

## THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN ROMANIA UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES THE SPREAD OF SARS – COV-2 CORONAVIRUS. PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANCE, COUNSELING AND ADVISING THE STUDENTS' CAREER.

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims at dealing with a series of aspects of the educational system in Romania regarding the psycho-pedagogical assistance services, educational and professional counseling and advising of the students, therapy for speech disorders under the circumstances of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus. These activities have taken place during March – October 2020 by school counsellors, speech therapist teachers working at county educational resource and support centres. Starting from the fact that sociology creates aspects, facts, phenomena, changes and social processes within the individual groups, of the institutions, the problems they confront in certain moments, the reality captured by the author aims at the solidarity but also at the problems of this segment made by the teachers from the educational resources and support centres. The introduction presents the concept of education with its quality of the right for education, recognised in the Constitution but also the institutions which develop, implement and assure respecting the educational policies.*

**Key-words:** *psycho-pedagogical assistance services; educational and professional counseling and advising of the students; therapy for speech disorders; SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus;*

### 1. Introduction

The right for education is part of a set of fundamental rights, as it includes an individual process of development specific to the human condition inspired by some essential values which stand at the base of society, values which are based including in the European Union. In Romania, *the right for education* is a constitutional right, the current Constitution being adopted in the meeting of the constituent's meeting from the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1991 coming into effect following the national referendum on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1991. It was revised and approved in 2003. This, article 32 guarantees the right for education by general education, high school and professional education, colleges and also other forms of education and teacher training.

From this perspective, education must be seen as a right to a educational policy based on interventions from the state and its actions offer the societies the right instruments for them to achieve its goals. In this respect, the different public institutions play essential roles in guaranteeing the citizens' rights in making, implementing and respecting the educational policies.

Law, nr 1 from 5<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 – the Law of National Education brings a series of clarifications regarding the fundamental right of life long learning. This law regulates the structure, the functions and the organisation and the functioning of the state, private and confessional system of education. (The Law of National Education, 2011, art. 1) but also the educational ideal of the Romanian schools which consists in a free development, entire and harmonious development of the human individuality in forming an autonomous personality but also in assuming a set of values which are necessary for personal development and also for developing the entrepreneurship

spirit for active participation in society, for social inclusion and for employment (National Education Law, 2011, art. 3).

A very important role in developing autonomous personality, in assuming a real system of values which would help the personal development in the entrepreneurial spirit of active participation in society for a social inclusion and inserting the teenager in the labour market have the school counsellor and the speech therapist teachers working at county educational resource and support centres in Romania. The functioning of these centres is regulated by the updated nr. Law of Education. In this context it is specified that in the county educational resources and support centres are specialized units of the high school educational system with a legal personality, being coordinated methodologically by the school inspectorate, 2011, art. 99 (4).

In the regulation regarding the organisation and functionality of the county's educational resource and support centres approved by the Ministry Order nr. 5555 on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2011, in art. 1 it is specified that in each county N educational resource and support centres is functioning. It is named CJRAE, and in Bucharest the educational resource and support centres is called CMBRAE.

CJRAE/CMBRAE are units subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research and are coordinated methodologically by county's school inspectorates (ISJ) and Bucharest school inspectorate (ISMB). The activities in CJRAE/CMBRAE focus on offering, coordination and monitoring specific educational services given to the children/students, the teachers, parents and community members in order to assure access to a quality education and also to provide the necessary assistance in this respect. Thus, it assures that at the level of the Romanian school education psycho-pedagogical assistance, speech therapies services, school counseling and advising, for the direct beneficiaries/the children/students/teenagers but also psychological assistance and counseling the parents and the teachers in their quality as indirect beneficiaries of the system of education.

## **2. Conceptual delimitations**

For a better understanding of the context of the current paper it is necessary to be presented the meaning of the psycho-pedagogical concepts, speech therapy, counseling and school orientation and also a short presentation of SARS -CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus.

Providing "assistance" is reported to the "assembly of the organised activities with the aim to ensure the right conditions for development and for life and to prevent and remove the suffering situations presented temporarily in the person's life (Tomsa, 1999). Taking into account this definition, the psychological assistance can be understood as a different aid or support offered to some people who are in difficulty at a certain moment or as an action of prevention or such situations. Pedagogical or educational assistance assures sustaining some people who engage in learning activities of personal development, counseling and carrier orientation. Taking into consideration that the educational system is structured around an assembly of activities which aim to make educational activities which could support the entire and harmonious development of the human individuality, in forming the autonomous personality and in assuming a system of values which is necessary for fulfilling and for personal development for the development of the entrepreneurial spirit and for active and civil participation in society and for employment in the labour market. Thus, this type of activity is usually achievable by specific activities of educational counseling and/or psycho-pedagogical counseling.

According to the American Counseling Association, counseling is defined as, "a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals." Counseling involves helping people make the needed changes in ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, and it is a goal-based collaborative process, involving a non-judgmental, supportive counsellor who works with a client in telling his or her story, setting viable goals, and developing strategies and plans necessary to accomplish these goals. For some people, this process takes a small amount of time, in some cases as little as one or two sessions; for others, the process may last longer. An extremely important part of counseling is confidentiality, which means that the information discussed in session will be accessible only by you and your counsellor, with a few exceptions

Starting from these affirmations, we can conclude that the activity of counseling describes an inter-human relation of support between a person with a suitable specialty (the counselor) and the person who requires the specialized support – specialty assistance (the client).

When we refer to the activity of *psycho-pedagogical counseling*, we consider this as a qualified approach, organized on scientific ground that allows the granting of a specialized assistance to those persons involved in the educational process (students, teachers, parents) and who, at a certain moment, face difficulties. (Dumitriu, and Dumitriu, 2003: 192) At the same time, as it is described in the school curriculum for the national examinations of tenure in pre- university educational system Psycho-pedagogical Counseling is an activity that is founded on reaching objectives both psychological as well as pedagogical. The subject propose the empowerment of the person (child, youngster, adult) in order to build the mechanisms that stay at the basis of personal autonomy through learning the modalities to modify the cognitions and behaviors, to deal with emotions, to optimize the relations with the others, to take decisions and to assume responsibilities.

*School and professional orientation* aims at personal development and endowment of the student with knowledge and abilities necessities for the management of self-educational and professional development, representing a process of preparation and guiding the students towards subjects and domains suitable to their own personality structure. School and professional orientation represents a system of actions and measures through which the students are guided to choose the right school, the one that forms their skills and abilities necessary to the desired profession. Also, the professional orientation refers to establishing the suitable profession for the students, based on their values, preferences and aspirations. (ISJ Bucharest, 2017: 3).

When we refer to the concept of therapy for speech disorders, first of all we need to approach the term from a speech therapy point of view. Carolina Bodea Hategan builds a delimited diagnostic category, by affecting all dimensions of speech and written act, as well as nonverbal modalities of communication. This category of speech assumes lack at the level of symbolic manipulation, both expressively and impressively. Speech disorders appear in the absence of sensorial disabilities, neurological disorders, motion disorders, intellectual disability or late development. (Bodea Hategan: 46). Thus, the speech disorder therapies aim at the education and re-education of of the speech, the role of the speech therapist is to re-do and strengthen the language by applying specific techniques in different ways.

According to WHO (World Health Organization), SARS-CoV-2 is the name for the coronavirus that has led to the present pandemic and COVID-19 is the disease caused by this virus. The name, the coronavirus acute respiratory syndrome, in short SARS-CoV-2, was chosen because the virus is related genetically to the coronavirus

responsible for the SARS in 2003. SARS comes from the syndrome acute respiratory and CoV from coronavirus. Starting from this definition we can conclude that at this present moment we face a new virus and a totally new pandemic similar to nothing before in modern times. As this pathogen(virus) is new, our immune system does not recognize it and therefore cannot defend accordingly. It was believed that from the numerous family of coronavirus, only six can infect people. For of them (229E, NL63, OC43 și HKU1) have lightly disturbed people for more than a century, leading to common colds. The other two, MERS and SARS( or classical SARS as the virus specialists named it) lead to more severe diseases. The 7th one, the new coronavirus, has already been given the name of SARS-Cov-2(Bioclinica).

### 3. Context

On March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, the President of Romania installs the emergency state on the entire Romanian territory for duration of 30 days with the aim of preventing the spreading of COVID -19 on the Romanian territory. In this situation the Ministry of Education and Research, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 communicates with all educational institutions the Address no 8699/12.03.2020 according to which all classes in pre university system are suspended until March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020, decision that it is based on Decision no. 6 of March 9<sup>th</sup> 2020, decision belonging to the National Committee for Emergency Special Situations (CNSSU).

On March 30, 2020 Mrs. Monica Cristina Anisie, Ministry of Education and Research sends a letter of gratitude to all teachers, thanking for implication towards maintaining the emotional equilibrium among the beneficiary of the educational system and also presents a series of instruments and digital resources necessary in the context of face-to-face classes being suspended.

Considering the situations previously described, the month of March 2020 is the month when the educational activities are re-invented. If, up to that moment, the online educational activities using methods and specific means, was difficult and hard and rarely used, now the educational activities and managerial activities are done only by using IT. It can be noticed that the majority of the pre-university teachers rapidly adapted themselves and involved in these activities although, as Breaz A. noticed, the children and students' capacity to socialize and relate is clearly affected by the development of IT technologies and of social online networks. (Breaz, A., *The Role of the Social Worker in Socializing Preschool Children*, p. 145) For this reason exactly the role of the 2920 teachers of all the CJRAE in Romania is very important and their involvement in the activities developed during this period is essential. They can contribute through programs and adequate methods to improve the capacity of communication and, implicitly, the children/youngsters' abilities to socialize. (Breaz, A., *The Role of the Social Worker in Socializing Preschool Children*, p. 146). Last but not least, as Mrs. Cristina Maria Marin, expert in Creation and implementation of integrated community services to fight poverty and social exclusion (POCU/375/4/22/122607) highlights, it is necessary to realize instruments and procedures to guide and offer support the members of the community in supplying integrated community services, through counseling services and school mediation.

The apparition, in April, of the Ministry of Education and Research' s Order no. 4135/21.04.2020 brings about legitimacy on the way of how didactic activities are conducted beginning with March 23<sup>rd</sup> up to the end of the school year. The online didactic activities offered liberty to each teacher to use any desired means of communication. These were used according to the experience and knowledge of each

teacher in particular. At first, there was WhatsApp, app that offers simple texting and accepts a large variety of media, texts, pictures, videos, documents. At the same time emails were used and Facebook. In rural areas, considering the fact that many students did not possess any necessary device (phone, laptop, tablet), the teachers found an alternative to contact the students, Xerox-copied material and these were taken by the families when they went out for shopping to the local grocery in the village. After April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 the Ministry of Education and Research, through the National Center of Policies and Evaluation in Education operationalizes the portal *Digital pe educared.ro* (<https://digital.educared.ro>) as the total of e-learning platforms and of all online educational resources accepted and recommended by the Ministry of Education and Research. The portal contains a series of tutorials, materials addressed to online didactic activities, but also modalities of keeping a track of the students' activities on the online platforms. At the same time, The Ministry of Education and Research informs all teachers, students, parents on the fact that a team of the Ministry of Education and Research will develop instruments for all parts in the educational system and will send measures to facilitate online teaching for all schools, through all School Inspectorates.

Based on Ministry of Education and Research's order no 4135/21.04.2020 each county elaborated the County Plan of educational intervention for the case of suspending classes in pre- university educational system. This plan contained the main directions of action and one of the components was allocated to the staff in CJRAE/CMBRAE. The main objective of this action was to identify and apply modalities of sustaining, counseling, psycho pedagogical assistance and speech therapy intervention for students, parents, teachers and members of the community.

Prior to the apparition of the Order no.4135 of April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 the Ministry of Education and Research, through the General Direction of Pre- university Education, communicates to all County Centers of Resources and Educational Assistance the Address no. 28901/07.04.2020 which contains a series of recommendations regarding the activities that can be developed by CJRAE/CMBRAE during the 2019-2020 school year, in the situation of the face-to-face classes having been suspended. With this address the evaluation of the psychosomatic level for the children that were about to enter the preparatory grade is suspended. Also, there are given recommendations for suspending the activity of psycho-educational evaluation within SEOSP, the communication and the receiving of the requests and demands to be done through email as well as assuring distance services of psycho-pedagogical assistance and speech therapy for young children and students, distance guiding and informing teachers along with campaigns of solidarity. At the same time, through the measures proposed by the Ministry of Education and Research and transposed into practice by CJRAE/CMBRAE there were encouraged the initiations of partnerships with institutions like DGASPC, Directions of Social Assistance, universities, theatres, hospitals to help educational online activities being developed. The need to create volunteering educational and cultural programs was deeply felt, in order to significantly contribute to the feeling of satisfaction to increase the quality of life (Breaz, 2020: 58).

#### **4. Relevant activities of CJRAE during the March-July 2020 the period of face -to -face classes being suspended**

A part of the CJRAE's online activities that took place during March-May 2020 due to the suspension of the face-to-face classes were gathered thorough the project *Creation and Implementation of Integrated Community Services to Combat poverty and Social Exclusion* (POCU/375/4/22/122607) and presented by the coordinator of the

county experts of the project, Mrs. Maria Cristina Marin. Thus, at the level of each CJRAE there were available:

- services of distance psycho-pedagogical assistance for young children, students, parents/tutors and teachers
- services of distance school and professional orientation for students
- services of speech therapy and distance communication for young children and students

On the CJRAE/CMBRAE sites and other promoting pages, information about assistance and methodological counseling for teachers through the facilitation of access to the educational content (educational resources) in specialty can be found. A large variety of solidarity campaigns are presented, co-operation in partnerships as the quality of the educational process and the respect offered by this category of teachers to their beneficiaries can be realized in co-operation partnerships (institution-family), through efficient programs of teaching, in suitable environments and sustained research (Goian and Breaz, 2020: 71).

For a better image and understanding of the March-August, 2020 period we selected some opinions belonging to three Romanian CJRAE directors.

Psychologist Dr. Melania-Maria GÂRDAN, CJRAE Sălaj, highlights some of the feelings we all went through starting with March. From the underestimating the situation to all catastrophic scenarios, our mind had challenges each and every day, in the present pandemic context. Considering this, all staff of CJRAE Sălaj understood the importance of immediate identification of solutions to continue the activity in a different way-online- and the necessity of adapting the solutions to the needs of the beneficiaries as well as the importance of identifying individual resources necessary to successfully face the rules imposed by the authorities in order to prevent from catching the SARSCOV-2, self-isolation, quarantine, developing educational and professional activities from home, challenge that nobody envisaged, wanted or was ready to cope with it, as there were no verified procedures or pre-written saving scenarios.

I immediately understood that we need to identify solutions, to act and react as a united team, with care for one another, for the children, students, parents and teachers who needed us. Therefore, we created a series of educational resources(guides, brochures, short articles in specialty, work sheets for the students, games, stories, didactic scenarios on themes of interest), having in mind the idea to make this period of time easier to cope with and to offer specialized support to all who want and look to improve the personal portfolio of resources in order to win this battle. We adapted to online teaching, we created educational resources and we continued to offer psycho pedagogical counseling, speech therapy, school and professional orientation as well as school mediation. We discovered together online modalities for our activities, we used educational platforms, phones, internet, social networks, the CJRAE site. Thus we flexibly adapted to the needs of our beneficiaries, being close to them.

Psychologist Daniela Laic, CJRAE Vaslui is of the opinion the suspending the face-to-face counseling activities for students and parents in the present pandemic context is negative. The communication lacks authenticity as the students are more shy, they do not trust the real situation they are in. The fact that they can be heard by other persons as well makes them be reluctant to counseling activities, to confessing the problems they are facing. The nonverbal communication is disrupted due to the virtual space and because of the technical blocks that appear in a virtual session. The number of the students who require these services is smaller. It is difficult for a guidance counselor to explain certain concepts, relations, phenomena. It is also difficult to use in practice certain work methods specific to guidance or some work sheets. For the SEN students,

the school counseling is even more difficult as these students do not have good skills in using technology, they cannot focus, they are bored or amused in relation to the counselor. I think this period made the teachers and the counselors adapt their didactic approach, made them flexible and motivated in finding realistic solutions to be of help to their students.

Psychologist Irina Ermolaev, CJRAE Constanța: we think that the greatest challenge of this period is represented by assurance of support of specialty in online in order to maintain the emotional equilibrium of our beneficiaries. How has it influenced us in a positive way? We addressed a large number of both beneficiaries as well as educational partners, in a record time, we ensured relevant educational resources, we developed new skills, we adapted to some limit situations, we focused on solutions and we maintained our optimism, inspiring those around us. How it influenced us in a negative way? The educational experts' efforts multiplied and the time dedicated to professional activities increased tremendously, the overlapping of online organized activities generating the focus on solutions but with the stress and extenuation that come with them, one online activity can be done over a large amount of hours/classes. A relevant aspect, at an institutional level: CJRAE has remained close to the community and has become more visible. The number of accessing the pages dedicated has increased, highlighting the need of children and adults to have access to the offered services.

## 5. Conclusions

We need to admit, no matter which side of the educational act we are, that our life after SARS-CoV-2 has changed and is still changing. If two or three years ago we could not imagine educational activities using only online means of communication, these have become a reality today. All those events influence people's behavior in accepting or rejecting some aspects of social life. (Breaz, 2019: 67). By browsing the sites of ten CJRAE (Arad, Bistrița, Covasna, Dolj, Maramureș, Mehedinți, Sălaj, Suceava, Teleorman, Vaslui) and CMBRAE, I noticed a raise in the degree of the teachers' involvement in realizing online activities, a large variety of methods and didactic means, a lot of creativity, examples of good practice, recommendations regarding the leisure time as alternatives to the online educational activities.

If, up to now the adults have been searching for solutions in order to limit the time spent by a student online and they have been trying to discourage the students' online activities, at this point we look for ways to make time spent online efficient, to offer solutions to minimize the side effects of online activities as well as to organize activities for both students and teachers and to offer them online protection.

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