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LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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Abstract: *In order to increase the effects of the learning process, outdoor education can be successfully integrated into formal education, the educational process thus becoming much more valuable in terms of quality and thus producing long-term advantages and thus allowing it to cover a wide range of school subjects. The concept of the outdoor being a complicated one must be deepened, experienced, and learned step by step until it becomes a habit for the school. The impact on the learning process is stimulating, motivating. Outdoor minimizes the constraint but does not eliminate the rules, clear codes to be strictly observed. The learning framework is generous, but the content is light, preferential. Children's experience is integrated into the context, methods must be chosen carefully to stimulate active but flexible involvement and participation, and long-term benefits are guaranteed.*

Keywords: *education outdoor, learning process, children, extracurricular education*

JEL Classification: *A31, I20*

1. Introduction

From ancient times man has had the right to know everything that is happening around him, to know these transformations. “Along with society, education also appeared as a process of development with distinct particularities from one historical moment to another, as the socio-human existence as a whole is constantly evolving. Education is absolutely necessary for man, there being in him the desire, the inclination, but also the capacity to spread the dowry of his wisdom and teaching, to perpetuate himself from a spiritual point of view, beyond the time and space that have been given to him” (Neagu, 2016).

Education, as defined by Cristea (2017), represents that “psycho-social activity with the function of training-development of the personality of the

educated, performed permanently based on the correlation between educator and educated.”

The ways of expressing education in the education system are organized through specific activities, at the level of formal education and non-formal education and unorganized, through specific influences, at the level of informal education.

“The school, the main provider of formal education, is often found in a split of the society’s education, of the current life of the students. For the most part, formal education has been considered an indoor activity, the outdoor educational space, seen as a support space of the indoor school, is the place where sometimes environmental or environmental activities take place. However, the outdoor educational environment is seen as a holistic space where all development needs can be promoted, this can be successfully achieved through outdoor education activities.” (Neagu, 2016)

Thus, outdoor education, in the broad sense, represents “the educational process, regardless of the subject taught / learned that takes place in a natural setting” (Cristea, 2016), and in the narrow sense refers to the sum of actions taken by teachers in a natural environment , using experiential methods, to produce changes in physical, intra and interpersonal skills and environmental behavior among children.

2. Learning opportunities through outdoor education

The It has been shown over time that extracurricular education, ie that type of education conducted in the non-formal environment, beyond the classroom, “approaches problem-based learning applies scientifically, helps students to discover new knowledge, skills and behaviors alone and together , necessary to solve problems encountered outside the classroom, sometimes simple, sometimes of great complexity” (MTCS, 2016).

Thus, outdoor education, a concept still new in Romanian education, but which is beginning to take shape, is an alternative method of traditional education through activities such as experiments, by asking for learning situations by using all the senses, by exposure to the natural environment and social environment, through outdoor activities.

“Outdoor education has its origins in many initiatives that have emerged in the last 150 years: tent camps, scouts (founded in 1907 by the Englishman Robert Baden Powell) - which pursues a kind of informal education, based on practical activities in the air free; forest schools in Denmark; schools and the Outward Bound movement, founded by Hahn (1941). In his opinion, modern society suffered from several diseases, which appeared as the reverse of the

evolution of technology: the decline of fitness, entrepreneurship, imagination, creativity and practical skills, self-discipline and interpersonal compassion. The educational model of Hahn's School could be summarized in the following quote: I believe that the main task of education is to ensure the survival of the following qualities: an innovative curiosity, an invincible will, tenacity to achieve the goal, self-denial and above all: compassion!

Outdoor education is "achieved through scheduled experiences, which take place in one place (residential) or during some adventures. Students take part in various events (actually more or less adventurous events prepared by educators), which generally pose problems whose solution stimulates the creativity of the participants and forces them to collaborate with each other. For such educational experiences are used: tent hiking, mountaineering, boat trips, activities in adventure parks, group games" (Ratien, Sarivaara, Kuukkanen, 2021).

In order to add to the educational system, outdoor education can be successfully integrated into formal education, which will make the educational system much more valuable in terms of its quality. Outdoor activities have many long-term benefits and allow the teacher to cover a much wider range of school subjects.

"Outdoor education is achieved through programs that can take place in one place or during trips, trips" (MTCS, 2016). According to these specifications, those involved in such an activity must differentiate between a regular activity and an activity that has a well-established program, with clear objectives to be achieved. In schools there are many programs and activities that can be done outdoors, these being useful in different contexts, depending on the objectives and topics chosen by the teacher.

In the Romanian education system, the education that children receive in the formal environment, within the institutionalized framework of the school, is one of a theoretical, cognitive nature, as the teachers follow the school curricula, according to the curriculum. In outdoor education, children (students) assimilate information in a practical way, with the help of experiments.

When the teacher wants to carry out such an activity, he must know that the outdoor activities meet a number of conditions, pursue certain objectives, respect the proposed themes, have a well-defined educational purpose and must provide the child with safety, trust.

One of the most important aspects of outdoor education is the fact that this type of education meets both the basic needs of the child, regardless of age, but also those that characterize him in the group of which they are part. Therefore, the following needs must be considered:

- "The need to be respected - carrying out various outdoor activities encourages the child to feel at ease, so he will be more open, will communicate, will express his own opinions, will feel cared for and will feel that his decisions

matter for the others; Students can be consulted about various games or activities;

- The need to be responsible - outdoor activities allow the child the opportunity to receive different tasks, responsibilities for achieving the proposed scope (for example if opting for a greening activity, one child may be given the task of clearing trees, another the task of watering flowers , it is important, however, that by communicating with the child, the teacher conveys to him the feeling that the prince who undertakes the environment will be cleaner, so he will realize that he has a responsibility to protect the environment)” (Neagu, 2016).

- “The need to be active - involvement in various sports activities, games, themed walks, brings many benefits to the child’s physical and mental development. The game being the fundamental activity of the child, it is important for all children to be constantly stimulated to play, to run, to participate in different activities actively.

- The need to be socially included - perhaps the most important feature of outdoor education is that it is a successful way to overcome some difficulties of the child (mental, physical, social, emotional or economic), so that he is socially included, to feels that he belongs to a community; it is considered that the environment inside the group is rather a competitive one, while the one outside the classroom is a supportive one, which allows children to express themselves, to relate to others, to collaborate” (MTCS, 2016).

- The need to feel safe – “the inside of the classroom is much safer for children, while the outside environment involves various risks and unforeseen situations that can have a negative effect.

The educator must identify the possible risks that may arise and design a risk management plan, as it is a particularly important aspect that has led some specialists in the field to deny the usefulness of using outdoor education” (Szczytko1, Carrier, Stevenson, 2018).

When education is done outside the classroom, the activity attracts children much more, motivates and excites them, but at the same time, it challenges them to new discoveries, teaches them to identify problems, to adapt to certain situations. strategists, a team, discover their limits. Also, due to the fact that outdoor activities offer a different learning climate, children are motivated, are empathetic, begin to become aware that they need certain physical skills, of course, in certain concrete situations, living environments, develop their abilities. understanding not only themselves and others, but also the world around them, the society they belong to, to which they belong.

The planning of outdoor activities by the teacher is done following a documentation, also, it must take into account the fact that learning is done holistically, through connections with all areas, and not separately. “The approach to outdoor school subjects is based primarily on a well-established

planning process, which supports the teacher's understanding of the essential steps for conducting an outdoor activity" (Reed & Smith, 2021).

According to the Outdoor Education Manual, the most important aspect in carrying out such activities is to consult children, because their opinion is very important, the teacher must know what children know about the topic, they must also know what motivates them, which arouses their interest.

Thus, the planning process involves the following steps:

- identification of the activity that the teacher carries out, depending on the age of the children, of the studied field;
- Creating a plan that clearly presents the objectives, purpose, activities proposed, but also the desired results;
- Technical details, namely: climatic conditions, place where the activity will take place, number of participating children, time / duration of the activity, material or human resources required, rules to be observed by all participants, but also risks;
- Evaluation of the outdoor activity: the methods and tools necessary for the activity carried out, SOWT analysis, because it is very important that each participant knows the opinion of all those involved.

For the teacher who initiated and carried out such an activity, it is very important to know the side effect, the impact that the respective activity had among the children, because depending on the results he will be able to plan a new activity correctly, he will be able to improve future activities.

Among the advantages of carrying out such activities by teachers, I will note the following:

- There are activities that are carried out in different contexts, which have a lighter learning framework;
- Use different methods that stimulate the involvement and participation of all children;
- Eliminates constraints specific to the formal environment of schools;
- It offers children multiple challenges, thus stimulating their creativity and developing their team spirit, but also the way they have to solve a problem, a given situation;
- Represents an alternative to the teaching-learning-assessment process;
- Helps the teacher to discover those children with behavioral or integration problems

"Outdoor education offers the possibility of direct contact with nature - environmental protection is a topic of global interest, mass urbanization has produced a harmful effect on the environment and the fact that people are not aware of the impact that their non-ecological actions have on the environment - outdoor education it emerges as an extremely beneficial way to change attitudes and behaviors towards the environment" (Reed & Smith, 2021).

Outdoor education is a powerful source of learning experiences - a relaxing, free environment can offer students countless challenges, so the education process becomes strong, inspirational and able to change antisocial behaviors, create a strong relationship between people based on support reciprocal. Outdoor education facilitates the learning process of students who encounter difficulties in this regard - outdoor education offers a different learning climate that allows students who usually have learning difficulties and have a low level of school performance, to become more motivated, much more capable” (Szczytko, Carrier, Stevenson, 2018).

3. Conclusions

Outdoor education is that form of education in which children’s education takes place through their direct involvement, in which it prepares children for the future, helps them develop relationships and teaches them to discover ways to overcome certain problem situations.

In a society that is constantly changing, it is necessary to carry out as many activities as possible in school institutions, such as outdoor activities. “Getting rid of the daily routine of the activities carried out in the group room, the activities carried out in nature acquire an attractive and more applied character. Outdoor learning is not just a new place for learning, it involves a change of approach, vision on activities, a new philosophy of action, a new perspective on learning, a high permissiveness for experiential acquisition and situationalization” (Szczytko1, Carrier, Stevenson, 2018).

Between the outdoor activities and the formal activities, carried out by the teachers, there must be a continuity, because without carrying out such activities, the Romanian education and the children will suffer.

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