

## BOOK REVIEW

**Teodora Popescu, Larisa Laura Popa, and Diana Avram Șandru.** *Dimensiuni și provocări ale educației incluzive: Formare continuă, resurse și parteneriate comunitare.* Alba Iulia: Editura Aeternitas, 2025. Pp. 1-195. ISBN 978-606-613-273-2

Reviewed by **Mădălina Rânghet** , 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia

The volume *Dimensiuni și provocări ale educației incluzive. Formare continuă, resurse și parteneriate comunitare* represents a substantial contribution to the contemporary discourse on inclusive education in Romania. Conceived within the framework of a district-level educational project coordinated by Rotary Club Alba Iulia and aligned with recent Romanian educational legislation (notably Law no. 198/2023), the book situates itself at the intersection of educational policy, teacher professional development, and community-based educational reform.

At a time when European and global educational systems are increasingly oriented toward equity, diversity, and inclusion, this volume responds to both international trends and the specific realities of the Romanian educational landscape. The book's stated aim—to support teachers in developing the competencies necessary for implementing inclusive education—addresses a recognised gap between policy aspirations and classroom-level realities. As such, the volume positions itself not merely as a theoretical contribution, but as a practical and normative guide intended to influence everyday pedagogical practice.

The book emerges from a concrete local initiative but aspires to broader relevance. Its grounding in Romanian legal, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts gives it particular value for national practitioners and policymakers, while its engagement with international literature and conceptual frameworks situates it within wider academic debates on inclusive education.

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The structure of the book (Introduction, four chapters and Conclusions) reflects a deliberate attempt to integrate theory, empirical research, and practical guidance. The progression from needs analysis to conceptual clarification, and finally to professional development and community engagement, mirrors a holistic model of educational reform, in which inclusive education is treated not as a narrow pedagogical technique but as a systemic transformation.

The *Introduction*, authored by Teodora Popescu, effectively situates inclusive education within the contemporary Romanian educational and legislative framework. The authors explicitly anchor their approach in Law no. 198/2023, emphasising Article 67, which guarantees the right to quality inclusive education for all students. This legal grounding is not merely formalistic; rather, it provides the normative backbone of the entire volume.

The *Introduction* convincingly argues that inclusive education is not limited to students with formally diagnosed special educational needs (SEN), but extends to all learners at risk of marginalisation, including those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and students exposed to abuse, neglect, or instability. This broad conceptualisation aligns with contemporary international understandings of inclusion as a systemic and rights-based approach.

A notable strength of the *Introduction* is its emphasis on the benefits of inclusive education for all students, not only for those traditionally labelled as having special needs. The author highlights the development of collaboration skills, empathy, social-emotional competencies, and respect for diversity as outcomes of inclusive classrooms. This argument reflects a shift away from deficit-oriented models toward a strengths-based and community-oriented vision of schooling.

However, the *Introduction* also reveals one of the book's recurring tensions: the balance between aspirational discourse and the practical constraints of Romanian schools. While the ethical and social imperatives of inclusion are strongly articulated, the structural challenges—such as resource limitations, class size, and uneven access to support staff—are acknowledged but not always systematically theorised at this stage.

Chapter I, *Necesitatea formării cadrelor didactice pentru o educație incluzivă. Analiza de nevoi (The necessity of teacher training for an inclusive education)*, authored by Laura-Larisa Popa, is among the most empirically grounded sections of the volume. It presents a qualitative needs analysis based on questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations involving teachers from Alba County. This chapter is particularly valuable because it moves beyond abstract advocacy and provides concrete insight into the lived realities of teachers working in inclusive or quasi-inclusive settings.

The chapter identifies several major challenges faced by teachers: insufficient training in inclusive education, difficulties in adapting teaching materials, lack of consistent support from auxiliary staff, challenges in managing disruptive or complex student behaviours, limited time for individualised instruction.

These findings resonate strongly with international research on inclusive education, suggesting that Romanian teachers face challenges similar to those reported in other educational systems. The emphasis on the emotional and professional toll on teachers—feelings of frustration, helplessness, and professional dissatisfaction—is particularly important, as it highlights the human cost of systemic under-support.

The chapter also offers a nuanced account of how inadequate preparation during initial teacher education contributes to later difficulties. The authors argue

persuasively that many teachers encounter inclusive education realities with insufficient theoretical and practical grounding, leading to reactive rather than proactive pedagogical strategies.

While the needs analysis is rich in descriptive detail, it remains largely qualitative and context-specific. The sample size is relatively small, and the methodology, though appropriate for exploratory research, limits the generalisability of findings. A more explicit discussion of methodological limitations would have strengthened the academic rigour of this chapter.

Nevertheless, the chapter's value lies less in statistical representativeness and more in its capacity to give voice to teachers' experiences. It effectively grounds the rest of the volume in real-world educational challenges and underscores the urgency of systematic professional development.

Chapter II, *Aspecte teoretice ale educației incluzive (Theoretical aspects of inclusive education)*, authored by Teodora Popescu, constitutes the theoretical backbone of the volume. It engages extensively with international literature on inclusive education, drawing on authors such as Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson (2006), Mitchell (2005), Slee (2001), Liasidou (2015), and others. This chapter demonstrates strong academic engagement and situates Romanian educational practice within broader scholarly debates.

One of the chapter's key contributions is its careful differentiation between inclusive education and integrated education, medical/deficit models and social/rights-based models of disability, narrow versus broad definitions of inclusion.

The author clearly articulates the shift from integration (which often places the burden of adaptation on the student) to inclusion (which requires systemic transformation of educational structures and practices). This distinction is crucial and often misunderstood in both policy and practice.

The chapter also addresses ongoing international debates regarding the feasibility, limits, and critiques of inclusive education. By referencing critics such as Warnock and contrasting them with proponents of systemic inclusion, the authors present a balanced and intellectually honest account of the field.

The theoretical discussion is comprehensive and well-referenced, reflecting a solid command of international scholarship. This positions the volume as more than a local handbook; it also functions as an academic resource for teacher educators and researchers.

However, the density of theoretical references may pose challenges for some practitioner readers. While the chapter is academically robust, its accessibility for classroom teachers without advanced training in educational theory may be limited. A more explicit translation of theory into concrete classroom implications within this chapter could have enhanced its practical utility.

Chapter III, *Formarea inițială și continuă a cadrelor didactice. Propuneri de dezvoltare profesională (Initial and continuous teacher training. Proposals for professional development)*, authored by Diana Avram Șandru, focuses on initial and

continuing teacher training, proposing a profile of the inclusive teacher and emphasising self-evaluation, mentoring, and collegial support systems.

One of the chapter's major strengths is its emphasis on reflective practice and professional identity. The inclusive teacher is portrayed not merely as a technician implementing strategies, but as a reflective practitioner committed to continuous learning, empathy, and collaboration.

The emphasis on self-evaluation is particularly valuable. By encouraging teachers to critically assess their own practices, beliefs, and attitudes, the volume aligns with contemporary models of professional learning that prioritise reflective inquiry over passive reception of training content.

The discussion of mentoring and collegial support systems reflects a recognition that inclusive education cannot be sustained by isolated individuals. The chapter advocates for professional learning communities, peer mentoring, and institutional cultures that support shared responsibility for inclusion.

This systemic perspective is one of the volume's key conceptual strengths. Rather than framing inclusion as an individual teacher's burden, the authors consistently emphasise collective responsibility and institutional support.

While the chapter provides a compelling vision of professional development, it offers fewer concrete implementation models or case studies than might be desired. The proposals remain somewhat normative, outlining what should be done more than detailing how schools with limited resources might realistically implement these structures.

Chapter IV, *Comunitatea de învățare (The learning community)*, authored by Laura-Larisa Popa, extends the scope of inclusion beyond the classroom to the broader learning community, including parents and local stakeholders. The inclusion of parental education ("Școala părinților") and community involvement reflects a holistic understanding of inclusive education as a shared social project.

The emphasis on community partnerships is particularly relevant in the Romanian context, where socio-economic disparities and limited institutional resources can significantly affect educational outcomes. By advocating for collaboration between schools, families, NGOs, and local authorities, the volume promotes a model of shared responsibility for children's educational success.

The discussion of relational climate and school culture highlights the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of inclusion. The author correctly identifies that inclusive education is not merely a matter of curricular adaptation, but also of building trust, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging.

This focus aligns with contemporary research emphasising the role of school climate in student well-being and academic engagement. It also underscores that inclusion is as much a cultural transformation as a technical one.

The volume concludes with a synthesis of the main ideas and a set of practical directions for planning and implementing inclusive education in Romanian schools. This final section reinforces the book's applied dimension by translating theoretical perspectives and empirical findings into actionable recommendations, particularly in relation to institutional support, teacher training, and resource

allocation. It highlights the need for coherent strategies at both school and system levels, emphasising collaboration, continuous professional development, and the creation of supportive educational environments.

An additional strength of the volume is the inclusion of Annex 1, which presents the needs-analysis questionnaire used in the empirical study discussed in Chapter I. By providing access to the research instrument, the authors enhance the transparency and practical utility of their work, allowing readers to better understand the methodological approach and potentially adapt the tool for use in other educational contexts. This inclusion further strengthens the connection between research and practice that characterises the entire volume.

*Dimensiuni și provocări ale educației incluzive. Formare continuă, resurse și parteneriate comunitare* stands as a timely and important contribution to the Romanian educational literature on inclusion. It offers a thoughtful synthesis of theory, policy, empirical insight, and professional reflection. While it does not solve all the structural challenges of implementing inclusive education, it provides a strong intellectual and ethical foundation for future work.

The volume will be of particular value to teacher educators and trainers, school leaders and inspectors, policymakers and educational planners, researchers interested in inclusive education in post-socialist and Eastern European contexts.

Ultimately, the book's greatest strength lies in its insistence that inclusive education is not merely a technical reform, but a moral, cultural, and systemic transformation. By foregrounding the dignity, diversity, and potential of all learners, the authors contribute meaningfully to the ongoing project of building more equitable and humane educational systems in Romania and beyond.

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