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SOIL CONFERENCE REPORT

EACEA-05-2016- Incluziune socială prin educație, formare și tineret / ERASMUS+K3/
Incluziunea socială a educabililor(SOIL)/580276-EPP-1-2016-AT-EPPKA3-IPL-SOC-IN

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REPORTERS:

Ana Elisabeta Naghi
Adina Mariana Tatu
Gabriel Vrînceanu

Between 07-09 November 2018 in Berlin, a series of activities related to the completion of the SOIL project took place, a project in which Teachers Training Center of Bucharest (BTTC) was a partner.



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The main activity was represented by the Conference **Think School New - The Presentation of the SOIL**, hosted by the Austrian Embassy in Berlin at the Austrian Cultural Center.

The purpose of the conference was to present the results of the project to a diverse audience, with decision makers from different levels, representatives of the education system, civil society, the media, as well as persons belonging to vulnerable groups or who are responsible for such persons.



The conference was opened by the hosts, following briefly Stana Schenck's presentation of the purpose of the activity and categories of guests.

Speaking about SOIL methods, Karl

Back, as an expert in digital education and using IT tools to ensure inclusion by reducing learning barriers, involved the audience in a Plickers-based activity, highlighting how simple and fast feedback or responses can be obtained when using electronic apps (single tablet or telephone and internet connection).



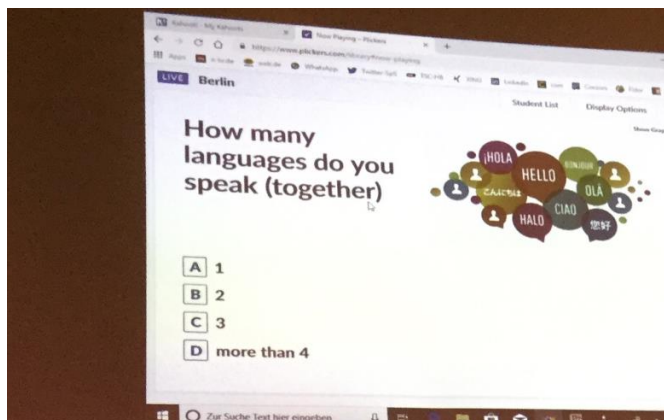
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As a constant presence during the project, Margret Rusfeld, the promoter of the School on the Move initiative, a good example of organizing the inclusive educational process, resumes certain themes and ideas that constitute her belief in education, but it always brings elements news.

Thus, Margret's presentation points out the following:

- The current paradigm: competition under the signs as quicker, more efficient, better;



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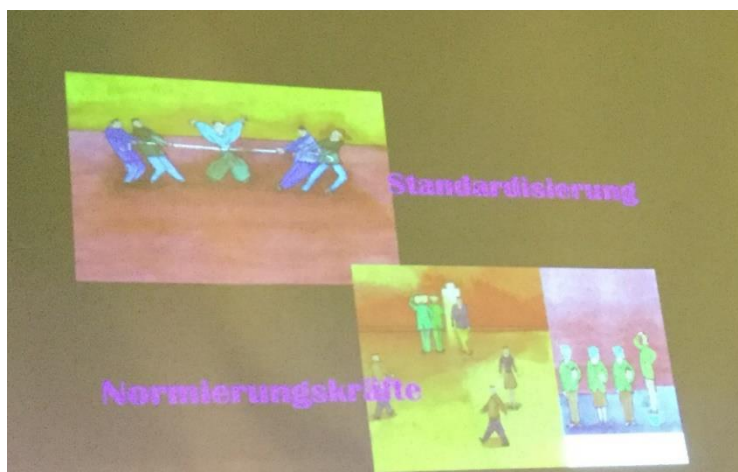


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- Today's world faces major challenges and challenging realities, which education should be provided by those adults of tomorrow able to formulate solutions for climate change, poverty etc. and to answer questions about the meaning of life, purpose (why we live, where, how etc);

- More and more often burn-out, both at work and at school;
- Studies show that in the current population, resource consumption requires not a planet but three, so the challenge of education is to educate adults and educators in a spirit of sustainable development, with a focus on changing eco-lifestyle, not ego;
- The German education system is selective, however selective/competitive than in many other countries. Cultivate perfection, but the meaning of perfection is one that can be assured by collaboration - I am not perfect, but putting together more imperfections can get to perfection; the refusal to collaborate and the struggle to be the only one of the few perfect provoke a major stress, often followed by burn-out; so children already young (under 10 years) feel pressure and get burned out; a study on the burn-out situation in universities reveals that 15% of teachers use different incentives, including amphetamine use, to cope with stress and demand;



- The many years in which standardization has been one of the principles of education put barriers for all educational alternatives;
- Keywords of the alternatives: participation, relationship, responsibility;
- Lack of courage to restructure the curriculum although there are studies that show that after less than 10 years after the end of the school (for pre-university education), the proportion of knowledge is extremely limited and where knowledge does not favor to improve

competence, then it has to be reformulated, restructured;

- Another aspect of selective, not inclusive, education is the fact that significant are control, not trust, competition over mutual support, marks against feedback, teachers



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focused on identifying what students do not know, areas of study rigid, unrelated, no interdisciplinary approach;

- An inclusive educational process not only allows for diversity, but is built so that reasoning and action errors are valued in learning, precisely to prevent failure;
- There is a need for substantial, radical change, based on collaboration, direct relationship and networks;
- A NASA research highlights the fact that from the point of view of creativity, at the age of 5 we meet and express it in 95% of the children, 10 years old - only 30%, 15 years - only 12%, in the adult age owns only 2% of people;
- When we refer to performance, we must think about what is good, what it will generate, what will it bring if it is a forced and is produced through individually approach;
- Since 1992, EU or UNESCO documents have urgently required the need for sustainable, collaborative learning, because the great problems of the world today are only possible to tackle together; reports show that 50% of human capital is not well exploited; schools must produce performance, that means competence for life, social, work etc; the principle of Think global and act local is evoked!



- School on the Move is an alternative in which students participate in learning groups, act responsibly, rely on each other understanding the meaning of cooperation; teachers are tutors, counselors, observers, are always present around students, but they no longer have all the classic roles (the students are engaged in their own learning, so they take part in these roles);

- Learning is improved through participation in projects (it is not faster, better but the number and complexity of the skills involved are more); 1 day / week is for project activity; projects also involve external support, such as artists, qualified NGOs on certain project-related topics etc .; on the last day of every week meetings are organized



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presenting the results of the week; learning through projects that either provide support to the community (support for people with disabilities, the elderly, etc.), or they are challenged (within three weeks, groups of students take part in a challenge, with 150 euros / person, in order to cope with identifying resources or providing work for food or shelter, the group has adult or young adult attendants, observers and parents can keep in touch, students not allowing them to have their mobile phone or other communication devices, which is to be achieved through these challenges is the formation of good response skills in conflict situations, situations characterized by uncertainty, mutual support and cooperation, able to improvise, everything to discover and develop potential) there is no emphasis on academic learning in the classical sense, but on values and attitudes that all contribute to the realization of realistic, tangible learning and life objectives for which the student will act to put them into practice on the basis of motivations intrinsic, not extrinsic; it is about assuming, being dignified, accepting diversity and acting in the sense of inclusion.

At the end of its presentation, Margret Rusfeld brings into discussion objectives in a public policy document, called Action Plan Germany, the result of the cooperation of more than 350 organizations active in inclusion and education, working in line with UNESCO's priorities for 2030, one of 17 objectives being quality assurance in education (objective 4), which implies the transformation of society through education.



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The conference continued with the presentation of the SOIL project and its results, highlighting the contributions of each partner.

In this sense, each partner has a speaker and prepared a material to highlight the contribution. On behalf of atempo, Eveline Wiesenhofer highlighted the rich meaning of the acronym of the project - SOIL - as a nutrient - rich substrate to cultivate the seeds of trust, acceptance, and inclusion.



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Stana Schenck presented some results about the number of students who were involved by including them in a learning process using SOIL methods (1668 students, of which 390 in Romania, corresponding to the 6 schools from District 6 of Bucharest).



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The representative of the Dutch partner presented the Maastricht strategy proposal, highlighting the fact that these are the result of the conference held in the project, and that, as of the second day, representatives of the local authorities attending the conference, have embarked upon the development of an inclusion strategy.



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Karl Back and his guest, Kevin, one of the youngsters who benefited from the atempo programs and who are currently working for the organization, attending groups of students presenting the atempo learning applications, made a brief commentary on the ease of learning to people belonging to disadvantaged groups, insisting on the feedback and confidence that is being made, especially as an example of Kevin's success, being himself in a continuous challenge with his own wheelchair deficiency.



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The Slovak representative presents the national specificity, mentioning that while there are important changes at the level of action and attitude, 6.30% of pupils are enrolled in the special education system (special schools), compared to an EU average of 2.3%.

As an example of the outcome, the project enabled the development of easy to read materials, re-transposing manual tutorials for pupils with learning disabilities.



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Adina Tatu and Ana Naghi, from BTTC, accompanied a video about the case of a secondary school student who, through computer-based SOIL methods, managed to constantly improve her school performance and her self-esteem, this year promoting very good national performance and successful at admission to high school.



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As an example of a real change in the hosts, Konrad Zuse Schule representatives were invited to the conference, who together with architect specialists rethought their educational spaces so that they could successfully implement the learning bureau method.



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The last part of the Conference was reserved for a discussion panel, moderated by Margit Glasow, journalist Icludio Medien and attended by representatives from various German institutions (political, local authority, blogger) and the BTTC director, Gabriel Vrinceanu.



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Discussions were conducted on both general issues and questions addressed to each speaker. In this respect, the representative of Romania answered the following questions:

1. As a partner in the SOIL project and as a representative of a local authority, how you describe your educational system: as an inclusive or as a selective system?

There are a lot of aspects who contribute to say that at the public educational policies level have all the conditions to create an inclusive system. In this way it is necessary to mention that our law of education sets, on the beginning, the principle of equal access to education for all levels and to lifelong learning, without discrimination, the principle of social inclusion and the rights for all members of minorities to develop and express their cultural, linguistic and religious identity.

Linked with these legal aspects, the policy makers develop national and local strategies and measures to improve inclusion and decrease the drop-out. So, the national program The Second Chance, where people how leave the educational system in the past have opportunity to continue the studies into an adapted curriculum. Another program is School after school, where the children are involving in educational activities after the classes, mostly complementary activities, with extracurricular and social approach.

It is important to say that at this moment some children with special needs/disabilities participate in their education in special schools (deaf/blind/mental disorders), but more and more of them are integrated in ordinary schools, with the support of counselors and extra help.

Other programs have as purpose to help vulnerable groups with social and economic constrains, through free meals offer in schools, free educational kits, free transport to/from school (especially in rural area), grants for books or for laptops.

So, all these aspects and more contribute to say that Romanian educational system is inclusive.

On the other hand, the fact that the access to education involve the national exams, a lot of school competitions at every level (primary, secondary) has a negative impact from the inclusive perspective.

In this way it is necessary to make great changes. It is important to oriented the process for develop real competencies and use academic knowledge only as a vector to increase the competence, with more attention to transversal competences and life and work skills, according with XXI century needs.



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2. The teachers are an important factor to promote inclusion, even the system has many structural barriers. Your domain of activity is addressed to the teachers. Are they opened and prepared to change their methods to improve the level of inclusion in classes?

I'm the director of teacher Training Center, but firstly I'm the teacher. Until few years ago, when I present myself, I was proud to say that I'm not an ordinary teacher, I'm math teacher. I think it is the time to make a smart move, as in chasse, to capture the queen, because I understand that the math isn't and never wasn't a queen of learning. So, I think that the big challenge for human resources – not only for teachers – is to understand that competitiveness is more than competition, it is about cooperative and collaborative learning and action.

In that way, me and my colleagues from TTC work to change the perspective and to offer new learning methods promote through SOIL project and other projects, through practical approach, not at the theoretical level, because the best way to learn is to practice. Our advantage is that we are good influencers for teachers, they trust in us. So, we create new training programs as a simulator of real educational process. The trainees will be able to put in practice their experiences facilitated thorough training activities, not what they listen or see. The message for our colleagues is: DARE, CARE, SHARE!

But the time necessary to change is longer than in other countries, perhaps, because the initial training of teachers is old fashioned and it is necessary to identify new clothes for the future teachers. It is a reality that the most resistant to change are the teachers. They feel fear when in the class are pupils with special educational needs, not because they haven't experience or support a good response for their needs, because the pressure of curriculum, of exams and of parents. It is normal that parents want for their children all the attention from teachers, but only a few accept the teacher to focus a child with vulnerabilities.

3. Every country is confronted today more than in past with issues linked with diversity, multi culturalism and a lot of vulnerabilities, even referred to social, economic or ethnic. For your country, Roma minority represent an important and full of specificity group. Can national strategies create a culture of inclusion for Roma people?

A strategy of the Government for social inclusion is addressed to Roma people and sets measures for 5 years 2015-2020. The strategy is in accord with EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 who sets that inclusion of citizens belonging to Roma minority is one of the most imperative social issues in Europe. It is reality that the Roma population is the youngest from all the ethnic European groups, so, in context of decreasing the rate of birth and increase the percentage of elderly persons, Roma young people will be very important for the work field in future, so it is necessary to create opportunities for them for better education, social skills and qualification for the work.



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The official registration, in Romania are around more than a half million Roma people (declared, but not all of them assume their ethnic origin, other sources spoken about almost 2 million Roma people which means 10 percent from all the Romanian citizens). More than half of Roma people lives in rural area and they have other vulnerabilities (social, economics, family disorders, parents abroad, illiterate, drop out etc).

The first two objectives of the National Strategy refer to education:

- increasing the level of education (only 0.7 percent from Roma people graduated higher education (meanwhile 14,8 percent from Romanians graduated higher education), almost 100 000 Roma people not graduate school.
- ensuring access of all Roma children to quality education.

The question is how these objectives become reality tomorrow?

It is necessary to start with parental education, increasing self-esteem at the personal level and at the ethnic group level, by create the premise to promote Roma personalities in various type of work and various domains.

It is necessary to promote the Roma culture and traditions. Most of them are good skills for music, dance manufacture and handmade products. I was few week ago in Iceland. It is a big difference between what the land offers as resources and how the human creativity finds solutions to use every piece of rock, every plant, the bones and the fur of animals to create traditional products for touristic purpose.

I think the problems with the Roma minorities will disappear when every Roma person understand that are no negative difference between him/her and other person, only positive differences who allow to contribute for a democratic and intercultural future.



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The participation of the BTTC Delegation at the SOIL Conference also involved attending the technical meeting, hosted at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, on November 7th.

At the opening of the meeting, Sarah Rohr and Barbara Bergmann presented data on the host organization, focusing on the major dimension of education support through the education department. At the organization level, it is revealed that hosting our work is one that adds to over 800 organized or hosted annually by the Konrad Adenauer Center.

The objective of the meeting was to highlight the stage at which the implementation of the project is in relation to each partner and the preparation of the final report. Each of the partner institutions has submitted a detailed report on the activities and the results obtained.

As a conclusion of all those present at the meeting, compared to the indicators set in the project, the expected results are recorded, but there is a need for the development of networks of professionals, stakeholder and influencer, which will ensure the continuation and continuity of the adaptation of the inclusion process using SOIL methods.



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The Director of the BTTC intervened to convey the message of His Excellency Florian Ionel Lixandru as State Secretary at the Ministry of National Education, thanking him for the interest and support given to the project implemented by our institution, including by accepting to present the legal framework regarding the persons with special educational needs and responding to a series of questions about inclusion.

The legal framework of SEN in Romania:

In Romania, the right to education is guaranteed by the Constitution. Special education and integrated special is a part of the national education system. Children with SEN operate as appropriate, in special education units or in mainstream schools. In special education units can be enrolled children with medium disabilities, severe, critical and associated. In groups or classes integrated into mainstream education may be enrolled students with disabilities, learning disorders, adjustment difficulties, integrating difficulties, as well as those with mild or moderate disabilities.

The evaluation, psychological educational assistance, school and professional guidance/reorientation of children/young people with SEN is performed by the County Centers for Resources and Educational Assistance or Centers for Resources and Educational Assistance in Bucharest and every county in Romania. These centers provide services of evaluation and school and professional guidance/reorientation prioritizing integration into mainstream education. The evaluation is to identify their specific needs and ensure optimal conditions for school, occupational and social integration.

Medical evaluation involves conducting clinical examination and laboratory investigations, if need to establish full diagnosis.

Psychological evaluation involves determining the level of development of mental functions and processes.

Educational assessment is meant to determine the level of knowledge assimilated to the intellectual level.

Social assessment involves the investigation of the environment of the child: housing, food, clothing, hygiene, mental and physical security.

Nowadays, every country encourages the idea of an inclusive society, as most of the states face a greater human diversity and mobility. Romania established as priorities the measures to prevent and combat marginalization and social exclusion by improving access to education for disadvantaged groups. The first measures after the 1990's meant to improve the preschool education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds or people with different types of disabilities, to provide support services and fostering children with special educational needs to successfully face compulsory education and improve school success rate, to encourage inclusion in programs for a second chance at the primary and secondary level.

The implementation of inclusive policies is still a priority for us, therefore the Ministry of Education is trying to develop solutions to integrate a greater number of students with special



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needs. Measures are taken, seeking to ultimately transform society into a system capable of ensuring the integration of every person with special needs firstly in schools, then in community structures.

Supporting the participation of all children to inclusive education will help to improve the quality of education from preschool to high school level, through proper teacher training and modern teaching methodologies and tools. It will also help to improve parenting skills and parent-child-school relationship, evaluate educational needs and improve resource planning at local, county and national levels and last, but not least it will help to strengthen school guidance, monitoring and supervision by county inspectorate.

The message included 3 questions, sent before to Mr. Florian Lixandru and below are the answers.

1. Questions: What are the strategies of empowerment families of children with SEN?

Answer: The arrival of a child is a moment of joy, but the birth of a child with disabilities turns the joy into a shock. The presence of such a child affects the family socially, economically, emotionally, psychologically and physically. Therefore, a clear strategy is required to avoid or at least to mitigate the effects mentioned above. I am thinking about counselling intervention programmes in the areas of skill training, parent education, counselling and parental rights, parents support services, delivered both by local community/The Ministry of Education and NGOs.

Parents need to feel supported and to have all the opportunities to tell their stories, as a therapy. Most of the stories can turn into models for other parents. Parents need to be acknowledged for the courage and loving that is manifest in the care of their child. They need advocacy from health professionals in negotiating support structures, which can be exhausting. In many countries there is a network of institutions and families that provides help for other parents. School system should encourage parents to participate fully in school programmes affecting their children and be a part of the SEN network.

All the strategies should fulfill the expectations of the parents, so the children with SEN have the best environmental support for their evolution as grown-ups.

2. Question: How can teacher training can help social integration and inclusion in mainstream schools?

Answer: Teacher training is the path to social integration. Teacher effectiveness was pointed out as an important element of quality of basic education for all in the Salamanca Statement. For this reason, having teachers received suitable training will enable them to develop a proper understanding of what is considered to be crucial when teaching students with diverse needs in practice. Nevertheless, with an understanding alone is not enough to keep going until the very end. It is pointed out that attitudes of the teachers towards inclusion are also very important since it might influence on how they welcome and react to children within their



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classes. The positive attitudes of the teachers can be developed through professional trainings. The four basic skills for the inclusive teacher are:

- Familiarity with the attributes of children with SEN and understanding their areas of responsibility;
- Expertise in teaching methods adapted to a broad range of children;
- Excellent classroom management skills for creating the optimal classroom climate and a sense of security among children;
- The ability to work as a part of a team and cooperate with other teachers and professionals in developing intervention programs.

Current education programs have been influenced by pedagogical traditions in the past decades. The knowledge the teachers are provided is different from the school practice.

The courses are often fragmented. The students are expected to apply those theories and integrate knowledge and practice by themselves. Training should aim providing teachers with a great variety of knowledge and skills that can apply in various settings and situations.

3. Question: What are the challenges for introducing people with disabilities into the workforce?

Answer: Preparing students for the work force is an important role for schools, or at least it should be. Most students with disabilities drop out schools, before graduating and are more likely experience unemployment, lower payed jobs and job dissatisfaction. Most of the students with disabilities go to vocational schools. Of course, many students with disabilities do go to college and have a great success and many of them find a job on top companies. A major ingredient of a successful school-to-work transition program is a comprehensive vocational assessment that integrates a variety of school and community agency personnel into the assessment process. The goal of such a vocational assessment is to facilitate educational and vocational planning that will allow students to make successful adjustment to work, postsecondary education and community living. Without a comprehensive assessment of the students' skills, it is difficult to identify the needs that should be addressed in the student's transition plan. The assessment should address the following areas: academic skills, daily living skills, personal and social skills, occupational and vocational skills, interests and aptitudes. The workforce preparation of students who do not go to college requires schools and local community to provide:

- Vocational education opportunities, which should be offered to the student a year before

the student enters the vocational school;

- Eligibility requirements for enrolling in vocational education;
- An assessment of interests, abilities, and special needs and other special services designed

to help students enrolled in vocational education transition into post school employment or training;



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- By the age 14, every student should have a transition plan to make a successful transition from school to work and community living.

An important aspect was the via skype discussion with the atempo representative, who presented and commented with the direct participants at the meeting on the synthesis of the actions and the results he had taken from the reports of each partner.

Part of the meeting was intended to prepare the interventions of each of the partners at the Closing Conference.

At the end of meeting, those present discussed the new joint project that was evaluated and met the eligibility criteria, Key Action 3: Social inclusion and common values: the contribution in the field of education, training and youth entitled Me and Your Stories MYS), which will be implemented as a period of implementation 24 months - 1/12 / 2018-30 / 11/2020 and involving institutions from 4 European countries, such as Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Maryland and the Bucharest Teachers Training Center.

We must mention and appreciate that representatives of the Konrad Adenauer Center have intervened in the opening of the working session on the fact that the choice to host a working session of the SOIL project is beneficial for all involved because the major concerns of the Center are increasing the democratic participation and ensuring the real chances for people with disabilities. Concerning the second concern, it is highlighted that at the center there is a department that evaluates and monitors the policies and standards for non-discrimination and support of people with disabilities, while assisting young people, informing and facilitating good practices for vulnerable groups to obtain professional qualifications, respecting the rights related to access to the labor market for persons with disabilities.

In addition to the mobility program in Berlin, representatives of the project partners - including a significant group of teachers in Slovakia who re-edited the study visit of teachers in Bucharest in December 2017 - were able to visit two schools, the 8 November is the school where Margret Rusfeld was director and where he implemented his vision



in the Schools on the Move initiative, and on 9 November the visit was made at the Picasso Primary School.



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