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SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION: STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION

Abstract. In recent years, the Lithuanian society and social institutions have been experiencing changes that could be explained not only by the necessity to transform the Lithuanian state but also by taking into consideration globalization. After the re-establishment of independence, Lithuania experienced significant structural, economical, social, political changes. The state can be free and democratic only if it succeeds to maintain the society that adheres to the rules of democracy. In this paper, we examine the research question: What educational strategies promote the creation of a cohesive community at the school level? We use both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Case study action research (quantitative and qualitative) analysis was conducted in order to develop the study that is referred to in this paper; however, only the results from the qualitative case study action research analysis were used for this paper.

Introduction

In recent years, Lithuanian society and its social institutions have been experiencing changes that could be explained not only by the necessity to transform the Lithuanian state but also by taking into consideration the process of globalization. After the re-establishment of independence, Lithuania experienced significant structural, economical, social, political changes. The state can be free and democratic only if it successfully maintains a society that adheres to the rules of democracy. However, changing the social system and creating new traditions require time and effort. According to I. Zaleskienė (2011, p. 74), the state should broaden “positive” choices and support for an individual by ensuring principles of equality in basic human rights and access to opportunities. On the other hand, an individual has to take responsibility for his / her own life. Both of these are decisive factors when choosing a personal life style and in building up the civic community. The absence of democratic traditions in Lithuanian families, schools, associations, work places etc. can still be felt today.

Therefore, the scientific problem addressed in this paper can be defined by the following research question: What educational strategies promote the creation of a cohesive community at school level? The object of the study is the educational strategies used for creating cohesive community.
We use both quantitative and qualitative research methods. *Case study action research (quantitative and qualitative)* analysis was conducted in order to develop the study that is referred to in this paper; however, only the results from the qualitative analysis of the *case study action research* were used for this paper (some of the steps of this study were planned and implemented while working together in FP6 programme project INCLUD-ED, coordinated by Barcelona University).

School as a community for social inclusion: pros and cons

Analysis of scientific literature and other resources enabled us to identify the school as one of the first institutions where different social problems reveal themselves because people come here with various social statuses, with different abilities, and from different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. We live in a globalized society and economy, so schools are at the forefront of this diversity. Every school needs to prepare its pupils to grow up in the world we live in, respecting, celebrating and interacting with people from different backgrounds and cultures are important parts of school education provided to pupils. It is a significant challenge for school, and especially for teachers, because the main responsibility for promoting a cohesive community at school belongs to them. Changes in the role of schools in the 21st century, where schools are defined as inclusive and centres of cohesive communities both locally and globally, are setting new objectives for contemporary educators.

There are two different perspectives towards understanding the school’s role in the creation of a cohesive society. The first perspective, based on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, sees school as an institution which legitimates inequalities. This theory states that social reproduction is realised through cultural reproduction in the schooling system (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Children of advantaged backgrounds do well in the schooling system because the culture in schools resembles the culture in their homes. Children who lack this cultural capital from home will find it much more difficult to adapt to the schooling culture, they will perform worse, will be rewarded less by teachers, and will select themselves out of the schooling system. Another perspective is based on Emile Durkheim’s theory, which is rather different from the first one. Even Bourdieu, a French sociologist, was affected by Durkheim and structuralist ideas in his early career. For Durkheim, education conveys the values and norms of society and by doing so, strives to integrate people within the ideological and cognitive community to which they belong (Saha, 2001). Durkheim believed that schools are the primary socialisation agent for the production of future adults.
This is reflected in his work on moral education, which places the development of consensus and solidarity in society in the hands of the school.

Inclusive education was identified as an effective tool for creating a cohesive community at the school level, where close family-school-community relationships are important factors in the creation of social capital. Special attention was given to families and community empowerment as a meaningful way to approach social cohesion. Without a doubt, family and community members from all backgrounds should take responsibility and be active agents in school life. The participation of family and community members from minority cultural backgrounds becomes essential because these adults create a role model for children, thus helping to overcome stereotypes and prejudices about minority groups through their interactions with all students. The participation of families in family education programmes in schools is a successful action that improves students’ achievements and creates closer relationships. As a result, families should be able to express their own individual learning needs. A theoretical model (see more Miliušienė, 2012, p. 87) was provided that identified a teacher’s main competencies for inclusive education. This model triggered further discussion about a teacher’s additional role in education. This model illustrates that teaching is still both a profession and a vocation. Contemporary teachers’ work involves creating cohesion among different groups of people. It is not enough to educate children to be literate; it is also important or even more important to communicate with children and family, to listen to them and to help them to strive for self-realisation and, ultimately, happiness.

Research Methodology

**Qualitative methods:** Analysis of *scientific literature and documents* (namely, literature on social exclusion concepts, meanings of social inclusion and role of cohesive community) has shown that the need of social cohesion in education is constantly increasing because society still faces major challenges both nationally and internationally. *Communicative daily life stories with children and families* are conversation-narrations that the researcher conducts with the participant about daily life in relation to the theme of the research. It is the result of the interaction between a person who performs the investigation and another person who, through the dialogue, moves forward the reflection and interpretation of his or her daily life. *Case study action research (quantitative)* revealed that, family and community involvement in school life increased during the four-year research. In the 1st year of the research, families
did not know what community involvement meant. Results from the Kaunas region school showed a higher level of satisfaction than results from the Kedainiai school. For example, families from the Kaunas region school reported being more satisfied with the school than families from the Kedainiai school. Children from the Kaunas region schools stated that community members helped them to learn more. These differences seem to show that the school from the Kaunas region is more successful than the school in Kedainiai city. Of course, it should be noted that the qualitative research during the four-year period was only implemented in the Kaunas region school. This factor could also influence the research, providing different results.

Results of the study: transformative educational strategies

Case study action research (qualitative) enabled us to define the main exclusionary, transformative and neutral strategies for implementing inclusive education designed to create a cohesive community. More transformative strategies were observed in the school that participated in the four-year research when compared to exclusionary strategies. Consequently, the school could be identified as a successful example of good practices for implementing inclusive education and creating a cohesive community. Factors that cause exclusion and create barriers for cohesive community and creation of social cohesion at school include lack a family’s lack of responsibility for the education process. This result is also closely related to the lack of encouragement for families to participate in the educational process. It means that if families are not encouraged to participate, they do not feel responsible to participate and their participation is weak in each part of the education process, especially in learning spaces where they could help their children learn at school.

Another weak area is family and community education. The need to provide special courses on the education process to families and community members was also noted. This should include not only formal information about their children’s success or failure but also important psychological aspects, e.g., communication with a child, working with a child at home, etc. Additional curriculum activities (non-formal activities) would also enhance family participation. This aspect is very important in creating closer relationships. Neglected children are yet another aspect affecting exclusion. It is even more difficult to communicate with the families of these children; however, medical information for families and children should be provided as a necessary service. The attitude that family and community involvement does not influence the health of the neighbourhood creates additional barriers for family /
community participation. Therefore, this attitude should initially be targeted for change by teachers and later by other members through informal education.

As it was mentioned above, implementing a *transformative strategy* was more frequently used at school. This is a good example for other educational institutions that try to implement inclusive education and to create a cohesive community. It was noted that such activities as the prolonged-day groups have positive impact on children’s cognitive, emotional and social development and is a support for busy parents. Family and community involvement is also one of the most important factors for creating cohesive community. Main forms of family and community involvement could be involvement in the decision-making processes and in this way ensuring the inclusion of all the voices of the whole educational community at every level, giving them important responsibilities in the decision-making processes.

Common non-formal activities are a way to create a good atmosphere, cooperation and strong relationships with each member within the community. This means that it is very important for teachers and other school members to communicate with parents directly and indirectly. School, and especially its teachers, should take responsibility as an active actor in developing better surroundings between these groups: family, school, community, and neighbourhood. The examples showed that family and community involvement influences housing conditions, employment conditions in the neighbourhood, and a community’s social and political participation.

Such aspects as family and community participation in the curriculum creation and assessment processes are not acceptable to respondents as such development is perceived as the job of a professional teacher. Therefore, it cannot be attributed to transformative or exclusionary strategies; similarly to the empowerment process of passive family and community members, it was included in the *neutral strategy* as not everything and not always depends on a teacher’s competence.
As Figure indicates, transformative strategies should be increased because they can help to create a cohesive community at school, while exclusionary strategies should be decreased if we want to overcome exclusion and increase cohesion. There is no common agreement on a neutral strategy and how it should be implemented in this context.

Conclusions

The following is a summary of all qualitative research data analysis that were identified, namely exclusionary, transformative and neutral strategies:

**Exclusionary:**
- Lack of opportunity for exercising the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Not providing additional support for neglected children.
- Lack of information about health care.
- Lack of encouragement for families to participate.
- Weak family and community education.
- Weak family and community participation in learning spaces.
- Lack of extra curriculum activities.
- Negative attitude towards the impact of family and community involvement on the improvement of health status in the neighbourhood.
Transformative

- Impact of additional educational services (prolonged-day group) on children’s cognitive, emotional and social development.
- Support for busy parents, providing additional educational services for children.
- Using school library for the wider school/neighborhood community.
- Active school participation in common activities organised in the neighborhood.
- Cooperation and strong relationship with each member in the community.
- A school’s active participation in developing better surroundings in the neighborhood.
- Family and community involvement in the decision-making processes.
- Implementation of non-formal activities for strengthening social coexistence.
- Inclusion of all voices of the entire educational community at every level.
- Direct and indirect communication of the school with parents.
- Positive attitude towards the impact of family and community involvement on housing conditions in the neighbourhood.
- Positive attitude towards the impact of family and community involvement on employment conditions in the neighbourhood.
- Active role of police in strengthening community’s social and political participation.

Neutral

- Family and community involvement in the processes of creating curriculum and assessment is complicated because it is mostly seen as the job of a professional teacher.
- The process of empowering passive family and community members is a major challenge.

References


**Mokslinė problema** šiame straipsnyje apibrėžiama šiuo probleminiu klausimu: kokios švietimo strategijos skatina glaudžios bendruomenės kūrimą mokyklos lygmenyje?

**Tyrimo objektas** – švietimo strategija glaudžiai bendruomenėi kurti.

**Veiklos tyrimo atvejo studija** (kiekybinis ir kokybinis tyrimai) buvo įgyvendinama ketverius metus (2007–2012), tačiau šiame straipsnyje pristatomi tik kokybinio tyrimo rezultatai.

Straipsnyje pristatomos dvi pozicijos remiantis dviejų autorių – P. Bourdieiu ir E. Durkheimo – požiūriais į švietimo vaidmenį socialinės sąlygos kūrimo procese. Remiantis P. Bourdieiu, industrializuotų visuomenių švietimo sistemų funkcija yra legitimuoti klasinę nelygybę. Švietimo sistemos sėkmę lemia kultūrinis kapitalas, kurį turi aukštesnio socialinio sluoksnio atstovai. Taigi vaikams, kurie yra iš žemesnio socialinio sluoksnio šeimų, nesėkmė mokykloje dažnai yra neišvengiamas dalykas. Tuo tarpu E. Durkheimas mato mokyklą ne kaip legitimuojančią nelygybes,
bet kuriančią socialinę sanglaudą. Švietimo funkcija, anot šio autoriaus, yra kurti solidarumo jausmą visuomenėje. Švietimas turėtų perduoti bendrasias vertybes ir normas, būdingas bendrai gerovei ugdant visateisį ir visavertį kiekvieną visuomenės narį. Pasak E. Durkheimo, mokykla yra aktyvi ir daug prisidedanti prie glaudžios visuomenės kūrimo.

Įtraukiamojo švietimo skatinimas turėtų būti laikomas vienu pagrindinių šiaudienio ugdymo kryčiai. Švietimas, besiremiantis priėmimo ir visų besimokančių įtraukimo įvairovės principais, turėtų būti įgyvendinamas taip, kad kiekvienas asmuo, nepaisant jo kilmės, socialinio-ekonominio statuso, tautybės, negalios, lyties ir t. t. būtų gerbiamas. Mokyklos–šeimos–bendruomenės bendradarbiavimas turėtų būti laikomas viena esminių švietimo strategijų, prisidedančių prie glaudžios bendruomenės kūrimo.

Apibendrinant kokybinio tyrimo duomenų analizę, išskiriamos atskirtį didinant, atskirtį mažinančios bei neutralios strategijos.

Esminiai žodžiai: įtraukiamasis švietimas, glaudū bendruomenė, bendradarbiavimas, strategija.

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