disciplines (mathematics, sciences and language) and they will also be well-equipped to continue their studies in universities (here or abroad) in order to start a career with a bright future.

Each school becomes "a community of those who learn", following its own plan of constant development of teaching, studying and discipline (Băran-Pescaru, 2004, p.70). All students strive to make progress in attaining the established standards, with the support of their parents, teachers and other partners.

Schools and community improve the training, evaluation and professional development of teachers, the development of managerial skills of the principals and the involvement of parents and businessmen, in order for each aspect of education to work as a part of a whole system, which support students to achieve their goals.

Under these conditions, education is the creation of the social being (Langa C., 2013, p.30). Education, through its characteristics, helps individuals develop other subjective qualities, than the genetic ones.

Society, as a whole, is targeted towards attaining its purpose of contributing to the development and education of the student.

The education system refers to all the institutions of a society, involved in the education of people, in a certain time period (Langa C., 2013, p.36).

The school is a formal organization whose purpose is to supply social service in education, in order to form, socialize and professionalize young generations (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.14). Schools function within a local community and they are directly influenced by everything that takes place in the social environment. Schools deliver information, develop abilities, rules and values. At the same time, schools have their own logical development, reproducing their own values, rules and organizational system.

Schools function within a community which is composed of many educational agents: family, local authorities, police, sanitary institutions, church, economic agents and NGOs with their own educational offers. Schools and other educational institutions are constantly under the pressure of other factors such as ideological groups which act at a local level, political systems, economic conditions and social trends. In other words, schools depend on the environment in which they function in order to obtain material, human, financial and informational resources.

The school functions within a social context, in a local community which provides for students, but which also has to respond to a set of expectations. The social context of the community can influence the school as part of the civil society, capable of defending its interests, not only by institutional means, but also by exerting social pressure directly upon the educational institutions.

The school also functions within a larger social context, at a national level which comprises:

- local communities, social groups, social organization forms and legal aspects;
- elements of social life: language, culture, values and traditions (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.10).

The school is an organization which develops a pedagogical activity within an institutionalized environment, with social regulations and roles which involve both micro and macrostructural parts of the educational process (Langa C., 2013, p.58). The school is a formal organization which functions within a local community with its own rules and which also conveys social values. At the same time, schools produce "the human material" in the community, the students and the teaching staff.

The concept of "community" has a long evolution over time.

Synthesizing different approaches of the concept, we can establish the following characteristics of a community:

- a community is a social global entity in which relationships between its members are very close, and the feeling of ingroup is very strong, with roots in traditions;

- a community is a supra-individual entity, which has priority over the individual, in virtue of its transcendence of ethical and political order;

- a community represents a common well-being, it is an element of moral reference for the individual, promoting basic values (through rules and traditions) to the individuals (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.15).

In Romania, the concept of community has mainly a geographical connotation, as a physically determined area. Even if lately there has been much debate over the development and involvement of the community in solving local problems, human relationships based on mutual support are only at the beginning of conceptual approach.

The concept of partnership imposes an approach from different perspectives and has many connotations.

Juridically, a partnership is defined as a legal understanding in which partners define together, a general objective of the partnership. Authentic partnership implies, in theory, a strong collaboration and a combination of certain advantages for both partners.

From the perspective of benefits, a partnership is defined as an efficient manner of management, either by changing managerial practice, or by changing the modality of approaching public issues, in order to solve them through a partnership.

The partnership can be a means of allocation and usage of local resources, or of attracting external resources for solving local problems. In many communities, certain local services, profit or non-profit, have developed in order to solve different issues.

The partnership between school and community has to be based on the principle of the complementarity of the social services offered by different organizations in the community.

A partnership is based on the idea that the ones involved have more to win if they act together, rather than acting alone. However, the intention of cooperation cannot guarantee success. For that, there needs to be a coordination of activities and decisions between the partners, and also a good management of the process of collaboration. The success of a partnership is determined by the common adherence to the rules established.

The formation of a partnership is a deliberate process which implies certain attitudes, strategies and knowledge, which the partners need to know and use.

A partnership determines the adoption of a management based on collaboration and change, communication and acknowledgment of diversity.

In a partnership, each partner must define his/hers expectations, objective and limits. A partnership is based on trust and it determines a certain responsibility and implication of the partners. It has to be a means of obtaining good results efficiently, a change for the good.

Over the last years, the concept of partnership has been defined in many ways within the majority of academic resources, regarding education. The term determines an opening towards the environment and the context. This way, a partnership becomes an element of the school opening towards the social environment in which it functions.

A partnership can take many different shapes and it directly influenced by the decision-making system of the community or country.

Within an educational system which is excessively centralized, a partnership could make parents actively participate in the decision-making process of the institution. In a centralized system, families or even local communities are rarely invited to participate in the debate over educational issues.

However, in a hierarchical educational system, a partnership can refer to a new spread of power and also some sort of communication between school principals, teachers, parent's representatives and even students.

Within a decentralized administration, the responsibilities are assigned, and the involvement of the community is institutionalized and immediate. Here, a partnership refers to the opening of the educational institution, towards the social and economical environment. However, if this kind of partnership could work at a high-school and college level (non-mandatory education), for primary and secondary schools, it would not work this well. Even so, it has been noticed that the opening of schools towards the economical system has been developed by different political parties.

The tendency of schools opening towards the community is common in most western countries. Given the fact that the resources for education are fewer and fewer, a partnership could be another way of handling local resources, or a new way of attracting funds for schools and valuing its resources in the benefit of the community.

Accepting a partnership in education implies a change in the roles of educational institutions and local agencies or organizations. Etymologically, the concept of partnership implies notions of sharing, separation and division of responsibilities and duties (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.29). Social agents would play a more active role in the public service of the educational system.

The problem comes with the identity and the ones involved in the partnership. Resistance can come from the side of the teachers, who can choose not to collaborate with organizations outside the school, especially if they have to put up with more effort for which they will not be rewarded. The process of education is considered most of the time to be a private practice, and teachers are rarely open to sharing their roles and knowledge. A partnership involves team-work. Therefore, the less competences the ones involved have, the less functional will the partnership be.

Another problem we encounter is the change in the school's role in the partnership. Schools have a very well-defined purpose and vision, and the opening towards the social environment could be an issue. Schools not only have the mission of responding to the needs of the community, but they are also involved in a larger educational process, at a national level, which outstands the local one. This way, schools are institutions which promote a national character with national social tendencies, and not local.

Given the social context, Romania's national policy on education is established on decentralization, a process which involves a partnership between social agents which have different roles and responsibilities at a local level. At the same time, students need a unitary and balanced interpretation, which can only be achieved through a partnership of all the social and educational agents. Therefore, a systematic collaboration between educational institutions and different social partners facilitates the schools' adaptation to reality.

In a community there are a lot of organizations with many different activities. The school-community partnership at a local level, refers to the cooperation of all the institutions and social agents interested in supporting education and its problems.

The success of the partnership is based on the permanent and constant link between community agents and school representatives (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.20).

Schools are organizations involved in the community. Their status, social functions and competences of human resources, make schools the promoter of community partnership. The school is an organization which learns and produces learning. What makes it similar to the other organizations is its ability to learn, and what makes it different is its ability to produce learning (Langa C., 2013, p.59).

The schools and the community need to assume certain types of relationships, without giving up their defining elements. The initiation, support and development of a partnership with the community which focuses on the student as a member of the community, can bring benefits both to the school and the community.

The principle which stands at the basis of this partnership is represented by the fact that the education needs of students are points of interest of any educational partnership.

Schools could solve many of the problems they are facing by collaborating with institutional or non-institutional local agents, which benefit from the services offered by educational institutions, whose activity depends on the quality of the education of the people they collaborate with.

For a true partnership to take place in education, there needs to be a change in the values, attitudes, principles, rules and behaviours of the decisional agents, the human resources, the representatives of the local institutions, the parents and the students. All of these agents need to make a partnership in order to stabilize the lives of the students (students receive a lot of messages of different environments which can confuse them in their integration in the community), because children are not only educated in schools, schools need to adapt to reality and apply the principle of decentralization (from which all the responsibilities of the local agents come).

In education, the partnership of the social agents need to be based on a set of values, accepted by all its members, such as democracy, civilism, humanism, diversity, tolerance, communication, common good, mutual respect and liberty.

This attitudinal change can be achieved by the formation of the human resources in the spirit of collaboration, active participation, elaboration of projects, the promotion of collaboration between all actors of the community interested in the development of education, adopting an active management style, active participation of parents in school programmes, establishing a balance between the educational offer and the educational need of the community, adopting an appropriate programme in consensus with the community's needs.

However, in this partnership there can interfere certain barriers, such as:

- different values of the members
- different interests and opinions of the members
- not respecting the contractual relationship
- different motivations of the members
- poor management of time, duties and responsibilities, activities
- inappropriate activities in relation to the duties of the members
- a poorly-defined policy of the school's relationship with the community
- the parents' carelessness
- lack of educational values
- the level of poverty of the population
- not identifying the advantages and the outcome

Each local partner has specific interests. In Romania's current social context, schools need to take the initiative in making a partnership. Being dependent of the resources of the community (material, financial and human resources), the schools need to constantly adapt. Changes need to take into consideration:

- permanent connection to the social and economical changes
- assuming and promoting the local values
- establishing the appliance of these values in practice

- the creation of an educational environment capable of facilitating the development and the integration of the young generation
  - assuming an active role in the community
  - assuming and practicing the role of the initiator and supporter of the educational partnership
- Changes in schools are major and they involve:
- the adoption of an active management
  - a change in the mentality of the school's members
  - adapting the programme to the students' and the community's needs
  - improvement of educational offers
  - improvement of extra-curricular activities
  - involvement of the students, parents and representatives of local institutions in the process of the school's development.

Schools have the duty of forming good citizens, future members of a community, and they have an essential role in the promotion of the community's spirit. Schools have to take initiative in the formation of the partnership with the community.

Schools have been financed more and more by local funds. Sometimes, local authorities invoke the lack of funds for schools. Under these conditions, schools need to make efforts in order to function and sometimes they even turn to other sources such as: sponsorships, parents' contributions, establishing partnerships with NGOs, accessing other funding lines, offering services for a fee.

Schools need to modify their educational offer. Some of the ways in which schools help the development of student in the local spirit are: adoption of new disciplines regarding community spirit, training teachers to teach these disciplines, the association with other organizations which offer educational programmes, initiation of new educational programmes, participation of local agents in elaborating the programmes.

The endeavour of schools in the partnership needs to be well-planned. Schools need to open up to the community through different actions which support the partnership and the collaboration with the local agents. Schools need to attract and involve local partners, with common interest in the partnership.

The benefits to the community are many. Communities form future active citizens. The community's programmes adopted by the schools can contribute to the growth of the quality of life and promote values such as: responsibility, cooperation, participation, transparency and communication.

The schools, as an organization, in order to attain its objectives, needs a proper managerial system, with specific functions, such as: projecting, decision-making, organization, coordination and evaluation (Stăiculescu C., 2012, p.35).

The management of the partnership is based on the human resources. And because of this, there is a need for the training of the persons involved. Not only the training of the faculty, but also of the parents, local authorities representatives, local economical agents, church representatives and local NGOs. People need to be prepared to work together, as a team, to assume their role in the local development and to identify the long-term advantages of the partnership.

The management team of the school, based on the local community, includes, besides the teaching staff, the principals, the parents, the students, members of the community, representatives of local businessmen and representatives of different organizations interested in education.

The majority of the schools in Romania try to attract in their managerial team, representatives of the local community which can participate actively to the solving of problems, to empower different community representatives and to attract material and financial support from them. Supporting the interests of a certain school in the local council, by a local councilor, can bring additional resources, as opposed to a school which doesn't have this kind of support.

The initiative for the involvement of community agents in educational issues must come from the schools, for they are the main institution which manages educational problems, given its main responsibility of educating the young generation. The community's agents must also acknowledge their role in the educational process and also the benefits that come from a good collaboration with the schools.

However, school management based on a relationship with the community can encounter many problems, beginning with the time allocated for meetings, the stimulation of involvement and the lack of clarity in both the content of the partnership and the method of support from the partners.

Therefore, if schools need to be the ones who initiate the partnership, then we can admit that an efficient school manager is the one that:

- contributes to the identification of new outcomes of the partnership, helping the group establish clear objectives;

- identifies real problems and initiates discussions at the right moment;

- makes sure that the process of decision-making does not have a formal character;

- initiates an agenda which allows people to get involved;

- knows all the institutions concerned with educational problems and the people he needs to contact;

- has abilities and qualities which allow him to involve in partnerships: adopts an active management style, delegates responsibilities, knows the legislation, knows the community and its problems, is sociable and communicative, has initiative and can take on responsibilities.

All in all, a good school manager expresses clear and difficult educational problems which the schools are facing, and also the possible solutions which can come from the partnership.

### 3. Conclusion

At this time, a school-community partnership is a true necessity. The partnership can be initiated by the schools and it can only function properly if community members involve in school activities, after seeing the educational offers which satisfy their needs.

A functional community is the one which has a good collaboration between all social institutions, and which considers the school to be an important part in a system that promotes the education of its members and cooperates with diverse organizations to provide people with educational, cultural and leisure services.

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