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## SOCIAL WORK AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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### ABSTRACT

In the present report is substantiated the necessity for the introduction of social workers in schools as a necessary guarantor of introducing inclusive education and general educational infrastructure development. Some features of school social work and inclusive education are examined; the main professional interventions of school social workers are outlined.

**Key words:** Social Work, Inclusive Education, Special Educational Needs etc.

In light of discussions on the adoption of new law on school education in Bulgaria, the matter regarding the development of inclusive education and integration of children and pupils with special educational needs in general education environment was placed with priority.

Topping and Maloney (1) introduced the subject of inclusion by stating that "... like the learning inclusion is a dynamic process, not static state - journey but not purpose of journey." Just as the learning which is described as a continuous process in the introduction to "Index of Inclusion" (2), inclusion goes hand in hand with the continuing improvement of the school. Thus, it is deliberately presented as an important and positive principle of schools involved in the politics of standards, which reflects on the assumption that the inclusive school is by definition good school (3). Social work as a professional activity, focusing on the welfare of individual, goes hand in hand with the inclusive education which emphasizes on inclusion of all pupils in the classroom.

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Since 2003 a number of reforms were made in Bulgaria in this direction, which went in parallel with the process of deinstitutionalization and decentralization of the social and educational services for children.

Right here is the time to put a postponed issue regarding the social work at school and the emergence of school social workers in Bulgaria.

Social work in the secondary education gains greater force when we connect it with the support for the development of inclusive education for children and pupils with special educational needs. This is quite normal since we know that social work in general performs various social services to disabled people.

School social work is one of the oldest varieties of social work and is of special interest today when our schools are facing the change to become inclusive schools. School social workers have a key role in the implementation of successful school reform.

In the U.S.A. school social work has developed by several "mobile teachers" in 1960 working in the community in schools in Boston, New York, Chicago and Hartford to a profession which is now practiced by over 20,000 social workers joined in more than 30 associations (4).

Internationally, recent studies suggest that there is school social work in over 40 countries with over 50,000 practitioners (5).

School social work is constantly evolving and the number of practitioners is increasing.

But what lies behind these figures of school social workers? What actually do school social workers in their positions? And in the spirit of these questions, what kind of interventions they use in their practice and how they can support the development of inclusive education.

As a problem before the school social work comes up to clarify whether this type of social work is clinical social work, or rather is closer to the school advisory activities.

In the U.S.A., where initially arose the school social work, have been taken different approaches in different States. For example in Illinois they adhere to the clinical role of school social work, using elements of psychotherapy in the context of school environment. In other areas such as California and Indiana they refrain from this approach and focus more on the school social worker as a school-based consultant who works with pupils, teachers, parents and community. Except consultants, school social workers also deal with prevention of various risks for the pupils such as alcohol, drugs, dropping out of school, aggressive behaviour, support to pupils with special educational needs etc.

The National Association of School Social Workers is more likely to circumvent clinical practices and give priority to school advisory and preventive activity of school social workers. (6)

Several authors point out that school social work occurred almost when the social work occurred in general in the context of the school. Not accidentally the first school social workers were called "mobile teachers". Their main purpose was precisely to assess the child's family environment, to provide preventive and consultative assistance outside the classroom. (7)

On the other hand, undoubtedly are recorded also the moments of clinication related to individual work and client-oriented approach, as well as the use of models in psychodynamic models in the work. However, the fact should be not missed that these activities are more related with school psychologists to

whom there are such professional requirements. (8)

Despite some controversy in professional circles related to the identity of the school social work the need for this professional activity in schools is not posed as question.

Surely in Bulgaria initially the challenges will be related to the perception of social worker as professional who can work in schools and assist to solve the many problems associated with education, training, socialization of pupils in extracurricular environment.

Families and teachers also need support which they can be provided by professionally trained school social workers.

All these discussions are particularly important for the development of inclusive education for children with special educational needs.

So many years after the adoption of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement in 1994, we started to make in Bulgaria serious and confident steps towards the building of an inclusive education in our school system.

What represents the educational inclusion? In literature there are many definitions for inclusion: some authors emphasize on the social inclusion (9), others – on educational inclusion (10) and many others describe an approach that includes measures based on values.

The challenge of this quest for equality in terms of opportunities and support is also caught in a definition published by the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) in the UK:

"Inclusion is not just a concept limited within the issues of location. Its definition should be extended to provide wider access to education and to recognize the importance to meet different needs. Increasing access for more people is an important goal. But it will not develop spontaneously and needs to be actively planned and encouraged."(11)

This definition naturally puts the connection of the resource teachers, as vocated to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the classroom with the school social workers who have to to implement interventions in extracurricular activities, family and community.

When we talk about supporting the children with special educational needs we must specify inclusive education, not only children with disabilities.

Evaluation of educational inclusion" (12) says that inclusion concerns:

- Boys and girls;
- Ethnic and religious minorities, Gipsy, refugees;
- Pupils for whom the national language is not mother tongue;
- Pupils with disabilities;
- Pupils exposed to neglect or risk of exclusion;
- Gifted and talented children:
- Children who are attended;
- Children with chronic diseases;
- Young, attending others;
- Children from families under stress;
- Pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers.

Social work regarding the schools is a difficult role, in which the professional identity, devotion and skills are a challenge, the focus of intervention being changed. (13)

Activities, which can be fulfilled by the school social workers for the development of inclusive education, are in several directions:

**- Socio-educational consulting;**

Consultation is a specific method to help people in difficulty. Very often in the process of inclusion a number of social problems are revealed - pupils', teachers' or parents'. Consultation is a complex of psychological, educational and psychiatric techniques designed to change the conscious sphere of the human person.

Consultation is a type of rational methodology which is based on the idea that people can be helped to achieve change in their abilities to perceive, assess and react in different life situations. (14)

In consultation a two-way process of interaction is realized, resulting in increase of the consumers' skills to cope with a real situation, what is the inclusion in the general education environment.

Creating intimate atmosphere of consultation should lead the pupil, teacher or parent to a self-disclosure so as the real problems can be understood and to outline the strengths to get along, which the consulted person holds.

**- Mediation;**

Piero Bertolini (15) effectively clarifies the relationship between mediation and education: he defines the mediation as one of the main functions of education which covers the various aspects of interpersonal relationships.

School social worker mediates between pupils and their social world (parents, classmates and friends, socio-controlling subjects) by creating construction and reconstruction of relevant relationships, development and conflict resolution, meeting and transition to new social dimensions. The teacher is also a mediator when pupils with special educational needs face the tasks of educational requirements. Tarozzi reminds that pedagogical relationships always require mediation: Mediation is a purposely act which allows to create or make evident the links that exist between seemingly distant subjects. The question is about orientation in the personality space of others and encouraging links between distant elements so that the meetings are useful in the development of emotional strength of the relationship in the classroom. The mediation takes serious place in the inclusive education because this is professional skill which facilitates communication between the separate participants in the educational process. That is why school social worker is the specialist who can enhance the development of communication in school and community.

**- Direct social work;**

School social workers provide services to pupils with special educational needs who have difficulty in their environment and thus their overall involvement in school is not sterling and experiences serious resistance. That is why the use of direct social work is necessitated. The direct social work or also known as "social outreach work" is a methodological concept, which in terms of Mobile Work with pupils with special educational needs, necessitates on the one hand of local and community-orientated attach the social environment, and there must be something particular to be offered to pupils and their families on the other hand. Sometimes this work consists in special time that is given to those pupils outside the school in their home or in other words, interventions directed at the pupil's environment. This activity can be expressed in conversations over the phone about the various problem situations faced by the family, in other cases it may be necessary to visit relatives and

friends of the family concerned with the case, and in third cases may concern a contact with other institutions such as social services or hospitals that are relevant to the problems of pupils with special educational needs. This calls to require by social workers to work not only in school but also outside it. This type of work requires a special approach by the social worker, because sometimes is needed interaction with the so called “non-voluntary customers” who would not wish to cooperate, however, they must be involved in the process of helping.

#### **- Resource support;**

This is one of the main educational services of inclusive education, at this stage in Bulgaria this service is provided basically by the resource teachers in schools and kindergartens. Very often, however, resource teachers have not enough time and competence to cope with additional difficulties for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in general education environment. Sometimes, schools are not prepared to accept pupils with special educational needs and to provide supportive environment allowing them to show most of their potential. Just because of this, it is necessary that the social worker at school works on one hand with the school management and teachers, and pupils and parents on the other hand. School social workers realize their work in collaboration with the whole school staff and other professionals from other social assistance services, specialized institutions and organizations relevant to the protection and care of children. (16)

Social worker can enrich the resource assistance by providing important information to participants in the educational process and help the interaction between them. In this sense, it is important for school social workers to know the main diagnostic groups of children with educational needs to precise better their professional interventions.

We shall now briefly summarize the main professional activities of school social workers in support of inclusive education:

- Assist with contacting families of children with special educational needs in the area of the school;
- Participate in the identification of special needs of the pupils in school;

- Orientate and provide information to parents and pupils when they enter school;
- Provide information on rights and opportunities for social and legal protection for pupils with special educational needs;
- Identify traces from violence on pupils and inform the authorities for child protection;
- Carry out individual and group meetings with all pupils at the school on various issues;
- Consult school management to adapt the school environment in a welcoming environment for pupils with disabilities;
- Organize information campaigns and training of pupils, parents and teachers;
- Contact with different institutions for social and educational services in the community;
- Provide school mediation in conflict relationships;
- Assist in the provision of specialized transportation and accessibility for pupils with disabilities.

This is a small part of activities of the professional profile of the School Social Worker, who express the urgent need of this specialist in the Bulgarian school.

In this statement we made an attempt to expose the concept of the relationship between social work and inclusive education as two important pillars in improving the welfare of children and pupils with special educational needs the and general education environment and promote the right of equal access to education.

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- DAMYANOV K.*
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