



School-Family Collaboration in Special Psycho-Pedagogy

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Abstract: The partnership between educational institutions and the family environment represents an essential component in the process of harmonious development of children with special educational needs. This article examines the aspects of this collaboration, examining how effective communication and active parental involvement can impact the academic progress and social integration of students with disabilities. Our approach highlights the challenges faced by both teachers and families in building an inclusive educational framework. By examining current practices and direct experience from the system, we highlight the need for personalized strategies that meet the individual needs of each child. The research emphasizes the importance of continuous training for teachers in parental counseling techniques and curricular adaptation methods, as well as the creation of psychological support mechanisms for parents. The results of the analysis suggest that authentic collaboration, based on mutual respect and common goals, can substantially transform the educational trajectory of a child with special needs, contributing to maximizing his or her developmental potential.

Keywords: educational partnership; special educational requirements; parental involvement; inclusive education; family

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1. Introduction

The child with special educational needs does not just go through the school benches - he crosses a complex universe in which each interaction, each experience shapes not only his cognitive capacities, but his entire being. In this context, the relationship between school and family becomes more than a simple administrative collaboration or a formal obligation provided for in official documents. It becomes, in fact, the foundation on which the entire architecture of the child's development is built, a pillar that supports not only school acquisitions, but also emotional balance, self-confidence, and social integration.

The reality in special education clinics and classrooms shows us daily that the education of children with disabilities cannot be shaped exclusively within institutional walls. The family remains that primordial space where the child builds his first landmarks, where he learns to communicate, to love, and to understand the world. The parent is the first therapist, the first teacher, the first model. At the same time, the school offers professional expertise, structured methodology, and adapted pedagogical tools. When these two dimensions meet in an authentic dialogue, the results can be truly transformative.

The literature confirms what practical experience consistently shows us: family involvement in the educational process of a child with special needs is a significant predictor of their success (Turnbull et al., 2015). Longitudinal studies conducted over several decades highlight that when parents actively participate in intervention programs, the child's progress is manifested not only in academic terms, but also in the areas of personal autonomy, social skills, and general well-being (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

However, the path to successful collaboration is strewn with obstacles. Parents of children with disabilities often face complex feelings: from denial and anger, to acceptance and activism. The process of adapting to their child's diagnosis is an intense emotional journey, requiring time, support, and understanding. Teachers, in turn, face administrative challenges, a lack of material resources, and the need for continuous training in areas that go beyond classical pedagogical training. In many situations, communication between these two partners becomes overloaded with distrust, unrealistic expectations, or simply accumulated fatigue.

In Romania, the educational system for children with special needs has undergone significant evolution in recent decades, moving from the segregationist model to the principles of inclusive education. The National Education Law (Law no. 1/2011)

established the legal framework for the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education, promoting the idea that every child has the right to education in the least restrictive environment possible. However, significant discrepancies persist between legislative provisions and the reality on the ground, and school-family collaboration remains an element that requires increased attention and substantial investment.

This article aims to analyze in depth this complex relationship, starting from the premise that understanding the mechanisms that facilitate or obstruct educational partnership can lead to the identification of practical solutions applicable in the current context of the Romanian special and integrated education system.

2. Theoretical and Practical Foundations of Collaboration in Special Education

When we talk about collaboration between school and family in the context of special education, we are referring to much more than occasional meetings or signing official documents. It is about building an authentic partnership, based on fundamental principles that go beyond simple administrative protocols. This partnership must be based on mutual respect, on the recognition of the competencies of each party, and on the establishment of common objectives that place the child at the center of any decision.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) provides a valuable perspective for understanding this collaboration. According to this theory, child development is influenced by multiple systems that interact with each other: the microsystem (family, school), the mesosystem (the relationships between these microsystems), the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The quality of interactions between family and school - that is, at the mesosystem level - has a direct impact on the child's development. When these two microsystems communicate effectively and coordinate their efforts, the child benefits from an educational consistency that facilitates learning and adaptation.

In contemporary psychopedagogical practice, collaboration with the family takes many forms and at various levels. At the formal level, we have the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or the Individualized Service Plan (ISP), documents that must be developed in partnership with parents and that establish specific educational objectives for each child. Experience in the field shows us, however, that these documents risk becoming mere bureaucratic formalities if there is no real

involvement of parents in establishing educational priorities. The parent must be perceived not as a simple signer of papers, but as an equal partner in decision-making, someone who knows their child in a depth that no professional can reach.

An essential aspect of this collaboration is communication. However, not every form of communication generates positive results. Effective communication in the context of special education involves several dimensions: it must be bidirectional (not only the school transmits information to the family), but it must be prompt and constant, not just reactive to problems, and it must be constructive, focused on solutions and the child's progress, not just deficits. Unfortunately, many studies indicate that school-family interaction is predominantly activated when behavioral problems arise or when progress is unsatisfactory, which creates a negative association in the minds of parents between contact with the school and bad news (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Barriers to collaboration are multiple and complex. At the individual level, we often encounter differences in perception between parents and teachers regarding the child's needs, educational priorities, or intervention methods. Parents may develop resistance to diagnostic labels, perceived as stigmatizing, while teachers may interpret this attitude as denial or lack of cooperation. Differences in professional language – parents being unfamiliar with psychopedagogical terminology – can generate confusion and misunderstandings. At the systemic level, time constraints, limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and the lack of adequate spaces for counseling constitute real obstacles to sustained collaboration.

From the perspective of parents, the challenges are equally serious. Many parents of children with disabilities experience parental burnout, overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities: caring for their child, navigating the medical and educational systems, managing additional financial issues, and maintaining a balance between family and work. Recent studies highlight that parents of children with special needs experience higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to parents in the general population (Hayes & Watson, 2013). These factors are sometimes compounded by feelings of guilt, frustration, or helplessness, which can affect their ability to actively participate in the educational process.

However, there are also notable examples of good practice. Schools that have implemented structured parent training programs, joint workshops where parents learn cognitive stimulation techniques or problem behavior management, have reported significant improvements in both children's progress and the quality of the

school-family relationship. Initiatives such as extended “open days”, where parents can participate in daily classroom activities, or parent support groups facilitated by school specialists, have proven to be effective strategies for strengthening the educational partnership. The role of the support teacher and the psychopedagogue thus becomes central in mediating this relationship. They must act as a bridge between the professional world of the educational institution and the personal universe of the family. This requires the development of skills that go beyond classical teaching training: counseling skills, empathy, flexibility, the ability to actively listen and validate the emotional experiences of parents. The continuous training of teachers in these areas remains an essential priority, but is insufficiently addressed in the current Romanian system.

Modern technology offers new opportunities for facilitating communication. Digital platforms, mobile applications dedicated to special education, and closed groups on social networks can constitute additional channels of interaction, especially for parents who face time or mobility constraints. At the same time, these tools cannot completely substitute direct, face-to-face interaction, which remains essential for building trust and addressing complex situations.

The literature proposes concrete models for structuring this partnership. The “Family-Centered Practice” model (Dunst et al., 2002) places the family at the center of interventions, recognizing that parents are the ultimate experts on their child and that any intervention must respect the values, priorities, and culture of the family. This model assumes that specialists do not work “for” or “on” the family, but “with” the family, in an authentic collaborative approach. Implementing this model in the Romanian context would, however, require significant changes in attitude and institutional organization, from the micro level of individual teacher-parent interaction to the macro level of educational policies.

3. Practical Strategies and Future Perspectives in Strengthening Educational Partnerships

Moving from the theory of collaboration to effective practice requires concrete tools and strategies adapted to the reality of the Romanian educational system. The experience gained in recent years in various educational contexts provides us with valuable benchmarks for building a functional partnership framework. It is essential to understand that there is no universal recipe - each family is unique, each child

presents a specific constellation of needs, and institutional contexts vary considerably from one school to another.

A fundamental first step is a comprehensive initial assessment, which must necessarily involve the family. This does not mean just filling out questionnaires or providing anamnestic information. It means building an overall picture of the child, which integrates the medical perspective, the psychopedagogical perspective, but also the experiential dimension of the parents – their observations of the child's behaviors in various contexts, the strategies that work at home, the child's preferences and aversions, and the family routines. This collaborative assessment process sets the tone of the partnership from the beginning and sends the message to the parents that their expertise is valuable and necessary.

The development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a crucial moment in the concrete implementation of the collaboration. In order for this document not to remain a simple bureaucratic formality, the IEP development meeting must be carefully prepared. Parents should receive information in advance about the structure of the meeting, about the participants, and about the issues that will be discussed. During the meeting, it is important to avoid overly technical language, to use concrete examples to illustrate the proposed objectives, and to give parents time to ask questions and express their concerns. Moreover, the established objectives must be realistic, measurable, and relevant to the child's daily life – not just abstract school performance, but skills that will increase their autonomy and quality of life.

Continuity of communication after the establishment of the IEP is equally important. Many schools have adopted the system of communication notebook or personalized agenda, in which both teachers and parents write down daily observations about the child's behavior, activities, successes, or difficulties. This simple tool facilitates a constant exchange of information and helps to quickly identify problems before they degenerate. In the digital age, these notebooks can be replaced or supplemented with mobile applications that allow instant communication, sharing photos or videos of activities, and even making short video conferences when necessary.

Another essential aspect is the involvement of parents in concrete activities within the school. This can take various forms, depending on the availability and comfort of each parent: participation in extracurricular activities, volunteering in the library or school cafeteria, involvement in organizing events, presenting their own job or hobbies in front of the class. Research shows that this physical presence of parents in the school space contributes to the demystification of the institution, reducing the

child's anxiety and building a closer relationship between the family and the teachers (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). For parents of children with disabilities, who often experience feelings of isolation or stigmatization, this integration into the school community can have significant therapeutic effects.

Training programs dedicated to parents are another valuable strategy. They can address various topics: techniques for managing problematic behaviors, methods for stimulating language or social skills, strategies for organizing daily routines, and ways to use assistive technology. The idea is not to transform parents into professional therapists, but to provide them with practical tools that will facilitate their interaction with the child and allow them to continue at home certain objectives worked on at school. These training sessions can be organized by the school in collaboration with the county centers for educational resources and assistance (CJRAE) or with specialized non-governmental organizations.

Parent support groups, facilitated by a psychologist or psychopedagogue, create a safe space where parents can share experiences, emotions, and strategies that have worked or not worked in various situations. This form of peer-to-peer support is extremely effective in reducing parental stress and combating feelings of isolation. Many parents report that discussions with other parents who deeply understand the specific challenges of raising a child with disabilities have a therapeutic effect that even the most professional individual counseling cannot fully replicate. The school can facilitate the formation of these groups by providing space and logistical support, even if the meetings are held in a less formal setting.

Transitions between different levels of schooling are particularly delicate moments for children with special needs and their families. The transition from kindergarten to primary school, from primary to lower secondary school, or from lower secondary school to high school or vocational school involves significant adjustments and can generate anxiety for both the child and the parents. Careful planning of these transitions, which should include prior visits to the new institution, meetings with the new teachers, and detailed information about the changes that will occur, can considerably facilitate this process. The specialized literature emphasizes the importance of formal transition plans, developed a year before the actual change, which coordinate the efforts of all parties involved (Kohler & Field, 2003).

An often neglected aspect is working with siblings of children with disabilities. They experience a particular experience, which can include complex feelings of jealousy, excessive responsibility, shame, or, on the contrary, special empathy and early maturity. Some schools have implemented specific programs for siblings of children

with special needs, providing them with age-appropriate information about their sibling's disability, space to express emotions, and strategies for managing difficult situations. This holistic approach, which sees the entire family as the beneficiary of support, not just the child with disabilities, contributes to creating a healthier family climate, which indirectly benefits the child in question.

Collaboration cannot ignore the cultural and socio-economic dimensions of families either. Parents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, parents with a low level of education, or parents from communities with specific cultural traditions may have a different perception of disability, of the role of the school, or of acceptable forms of intervention. Teachers must be trained in intercultural skills and adopt an open, non-judgmental attitude that respects diversity and seeks solutions adapted to the specifics of each family. The involvement of school mediators, social workers, or respected members of the community can facilitate the building of bridges between the school and families from vulnerable groups.

Periodic evaluation of the collaboration is as important as its initial establishment. Systematic feedback from parents on the quality of communication, accessibility of teachers, relevance of the objectives set, and degree of satisfaction with the child's progress can provide the school with valuable information for continuous improvement of services. This feedback should not be perceived as a threat or as a criticism of professional competence, but as an opportunity to adjust and personalize interventions.

From an educational policy perspective, strengthening the school-family partnership requires clear investments. It is necessary to allocate time in teachers' schedules for counseling and communication activities with parents - these activities cannot be considered "in addition" to the teaching norm, but are an integral part of it. It is necessary to provide initial and ongoing training for teachers in skills for working with families, in counseling techniques, in understanding family dynamics, and processes of adaptation to disability. It is necessary to create material resources - dedicated spaces for meetings with parents, quality information materials, translations into minority languages for families that do not speak Romanian, and technology that facilitates communication.

Recent international research highlights the trend towards increasingly sophisticated collaboration models, which go beyond the simple bilateral school-family partnership and include the extended community – medical, therapeutic, social, and recreational services. The "wraparound services" model promotes the idea that the

education of the child with disabilities cannot be separated from his physical and mental health, from the well-being of his family, and from the opportunity for social participation. Implementing this model in Romania would require inter-institutional coordination, which is currently difficult to achieve, but represents a valuable direction for the future.

4. Conclusion

Collaboration between school and family in the field of special education is not an option or a decorative element of the educational process - it is a fundamental condition for the success of the intervention and for the harmonious development of the child with special educational needs. The analysis undertaken in this article highlights the complexity of this relationship, which goes far beyond the formal dimension of official documents or occasional meetings.

The theoretical and practical foundation of this collaboration is based on solid principles: mutual respect for the expertise of each party, recognition of parents as equal partners in educational decision-making, constant and constructive two-way communication, and personalization of strategies according to the particularities of each family. When these principles are internalized and consistently applied by educational institutions, the impact on the child becomes visible and measurable - not only in terms of academic performance, but especially in terms of the development of autonomy, social skills, and emotional balance.

The challenges that prevent optimal collaboration are multiple and manifest themselves at various levels: individual (psychological resistance, differences in perception, language barriers), institutional (limited resources, overload, insufficient staff training), and systemic (inadequate educational policies, lack of inter-institutional coordination). Recognizing these obstacles should not lead to resignation, but to identifying realistic and applicable solutions in the current context.

The experience accumulated in the system and the results of research indicate that there are concrete strategies that can significantly improve the quality of the educational partnership. Collaborative initial assessment, participatory development of individualized educational plans, diversification of communication channels, involvement of parents in concrete school activities, training programs and support groups for parents, careful planning of transition moments – all these are valuable tools, effectively proven in practice.

It is essential to understand that this collaboration is not a static process, but a dynamic one, requiring continuous evaluation and adjustment. Each child is unique, each family goes through different stages of adaptation to the reality of disability, and each educational context presents specific particularities. Flexibility and the ability to personalize interventions according to these variables are the key to success.

Looking ahead, sustained investments are needed at all levels of the system. At the micro level, teachers need to receive ongoing training in family counseling and effective communication skills, and the time dedicated to these activities must be formally recognized and valued. At the meso-systemic level, schools need to develop clear protocols for collaboration with families, create appropriate spaces for this interaction, and facilitate access to information and support resources. At the macro level, educational policies need to reflect the importance of this partnership through clear regulations, adequate funding, and mechanisms to monitor the quality of services provided to families.

The cultural and socio-economic dimensions of families cannot be neglected. The approach must be inclusive and sensitive to diversity, recognizing that parents from different backgrounds may have different perceptions and expectations of the system. Involving the wider community – health services, social services, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups – can create a support network that compensates for the limitations of each institution.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the ultimate beneficiaries of successful collaboration are children with special educational needs. When the adults around them manage to overcome professional pride, sterile bureaucracy, or accumulated frustrations and build a united front, focused on the best interests of the child, the results can exceed initial expectations. Numerous case studies document remarkable transformations – children who have surpassed their initial prognoses, families who have moved from despair to positive activism, and school communities that have become more open and inclusive.

School-family collaboration in special education is not just a methodological necessity – it is a moral obligation towards the most vulnerable members of our society. It is an investment in the future, in building a truly inclusive society, in which every child, regardless of their particularities, has the chance to reach their full potential. The road is long and strewn with difficulties, but every step taken towards an authentic partnership is a victory for the child at the center of these joint efforts.

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