

## **Project for the multidisciplinary team and their management in the context of special education**

*Proiect privind alcătuirea echipei multidisciplinare și managementul acesteia în contextul învățământului special*

**Crina Laura Ionescu, Mușata-Dacia Bocoș Bințișan**

*Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

### **Abstract**

The fundamental purpose of a *multidisciplinary team* as a group of professionals that collaborate, design, make decisions and achieve specific activities to attain the proposed objectives is to respect the children's superior interest by the decisions made and the activities carried out. The structure of the multidisciplinary team is conditioned by the nature of the child's special educational needs and the type of necessary support.

The instruments available to the multidisciplinary team in the planning and coordination of individualized psychopedagogical and social services are: *the personalized service plan (PSP), the personalized intervention plan (PIP), the individualized educational program, the case study and the psycho-pedagogical sheet*. These instruments contribute to the elaboration of *case management*, which represents a method for coordinating assistance activities in the interest of children and their families, being aimed at developing and using their potential and resources.

*The inclusion of children with special educational needs* is an intervention in their growth and development, for their school and social integration. To attain this desideratum, a team is formed, whose members collaborate to ensure the necessary conditions.

In special education, the established objectives can be achieved and problems can be productively addressed only by work within a multidisciplinary team, which is the main source of energy for continuous learning and improvement.

**Keywords:** multidisciplinary team, special educational needs, personalized service plan, individualized educational program

### **Rezumat**

*Echipa multidisciplinară* ca grup de profesioniști care colaborează, proiectează, iau decizii și realizează activități specifice pentru atingerea obiectivelor propuse are ca scop fundamental respectarea interesului superior al copilului, prin deciziile luate și activitățile derulate. Structura echipei multidisciplinare este condiționată de natura cerințelor educaționale speciale ale copilului și de tipul de sprijin necesar.

Instrumentele de care dispune echipa multidisciplinară în activitatea de planificare și coordonare a serviciilor psihopedagogice și sociale individualizate sunt: *planul de servicii personalizat (PSP), planul de intervenție personalizat (PIP), programul educațional individualizat, studiul de caz și fișa psihopedagogică*. Aceste instrumente contribuie la elaborarea *managementului de caz* care reprezintă o metodă de coordonare a activităților de asistență desfășurate în interesul copilului și al familiei, având ca obiectiv dezvoltarea și valorificarea potențialului și a resurselor de care aceștia dispun.

*Incluziunea unui copil cu cerințe educative speciale* este o intervenție în creșterea și dezvoltarea acestuia, pentru integrarea lui școlară și socială. Pentru atingerea acestui deziderat, se constituie o echipă care colaborează în vederea asigurării condițiilor necesare.

În educația specială nu se pot atinge obiectivele stabilite și nu pot fi abordate productiv problemele decât prin lucrul în echipa multidisciplinară care este principala sursă de energie pentru învățare și îmbunătățire continuă.

**Cuvinte cheie:** echipă multidisciplinară, cerințe educative speciale, plan de servicii personalizat, program educațional individualizat

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*Address for correspondence:* Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Sindicatelor Str. No 7, Cluj-Napoca, 400029, Romania

*E-mail:* lauraionescu2005@yahoo.com

*Corresponding author:* Crina Laura Ionescu; lauraionescu2005@yahoo.com

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## The role and sequence of actions in a multidisciplinary team

A *multidisciplinary team* is a group of professionals that collaborate, design, make decisions and achieve certain specific activities to attain the proposed objectives, with the fundamental purpose of respecting the children's superior interest by all the decisions made and the activities carried out (Lacey, 1988).

Setting up work teams to approach interventions for persons in at-risk situations initially occurred as a concern of the medical and nursing sector. Medical diagnostic decisions, surgery proposals, referral to specialized services or institutions are promoted as decisions made within a team of professionals, who usually belong to different intervention areas. However, this work strategy has also been developed in the social sector and, over the past years, in the educational sector, mainly in special education (York et al., 2009).

*The role of the multidisciplinary team* is synthesized in four official documents of the Romanian legislation regarding activity in special and integrated education:

- *Order 18/2001* regarding the complex evaluation of children with disabilities; this evaluation should be performed by a multidisciplinary team including at least: a psychologist, a pedagogist and/or an educator, a doctor and/or a nurse, and a social assistant (\*\*\*. 2001).

- *Order 49 of 19 January 2011* for the approval of the framework methodology on prevention and intervention in a multidisciplinary team in cases of violence against children and violence in the family (2).

- *Multidisciplinary and inter-institutional intervention methodology for exploited children and children at risk for labor exploitation, victims of human trafficking, as well as migrant Romanian children, victims of other forms of violence on the territory of other states* (3).

Establishing, treating and solving a particular case for a child with special educational needs require specialized intervention. This type of intervention requires the following sequence of actions and conditions (Verza, 2002):

- establishing the case, by determining the key problem;
- a detailed analysis, including strengths and necessities;
- mentioning the services and the favorable development environment;
- setting up a *personalized service plan* (PSP);
- setting up a *personalized intervention plan* (PIP), for each service or activity;
- recovery/habilitation/rehabilitation intervention through certain services and/or activities;
- periodic reevaluation, with the performance of changes and recommendations in PSP and PIP, referral to other environments or services;
- continuous monitoring of the case;
- identifying the necessary conditions for intervention;
- common effort of all team members to support the child;
- team work;
- ensuring a family, educational and habilitation/

rehabilitation environment favorable to growth and development,

- social integration in all its forms, as a predicted result.

Guided by the common aspiration to support the child, the team members, together with the family, which offers the adequate environment for growth and development, are in fact the *intervention team* (IT), also called *multidisciplinary team* (MT).

In order to obtain the expected results, team work is necessary. Establishing, implementing and monitoring the intervention can only be achieved by team work. *The inclusion of children with special educational needs* is in fact an intervention in their growth and development, for their school and social integration. To attain this desideratum, a team is formed, whose members collaborate to ensure the necessary conditions (Vrășmaș et al., 2005).

## The development and management of the multidisciplinary team

The structure of the multidisciplinary team is determined by the nature of the child's special educational needs and the type of necessary support – for example, if the parents and child wish to participate only in extracurricular activities or to partially study certain disciplines.

*The multidisciplinary team* can have the following structure:

- the group educator/teacher/form master;
- all the other teachers – psycho-pedagogues and specialty teachers (foreign languages, physical education and sport, musical education, art education, religion, etc.) involved in the education and training of children;
- the support teacher, if needed by the child;
- the personal assistant, if necessary;
- the management of the education institution;
- the psychologist of the education institution;
- specialists of rehabilitation services (speech therapist, kinesiologist) – if the child benefits from such services – or the family doctor and/or the treating doctor;
- the parent/parents, legal tutor or caretaker;
- the child – when his/her presence is necessary.

However, there is no standard component of the multidisciplinary intervention team. The number of the team members and their areas of activity depend on the nature of the educational needs and wishes of children, their families and, certainly, on the capacity of the education institution to meet the child's special educational needs. During the intervention stages, the structure of the team may change, depending on the child's and family's needs and interests.

The success of the work effort of the *multidisciplinary team* can only be ensured by meeting the following requirements:

- clarity of pursued objectives;
- efficiency of communication (listening, communication, evaluation);
- effective participation of all members;
- negotiation in choosing the best solutions (respect of the child's superior interest);
- making clear and prompt decisions in favor of the

child;

- solving conflicts;
- thorough planning of work sessions;
- information exchange, regarding both the child and the family, as well as at professional level;
- group culture – round tables can be organized so that all participants can feel important (Lacey, 1988).

Organizing, planning and creating a favorable climate are basic elements in meeting these requirements.

The obligations of the team members include:

- knowing their role and responsibilities;
- conscientiousness and punctuality;
- manifestation of a cooperative and open attitude;
- flexibility and empathy;
- expertise in the field;
- prompt intervention in crisis situations, as well as in other actions (Lacey, 2000).

Thus, the multidisciplinary team can be redefined in the context of special education as a team of professionals from various fields (training/education, special psycho-pedagogy, health, social assistance) and parents/tutors, whose aim is to evaluate the child's situation (by various strategies and methods). Putting together their individual professional experiences, these decide in consensus about the most beneficial and effective way of action in favor of the child with special educational needs. The beneficiary (child), parents and professionals get actively involved, together, in the planning and execution of the team's actions. All team members know the individualized action plan and are responsible for its achievement.

### **Psycho-pedagogical intervention instruments of the multidisciplinary team**

Considering that “*all pupils who participate in the educational process should benefit from educational differentiation because they have different abilities, different interests, different previous experiences, and come from different social environments*” (Gherguț, 2013), there was a need to develop specific instruments and to approach psycho-pedagogical intervention strategies aimed at supporting the work of the multidisciplinary team, so that all children with special educational needs might benefit from quality education.

The instrument for the planning and coordination of individualized psycho-pedagogical and social services, aimed at continuity, complementarity and quality of services, in response to the numerous and complex requirements of people with special needs, is called a *personalized service plan* (PSP) (Gherguț, 2011).

This plan is elaborated by the multidisciplinary team and is used by all its members in solving a particular case, as an approach that starts from a deep knowledge of the beneficiary, followed by adequate measures and effective improvement and/or rehabilitation solutions, with the involvement and responsibility of the family/carers (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989).

The final aim of PSP is to respond to the children's special needs, in order to support their development, to form, maintain and improve personal autonomy and facilitate social integration.

Another planning and coordination document, permanently used as an instrument for the achievement of the objectives proposed through the service plan, for the beneficiary, by intervention areas, is the *personalized intervention plan* (PIP). This is a component of the service plan that includes the immediate objectives, activities, strategies and means used, the duration of each activity, as well as the modalities for evaluating and revising the intervention activities.

A particular form of the personalized intervention plan, intended for pupils with special needs included in the mass education system, is the *individualized educational program* (IEP). This presents the way of accessing the mass school curriculum, the necessary resources, the objectives and the educational evaluation of pupils. Individualized educational planning aims to adapt education to the individual needs dictated by differences between pupils (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Therefore, *the individualized educational program* is a document that guides the educational activity of a pupil with a certain type of educational needs, the way of adaptation and/or modification of the school curriculum, of teaching methods and material resources, providing at the same time the criteria, instruments and procedures for measuring progress and the rate of achievement of directly formulated objectives, in order to meet the unique needs of that pupil. In the design, revision and development of this document, a mixed team is involved, which includes parents/legal tutors and school teaching staff. This document allows access of pupils with special educational needs to the general mass school curriculum, mentioning the adaptations, services and support adequate for the pupils' individual needs, so that these can participate alongside their schoolmates in the school curriculum, overcoming the difficulties caused by their disability or special situation.

*The case study* represents a research and qualitative evaluation method focusing on the detailed analysis of an individual/group or a particular aspect, in a given circumstance, using various sources of information (questionnaires, documents, evidence, interviews, etc.). It can also focus on a distinct event or on a problematic situation in the school, professional or daily life of an individual or a group found in a distinct circumstance, with serious implications for their subsequent evolution (Bocoș et al., 2017). One or more persons, directly related to the case, collect the information using specific methods, procedures, instruments and evaluation tests, then they exchange information and ideas that lead to the most plausible explanations regarding that particular situation and the identification of effective measures and solutions for the case. If the case study is conducted by a team, its members may fulfill similar or complementary roles (Gherguț, 2013).

It is recommended that all team members participate in the stages of conceptualization and establishment of the problems subjected to research.

The permanent work instrument developed at the beginning of the activity with the child is termed *psycho-pedagogical sheet*. This is used in practical activity in the field of special psycho-pedagogy and school counseling, as well as in speech therapy or educational therapy. The

psycho-pedagogical sheet is filled out periodically with relevant data regarding the child's development dynamics.

Filling out the psycho-pedagogical sheet, regardless of its complexity, requires the collaboration of teaching staff, specialists in the field of psychology, and parents. Such a sheet, well structured and formulated, is of great help for the pupil's school and professional guidance.

The multidisciplinary team fulfills a number of functions that define the purpose and objectives for which it has been formed. These functions can be summarized as: information function, organization function, mobilization function, collaboration function and support function (Harris, 1995).

In the case of the protection of children with special educational needs, *case management* is a method of coordination of all assistance activities carried out in the interest of children and their families, being aimed at developing and using all their potential and resources, as well as the opportunities existing in the community (Norwich, 1997). This method coordinates actions from different areas (medical, educational, psychosocial), offered by specialists, institutions and organizations concerned with the support of children and their families in solving the problems encountered, by setting up a *service plan* (1). Case management is also intended to eliminate the problems that may occur due to fragmentation of services and interventions, personnel mobility or deficient coordination of specific service providers for children and their families (Ainscow, 2016).

Knowing the fact that special education currently faces many challenges, but also opportunities, team work is necessary in order to develop new ways of thinking and practical engagement. Work in a multidisciplinary team is the main source of energy for continuous learning and improvement. Effective teams do not appear over night, they are the result of intentional design and development efforts.

## Conclusions

1. The development of multidisciplinary teams, their optimal management, and their educational activity with children with special educational needs, in formal contexts, are necessary.

2. The psycho-pedagogical intervention instruments of the multidisciplinary team facilitate the planning and coordination as well as the implementation of individualized psycho-pedagogical and social services.

## Conflicts of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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