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Students' School Adjustment/Maladjustment Through Preparatory Class

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Abstract

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School adjustment/maladjustment is emphasized through pupil's positive/negative performance in his/her actions to solve the tasks imposed by the educational environment. It is connected to school success in a broad sense, emphasized through analyzing the school efficiency, progress and success. An important aspect of adjustment refers to preparatory class child's ability to create a relation with the teachers, the other students, to internalize school rules and accepted social values. Maladjustment is determined by various factors – emotional, of character, moral, of family, of school, educational – which can disturb the dynamic balance student – school. Pupil's adjustment to school regime keeps in its center the teacher, as main factor, and the relationship teacher – family is extremely important in making the whole educational process efficient. The partnership relationship is a multidimensional activity, it is not based on a single activity, but it is based on combining a number of different actions with the same aim. Activities with parents require carefully planned actions, which can enhance parents' trust in institution, having as effect the success of transition towards education.

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Keywords: School adjustment/maladjustment; school – family partnership; preparatory class.

1. Introduction

The school institution is an important factor of systemic and continuous education. At the level of this institution education and instruction reach a maximum level of development through the programmed, planned and methodical character of instructive – educational activities. Education is realized in different shapes, most often through collaborative activities, students learning from each other. Learning situations are deliberately built by the responsible factors within this institution. The

contents transmitted are carefully selected according to psycho – pedagogical principles and the educational activities must be structured respecting didactic principles. Those who realize the formative processes are specialists who have, besides disciplinary and academic skills, psychological, pedagogical and methodical skills. (Cucos, C. 2006, page 49). The influence of teachers over the development of child's conception about self and self-esteem is very strong. The young student (6-7 years old) gains new skills for his educational activity: he/she can draw, write, make simple calculations, etc. when he/she is encouraged to make such things and he/she is appreciated for accomplishing them, gradually he/she will manifest a tendency to work continuously, to persevere in accomplishing difficult tasks, to set work before the pleasures of the moment. If his/her hard work, instead of being appreciated will lead to him/her being criticized, punished, the teachers, parents will be dissatisfied, if he/she will be made to prove what he/she is capable of and he/she will be waived from hard work or responsibilities, then the child will gradually acquire a feeling of inferiority connected with his own abilities and of incapacity in relation with the others (Stan, E, 2004, pg. 51).

2. The role of preparatory class in facilitating pupil's adjustment to school regime

The reason for introducing the preparatory class within primary school is simple and logical: child's personality development is beneficial and more efficient. This efficiency appeared as a consequence of early socializing within an organized environment. As a result, the first contact with school must be slow, natural and pleasant. I think that a sudden transition from childhood games to the first school activities can be traumatizing for a child. The introduction of preparatory class ensures a gradual transition for children from kindergarten (for those who attended kindergarten) or from family environment (for those educated at home) to school life. As a continuity element in this transition process, preparatory class has a double didactic role: it consolidates the knowledge already acquired and it facilitates children's socialization and adjustment to changes. Furthermore, preparatory class guarantees all children a better start in school life. Besides, the role of this class is to give children the possibility to gain necessary preparation for school activity debut, and under formative aspect it ensures the right development of mental processes of knowledge.

Maladjustment can be avoided if the teacher talks with the pupils about alternative sources of information, about new technology and creates occasions for these to be used. The lack of a permanent encouragement of children from the teacher or parents' part to ask questions and to appreciate their content can lead to negative aspects appeared in stimulating curiosity. Moreover, discontinuities can appear if will to know and explore, specific to young students' age, is not satisfied through providing them attractive books, materials cleverly made, equipment, games or if these are not presented in different educational occasions. Obstructing young students from choosing the activity or work or play partners can diminish their interest for educational process. For this reason the teacher must support children's valuable initiatives. Encouraging children to work in small groups or pairs to leaf through a book or listen to something together can stimulate children's interest for school activities. Young children's perseverance in solving problems can diminish if the teacher does not talk with each of them

or with the group, this one having the possibility to offer students other approach possibilities, stimulating them to come back to and reflect over the proposed task.

School adjustment is the process of realizing a balance between the student's evolving personality during his/her formation and the ascending exigencies of the entourage under the conditions of assimilating the informational content according to own availabilities and adjustment to qualitative and quantitative changes of rules and values ensemble of the educational system. Adjustment implies the action of modification, adjustment, transformation of the child to become capable of attending school, capable to face up to instructive-educational requirements and to be compatible under the aspect of bio-psycho-social availabilities, according to rules and regulations imposed by school curriculum to successfully acquire the status and the role of student, so it considers the settlement and the adjustment of behavior in relation with daily situations. (Coasan, A., Vasilescu A., 1988, pg.10).

School adjustment is the result of the confluence, the interaction of an ensemble of factors, which can be grouped in two categories: internal factors (bio-psychological) and external factors (scholar and socio-family).

School success is in the most obvious way influenced by the level of intellectual development. So, accomplishing the proposed objectives requires a normal development of the child's intelligence, especially of its specific form, known as scholar intelligence which expresses the degree of children's adjustment to scholar activities. (Kulcsar, T., 1978, p.88) The student who acquires the expected performance can be considered adjusted to school, according to his/her level of intelligence, because intelligence designates the organizing ensemble of cognitive structures which can be measured through assessable performances.

In order to act as adequate as possible under the social conditions, the student in the preparatory class must learn, from the others or in relation with the environment, the skills to exercise socially. The educative activity exercised on the child aims in the end to make a well adjusted adult, well integrated in the society where he lives. (Holban, I., Giugiuman, A., 1972, pg. 113)

For a child the most sensibly different characteristic, once he/she comes to school, is the affective naturalness of the scholar environment which creates the condition for the desire to gain independently a status within the class collectivity. The manifestations of affection and charm that the child used to manifest are no longer valid. He/she becomes member of a collectivity where a new affective climate is created, of recognizing authority and of reciprocity relations. (Neacsu, I., 1978)

The preparatory class represents for the child a new environment with influences that leave a mark on his/her behavior, which can be characterized by a certain "affective neutrality" towards the family (eminently affective), which prepares the child for a disciplined, continuous, organized work. The teacher offers a new image of the adult, less tolerant, more authoritative, but, most often, more capable than the parents to open new horizons of knowledge. (Paun, E., 1991, p.4)

The teacher must make a continuous adaptive effort, his/her mental identity suffering readjustments under specific empathetic impulses of the pedagogical act. By entering in affective consonance with every subject the teacher triggers internal resources as relays for the proposed didactic strategy. According to Piaget's vision, empathy is in full consonance with the two adaptive processes – assimilation and adjustment, the adaptive effort of the child intersecting with the one of his/her

educator. Furthermore, the teacher expands the energetic field to receive in his/her perimeter as many energetic fields as possible so that the two entities educator – educated can become compatible.

After analyzing these indicators we can draw the conclusion that scholar adjustment will always correspond to a scholar efficiency situation associated with conformation to social behavior regulations. We can say that student's adjustment to school regime has in its center the teacher, as main factor in the adjustment process. The relationship educator – family is extremely important in the process of the child's adjustment to school regime (P.Băran, 2004).

The concept of maladjustment can be defined as the psycho-behavioral manifestations ensemble characterized by temporary lack or difficulty to integrate or adjust to the social educational environment. Behavioral maladjustment regards, mainly, students' disorders of relation with parents, teachers, colleagues and breaching the rules of scholar and extra-scholar collectivity. There are forms and degrees of maladjustment, of different intensity, which have in common generating dissatisfaction at individual level (tensions, failure or lack of success) which cumulated can favor the appearance of psycho-pathological troubles and prejudices at social level (they can disturb interpersonal communication, the process of instruction and education). At the beginning scholar maladjustment is manifested through dissatisfactions which can cause fear and discouragement. If they are repeated in time they tend to make student's anxiety and frustration chronic.

In what regards cause factors which can lead to the appearance of maladjustment phenomenon, the research in this domain led to the identification of many categories of factors (T. Kulcsar, 1978) and classifying them he divides them as it follows:

A. Internal factors (which depend on the individual): intellectual factors of scholar intelligence form, this one representing the adjustment degree to school activities; non-intellectual factors, which depend on the child's personality and motivation: level of aspiration, emotional stability, self-trust, skills, abilities, attitudes, capacity, perseverance, cognitive interest and so on. So, we can talk about physical and mental solicitation, as well as about factors related to personality, which is through its nature a subjective condition. From this point of view it is considered maladjusted that student who does not achieve the expected performance according to his/her level of intelligence.

B. External factors: pedagogical factors (of school nature); family factors; social factors (for example, of interaction within the age group). Pedagogical factors which interfere with the appearance of maladjustment phenomenon are:

- The organization form of the education. The comparative analysis of classical organization forms with the alternative ones reveal adaptive differences of subsequent social competence of students.

- Didactical methods and means, especially adjusting those ones to the child and his/her type of personality;

- The nature of school requirements, especially quantitatively speaking – how much can one ask from a students who spends a big number of hours at school so that the requirements of school activity quality can be accomplished;

- The teacher is one of the factors with a great influence over the phenomenon, through: professional qualification; attitude towards profession; attitude towards students, etc.

Family factors – of which the most important ones are:

- The educational – cultural level of the family;
- Cooperation with other educative and social factors. This thing becomes necessary because of the wish to standardize the directions of action towards the student, so that they shouldn't be contradictory

Social factors refer, first of all, to:

- The system of extra-family and extra-scholar relationships within its limits of taking place
- Student's life experience;
- The influence of the age group and its effects on the student

These categories of factors interact in relations and correlations systems, as real inter-conditioned networks, difficult to be separated, which can co-work positively, encouraging a good school adjustment, or, on the contrary, negatively, determining the appearance and the maintenance of maladjustment phenomenon. In the literature of specialty the following forms of school maladjustment are presented and described: school failure; scholar immaturity; limited or under limit school intelligence; psychomotor and emotional instability; instrumental disorders; behavior disorders; school abandonment.

3. Research organization (L. Antonesei, 2007)

The purpose of this pedagogical research is represented by the objective knowledge, the understanding, the analysis, the explanation and the optimization of action methods used within the partnership school – family which regard the prevention of school maladjustment for the students of preparatory class, having as measurable effect the enhancement of school performance and of quality in the process of personality formation/modeling.

3.1. Research objectives

- a) To determine the general and particular level of adjustment, maladjustment to school requirements of the students involved in the research;
- b) To identify and combine the forms of school – family collaboration, the strategies of involving the family in education which helps prevent school maladjustment, with visible effect on students' performance and behavior, on their motivation to know and on their attitude towards didactic tasks;
- c) To record, monitor and compare the results obtained by the students at the tests specific for each level of research;
- d) To analyze the relation between school and behavior performance, the strategies of involving the family in students' education which facilitates the prevention of school maladjustment through qualitative and quantitative interpretation of students' results at tests and to emphasize factors that stimulate or drags school maladjustment.

3.2. Research hypotheses

1) The partnership school – family is an efficient means of preventing school maladjustment together with the activity in class when the forms of school – family collaboration, the strategies of involving the family in education are used adequately.

2) The cultivation and the systemic development of school – family partnership relations contribute to the reduction/disappearance of school maladjustment phenomenon, so that the student shall answer positively to the requests of educational environment manifested through a scholar and behavioral superior performance.

3.3. Research variables

- Independent variable (IV) represents the experimental controlled factor, through the modifications of which some effects are produced, effects which are measured within the experiment: “systemic development of school – family partnership relations”.

- Dependent variable (DV) is the measurable factor, affected by the modification of independent variable, being defined in the experiment: “scholar and behavioral performance” – as indicator of the reduction/ disappearance of scholar maladjustment phenomena.

Scholar and behavioral performance – indicator for the reduction/disappearance of scholar maladjustment phenomena as dependent variable of the research, is not only emphasized through the marking scheme used in primary cycle, with the aid of marks (FB, B, S, I), but is also defined as quantitative variable, which synthesizes a series of significant indicators to notice the effect of independent variable interference.

3.4. Content sample

The research imposed the identification of school – family collaboration forms, of involvement strategies of the family in education which can ensure scholar adjustment noticed through positive performance of the student in his actions to solve the tasks imposed by the educational environment.

The content sample is based on usual strategies to involve the family in education and implies their participation at the activities realized by the school or by the class – they aim the identification and the use of parents’ abilities in educating their own children through which it was aimed:

- To get to know children’s families;
- To get to know the community;
- To use parents’ cultural capital;
- To increase educating factors of the family.

The sample group of subjects was constituted of 20 students from preparatory class x, Primary School y, coming from urban environment, characterized by homogeneity in age and physical and mental development and by differences in the level of intellectual capacity and knowledge.

The 20 students of the sample group formed an experimental group, on which they intervened with the study, according to the research hypothesis, following to observe, to measure and assess the results of the educational activities. These students form an experimental group because the research aims to identify the importance of the partnership school – family in preventing scholar maladjustment of the students of this level. Regarding the relationship between teacher and parents the most frequent collaboration forms between school and family included in the sample content were:

- a) Meetings programmed/organized by the teacher (with all the parents from the class, with a group of parents, with a single parent) – meetings with parents, lectureship with parents, parents' counseling
- b) Casual meetings (during breaks, at the end of the program, on the street, etc.);
- c) Phone conversations;
- d) Correspondence;
- e) Home visits;
- f) Non-formal activities (trips, sports activities, competitions, festivals, anniversaries, festivities, etc.)
- g) Consultancy at parents' request;
- h) E-mail communication, school's site, school's, class' Facebook page, Yahoo Messenger, etc.

For the pedagogical tests items from the subjects' content will be formulated – Communication in Romanian, Mathematics and environment exploration.

3.5. Research methods

The experiment, as basic method of research, supposes introducing an independent variable, systemic development of school – family partnership, in certain conditions.

The type of experimental plan used within the research is influenced by the objective conditions of experiment's progress. Having only one group (class of students) during an entire school year, the applicable plan was the experimental one with unique case, based on the technique of unique sample. A within-subjects experimental design corresponds to this technique, which supposes watching the group during all the steps of the experiment and analyzing its evolution regarding school adjustment/maladjustment problems. The technique of the unique sample imposes the measurement of students' performances both in pretest and after school – family partnership activities.

The pedagogical test was not only a method of assessment of scholar knowledge and acquisition but also an instrument of research, which allowed gaining important information connected to subjects' personality, with their level of competences and knowledge, with their behaviors and attitudes – their scholar adjustment. This research instrument is made of an ensemble of items, through which they search to identify the level of some knowledge, abilities, capacities or behaviors.

In order to verify the quality of the tests, they searched especially to ensure their fidelity and validity. The fidelity represents the stability of the test and it was materialized in applying the research instrument to the same subjects, in both stages of research progress. In this way the results of the subjects after applying the test were comparable to those obtained by the same subjects after applying a

test with similar items. Using a greater number of items, similar in type and quality, has as result the truthfulness of the assessment.

Validity refers to what extent the test covers the problem to be studied and it was materialized in reflecting as faithful as possible the effect of didactical methods over scholar performance of the subjects at Romanian language and literature.

Last but not least, the tests had to be standardized, by ensuring a scale, considered standard to which the individual results will be reported. The standard scale of the tests was realized through establishing the performance descriptor for each item.

Systematic observation has a particular role in the ensemble of data collecting methods used in the research, methodologically combining it with all the other methods. The method supposed following some observational indicators, which represent direct observable aspects and objectively measured, regarding the quantitative dimension of a qualitative manifestation of the investigated phenomenon. Objectively speaking it refers to aspects such as actions, reactions, attitudes and subjects' behavior under the impact of the school – family partnership activities.

Observational indicators considered useful and selected within this research, in order to emphasize the activating effect of implementing an efficient strategy of school – family partnership with influence over scholar and behavioral performance are: motivation, creativity, tasks accomplishment. The best collaboration methods were established in agreement with the parents:

- 1.Extra-curricular activities with students and parents participation – school festivals and anniversaries;
- 2.Lectureships with parents on chosen themes according to class scholar situation;
- 3.Parents counseling activities;
- 4.Information via telephone whenever necessary;
- 5.Communication with parents that are abroad with the use of Skype platform – based on a well-established schedule;
- 6.Organizing meetings for the students with their parents out of country through Skype platform in the school informatics laboratory – organized once a week by the teacher;
- 7.Home visits during which formal and informal aspects were combined, their role being extremely important – if the approach is correct – the school gets close to the family, barriers, reservations are eliminated, possible conflicts can be adjusted, mentalities can be corrected which educational actors can benefit from;
- 8.Promoting the class – students on school's Facebook page, in order to encourage both parents and children – strengthening the idea of belonging to the organization for scholar integration.

“Casual” meetings were an important element that the teacher prepared so that he/she could tighten the bonds with students' families, especially with those with scholar adjustment problems.

An important intervention took place during the research period 05.02.2016 – 20.04.2016 and it supposed improving the strategies of involving the family in education in order to prevent scholar maladjustment. The results obtained by the students at formative assessment were at the base of the activities that took place during this period, results which revealed that the efforts of tightening the

relations school – family can lead to preventing scholar maladjustment. Systematic development of school – family partnership relations aimed to modify the independent variable – scholar and behavioral performance – as indicator of diminishing/disappearance of scholar maladjustment phenomena.

3.6. Post-experimental stage

The final test of the research was sustained after covering all learning units planned up to the date of 20.04.2016. The structure of the test aimed to verify students' abilities at Communication in Romanian and Mathematics and environmental exploration, with items adjusted to the level of difficulty of the lessons.

3.7. Presenting and interpreting the results

Cultivation and systemic development of school – family partnership relation contribute to diminishing/disappearance of maladjustment phenomena, so that the student will respond positively to the requirements of the educational environment manifested through a superior scholar and behavioral performance.

From the indicators table we can identify the fact that the level of motivation for learning is not equably distributed within the sample, this one being present more on the side imposed by parents' exigency and school authority and only in 40% of the cases (7 children) as a wish to gain good results and out of curiosity impulse. The partnership school – family can come as a plus regarding children's motivation for learning. Creativity is emphasized in this stage, at most of the students mostly in spontaneous expressivity side, of narrating from imagination. There are 3-4 children who can easily make associations between images and, with some help, between words, which shows a high degree of adjustment to school requirements. The degree of task accomplishment was calculated according to the development level of the initial test requirements, as shared sum of the report between the number of correct answers and the number of tasks of each item. The weighting factor was established according to the difficulty degree of the items. The level of scholar and behavioral performance – as indicator of diminishing/disappearance of maladjustment and inadequacy phenomena (the dependent variable of the experiment) was expressed through a simple mathematical average of the three observational indicators, all the values being mentioned in table 1:

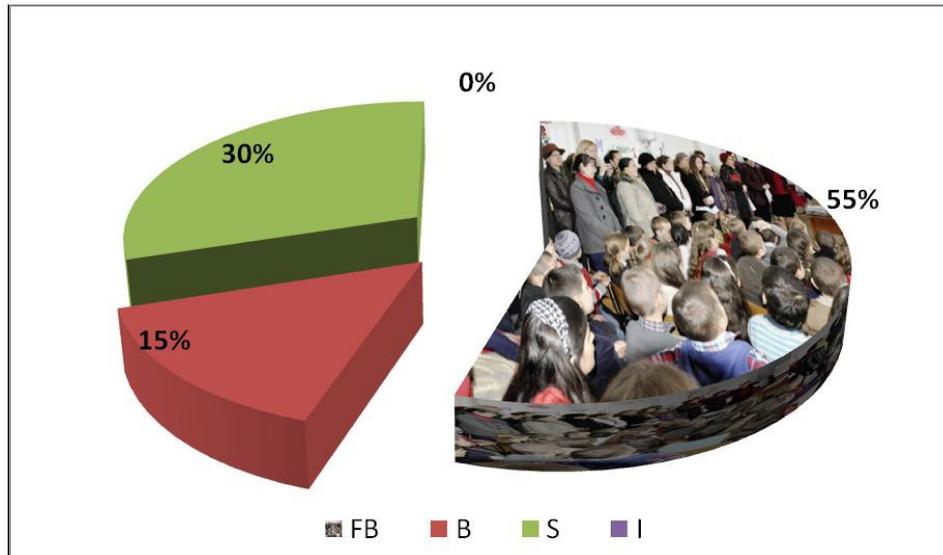


Figure 1. Marks shares at formative assessment test

In the structure of the final marks got at the formative test, the very good ones prevail (55%), which, on their turn, have a relatively homogenous construction regarding the results obtained for the assessed abilities. The three students that got the mark I at the initial evaluation, now got, two of them S and one of them B, these results being the positive consequence of family's involvement in the partnership with V.D. school, a student with divorced parents got the mark B, a positive sign that the student got over the critical moment, R.F. – raised by his grandparents and F.P. – a student coming from a numerous family they both got S, their families, the grandparents for the first one and mother for the later, understood that they have to support school in the effort to prevent students' maladjustment. The last step of the formative evaluation, was filling in the systemic observation chart, and its centralization is shown as it follows:

Motivation for school activities registers positive influences of success, but also negative ones of failure. A few students have the tendency to "demobilize" when they do not get the results their families were expecting from them, and that is an aspect that the activity of school – partnership concentrated on in the next stage of the experiment. The negative results also influenced student's status within the group, with an effect on decreasing motivation, another important work aspect within the school – family partnership. Good results, eliminating students' fears not to do something wrong, which sometimes can block expressing creative abilities, in which the family played an important part gave students' creativity an impulse.

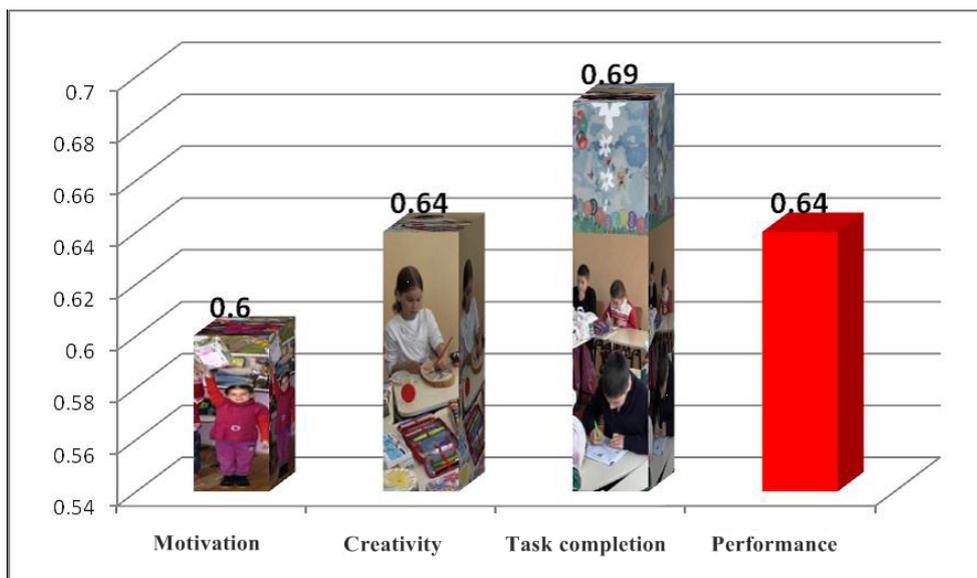


Figure 2. The level of observational indicators.

The average values of observational indicators at the end of this stage are different. The medium level of performance, though rising and reaching 0.64, is not satisfying. It is sustained mostly by the degree of task completion (0.69) but also by creativity (0.64). This conclusion indicates the necessity that in the next stage of the experiment we should focus more on developing children’s motivation to study, now at the level of 0.60. Students’ families with motivation between 0.25 and 0.50 draw teacher’s attention for the next stage of the experiment, the activity with parents from this group benefited from special attention. We also took into account that task completion within this group has a pretty low coefficient. We then acted upon the independent variable – the controlled experimental factor –systematic development of school – family partnership, which aimed at modifying the independent variable – scholar and behavioral performance – as indicator of diminishing/disappearance of scholar maladjustment and inadequacy phenomena.

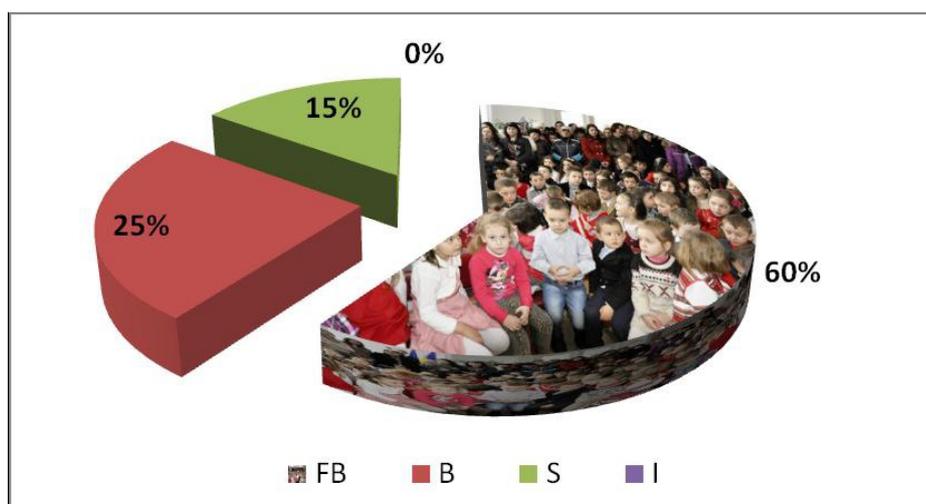


Figure 3. Final evaluation marks weighting

In the structure of the final marks obtained at the final evaluation, the very good ones prevail (60%), which on their turn, have a relatively homogenous structure regarding the results obtained for the abilities assessed. Tightening and diversifying the relations school – family allowed a modification of parents’ mentality with effect on the students that made progress with all indicators. Work methods with the parents had good results. The students are active, detached in expressing themselves and communicating without the fear of failure.

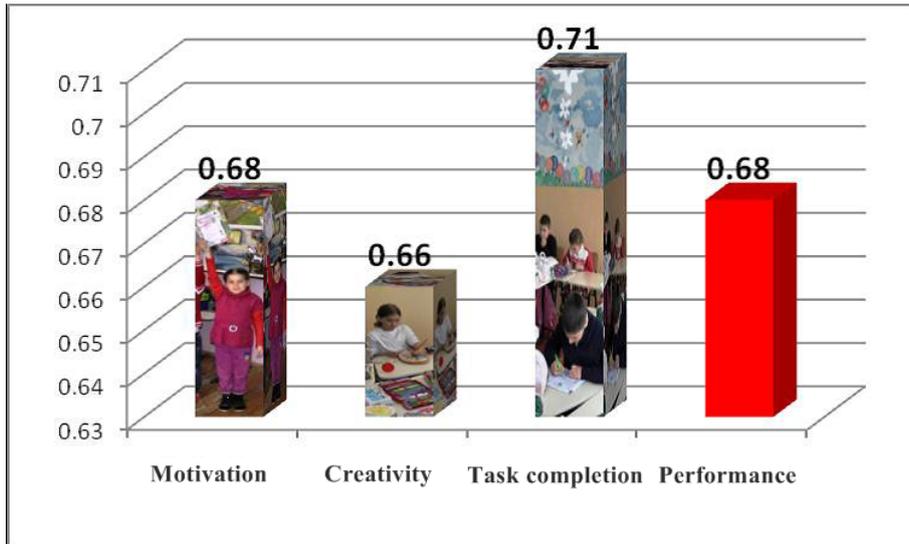


Figure 4. Observational indicators level – final evaluation test

The average values of observational indicators at the end of this stage are different. The medium level of performance, though rising and reaching 0.68 – an important general indicator for the way in which the students answer school requirements. It is mostly sustained by the degree of task completion (0.71) but also by creativity (0.66). In conclusion, we can say that most of the students had an uprising evolution – expressed by both the marks obtained at tests and the level of observational indicators that we are going to present in the table below in order to demonstrate the conclusion regarding their evolution

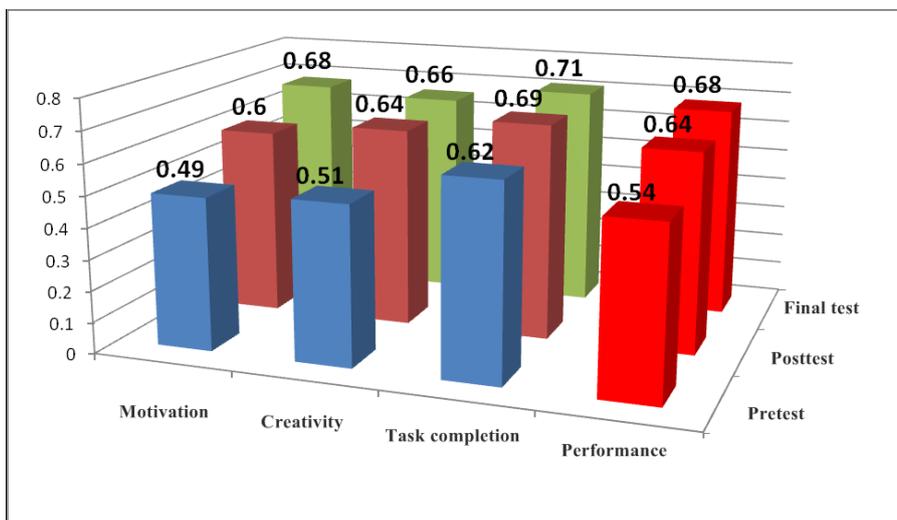


Figure 5. Graphic representation of observational indicators evolution

The emphasis on developing children's motivation to study raised this coefficient at 0.68 with direct influence on scholar performance as clear form of scholar adjustment. This aspect confirms the efficiency of school – family partnership activities, the students answered better at school requirements after implementing partnership actions.

4. Work conclusions and proposals

In elaborating this work I started from the premise that introducing an intermediary in school – student reports – involving the family in scholar activity – with mediation role, can lead to scholar maladjustment prevention.

Attracting parents as school partners in the educative work, their democratic participation at making decisions about their children's education, about the institution they sent their children to, as well as their preparation to play their part within the partnership with the school are attributions of the school which lead to gaining community's trust in school institution and making parents more responsible about their educative role. The work is difficult because in most of the communities educational partnership is not part of community's culture. That is why, in realizing the partnership school – family, activities to educate parents through school are also necessary. A partnership school – family without parents' education is not possible, and also we cannot talk about parents' education if they refuse to cooperate with school.

Observing the relation between school and family from the perspective of its role in preventing scholar maladjustment for students of preparatory class, the experiment revealed the following aspects:

- During the meetings with the parents an efficient educational partnership can be started, and later these ones can go in the background
- In school – family relationships we must firstly gain the trust of weak and satisfying families from the educative point of view
- If there are students with adjustment/maladjustment symptoms, the teacher, knowing internal (bio-psychological) and external scholar factors, must focus on social-family external factors and to diversify partnership actions with the family or to modify work strategies, to get the student out of a dangerous zone, of scholar failure, scholar abandonment etc;
- In order to reach a high quality level in improving the relationship school – family there is a complementary report, everyone's action competing each other's action; the quality of the relations between teacher and parents represents an element of forecasting the quality of education. The relationships of trust and respect between the partners involved in education are indispensable in creating and supporting school connection with the families;

From the research made we must highlight the factor school – family communication, as support element for the partnership.

The research data indicate the necessity of *a more open communication* between parents and teachers, so that daily co-work and cooperation should become a natural experience;

The bonds school – family are not static, on the contrary, they are a complex phenomenon which can vary through factors depending on the student, the educational level of the family, the implemented partnership activities, teacher's determination to continue the cooperation and so on. Through an efficient partnership relationship we can adjust the report between parents' aspiration level and students' potential, with effect on raising parents' degree of involvement in education;

At the level of the entire class we noticed a raise in school performance, in indicators regarding motivation, creativity and task completion. For the success of scholar partnerships which aim to prevent scholar maladjustment/inadequacy a strategy well-conceived is necessary which should include different activities, performed in a warm, friendly environment. This is the first step in gaining parents' trust in education. They will become partners on their turn in their children's education. Their interest for school will be noticed in the unconditioned support they will offer their children in their effort to face up to the requirements of the educational environment.

The mentality that only school must take care of children's education – the teacher knows better what to do – will gradually disappear and the idea that the teacher needs help, support from the parents to enhance education quality will appear.

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