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# **Narratives Shaping Teachers' Professional Identity and Influencing Career Development**

**Ariella Zeevi, Carmen Mihaela Crețu**

# Narratives Shaping Teachers' Professional Identity and Influencing Career Development

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

narrative,  
professional  
development,  
professional identity

This article seeks to distinguish between teachers' academic studies which they chose of their own volition, and professional training throughout their career that is imposed on them as part of their role as educators, in the framework of their professional development. This is a qualitative-narrative study, whose data were collected through the life stories of two educators, one is currently serving as the principal of a junior high school, and the other serves as a vice principal of a junior high school and is also preparing to be the principal of a school. The data were analyzed by means of content analysis, which yielded themes that were combined into three chapters: Chapter one: The seeds sown in the parents' home towards professional life, Chapter two: The choice of the professional life track, and Chapter three: Professional development towards career advancement.

The findings show that this distinction points to the formation of teachers' professional identity: The free choice in academic study tracks contributes greatly to the formation of their professional identity, while continuing their training as teachers in the afternoon after a long school day, does not contribute to the formation of their professional identity. Some see these studies as an inconvenience and its main value for them is financial. The findings of this study reprise the question of the connection between teachers' training throughout their careers as formulating the perception of their professional identity.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Erzählung, berufliche  
Entwicklung,  
berufliche Identität

In diesem Artikel wird versucht, zwischen akademischen Studiengängen von Lehrern, die sie freiwillig gewählt haben, und einer beruflichen Ausbildung zu unterscheiden, die ihnen im Rahmen ihrer beruflichen Entwicklung im Rahmen ihrer Rolle als Erzieher auferlegt wird. Hierbei handelt es sich um eine qualitativ-narrative Studie, deren Daten aus den Lebensgeschichten zweier Pädagogen zusammengetragen wurden. Einer ist derzeit Schulleiter einer Realschule, der andere ist stellvertretender Schulleiter einer Realschule und bereitet diese ebenfalls vor Schulleiter sein. Die Daten wurden mittels einer Inhaltsanalyse analysiert, die Themen ergab, die in drei Kapiteln zusammengefasst wurden: Kapitel eins: Die Samen, die im Elternhaus für das Berufsleben ausgesät wurden, Kapitel zwei: Die Wahl des Berufslebens und Kapitel drei: Berufliche Weiterentwicklung zum beruflichen Aufstieg.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass diese Unterscheidung auf die Herausbildung der beruflichen Identität der Lehrkräfte hindeutet: Die freie Wahl in akademischen Studiengängen trägt in hohem Maße zur Herausbildung ihrer beruflichen Identität bei, während ihre Ausbildung als Lehrkräfte am Nachmittag nach einem langen Schultag nicht fortgesetzt wird zur Bildung ihrer beruflichen Identität beitragen. Einige sehen diese Studien als Unannehmlichkeit und ihr Hauptwert für sie ist finanziell. Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie wiederholen die Frage nach dem Zusammenhang zwischen der Ausbildung von Lehrkräften während ihrer gesamten Laufbahn und der Formulierung der Wahrnehmung ihrer beruflichen Identität.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the narrative of the formation of professional identity of teachers as a result of learning in professional development throughout their careers.

The method: semi-structured interviews with two teachers, one who later became a school principal and another who serves as a pedagogic vice principal in a

junior high school and undergoes a training process as a school principal. In addition, five stories of school vice principals were analyzed in view of the professional development process they underwent throughout their careers, while looking at its influence on the formation of their professional identity.

The research question: Do professional development processes affect the perception of teachers' professional

identity, and to what extent do these affect the continuation of career development?

**Contribution to knowledge:** Some studies argue that the narrative contributes to the perception of professional identity (McAdams, 1993). This article seeks to build on this assumption and to examine how the concept of professional identity crystallizes in the learning of teachers during their professional development and how these affect the continuation of their career development.

Three decades ago, a "narrative shift" occurred in the social sciences which led to the use of the narrative as a tool for studying human reality. The perception that stories – narratives – are a major cognitive scheme (Bruner, 1987), central channels for imparting meanings (Polkinghorne, 1988), a significant means of shaping identity (McAdams, 1993), and a basis for interaction (Gergen & Gergen, 1983), led to narrative research permeated into diverse social disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, social linguistics, communication, gerontology, gender studies, as well as the major social professions, including education, social work, psychotherapy, counseling and mediation.

Some distinguish between "narrative" and "story," but most social scientists use both terms interchangeably (Riessman, 2008). This study will use the term "narrative" and "story" as one and the same.

It is possible to discern a continuum, at one end of which is the narrow definition of social linguistics, according to which a narrative is a distinct discourse unit focused on a subject and organized over a time axis, and at the other end definitions used in social history and anthropology, which view the narrative as a complete life story, formed from pieces of interviews, observations, and documents. In the middle of the continuum are the prevailing definitions in psychology and sociology, that view narratives as lengthy reports of life within a context, which develop during a single interview or over several interviews (Riessman, 2008) in an attempt to integrate the key elements identified with the narrative form. Smith and Sparkes define a narrative as "a complex genre that often includes a point and characters alongside a plot that links events that are unfolded over time and space to provide an explanation or general outcome." (Smith & Sparkes, 2009: 2).

Bruner (1985, 1996) argues that one can see two basic ways of knowing and thinking through which people organize and manage their worldviews: the positivist (paradigmatic, or logical-scientific) way, and the narrative way. The positivist path is based on the search for a universal position of truth and is suitable mainly for exact sciences. The narrative-constructivist way, through which one can know and grasp the world, is based on the assumption that the complex and rich phenomena of experience and of life are better represented in stories and narratives (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The narrative approach is more suited to understanding the world of people and grasping their experiences.

People become narrative autobiographers in the way they tell about their lives (Riessman, 1993). People are natural storytellers, it is a quality of their human nature rather than an expression of artistic abilities (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Beattie, 1995). The story is the landscape in which we live as human beings and function as people who find meaning (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1991).

The basic assumption underlying the claim to use narrative in sociology, psychology, and education studies is the perception of the human self as a narrator of stories and as constructing narratives about themselves and their environment (Bruner, 1990). Indeed, in recent decades, researchers have been using the methodologies of researching the self, the collaborative and narrative to understand educational phenomena, among other things through the help of people's stories about themselves (Culler, 1981; Iser, 1976). The story, therefore, is a fundamental way of the individual to give meaning to their experience, to bridge and reconcile the inner world of their thoughts and feelings, with the external world of observing actions and expressions of interest (Garro & Mattingly, 2000).

Chase (2005) argued that a narrative can be delivered orally or in writing, and may be created during a field research, an interview, or a spontaneous conversation between people; in each case it may be a short and focused story about a specific event, or an extended story about a continuing aspect in the life of the narrator, or about a whole life course of the person from birth to the present. Chase proposes six common "lenses" for narrative researchers, through which the contribution of narrative writing can be characterized: (1) the story as creating meaning, (2) the story as expressing a voice, (3) the story

as expressing and forming identity, (4) the story as representing change and development, (5) the story as a connection between the narrator and the listener, and (6) the story as a contextual product (Chase, 2005).

This article refers to the third lens: the story as expressing and forming identity. Two teachers were invited to write the story of their professional development and were asked in a semi-structured interview how much professional development contributed to their perception of their professional identity and to what extent these contributed to their career development. This raises the question: what is identity and what is the professional identity of teachers?

## 2. Theoretical foundation

The term "identity" can be defined by the question "who is or what is the person?" The different answers that persons give about themselves, or the meanings attributed to them by others, are those that define their identity (Beijaard, 1995). The early literature, such as Erikson (1968), describes the concept of identity in terms of the 'self.' According to Erikson, identity is a concept that changes and develops with age, which does not relate to what a person has, but to what they develop during their lifetime. Erikson defines the "identity of the self" as an inner sense of the individual - of their knowledge of themselves, of their path and of their goals in the future. This basic sense consists of a core personality (of attributes, wishes, desires, talents) that does not change. This core upholds the experiential sequence of the individual beyond situations and times. According to Erikson, identity is not a collection of the individuals' beliefs about themselves, it is more than the sum of these beliefs: it is an integrative organized perception, i.e. identity is not a 'description of myself' but an attempt to explain oneself, a task that requires complex integration.

The research views identity creation as an ongoing process, that includes repeated interpretation of experiences encountered by the individual (Kerby, 1991). Identity formation involves the process of creating identity, expanding it, and making changes within it through actions of self-evaluation (Cooper & Olson, 1996). Self-evaluation and identity are part of a person's self-image and may therefore be threatened by changes that may affect their self-image and, consequently, their personal identity (Kozminsky & Kluer, 2011).

Identity, then, is not imprinted in a person from the moment of birth, but rather a dynamic process of creation and construction in an ongoing process of interaction between the individual and the environment on one hand and the inner feelings of the person on the other. The construction of identity is a process by which a person strives to combine the roles and experiences in society into a coherent image of the self. Thus, teachers shape their professional identity through their interactions with themselves and with others (students, colleagues, parents, etc.) (Kozminsky & Kluer, 2011). Part of a person's self-identity is also their professional identity, which answers the question "Who or what am I as a professional?" There is a mutual influence between the professional identity and personal identity. Each identity influences and is influenced by the other, and therefore a change in each of them has an effect on the other (Kozminsky & Kluer, 2011).

Professional identity is defined as the teachers' sense of belonging to the teaching profession and their identification with it (Tickle, 1999; Kremer & Hoffman, 1981). Coldron and Smith (1999) expand this definition and explain that professional identity is the way the teachers are perceived not only by themselves but also by others. As a result, "self-perception" and "perception of others" are two elements whose interactions affect the professional identity and are affected by it (Reynolds, 1996).

The construction of the professional identity of a teacher is critical because the teachers bring themselves, their personality and professional identity in the classroom, in the discourse with the students, and in their teaching processes. Therefore, one must take into account that conflicts that arise within one's professional identity may undermine the teacher's sense of coherence as regards one's personal identity. Day, Elliot & Kington (2005) argue that a change in educational policies and reforms, that usually occur as an expression of policy from above rather than a need from the field, create an ongoing identity crisis. They found that a crisis damages their commitment to teaching, the degree of motivation, sense of self-efficacy, satisfaction and professional pride, and their own internal coherence in relation to their professional identity. Therefore, Rodgers & Scott (2008) call for teachers to strengthen their awareness of their professional identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shape their identities. The call is for a change in the perception of teachers regarding themselves

as professionals who shape their own identity. They are the ones who will express their professional voice rather than letting external forces do it for them.

The perception of teachers' professional identity has an impact on aspects of the teacher's personal and social environment:

1. Sense of self-efficacy, judgment, and the professional decisions – the perception of professional identity influences the sense of self-efficacy, judgment, and the professional decisions (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) argued that "Teacher identity - the beliefs that teachers have about teaching and learning as a teacher - is an essential issue in teacher training; it is the basis for creating meaning and making decisions...teacher training must therefore begin with the self-inquiry of the teacher" (p. 21).
2. Self-examination – professional identity is part of the role perception. Altman and Katz (2001) note that the role perception, i.e. the concrete way in which the professional perceives their professional identity and performs their role, is expressed in everything the professional uses to fulfill their duties: behaviors, work methods, mindsets, beliefs, declarations, etc. In their opinion, familiarity with the components of the personal role perception, their examination and raising them to awareness can help the teacher to examine the effectiveness of their perceptions and the behaviors derived from them and to improve them.
3. Professional development and attitude to changes – professional identity also determines to a large extent how teachers continue to learn and develop professionally, and what will be the attitude of teachers to educational changes and reforms (Knowles, 1992). If the teachers see themselves as professionals who keep up to date in the various aspects of their field of study and examine the new information in light of their work, it is likely that they will show interest and openness to professional development.
4. The status of the teacher – the perception of oneself is also influenced by teachers' socioeconomic status and prestige that society

attributes to the group to which the person belongs (Schwarzwald, 1978). Teachers can strengthen their professional status and their self-image as professionals by taking the authority to form their professional identity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

This article refers to the aspect of professional development and the attitude toward change, since professional identity determines to a large extent how teachers continue to learn and develop professionally and where they aspire to progress and develop as educators. The question arises, therefore, what is the professional development of teachers?

In this article, two forms of professional development are expressed: academic studies towards a degree in universities or colleges, and professional development that every teacher is required to undergo – these are referred to as "advanced courses". The critical difference between the two is that teachers' academic studies were performed by their own choice, while professional development studies are imposed upon the teacher, with limited ability of the teacher to choose what to learn. The choice is a motivator while coercion creates resistance.

The research question: "Do professional development processes affect the perception of teachers' professional identity, and to what extent do these affect the continuation of career development?" refers to the training that every teacher must complete throughout their career, as part of their obligations.

Professional development of teachers is perceived as adult learning, or "Andragogy." Alexander Kapp first coined the term in 1833. Malcolm Knowles popularized this term and therefore is associated with it. Andragogy is "the art and science of helping adults learn." It was developed in Europe and North America as a distinct theory to solve the problems in pedagogy, which is "the art and science of teaching children" (Hanson, 1996).

Knowles (1973:43) discusses four Basic Assumptions for Andragogy:

1. The first assumption is that when a person grows older, he/she become transformed from a dependent entity into a self-directed entity. The adults do not see themselves as learners who are dependent on the teacher, but as someone who is active through self-intention or as a creator.



2. The second assumption is that the adult differs from the child in the way they perceive life experience. Children refer to experience as an external event that happened to them, while adults perceive it as part of their identity - "An adult is what they did with their lives."
3. The third assumption is that there is a difference between children and adults in readiness to learn. A developmental task is a task that arises at some point in a person's life and creates a readiness to learn, a moment in which one can be taught. Success in this task leads to success in future tasks.
4. The fourth assumption holds that children and adults differ in their orientation to learning. Children have a perspective of postponed application of knowledge: "What I learn in elementary school will help me in my high school studies." In contrast, adults relate to their studies from a perspective of immediacy of application: they want to immediately implement what they learn and see in their studies as a means to improve their ability to cope with life problems.

Since we seek to view the professional development of teachers as andragogy, we must examine how well teachers' professional development processes consider these basic assumptions.

Vidislavski (2011) argues that professional development is the constant development of professional knowledge and skills throughout the professional life-long learning of teaching staff. As an integral part of their work, teaching staff expand their knowledge, deepen their insights about teaching-learning processes, develop new teaching methods, and develop skills to promote students' functioning and achievements. The development takes place in the course of professional functioning, and learning takes place in diverse frameworks of teaching staff, within the roles and between the roles, in the fields of knowledge, in the fields of pedagogic management, and in the educational and organizational spheres. The professional development takes into account the educational continuum along the course of the development of students according to the corresponding age groups.

Professional development contributes to the improvement of professional identity, to the enhancement

of the professional functioning of the teaching staff as an educator, teacher, and position holder (Vidislavski, 2011). Therefore, the professional development process is structured, systematic, and enables the development of accountability and commitment to the role.

The creation of a continuum of career development between training before the role and the professional development within the role will bring the teaching staff to a high level of expertise, and increase the prestige and status of teaching as a profession. Therefore, this study illustrates the process that teachers undergo from narrative writing towards reflection and from the formation of professional identity towards the continuation of career development.

### **2.1. The narrative as human expression and identity formation**

When people tell their life stories, they become autobiographers (Riessman, 1993). Stories are part of our identity, we create stories about ourselves that we convey in a variety of ways to others. The creation of the self-narrative enables us to understand who we are and where we seek to advance in our lives. (Gudmundsdottir, 1991) The research question, therefore, seeks to find an answer from the narrative approach that helps the storyteller to form his/her identity.

## **3. Research methodology**

### *Study design*

Four educators are at the center of this study. P1 is currently the principal of a junior high school in the south of Israel, P2 is a pedagogic vice principal of a junior high school in central Israel, P3 is a Middle school pedagogical coordinator and P4 is a homeroom teacher. In-depth interviews were conducted with P1, P3 and P4 and the vice-principal, while P2 wrote her professional life story from her childhood up to the present time when she attends a training course for future school principals. The choice of in-depth interviews stemmed from the desire to let the participants tell their stories about the subject of this study in their own language (Sparadley, 1979). For example,

*P1: "The questions in the interview sharpened some things about myself, for example: the very fact that as a principal I perceive the courses differently than when I*

*was a teacher. I understood that what I see as a principal is different from what I saw as a teacher..."*

The principle is that every interview is a product of interaction between the speaker and the listener. In such conversations, both the listener and the speaker develop the meaning together, creating a story that is meaningful to both partners (Gudmundsdottir, 1996). The in-depth interview is a process of building a reality that both sides contributed to (Woods, 1996, p. 53). P2, the vice principal, has written her life story. "People are natural storytellers" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7). They construct narratives about their lives and tell their life stories (Bruner, 1990). Telling stories about the past, present, and future events is considered as universal human activity and one of the first forms of discourse we learn as children (Riessman, 1993). The task of the interviewer, the author of this study is to help the interviewee construct his/her story.

#### *The research tool*

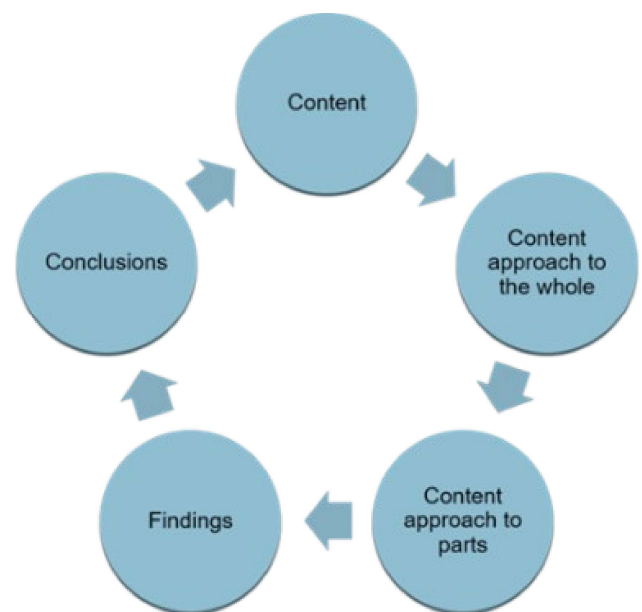
The study used semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is a qualitative methodological tool that combines flexibility and openness on the basis of built-in questions (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Norman, 2009; Fisherman & Weiss, 2011; Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 1990). During the interview, the interviewees were asked to describe their life story, starting from their parents' home, through their continuing professional development and up to the time of the interview. The interviewees were invited to address their professional identity in general, and especially with regard to the formation of their professional identity in their learning process and professional development over the years. In the course of the interviews, clarifying questions or questions directed at the subject of the study were sometimes asked, especially regarding professional development courses.

#### *Analysis of life stories*

Two main types of analyses are common in narrative research: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis of narratives approach uses the collection of stories of a group with a common practice, and analyzes them to reach a generalization about a group or a phenomenon under study (Bruner, 1986). Narrative analysis is a research that is done with narrative, in which personal or shared singular cases are examined. Its goal is to produce a narrative creation that will provide the data with full and

profound meaning, and the data collected from the stories aggregate into common themes. This study uses narrative analysis to create a narrative that can answer the research question: Do professional development processes affect the perception of teachers' professional identity, and to what extent do these affect the continuation of career development?

The narrative analysis in this study was carried out according to the stages depicted in figure 1 (Kassan & Krummer-Nevo, 2010).



**Figure 1.** *The stages of narrative analysis*

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. The three chapters of life stories**

The life stories were organized around three chapters: The seeds sown in the parents' home towards professional life, the choice of the professional life track, and professional development towards career advancement.

*Chapter one: The seeds sown in the parents' home towards professional life*

This chapter incorporates stories from childhood, from accepting values from the parents' home, and the formation of a professional, value-based worldview.

*P1: "Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a teacher. I really love this field. I think it's amazing."*

*P2: "To this day my connection with my father is the strongest, and I have no doubt in retrospect that my father*

is a very significant figure for me, in the person I grew up to be, and in the personal and professional identity that I formulated."

P3: "Many of my family members are educators in various areas of education. I wonder how much this fact affected the continuation of my professional development. I experienced and absorbed an 'educational spirit'. I believe that this 'educational spirit', the values into which I grew up in such a family, are like seeds sown for my continued professional development, namely choosing a profession that encompasses a human touch, requires attention, support and giving to others, acceptance, empathy, and so on..."

P4: "As the third sibling, my two older brothers were a role model for me. I chose in fact to study in an orthodox high school (unlike my three brothers). However, the efforts, learning from failure, and determination were their strong point and they embedded them in me..."

#### *Chapter Two: The choice of the professional life track*

This chapter incorporates the "self" perception of the current professional identity, coping with challenges with respect to the perception of personal self-efficacy, and the place of professional development courses.

#### *The choice of the teaching profession:*

P1: "I went to study, got my bachelor's degree and went back to teaching. In a high school as a homeroom teacher and in the second year as an English teacher, from 1994 to 2016 – 22 years. I taught junior high school and high school. I have had a lot of roles: subject-matter coordinator, grade level coordinator, schedule coordinator, evaluation coordinator... all these years I always had a role, I submitted to matriculation exams, and I evaluated matriculation exams. Two years ago, I won a tender for school principal after many attempts. Now I have been managing a junior high school for two years now..."

P2: "I knew that I came with the tools and skills that I acquired during the four years of teacher training and practical work, and I decided in my heart that I would not let the fears affect me and that I would do the best I could to succeed and advance..."

P3: "I studied special education plus sociology and anthropology towards a B.A. degree. Later on, I attended

courses for a teaching certificate in special education. Throughout all my years of studies, I continued working in the kibbutz educational frameworks. It offered me extensive field experience and expanded my learning beyond theories. I graduated with distinction and it contributed to me..."

P4: "My parents had no formal schooling but they insisted that we, the children, would learn and learn and learn... For me, my father, a 'teacher' figure, was the peak of self-realization. I think that he embedded it in me... And indeed, when I became a teacher, it was his greatest pride, I felt that I had closed a circle..."

#### *The place of advanced courses in achieving professional development:*

P1: "The school advanced courses did not contribute anything to me, they were boring and irrelevant, except for a small number of them that gave my teaching tools, that helped. What contributed most to me is my graduate studies at the university, I learned about motivation theory, what causes internal motivation, if I once believed that everyone should be kept on a 'short leash'...this learning changed my worldview from one end to the other. I have learned that support, tolerance, etc., are not difficult words."

P2: "Looking back, I can say with certainty that what gave me confidence is the period of college studies. I thought that if I managed to meet all the goals I set for myself at this time, I had the ability to cope with what was required of me as a grade level manager."

"In addition, my studies revealed to me a whole world of management principles and I felt that I was ready for it on a professional and mental level."

P3: "The in-service training courses are usually given at the end of the work day, after an arduous day in class, and exhaustion prevails! Unfortunately, except for one in-service training course that gave me practical instruments, I remember none of them as meaningful, a course that will leave its mark and contribute to me in the school experience."

P4: "During these years, I have attended several in-service training courses about various topics, e.g. sciences, class management, individual hour teaching and differential teaching. These courses contributed a lot since they offered practices that I could implement in my



teaching. On the other hand, there were quite a few in-service training courses that I was obliged to attend. They did not interest me and had no benefit for me. I would prefer being able to choose every year what to learn and in which direction to grow..."

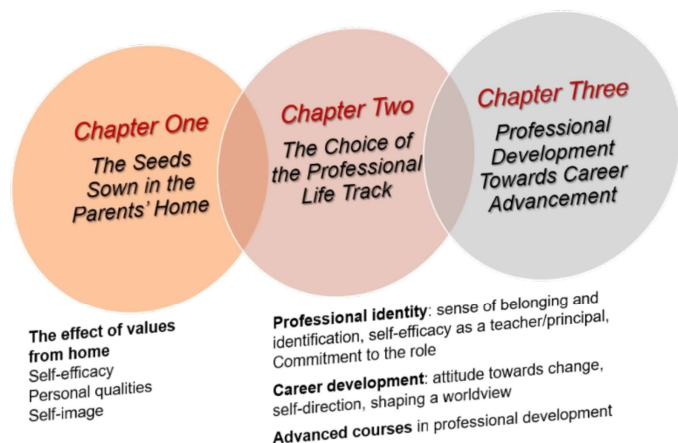
### *Chapter Three: Professional development towards career advancement*

This chapter refers to the aspirations to continue career development based on current achievements and on the basis of self-perception – the personal and professional identity.

P1: "From day one I knew I wanted to manage, it was always aimed there, I see myself as a six-year principal." (now a junior high school principal and aspiring to be a six-year principal, grades 7-12).

P2: "At that time, my perception of myself was shaped not only as a teacher but also as an educator, and the desire was awakened in me to place myself in a position where I could also influence profound processes in education."

Each of the chapters was divided into several categories that were extracted from the text and written in the personal narrative. These categories were repeated throughout the narrative.



**Figure 2.** The three chapters of life stories and their categories

In chapter one, the values from the parents' home have had the most dominant influence, and from them emerged high self-efficacy and high self-image, and these shaped the personal qualities of the interviewees.

In chapters two and three, there is an emphasis on the influence of values from home, on a sense of high self-

efficacy, on shaping the worldview as an educator, high commitment to the role, and a sense of belonging and identification with the teaching profession. The academic studies that take place in the second chapter seem to have had the greatest influence on the perception of professional identity and the sense of efficacy to continue career development, alongside inspirational figures and mentors, who strengthen the perception of professional identity.

### **4.2. Identity, professional development, and the continuation of career development: do they go together?**

At the center of this article is the question: Do professional development processes affect the perception of teachers' professional identity, and to what extent do these affect the continuation of career development?

#### *Chapter one: The seeds sown in the parents' home*

P1: "The direction at home was that a woman should be a teacher...In Russia, being a teacher was very honorable... that was always the direction. Education was the most meaningful."

P2: "My father's education to his daughters was liberal, empowering, and encouraging excellence. I remember him always saying emphatically: 'You will study, get degrees, work in jobs that will enable you to be independent and not dependent of your husbands...'"

P3: "Until today I feel that work is my first priority, like my father. The feedbacks that I receive, provide a lot of meaning, I know that I am in the place that is right for me..."

P4: "Both in my adulthood and my professional choices, the home where I grew, the education and general atmosphere there, affected me and served as a lighthouse for me..."

P1, who was born in Russia, immigrated to Israel when she was 4 years old. At home she received a conservative education aimed at excellence and practical choice of a profession that would enable her to make a decent living:

P2: "I knew that there would always be a living in teaching English and that I could give private lessons and earn more money, and that's indeed what happened."

P2, was born in a development town in the south of Israel (a development town is a place for new immigrants from Asia and Africa). She has five sisters and a brother. The economic situation at home was not good. And at the same time, P2's father was a public activist and brought P2 in particular close to him, gave her the feeling that she was the most successful and outstanding of all the children:

*P2: "I remember dad calling me, sitting me on his lap and I felt the most special in the world, special that I am the only girl who has the right to be a partner in such adult conversations."*

P1 became a teacher because of the message she received at her parents' home and she studied architecture but retrained in teaching as a professional. She chose teaching because she was searching for a role with meaning derived from the education she received at home. Both P2 and P1 emphasize their personal qualities as supporting and driving their professional development.

*P1: "I always wanted to manage and I knew I would be a principal, I enjoy it very much..."*

*P2: "I realized that school position holders notice me when I initiate, invest, make an effort...I have emerged as a pioneer in a significant way..."*

The first chapter, the parents' home, sows the seeds that will eventually become career paths and professional development:

*P2: "Of all my sisters and even my only brother, my father's connection to me was the strongest and the closest. Even though it was never said aloud, everyone knew that I was 'daddy's successful, smart, and beautiful girl'."*

*P1: "At home I was directed to look for a practical profession. I knew that there would always be a living in teaching English and that I could give private lessons and earn more money, and that's indeed what happened."*

In summary, each of the educators interviewed for this study had a different life story. They came from a completely different social and cultural family background. And despite the great diversity, what the two share is that the home, the parents, and the cultural environment influenced the values and motivation for further personal and professional development. The parents' home greatly influenced the shaping of the

identity of the adult. It is possible to examine how the formation of identity perception is an evolving process and is influenced by the family environment. Identity is not a constant attribution of the individual, but rather an evolving and changing characterization. The development of self-identity takes place as an ongoing process between the individual and their environment. In this process each person interprets oneself, what kind of person one is, and how he/she is identified in a given context. That is, self-identity is the perception of oneself in a particular context. In this sense, the finding strengthens the words of Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004).

#### *Chapter two: The choice of the professional life track*

P1 and P2, each on her own path turned to academic studies; P1 studied English and teacher training, and P2 first studied architecture and then converted to education and science. Each of them pointed out that the foundation for shaping their professional identity was laid during their academic studies and later in their choice to undergo training towards school principalship.

*P2: "I knew that I came with the tools and skills that I acquired during the four years of teacher training and practical work."*

*"Looking back, I can say with certainty that what gave me confidence is the period of college studies."*

*P1: "What contributed most to me is my graduate studies at the university, I learned about motivation theory, what causes internal motivation, if I once believed that everyone should be kept on a 'short leash'...this learning changed my worldview from one end to the other. I have learned that support, tolerance, etc., are not difficult words."*

In other words, the choice of professional life led the two participants in the study to academic studies in order to enable the choice and in accordance to it. The choice of the education and the teaching track was their free choice and in accordance with the values that each received in the parents' home, which also includes the ability to influence, to 'go far'.

#### *Advanced courses and teacher professional development*

Every teacher in the Israeli education system is committed to continuing their professional development, to learning and continuing education. The basic assumption is that

continued learning enriches, develops, and strengthens the perception of professional identity. At the same time, each of the educators who told their stories does not consider the studies that were imposed on them as a significant contribution, apart from a few seminars, especially those that contributed to their toolbox as teachers and thus their sense of self-efficacy in teaching.

*P2: "I participated in various courses in the fields of differential teaching, youth psychology, the unique schedule of the 'Ofek Hadash' reform, and more, but there was one advanced course that was meaningful for me to develop my professional identity – the course for the two-year grade level coordinators."*

*P1: "I took a successful English advanced course that was related to meaningful learning, a useful course from which I learned a lot..."*

*P1: "I made a mistake, at first I did not study in advanced courses and I was not encouraged to do so, not only from the financial point of view, no one cared...once I realized that it had financial significance, I started to do it. At that time, I was also doing my master's, then I started doing a lot of advanced courses, first because of the financial aspect and then because of the reform..."*

*"And apart from those individual courses that strengthened my sense of self-efficacy by providing practical tools, after all, professional development is perceived as a burden, irrelevant and not advancing, but eventually necessary for financial advancement"*

In other words, the advanced courses as a framework for professional development were seen as an option for the financial advancement of the two teachers.

#### *Attitude towards change*

P2 points to every change in her professional life as increasing motivation, satisfaction, and her sense of meaning in the work of education:

*P2: "In August of that year, after I had already finished preparing for receiving a new grade as principal, I was approached by the junior high school principal and the six-year principal, who offered me the position of vice principal, and I was very surprised by this proposal. There were five other worthy grade-level coordinators and I was the youngest of them professionally, yet they chose me...me! They saw me as the most suitable for the*

*job. There are not enough words to describe the level of the satisfaction, the joy and the tremendous motivation that arised in me because of this. This time only one minute was enough for me to say yes. At this stage I already knew my ambitions, my abilities, and I understood my mission. I felt that this role played an important part in the formation of my professional path and that it will reveal to me the missing pieces in the puzzle toward realizing my goal."*

With regard to advanced courses and professional development, P2 did succeed in taking part in some courses, but her academic studies were the ones that contributed to her professional identity and her sense of self-efficacy:

*P2: "I participated in a number of professional advanced courses in the fields of biology and chemistry. These courses revealed interesting and innovative teaching methods, and I made sure to incorporate this new knowledge into lessons..."*

*"My studies revealed to me a whole world of management principles and I felt that I was ready for it on a professional and mental level."*

*"Looking back, I can say with certainty that what gave me confidence (to serve as a grade level coordinator) is the period of college studies."*

P1 points to a positive and challenging attitude to any change that occurs when a new role is taken, and especially a management role:

*P1: "I was very happy, and from every position I grew, I learned, I advanced both professionally and personally."*

Along with the great motivation of each of the teachers for any change in their educational role, changes resulting from the requirement for professional development were greeted with less joy and motivation, mainly because they were forced from the top down. P1 attests that as a teacher, she was not interested in advanced courses that seemed irrelevant and boring to her, but as a principal, she began to understand their great value, mainly because she must lead the professional development of teachers, because her perspective has changed.

*P1: "Also a worldview beyond professional development through advanced courses, I really believe in professional*

development; as a teacher I did not like the advanced courses, and now as a principal I see their value..."

*"The only way to empower teachers is to give them a platform, whether through professional development or not. Since teachers have no options for progress, then if that can be given to them it will be a platform for progress. At this stage I am considering motivating teachers to engage in their own professional development at school, that is, any teacher who is willing, is welcome to give a training course to the entire teaching staff... this idea was welcomed by them."*

#### *Formulating a worldview as an educator*

P1 received a strict education at home, indicating that at the beginning of her educational career, her worldview was very rigid. Her M.A. studies constituted a turning point for her in terms of her educational worldview, mainly in various theories of motivation and later on in her work alongside a school principal who was her role model and inspiration:

*P1: "My perception at first was very rigid, setting clear boundaries. The aspects of tolerance, the understanding that not everyone was able to deal with situations that to me seemed simple, did not exist at all, and that caused resistance towards me. With time I learned to cut corners, to listen to the difficulty, to understand that not everything has to be accurate...the change was not easy because that's what I learned from my parents..."*

*P1: "In my M.A. studies I learned a lot about theories of motivation, and I connected a lot to a model of support for efficacy, belonging and autonomy, and I connected to it because I also experienced it with my father (a school principal himself), he really enabled exactly these aspects and since this experience was good and empowering for me, I realized that this is how we should work with others..."*

P2 was educated in a home that challenged her towards management roles and aspirations. Her educational worldview was shaped through the accumulation of her experience at the school, and positive feedback she received from both the students and the school principal, who was a role model for her:

*P2: "At the end of my first year as a grade level coordinator, the six-year principal, who was an admired and special person, a senior and experienced person, held a yearly summary meeting with me in which he praised my work and noted that he saw in me tremendous development at an extraordinary pace in this year. He told me that my development in one year was equivalent to several years with other grade level coordinators in the past. I think that this was the first time I really understood how senior managers perceive me, and as I write these words and think about this conversation in retrospect, I also understand that in this conversation, the knowledge that one day I would be a school principal was affirmed, like a seed that was underground, and as soon as it was watered it managed to sprout. I did not know how long it would take for this sprout to grow into a real flower or in what roles I would serve until then, but I knew it was my destiny."*

In summary, P1 and P2, both chose their professional track in the education system as a free choice. Each of them knew when they chose this track that they were headed towards management. Each one of them attests to the fact that the choice was based in guidance from home, from the messages they received, and later on the reinforcement they received from their academic studies. None of them mentioned the professional development courses as intensifying their motivation to be a principal. The main reinforcement came from their studies for the bachelor's and master's degrees. Each saw herself as coping well with changes and as seeing change as a platform for something new, something that stimulated progress. The common denominator was therefore the choice of studies rather than the demand to take advanced courses that were imposed from above. The choice is authentic to the personal and professional identity, while the demand from top-down raises resistance.

#### *Chapter Three: Professional development towards career advancement*

P1 was interviewed for this research when she was already a junior high school principal in southern Israel. P1 describes herself as someone who has always known she would like to run a school:

*P1: "From day one I knew I wanted to manage, it was always aimed there. In the future I would like to advance and manage a six-year school (grades 7-12)."*



As far as P1 is concerned, what will prepare her for this, and enhance her sense of efficacy are the experience that she accumulates and her work alongside the six-year principal whom she views as her mentor:

*P1: "I'm learning about myself and I'm growing, most of my professional development is from my work as a principal and alongside the six-year principal, I feel very good about it. He has a very warm attitude towards me, and it fills an important void in me."*

P2 wrote her professional life story after finishing her master's degree in educational systems management. According to her, it was these studies that instilled in her the great sense of efficacy towards management and directed her to continue professional development in the direction of running a school.

*P2: "At the end of this period, I signed up for a master's degree in education systems management at Achva College, with the goal of taking on a management position in my school. I felt that I want and that I could fly as far as possible, like a butterfly."*

At the end of her master's degree, she was accepted to a school principalship training course, and during this period she undergoes a training process that will culminate in the management of a six-year school (grades 7-12).

*P2: "I am finishing this chapter full of anticipation and excitement for the next year to discover new chapters in my professional life, more avenues, and optimal self-realization!"*

P2 also notes that one of the decisive factors in shaping professional identity for further development was the school principal as an inspiration, and as a mentor who empowers the teacher:

*P2: "At the end of my first year as a grade level coordinator, the six-year principal, who was an admired and special person, a senior and experienced person, held a yearly summary meeting with me in which he praised my work and noted that he saw in me tremendous development at an extraordinary pace in this year. He told me that my development in one year was equivalent to several years with other grade level coordinators in the past. I think that this was the first time I really understood how senior managers perceive me."*

In summary, the third chapter which dealt with career development, emphasized the presence of a mentor, the principal of the school, as a person who lights the way forward, who encourages, praises and empowers. The power of a mentor lays in shaping professional identity and in influencing career development. What began in the first chapter in the parents' home as the father or mother figure who provided values and motivation, appears in the third chapter as a mentor – the one who continues the dominant figure from childhood.

## 5. Discussion

The life stories of the two educators point to an ongoing process of forming an identity from childhood, the parents' home, and later through higher academic studies. The study views identity creation as an ongoing process that includes interpretation and re-interpretation of the experiences of the individual (Kerby, 1991). Life stories suggest that there is a mutual influence between professional identity and self-identity. Each identity influences and is influenced by the other (Kozminsky & Kluer, 2011). The identity formation of the two educators whose stories have been shared here is a process by which both P1 and P2 strove to combine their various roles over the years into a coherent image of the self (Kozminsky & Kluer, 2011).

And at the same time, we can identify three anchors that shape professional identity: The parents' home, academic studies and an inspiring role model. The third anchor can be seen to some degree as a return to the parents' home, to the significant figure. The relationship between each of them with the school principal supports and enhances their perception of their professional identity. The process of identity formation takes place over time and through creating relationships with others (Cooper & Olson, 1996). Coldron and Smith (1999) claim that the professional identity is the way in which the teacher is perceived as a teacher not only in their own eyes but also in the eyes of others, and indeed, P2 and P1 claim that when they received feedback from colleagues or position holders, they understood how they were perceived by others and it encouraged them to strengthen and form their professional identity. And indeed, the professional identity encapsulates two components that share a reciprocal relationship (Tickle, 1999).

There is no doubt that the identity of the two teachers is dynamic, from childhood to the present stage in which

they are currently. Identity in general is dynamic and is in a constant process of formation and development. Identity is therefore not stable and may change according to the context and because it is multifaceted. This finding is supported by researchers who argue that the professional identity does not consist of one identity, but includes different sub-identities (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Both P1 and P2, who were already interviewed as school principals, raise throughout their life story their identity as a teacher and as a holder of other positions at the school.

#### *Free choice versus coercion from above*

In both stories it is possible to identify that when the teacher was given free choice for the path of academic studies for the purpose of professional development, the choice reflected taking responsibility for the outcomes, and a high level of internal motivation that affects the continuation of career development as well as the perception of professional identity. On the other hand, during the years of working as teachers, when they were forced into taking advanced courses as part of the professional development, it raised resistance, they did not

succeed in benefiting from them except for a minority of courses that provided tools for implementing their work as teachers.

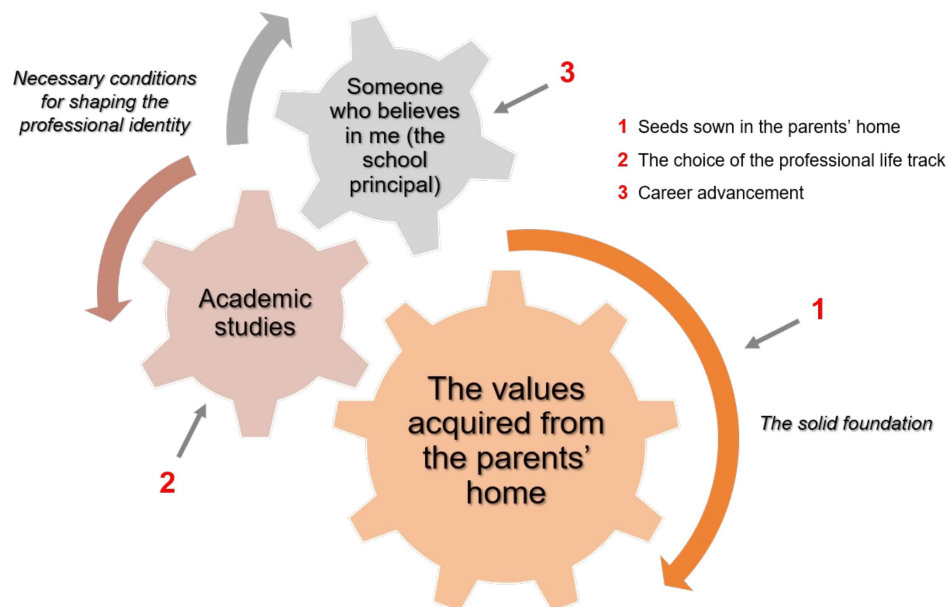
P2, on her choice of continuing the academic track:

*"At the end of this period, I signed up for a master's degree in education systems management at Achva College, with the goal of taking on a management position in my school. I felt that I want and that I could fly as far as possible, like a butterfly."*

P1, on her master's studies as shaping her educational worldview:

*"For example, in my master's degree, I learned about motivation theory, what causes internal motivation, if I once believed that everyone should be kept on a 'short leash'...this learning changed my worldview from one end to the other. I have learned that support, tolerance, etc., are not difficult words."*

The findings are summarized in the following model presented in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Professional identity, professional development, and career advancement

Figure 3 shows that:

1. The parents' home – provides values, inspirational characters, and creates the solid foundation of a sense of efficacy and perception of personal identity.
2. The choice of academic studies – as a free choice that is nurtured from the parents' home, enhances the perception of personal identity and hence the professional identity.

3. Towards the continuation of career development – at its center is an inspiring figure, a mentor, a school principal who enhances the sense of self-efficacy and professional identity.

The advanced courses that the teachers have undergone throughout their careers as educators and are part of the professional development have not been mentioned in their personal stories as shaping the perception of professional identity or as a driving force for further career development. There were advanced courses that contributed to them to a certain extent, but they did not help form a worldview, perception of professional identity, nor motivated the continuation of career development:

*P1: "I took a successful English advanced course that was related to meaningful learning, a useful course from which I learned a lot and implemented, and I bring it with me as a principal."*

*P2: "I participated in a number of professional advanced courses in the fields of biology and chemistry. These courses revealed interesting and innovative teaching methods, and I made sure to incorporate this new knowledge into lessons..."*

## 6. Conclusions

Teachers, educators, as well as other professionals, develop when they are in conditions conducive to learning and experiences of support and challenge. Kegan (1994) observed that "people grow best when they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary" (p. 42).

The writing of this article stems from a desire to understand the extent to which the teachers' professional development, the 'advanced courses', contribute to their perception of their professional identity and drives them to continue their career development. The basic assumptions of professional development of teachers relate to the fact that their professional development shapes and enhances the perception of professional identity.

From the stories of the two educators interviewed for this article, each of which is still in the process of career development with aspirations for continuing, it is evident that the main contributors to their perception of professional identity, as well as their sense of efficacy lie in each of the three chapters detailed in this article: the

parents' home and the values they absorbed in it, the choice of academic studies for the career track of teaching, and a meaningful and inspirational figure the believes in them and drives them towards continuing their career development. The place of advanced courses in their professional lives is localized - in places where the course provides tools and skills and financial advancement, they contribute to improving teaching, but they do not shape the professional identity or motivate the continuation of career development.

It seems that each chapter can be seen as standing in its own right, but from a bird's eye view it seems that these chapters are intertwined and connected, when the parent figure (P1) or the father figure (P2) reappear in another variation in the third chapter as an inspiring and motivating figure.

## Authors note:

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# **The attitude of the typical students towards the inclusion of their colleagues with special educational needs in mass education**

**Nicoleta Raluca Lupu**

# The attitude of the typical students towards the inclusion of their colleagues with special educational needs in mass education

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

Integration, attitude, special needs, mass education, typical student

The present article is a quantitative research which responds to the following question: what is the attitude of the typical students towards the inclusion of their colleagues with special needs. The attitudes of typical students were measured using a scale designed for this purpose. The results showed a positive attitude towards inclusion. The attitude was also influenced by factors such as gender. Through the paper "Educational Implications of Game in Students with Special Educational Needs from Inclusive Schools", a new way of inclusion was suggested, the inclusion through game addressed to the whole community. The key groups involved in the inclusion process and the proposed objectives for each target group are thus presented: **teaching staff**: 1) identifying teachers' attitudes towards the integration of the students with special needs in mass education, 2) changing the teachers' attitudes through games; **students with special educational needs**: 1) designing and testing some forms of support through game; **the parents of typical students**: 1) identifying the attitudes towards the integration of students with special needs in mass education; **typical students**: 1) identifying the attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in mass education

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Integration, Einstellung, besondere Bedürfnisse, Massenerziehung, typischer Student

Durch das Papier "Pädagogische Implikationen des Spiels bei Schülern mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf aus den inklusiven Schulen" wurde eine neue Art der Inklusion vorgeschlagen, die Inklusion durch Spiel für die gesamte Gemeinschaft. Die am Einbeziehungsprozess beteiligten Schlüsselgruppen und die vorgeschlagenen Ziele für jede Zielgruppe werden folgendermaßen dargestellt: **LEHRPERSONAL**: 1) Ermittlung der Einstellungen der Lehrer zur Integration von Schülern mit besonderen Bedürfnissen im Massenunterricht, 2) Änderung der Einstellungen der Lehrer durch Spiele; **STUDENTEN MIT BESONDEREN BILDUNGSBEDÜRFNISSEN**: 1) Entwerfen und Testen einiger Formen der Unterstützung durch das Spiel; **DIE ELTERN typischer Schüler**: 1) Ermittlung der Einstellungen zur Integration von Schülern mit besonderen Bedürfnissen in der Massenerziehung; **TYPISCHE STUDIERENDE**: 1) Ermittlung der Einstellung zur Integration von Schülern mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf in den Massenunterricht

Bei dem vorliegenden Artikel handelt es sich um eine quantitative Untersuchung, die folgende Frage beantwortet: Wie stehen die typischen Studierenden zur Einbeziehung von Kolleginnen und Kollegen mit besonderen Bedürfnissen? Die Einstellungen typischer Schüler wurden anhand einer für diesen Zweck entwickelten Skala gemessen. Die Ergebnisse zeigten eine positive Einstellung zur Inklusion. Die Einstellung wurde auch von Faktoren wie Geschlecht beeinflusst.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The attitude, general characterization

In the literature, there are several definitions of attitude, being an intensively studied field in social psychology. Iluț (2004) explains the interest manifested through its complexity and its multiple facets. The analysis of the definitions in the literature, Luthans (1985), Murray (1938), Grigoruță (2005), Bogardus (1931), Tapia (1991), Folsom (1931), Eiser, Van Den Plight (1988), Moscovici (1998), Droba (1933), Drăgan, Demetrescu (1996), Roșca (1943), Albig apud Chircev (1941), Bernard (1927), Mărgineanu (1938), Chircev (1941), Stoetzel

(1963), Boza (2010), Popescu-Neveanu (1978), Chelcea apud Chelcea, Iluț (2003), Vrabie (1975) allows outlining the following definition of the attitude: a sum of emotional reactions, provisions, more or less durable, stable, conscious or unconscious evaluations which entail a behaviour, an action regarding the object of attitude (situations, ideas, people, one's own person) and which appear on the background of one's own personality, own beliefs, values or under the influence of the social group which manifest themselves with a greater or lesser intensity, in a positive or negative manner, of rejection or acceptance.

According to Chircev (1941) the **characteristics of attitude** are divided into dominant characteristics and secondary characteristics. Boza (2010) reminds of the properties of attitude, raising the following question regarding the characteristics of attitudes: are attitudes temporary constructions or stable entities?

As for the **functions of attitudes**, Katz (1960) mentions four functions: adaptative function, cognitive function, expressive function, the defence function.

Regarding the **classification of attitudes**, Brown apud Chircev (1941) recalls seven types of attitudes: group attitudes, unconscious attitudes, objective and non-objective attitudes, complex and specific attitudes, organic and social attitudes.

The attitude consists of three components that interact with each other, having different inputs in forming the attitude. It is what Neculau (2004), Chelcea (2008) call "the three-dimensional model of attitude": the cognitive component (opinions, beliefs, convictions), the behavioural component (the manifested behaviour), the emotional component.

Eiser & Van Den Plight (1988) consider that measuring attitudes is difficult because they are not visible, being measured indirectly. Chircev (1941) lists the following **methods for measuring attitudes**: 1) The census method, 2) The method of the questionnaire, 3) Opinion tests, 4) Situation tests.

## 2. Forming attitudes

Chircev (1941) describes the individual factors and the social factors that determine the formation of attitudes.

Individual factors include age, gender, race, intelligence, temperament, the emotional stability and instability, the tendency towards domination or obedience. Social factors include family, school, church, economic conditions, background, social class, parents' profession, access to information in general, propaganda, the press. Attitudes formation is also explained by the following learning models: contiguous learning, learning through reinforcement, learning through observation. Contextual influences also contribute to the formation of an attitude. Boza (2010) mentions among them goals, mood, body condition, standards and ease of updating information.

## 2. Research Methodology

*The objective* of this research is to identify the attitude of the typical students towards the integration of students with special educational needs in mass education.

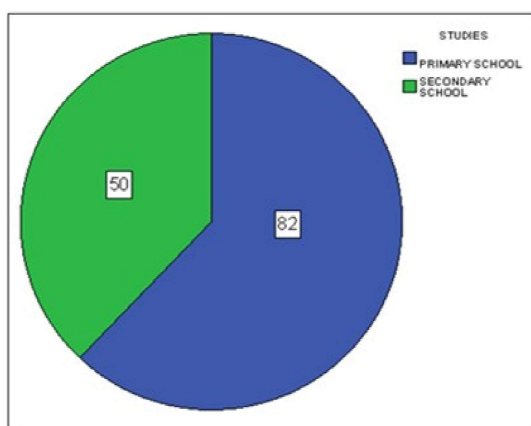
Starting from this objective, the following hypothesis are formulated:

*Hypothesis 1:* The students' attitude is influenced by the degree of proximity to the people with special needs.

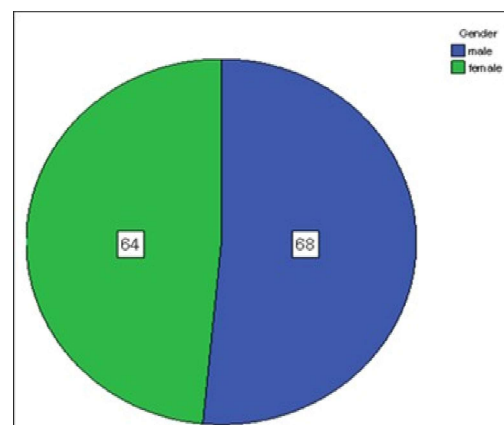
*Hypothesis 2:* There are significant correlations between attitude and the socio-professional characteristics such as gender and studies.

### 2.1. Participants

The students participating in the study come from the urban environment, primary and secondary schools. Out of the 132 students, 82 are enrolled in primary education and 50 students in secondary education (fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Distribution of participants by studies



**Figure 2.** Distribution of participants by gender

## 2.2. Instruments

The attitudes of the typical students were measured using a scale designed for this purpose. The scale is made up of 25 items distributed in three sub-scales, of which 11 are items with reverse scoring: Subscale I- General attitude towards the people with special needs (3 items), Subscale II- Attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in their own school (9 items), Subscale III - Attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs into their own class (13 items). The scale has an internal consistency coefficient of .76. The first subscale has an Alpha coefficient of .64, the second a coefficient of .60, and the third subclass a coefficient of .63. There are strong correlations between the scale and its subscales at a  $p < .01$ . The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the distribution of the variables involved and the normal distribution, to a  $p > .05$  in the case of the variables "the attitude towards the total integration" and "the attitude towards the integration in the class".

The statistical processing of data will be achieved by applying the SPSS computerized program.

## Procedure

The following procedure was observed in order to achieve the objective:

- Informing the school headmasters about the conduct of this research and obtaining the agreement
- Informing the teachers and the parents of the students and obtaining the participation agreement
- Applying the instruments
- Data input and presentation of the results
- Presentation of the final conclusions

## 3. Results

### Hypothesis I

*The students' attitude is influenced by the degree of proximity to the people with special needs.*

The "attitude" variable has three dimensions: the attitude towards the integration of the people with disabilities in society and in mass education, the attitude towards the integration of the students with special educational needs in their own school, the attitude towards the integration of the students with special educational needs in their own class.

It can be noticed (fig.3) that the environments obtained by the students participating in the three subscales increase from an average of 13.03 regarding the general attitude to an average of 49.66 regarding the specific attitude towards the integration of the students with special educational needs in their own class. So, the degree of proximity affects the attitude positively.

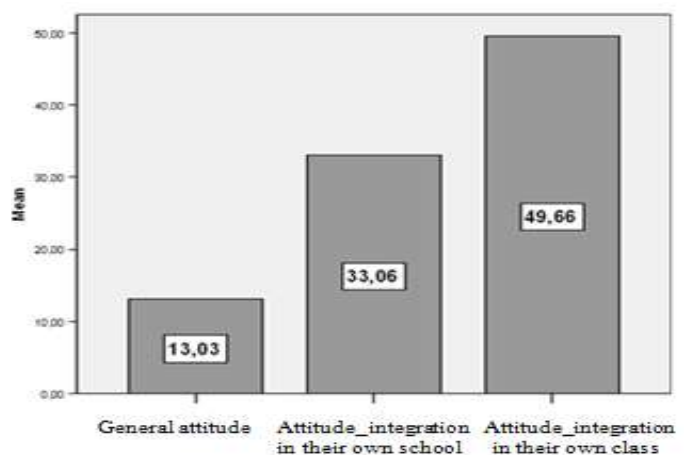
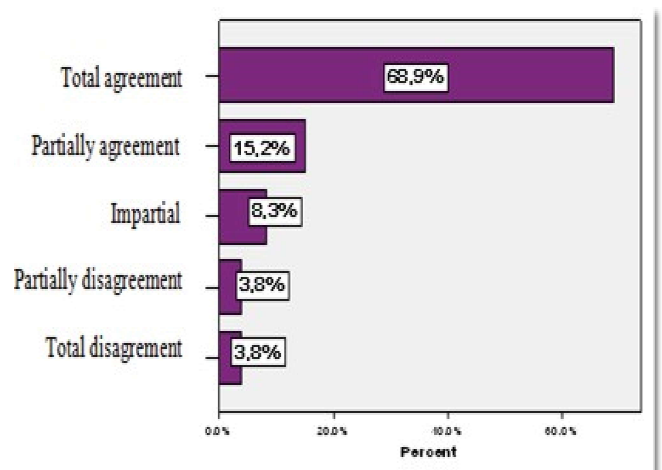


Figure 3. Distribution of participants by studies

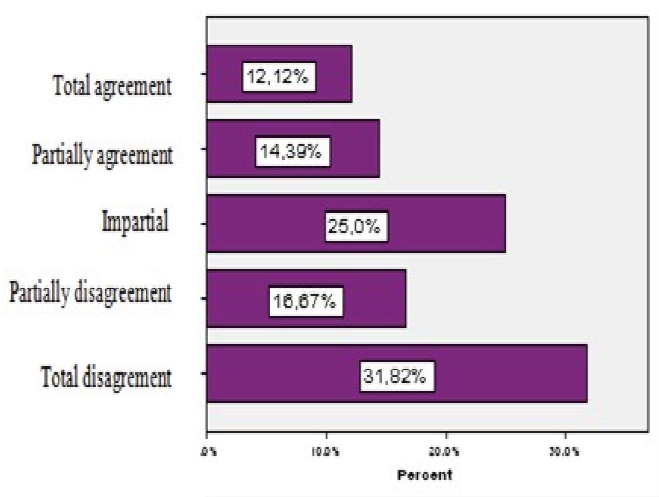


For a better analysis of the results, the students' answers to the key questions in the questionnaire are presented through the census method.

Most of the questioned students totally (68.9%) and partially agree (15.2%) that disabled people have the right to go to school (fig. 4)

**Figure 4.** *The students' answers regarding the right to education of persons with special needs*

In terms of schooling, only 12.12% of students believe that the place of children with special educational needs is in the special school (fig. 5).



**Figure 5.** *The students' answers regarding the form of schooling of students with special needs*

Although most of the questioned students consider that the place of children with special educational needs is not in the special school, the severity of the disability influences the attitude towards integration, 29.55% and 15.15% of the students totally and partially agreeing that the students with severe deficiencies should not attend a regular school.

In contrast, the students with minor disabilities are accepted in inclusive schools, 27.27% and 28.03% of students being totally and partially in favour of their integration.

Regarding the image of the school and of their own class, 53.8% of the students questioned consider that the image of the school is affected by the presence of colleagues

with special educational needs because they do not have good results and can give cause for ridicule.

Also, 55.3% of students totally agree that students with special needs lower the level of the class and 37.9% think that these colleagues disturb the activity and monopolize the teacher's attention to the detriment of the other children.

It is interesting to note that although most of the questioned students consider that the integration of peers with special needs affects the image of the school and the class, 73.5% fully agree that the school should be adapted to the needs of these students.

In addition, students show tolerance towards their disabled colleagues and although they disturb and monopolize the teacher's attention, 63.6% think that this category of students should be understood by the teachers in terms of evaluation.

Moreover, 47% of students think they need to help their colleagues with special needs to learn.

Regarding social integration, 76.5% of the surveyed students are totally in agreement with the statement "Students with special educational needs can have friends" and 54.5% accept the integration of their peers with special needs in the normal classes in order to make friends, although 41.7% think that these students will not learn anything. If for peers with special needs, an advantage of the integration in mass education is the formation of new friendships, for the typical students, an advantage could be the development of empathy.

A total of 30.3% of the questioned students are undecided if the presence of their colleagues with special educational needs could make them better.

## Hypothesis 2

*There are significant correlations between attitude and the socio-professional characteristics such as gender and studies.*

The results (table no.1) show statistically significant correlations between the attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in school and class ( $r = 0.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the participants' gender. Regarding the relationship between attitude and studies (primary and secondary), a statistically significant correlation is noted between the studies and the attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in class ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Gender and studies do not influence the general attitude towards the integration of people with special educational needs into society.

**Table 1.** Correlations between student attitudes and socio-professional characteristics

		Gender	Studies
<b>General attitude</b>	Pearson	,06	-,08
	Sig.	,48	,36
	N	132	132
<b>Attitude_school</b>	Pearson	,19	-,15
	Sig.	,02 $p < .05$	,08
	N	132	132
<b>Attitude_Class</b>	Pearson	,19	-,27
	Sig.	,02 $p < .05$	,00 $p < .01$
	N	132	132

The T test for independent samples (tab. 2) shows statistically significant differences between boys and girls as regards the attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in their own school ( $t = 2.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and class ( $t = 2.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Girls are more tolerant than boys in accepting colleagues with special needs in their own school and class. Regarding the general attitude towards the integration of the people with disabilities in society, there are no significant differences.

**Table 2.** Differences between boys and girls as regards the attitude towards the integration of students with special educational needs in their own school and class

Var.	Gr.	N	Means	t	p
<b>Attitude_school</b>	M	68	31,97	2,20	.02, $p < .05$
	F	64	34,21		
<b>Attitude_class</b>	M	68	48,27	2,26	.02, $p < .05$
	F	64	51,12		

## Conclusion

The degree of proximity to this category of students influenced the attitude positively. The closer they approached, the more the students participating showed a greater degree of tolerance and acceptance. The attitude of the community was also influenced by factors such as the male students and the female students.

The results obtained are supported by other studies from the specialized literature (Adet, Pomohaci, 2016, Cheianu, 2011, Malcoci et al, 2015, Horga, 2009), the attitude of typical students towards their colleagues with special needs being influenced by certain factors such as school success, the degree and type of the deficiency, the social image.

## Contributions

### Application value

The research results can be used at the institutional level in the activity of the school psychologists in mass education in combating discrimination and the formation of an inclusive policy.

## Authors note:

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# **The Impact of Training Programs on Professional Learning and Development (PLD).**

## **A study for Romania**

**Horațiu Catalano, Ion Albulescu, Cristian Stan**

# The Impact of Training Programs on Professional Learning and Development (PLD). A study for Romania

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

Professional Learning and Development (PLD), continuous training, training program, teachers' competencies

Training programs focused on professional learning and development are meant to provide teachers with opportunities to develop their professional competencies for teaching in specific domains. These programs represent an important branch of the educational system in Romania. In the study that we have initiated we have tested and validated the hypothesis that identifying professional training needs and offering specific courses in order to develop the professional competencies represents a key condition for teachers' effectiveness in terms of their professional learning and development. The methods and instruments for educational research that we used in the present study are both qualitative and quantitative, based on questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group interviews. The reason why we opted for the mixed methods is because quantitative research throughout questionnaires does not always allow participants to explain their choices or the meaning of the questions.

The quantitative survey was carried out on a non-probabilistic sample (770 teachers) and the focus groups were conducted with groups of 10 randomly selected respondents from the training program. All the teachers participating in our study are from pre-university education and have participated in continuing education programs accredited by the Department of Educational Sciences of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselwort:

Professionelles Lernen und Entwicklung, Kontinuierliches Training, Trainingsprogramm, Lehrerkompetenzen

Die verschiedenen maßgeschneiderten Fortbildungsangeboten geben Lehrer die Möglichkeit sich fort und weiterzubilden in den Unterrichtsfächer für die sie sich spezialisiert haben und Sie selbst unterrichten.

Diese Bildungsprogrammen sind einen wichtigen Teil des rumänischen Bildungssystems. In meinem Studium, habe ich die folgende Hypothese getestet und auch validiert: die Bedarfsermittlung sowie die zur Verfügung gestellten Fort- und Weiterbildungsangebote, die unterstützend für die Entwicklung der beruflichen und fachlichen Kompetenzen fungieren sollen, gelten als eine sehr wichtige Voraussetzung, um die angezielte Qualität der Bildung in Bezug auf das Lernen und berufliche Entwicklung, zu gewährleisten.

Die Methoden und Werkzeuge, die ich in der Forschung verwendet habe, sind sowohl qualitative als auch quantitative und basieren auf einer Mehrzahl von Fragebögen, Einzelinterviews und Fokusgruppen.

Ich habe mich für diese Art von Verfahren entschieden, da es mittels diesen standardisierten Fragebögen, die Probanden nicht die Möglichkeit hatten, bestimmte Entscheidungen oder Meinungen, zu erklären.

Die quantitative Studie wurde an einer nicht-probabilistische Stichprobe von 770 Lehrern durchgeführt und die Fokusgruppen wurden mit 10 Befragten durchgeführt, die zufällig von den Teilnehmern an der Ausbildung ausgewählt wurden.

Alle partizipierende Lehrer, waren Teil der Bachelor-Ausbildung in Rumänien und sie haben an Trainingsprogramme teilgenommen, die von der Abteilung Erziehungswissenschaften der Fakultät für Psychologie und Erziehungswissenschaften akkreditiert wurden.

## 1. Introduction

Identifying training needs and offering follow-up courses is a key condition for recording the success of a lifelong learning program. Educational requirements imply the training and development of professional competencies appropriate to the teaching profession standards. Thus, the need to develop the level of training and qualification/retraining, self-education, self-development and maximization of the skills and the

individual intellectual potential is a desirable dimension of educators, educated and trainers alike. This study investigates both the need for in-service teacher education from the pre-university environment and the value indicators of the training programs needed to reach the quality standards in education. Achieving professional competencies consistent with current psycho-pedagogical and social exigencies is desirable given the relationship of interdependence between the quality of education and the quality of the teaching staff, hence the need to ensure

continuous training on the basis of rigorous standards correlated with international standards.

When we designed this program, we focused on the characteristics of the beneficiaries, i.e. on the need to develop specific content management and communication in educational institutions. We have left from the results of studies that have investigated adult training, according to which trainers teach in a declarative way, and learners must transform declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, possibly only if they have procedural knowledge, that is, they are capable of carrying out certain tasks and acting accordingly (Stolovitch, Keeps & Rosenberg, 2017).

In developing the training program, we have ensured that our beneficiaries have the cognitive and motivational framework in place, so that we have created relevant course support, we have provided learning activities based on their experience, we have organized moments that offer the opportunity for collaborative learning and situations in which I suggested the advantages of participating in programs that unconditionally support their professional development.

## **2. The National and European Context of Professional Learning and Development (PLD)**

In Romania's educational system, continuous training is achieved through the acquisition of didactic degrees, but also through participation in various programs of continuous training. Regarding continuous training, the Law on National Education in Romania (LEN, 2011) states that it includes professional development and career development and is based on progress in the field of education and training. Consequently, the management of each educational unit designates a person responsible for the continuous improvement / training of teachers, who will manage the following coordinates: information, organization, counseling - consulting, training, monitoring and appraisal.

Continuous training and professional development programs, initiated and carried out by universities or various associations and organizations, are a real benefit in professional development. This is represented by the educational offer of a provider, which aims at the formation and development of the professional competences of the didactic and auxiliary teaching staff, as well as of the leadership, guidance and control personnel in the pre-university education, according to the

professional standards for didactic profession, standards quality and professional skills according to art. 2, par. (2) of OMECTS no. 5564/2011.

Continuous training of teaching, leadership, mentoring and control staff and professional retraining are based on professional standards for teaching, quality standards and professional skills.

Although the complexity of the teaching profession requires a lifelong learning perspective in order to adapt to rapid change and evolving constraints or needs, international studies on teachers and PLD have shown that up to now vocational training is considered a professional duty in approximately half of all European states, but it is practically optional in many of them. Depending on the degree of centralization / decentralization in national education systems, PLD planning and organization is the responsibility of schools or local authorities in a number of countries (including the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland, and most of the Nordic and East European countries).

An organized plan of supportive measures for new teachers in their early years of career - the most demanding and decisive stage in teacher development - is only foreseen in a small group of EU countries, of which the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Lithuania seem to have a wide range of support activities (Caena, 2011).

In 2013, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, Eurydice and Policy Support) published the results of a study on key data on teachers and school leaders in Europe. According to this study, Professional Learning and Development has gained considerable importance in recent years, being now considered a professional duty in 28 education systems. Usually, this obligation is mentioned in legislation or regulations in some countries and is stipulated in the employment contracts of teachers or in collective agreements. Thus, in six countries, the minimum number of hours each teacher is obliged to dedicate to PLD courses (Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Finland) is stipulated.

In the Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (Scotland), a minimum number of hours dedicated to professional development is considered as a teacher's right. In Denmark, Ireland, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, the involvement of teachers in professional development is

not expressed in terms of professional duty. However, in France and Poland, development is clearly linked to career progression. In all other education systems, even if development is not explicitly required for promotion, this is an important advantage.

Professional development and progress in teaching is also related to the motivation of the teaching staff. Thus, in 18 European education systems, participation in PLD is clearly linked to promotion to a higher professional level that entails wage increases. However, professional development is rarely the only condition for advancement, generally being an important aspect in evaluating the performance of teachers.

Even if there are concerns about PLD at European level, many studies being developed, it is difficult to identify their pragmatic effects. In some situations, the professionalism of the teaching profession is reformed in a disparate way in the sense that either reforming the initial training or the component of the continuous professional development, or the period of the professional traineeship, results in a lack of continuity and coordination between the three parts of the professionalization (Catalano, 2018).

PLD is essential to ensure that teachers keep up with the changes in education, familiarize themselves with the new teaching methods in the areas of content they teach, learn the latest digital teaching methods and adapt to the needs of new generations students. However, despite the national recognition of the importance of PLD for teachers, report after report describes that PLD is inadequate (Lawless, Pellegrino, 2007).

Economic and social changes penetrate quickly and inevitably in every social field, including education (Hargreaves, 2000; Webb et al., 2004). Thus, teachers who want to cope with a wide range of tasks and requirements in such a context are confronted with the need to define and redefine their professionalism and professional development (Esteve, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000). Thus, teachers have to develop professionally throughout their careers, due to constant changes in educational policies, but also due to innovations in the field of education (Knight, 2002).

This pathway is called lifelong learning or continuing professional development (PLD) and is considered a key factor for improving the quality of teachers, schools, and the role teachers have on pupil learning (Day & al., 2007).

The term PLD is used to describe all the activities in which teachers engage in a career and improve their didactic activity (Day & Sachs, 2004). PLD activities can include professional development meetings, internal and external courses and conferences, coaching and mentoring activities, participation in reflexive discussions and research-action (Sabah, Fayez, Alshamrani, Mansour, 2013).

Vocational training is a process by which people are helped to learn a skill (manual or intellectual) or a method, and the factors that influence the quantity and quality of training activities are:

- Amplitude of changes in the external environment;
- Internal changes;
- Existence of appropriate skills and qualifications in the workforce;
- The degree of adaptability of the workforce;
- The extent to which the organization supports the idea of internal career development, etc. (Florea, 2014, p. 36-38).

Guskey (2002), Ifanti & Fotopoulou (2011) argue that high quality professional development is a central component in almost all modern strategies to improve education. Policy makers increasingly recognize that schools cannot be better than teachers and administrators working within them.

Eraut (1994) states that it is not only important to acquire a type of professional knowledge but the context in which it is acquired and used later to help us understand the process of acquiring them. Analyzing the means by which the PLD is organized and structured, we can highlight not only the motivation behind this process but also the nature of the professional knowledge and professionalism itself.

The most common PLD models are consistent with the core standards of the teaching function and the competencies associated with nationally agreed standards that unfortunately maintain a high level of centralized control and maintain a limitation of innovation and creativity in teaching. Standardization limits proactive action in identifying and meeting their own PLD needs (Kennedy, 2005).

Professionalization involves the legitimization of the teaching profession among socio-human activities and professions by recognizing the role of teachers in

promoting individual, social and European values and by shaping a unitary model of the teaching profession based on professional standards, differentiated according to age at department and specialization (Catalano, 2015, 2016).

In terms of lifelong learning programs, John Hattie, a researcher in the field of visible learning, believes that they 'need to deal less with the promotion of a variety of teaching strategies and more with how the beginner teachers can assess the impact of their teaching on students' (2014, p. 179). The quality of the educational process is influenced by the construction of the professional identity of the future professor, by the way he perceives and realizes the responsibilities claimed by the teaching profession.

Ken Robinson, the well-known British expert on education and teaching, gives us a coherent view of the teaching career: "The extraordinary teachers are the heart of the extraordinary schools. Through their different roles, they can accomplish three essential goals for students:

- Inspiration: They inspire students with their own passion for their disciplines and to achieve the highest level in their fields.
- Trust: They help students to assimilate the skills and knowledge they need to become independent learners, with confidence and who can continue to develop their level of understanding and expertise.
- Creativity: They allow their pupils to experiment, explore, ask questions and develop their skills and provisions of original thinking. These benefits should be derived from the whole process of training for all the subjects in the program" (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 188).

Professional Learning and Development refers to the training activities carried out in formal and non-formal environments, distinct in their essence, which can be ordered on an axis, depending on the distance from the requirement to solve the nonconformities and the consequences of the results of the evaluation and self-evaluation processes.

A good PLD strategy should start from teacher evaluation. This would give usefulness to the results of the evaluation, which would reveal the possible discrepancies between the requirements of the evaluation standards and the level of the teachers' performance. Current PLD strategies of nationally-designed teachers need functional quality management systems at school level for effective

program implementation. We appreciate the effort made by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP), a public institution of central interest, in the development of management and quality assurance systems in education, through the European strategic projects in which this institution is engaged.

Professional development implies setting goals centered on self-knowledge, self-assessment and the development of career planning skills, and career progression involves monitoring their degree of accomplishment. However, research confirms, based on teachers' own statements, that there is insufficient awareness of the need for PLD, as this does not guarantee a change in the practices teachers adopt in classroom work (Harland & Kinder, 1997).

### 3. Methodology and study results

In the course of the study we used a mixed research methodology, on the one hand a questionnaire survey, as a quantitative method, cross-centered with the focus group method, as a qualitative method. The rationale for which we have used both research approaches has circumscribed the testing and validation of the hypothesis that *provision of continuous training programs whose content has been selected following the identification of real needs of trainers and value-specific indicators of professional development contributes significantly to the formation of professional competencies and strengthening the professional status of teachers.*

The present study was administered to a sample of 770 (N = 770) respondents for the quantitative methodological approach and 20 groups of 10 teachers, selected on the basis of their own options for participation in the qualitative investigation conducted by the focus group method and supervised by us.

It should be noted that the sample was made up of the teachers who participated and finalized the continuous training programs provided by the Department of Educational Sciences and the questionnaires were administered after the appraisal of the students. Also, the focus group meetings were organized during the training program and pre-validated the application of the questionnaire, as the focus group structure was circumscribed to the questions and the research hypothesis.



In the design and deployment of training programs, I have used innovative ways of teaching, as well as various opportunities to interact with colleagues and trainers. The design decision was framed by teacher-centered professional development ideas that allow teachers to access resources and tools to design their own learning experiences.

In a similar study, only that it targeted the online PLD component, Farooq, Schank, Harris, Fusco and Schlager (2007) used a methodology to immediately identify the perceived value of the components and design content of the programs, as well as evaluate learner satisfaction.

Vavasseur and MacGregor (2008) have expanded the idea of technical design of training programs using mixed methods in which they blended content-oriented online learning with face-to-face training. Among the advantages that have been learned are the importance of face-to-face training, teachers' collaboration in team building, more concrete content in traditional training than online training.

The main categories of professional development goals that emerged from the review of the literature were taken into account by us both in building the questionnaire and structuring the interview guide we used in the focus group method.

The questionnaires we have applied are likely to fit into statistically significant samples, allowing a rapid interpretation of the results, which can be administered to numerous groups, as was the case, and the interviewer's perceptions of anonymity were high. There is also a relatively high validity of the calculation of the results for the well-built questionnaires, the close-ended being able to provide the exact information desired by the researcher (data analysis is easier for closed items).

Organizing and conducting focus group meetings on the basis of the interview guide whose variables we recall in this study provided us with detailed information, respondents using their own words about the real perception of lifelong learning: attitudes towards their own professional status, satisfaction with the professional environment, perception of their own professional skills, attitudes towards continuous training, their own

conception of continuous training, the frequency of access to training courses, the share of reasons for non-participation in continuous training, the share of the courses access to training, the share of expectations for future training areas, the share of the need to develop professional skills, the perception of the expected characteristics of continuous training courses, the perception of the valency of continuing training.

We consider that the sample of subjects is valid given that the participants in the training programs offered by us have been subject to the approval of the Board of Governors of the schools at the proposal of the responsible person in charge of the continuous training in each school. Thus, their selection was based on professional arguments based on the real need for continuous training.

In addition to the results obtained from the application of the questionnaire (the processing and interpretation of the data obtained after its application was made through the SPSS program one of the most used in the statistical analysis of the data), the focus group was trying to capture not only the opinions of those surveyed, but also their motivations, attitudes and expectations towards the need for PLD.

In the first part of the questionnaire we were concerned with the basic variables, namely: didactic function and didactic experience. In the second part of the questionnaire, we introduced 8 multiple choice items through which we wanted to identify teachers' perceptions of PLD.

Table no. 1 provides details about the participants' job positions and their seniority in education which, according to the table below, indicates a standard deviation of 10.68 and an average of 17.83 years old which allows us to affirm that this statistical population renders enough homogeneity.

We notice that teachers who are in primary didactic positions represent the majority, those who teach various subjects in secondary school and high school have a share of about 30% and those in pre-school education about 20%. Although this dispersion is in favor of the teaching staff in primary education, we do not consider that research results can be prejudiced in any way.

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents on teaching and teaching experience

	Frequency	Percent
Teacher in secondary school and high school	230	29.87
Primary school teacher	380	49.35
Teacher of pre-school education	160	20.78
Total	770	100.00
<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
770	1 year	38 years
	<b>Average</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
	17.83 years	10.8

Maxwell (1996) is of the opinion that research methodology should have a coherent design in which research components are compatible and relate to research questions. In elaborating the research questionnaire and methodology we took into account the following points:

- clear research questions;
- rigorous data collection methods, quantitative and qualitative, that have been linked to research questions;
- analyzes based on research questions;
- findings resulting from the analysis of research questions (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit & McCloskey, 2009).

We have identified in the literature a number of articles that have analyzed the impact of training programs on the PLD, so we have formed an updated picture of the empirical research on PLD, we have discussed some of the

most recent studies that meet and also our research criteria.

We have evaluated these research studies and found that the research questions addressed the issues that we will also describe below. It is true that these studies are not exhaustive, but they are the best steps to differentiate between the different types of studies we have reviewed in order to form the most appropriate image for our analysis.

We present the research questions that have been formulated, the results that have been obtained and a comparison, where this is appropriate, with the results identified in the studies analyzed by us in the literature. We also need to specify that PLD specific to Romania is not the same in the other states around the world, so some interpretations of the results obtained could be difficult to generalize.

**Table 2.** Need for training domains

	Frequency	Percent
Courses offered by the Teaching Staff House (CCD)	320	41.56
Courses offered by the Department for Teacher Training (DPPD) at universities	210	27.27
Courses conducted through Sectoral Operational Programs. Human Resources Development (POS DRU), offered by different institutions	170	22.08
Courses offered by NGOs	70	9.09
Total	770	100.00

Respondents' responses to the typology of in-service training providers are outlined in table no. 2 and we notice that the highest attractiveness is related to the continuous training programs offered by the Teaching Staff House (41, 56%), the second place with a 27,27%, the

Departments of Teaching Staff Training at the Universities, while the courses conducted through POS DRU occupy the third position according to the respondents' preferences. The argument for which most respondents chose to follow the training programs provided by the CCD is related to the obvious visibility

that this institution has, being subordinated to the school inspectorates and in direct connection with school managers in the public educational system.

A series of studies (Goodall et al., 2005, Harris et al., 2006), which tackled the competencies of the trainers and the experience of the PLD provider, concluded that as concerns their choices, teachers have a critical role in

choosing an offer that is directly linked to the performance of the PLD provider. The provider of a PLD program needs to consider a number of key factors, including teacher motivation, wishes and expectations (Sabah, Fayez, Alshamrani, Mansour, 2013). Table no. 3 below presents teachers' options for different types of areas of interest that reflect their need for training.

**Table 3.** *Need for training domains*

	Frequency	Percent
Teaching practice specialty	90	11.69
Specialty subject matters- specific to the post / function held	220	28.57
Elements of Group / Class Management	80	10.39
Computerized / digital systems	150	19.48
Innovative elements in teaching-learning-appraisal approaches	230	29.87
Total	770	100.00

As regards the specific training needs, respondents perceive that the elements that contribute to the innovation of the didactic process, as well as those related to the specific teaching domain are of paramount importance. Although the digital era is 'overwhelming' the daily

activity, digital needs are third in attractiveness, and knowledge of specialty didactics and classroom management elements are perceived as necessary but not prioritized.

**Table 4.** *Types of training activities*

	Frequency	Percent
Face-to-face training	470	61.04
On-line training	90	11.69
Blended-learning training	210	27.27
Total	770	100.00



Table number 4 indicates the willingness of the teachers to take part in face-to-face training programs, even if the digital era with its new technologies has infused greatly the didactic process. However, 27.27% of respondents adhere to the organization of blended-learning training programs, seen as a mix between traditional and innovative organization. Researchers argue that PLD courses that call for technology use play a major role in helping teachers to learn better about how to integrate it into future practice by facilitating the learning process (Collier, Weinburgh & Rivera, 2004; Truesdell, & Birch, 2013).

Otero, V., Peressini, D., Meymaris, KA, Ford, P., Garvin, T., Harlow, D., Mears, C. (2005) have observed a significant change not only in individual practices but also in understanding how technology can be used for didactic purposes. Similarly, Hooper and Riber (1995) have

proposed a model for the adoption of new technologies that consists of specific phases: familiarization, use, integration, reorientation and evolution. In the familiarization phase, the teacher simply learns to use technology. In the use phase, the teacher uses technology in the classroom, but has little understanding or knowledge about technology as a pedagogic and learning

tool. During the integration phase, technology becomes an integral part of the course in terms of delivery, learning, management or other aspect of the class. In the reorientation phase, the teacher uses technology as a tool to facilitate reconsideration of the purpose and function of the class. Finally, teachers entering the evolution phase are able to continuously modify the structure and pedagogy of the class to include learning theories, technologies and lessons learned from experience.

**Table 5.** *Ways of presenting the courses' content*

	Frequency	Percent
Detailed	60	7.79
Synthesized, highlighting concepts / key elements / events	280	36.36
Particularly, by case studies	190	24.68
Evoking pragmatic experiences and solutions	240	31.17
Total	770	100.00

In order to improve our teaching experiences as trainers, we wanted to probe the learners' opinion about how to submit the curriculum specific to the training program. As can be seen in table no. 5 the most preferred way is to summarize the information by highlighting the

key concepts, followed by the exploration of experiential learning and pragmatic solutions as an option while the particularisation of the contents and the discussion of case studies represented the third option of the respondents

**Table 6.** *Respondents' options regarding the most effective way to run PLD courses*

	Frequency	Percent
Interactive	450	58.44
Lecture type	40	5.19
Through demonstrations and exercises	280	36.36

Total	770	100.00
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In table number 6 are listed the respondents' options regarding the most agreed modalities for the transmission of the content specific to training programs. The most agreeable way is the interactive one with a score of 58.44%, and demonstration and implementation of applied exercises is perceived as the most effective strategy by

36.36% of the participants in our research. Only 4 of the 770 respondents chose the lecture as the main method, which suggests that traditionalist approaches have lost their meaning compared to innovative and interactive approaches.

**Table 7.** Respondent's' opinion regarding the right way for the assessment method they prefer for training courses

	Frequency	Percent
Portfolio evaluation	510	66.23
Oral evaluation - oral questionnaire	50	6.49
Oral evaluation - presentation of completed themes	90	11.69
Interactive debate based on a material (project) drawn up by student groups	120	15.58
Total	770	100.00

Evaluation seen as a basic component of in-service teacher education programs is often the subject of discussions as regards the effectiveness of these forms of continuous training. Thus, we have inserted in the questionnaire included in the present investigation an item where we asked the respondents to express their option for the most efficient evaluation method for the courses they had during the continuous training program. Table no. 7 indicates that the most preferred method, with a

significant percentage of 66.23%, i.e. 51 respondents out of the 770, was portfolio evaluation. The method of interactive discussion based on a project won't be neglected in our academic work, as 15.58% of the respondents opted for such an alternative in the final assessment of lifelong learning programs. The methods of oral evaluation constructed as oral questionnaires or presentations were less well accepted.

**Table number 8.** Orientation of the course content

	Frequency	Percent
Practical aspects	380	49.35
Identifying issues and solutions	190	24.68
Reflections and personal investigations	10	1.30
Putting theory into relationship with practical experience	190	24.68
Total	770	100.00

In order to improve our work in the field of continuous training we asked the teachers participating in the investigation to appreciate which ways would suit their training needs. Table no. 8 indicates that a priority is to transfer the practical experiences specific to the didactic activities, then, an equal focus has been placed on the identification of problems and solutions, as well as the relationship between theory and practical reflections.

What is interesting for us is that, although we wanted to challenge respondents with a variable aiming at triggering a metacognitive behavior related to triggering personal reflections and introspections, only one respondent agreed with this way of focusing on teaching the curriculum of the training program.

In order to acquire cross-curricular skills, training courses would help you if:

**Table number 9.** Respondents' opinion versus acquiring cross-curricular skills

	Frequency	Percent
Focus on cooperative learning	410	53.25
Highlight self-learning strategies and behavioral self-regulation	160	20.78
Present operating models with scientific content (synthesis-generalization, analysis-comparison, etc.)	200	25.97
Total	770	100.00

Starting from the premise that PLD ensures the updating, development and extension of the transversal competences of the teaching staff, we have put in the questionnaire an item asking the respondents to express their choice. We can see in table no. 9 that 53.25% of the respondents were interested in adopting training strategies

through co-operation, an attitude that is specific to adult education. Operating with scientific content was attractive for 25.97% of the sample surveyed, and only 20.78% of the respondents agreed to self-learning strategies and behavioral self-regulation in order to build transversal competencies through training programs.

To develop expertise in a field, learners should benefit from learning experiences that enhance their ability to recognize information models that are meaningful to solve problems in this area (Bransford et al., 1999). This will not be possible if learning tasks are simplified or detached from actual teaching contexts.

In the course of the diagnosis conducted, besides the questionnaire survey method, we also used a focus group as a qualitative method. Through this method, we obtained fewer concrete data, but it was more useful in terms of sincerity and objectivity. Through this method, we also had the opportunity to observe participants' non-verbal behavior, gestures, emotions, all of which provided us with additional information that supported verbal responses.

In this study, the qualitative intervention was guided by a series of variables that underpin the elaboration of the focus group guide. These were the following:

- Teachers' expectations for in-service training programs as indicators: the quality of the program, the quality of available human and material resources, access to training programs, duration of courses, etc.;
- Suggestions for improving the curriculum of the program, as well as indicating efficient ways of methodological approach (the theory-practice relationship within the training programs, the usefulness and applicability of acquired knowledge and skills);
- Appreciation of strategies, methodologies for evaluation and accreditation of training programs;
- The ways of promoting the training offer;
- The usefulness of in-service training programs in didactic activity;
- Difficulties encountered in organizing and conducting training programs (lack of motivation, lack of budgets for human resource training, etc.);
- Proposals for solutions and recommendations on improving training programs.

Based on the variables listed above, we explored the responses of the respondents presented openly in the focus group. Thus, we have found that the basis of the decision regarding the options they take regarding the continuous professional training consist in a series of arguments that mention:

- acquiring new professional, scientific and transversal skills;

- increasing personal motivation for participation in training;
- improving the efficiency of teaching activity;
- enhancement of school time management;
- the motivation for continuing vocational training is rather extrinsic than intrinsic;
- discovery of new methodologies with an interactive and innovative character.

When we examined the expectations, the agreement or the disagreement with the PLD, based on the grid variables, the views showed that, as a whole, older teachers were more likely to have a negative view of PLD. Data on individual affirmations showed that most teachers believe that the school's PLD needs must be ahead of their individual needs. The results obtained by us have also been validated in other investigative approaches to the perception of teachers towards PLD (Hustler, Mc Namara, Jarvis, London, Campbell & Howson, 2003).

The effectiveness of PLD experiences can therefore, to a large extent, be a consequence of the learning context, be it the culture of a PLD course, or the educational culture of the school and the professional reference group. Values, attitudes, interactive practices in the context of learning can have a great influence on the performance of the teacher, as well as on professional culture (Dadds, 1997).

#### 4. Study boundaries

Opinion questions comprise aspects that highlight the perception of each individual taking part in the investigation, given by their inner universe, that is why sometimes these items imply difficulties in the accuracy of the answers given, the consistency between real views and those expressed by good or bad true answers or false answers.

Another limitation can be attributed to the limited sample of teachers compared to the large number of pre-university education teachers in Romania.

As part of the focus group approach, we have been unable to ensure confidentiality, and this may induce compliance or self-censorship in participants' responses. Usually respondents show a desire to be socially accepted and feel the need to be perceived as 'in the world', classical experiments show that sometimes it is enough for someone to have only one ally to talk about experiences or

opinions contrary to those already expressed (Carey & Smith, 1994).

Another limit of our study consists in the time needed for evaluating PLD programs. Currently, most of the data is collected immediately after the end of a program or even during the course of the program, and teachers actually apply what they learn in professional development after a month or several months in the teaching process, so that the impact of the acquisitions made by teachers by participating in PLD programs may diminish. In this regard, we want to carry out a rebound / distance assessment to test the usefulness of the abolished aspects of medium and long-term programs.

Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit & McCloskey (2009) note that the more and varied the evaluations, the more likely it is to more fully perceive PLD purchases and how new knowledge and skills are used by teachers in teaching.

## 5. Conclusions and discussions

The didactic career is double-dimensional, on the one hand, the objective side which implies the development and progress of the teaching staff and, on the other hand, the subjective side which represents the proper professional path, consisting of the assumption of a very complex ensemble of knowledge, skills, aspirations and individual motivations, relative to the requirements of the educational system.

Although at European level there are concerns about the professional development of teachers, many studies have been developed even though it is difficult to identify their pragmatic effects.

Most of the time, trainees are poorly motivated to take part in different PLD initiatives, as their training is not rewarded by wage increases, and participation fees in lifelong learning programs are paid from their personal budget. Increasingly, more and more teachers are participating in training courses and more and more programs and suppliers contribute to the diversification of offers, which is very diverse.

Teachers' perceptions of PLD have been positively influenced by their ability to strengthen and innovate the teaching and learning process itself. These findings were in line with Day & Gu (2007) and Ifanti & Fotopoulou (2011), which supported the importance of these factors in

the professional satisfaction of teachers. With regard to the first and most important factor for increasing teacher satisfaction, improving the teaching strategies of a considerable part of our sample correlated their professional development and desire to become better teachers with the learning outcomes of their pupils. Such a finding is also in line with the studies of Guskey (2002), Helsby and McCulloch (1996).

The teachers in our sample mentioned that they have invested their personal time in PLD in order to keep up with professional requirements and responsibilities. This finding is consistent with Hustler, Mc Namara, Jarvis, London, Campbell & Howson (2003).

It should be noted that the perception of PLD teachers is also influenced by a number of negative connotations that induce negative emotions and professional stress. Thus, inadequate labor conditions specific to Romania (commuting between home and work, low wages), the high number of pupils in classes (sometimes over 30), the bureaucratic system requiring multiple procedures, statistics and documents, parental pressure and multiple assessments may lead to teachers' lack of motivation and professional satisfaction. Similar findings are also reported in Day's et al. (2007), Zembylas (2003) and Ifanti & Fotopoulou (2011), which present the results of a similar research in Greece that resembles our results.

There are other factors that influence PLD in the view of our respondents, such as personal, environmental, and cultural contexts. Thus, according to these, there are similarities and differences of perception as concerns the items in the questionnaire and the variables in the guide of the focus group method. Overall, these similarities and differences show how teachers perceive the above-mentioned concepts as well as the factors that affect their ideas. Dadds (1997) considers that the core of PLD should be the cultivation of intrinsic motivation and critical judgment in relation to the development of the self, seen as crucial and indispensable from the perspective of didactic activity. However, even the longest PLD course is short compared to the uninterrupted learning required for professional development.

In conclusion, the teachers in our sample considered PLD as a very complex multidimensional process and stressed the importance of having more knowledge, skills and competencies that will substantially contribute to the consolidation of their professional status. These ideas are



in line with other relevant findings of some of our researches (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011) and highlight the shared concerns of PLD teachers in several European countries.

This research has reconfirmed that PLD is a particularly complex phenomenon with individual, organizational, conjunctural or systemic determinations and influences.

Some longitudinal research on PLD's goal showed that most of the teachers who participated in different PLD courses do not put into practice what they have learned even if the results of the evaluation were positive (Iain, 2011). Thus, in order to be effective, PLD activities need to be designed and distributed appropriately to meet the professional development needs of teachers. The specialized literature on PLD's effectiveness clearly indicates that it should be designed around meaningful learning activities (Iain, 2011; Adams, 2005; Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit & McCloskey, 2009; Gosha, Billionniere, Gilbert, & Ramsey, 2010; Meehan, Obler, Schiorring, & Serban, 2002; Mouza, 2009; Ostashevski, 2010; Samarawickrema, Stacey, & Warren, 2008; Wettasinghe, 2003). This means that training modules must be related to practical situations and practical challenges, and that training should focus on pedagogical innovation that will lead to improved student learning (Meehan et al., 2002).

A very high-quality research approach should be based on previous research, but also on research in other areas, such as law or medicine, to consider expanding research design and online PLD programs. We believe that this type of research will lead to a general concept that integrates theory and practice based on evidence. Building such a comprehensive theory involves a collaborative effort between specialists from different scientific fields.

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# **A qualitative study on the values of moral eco-pedagogy: A case study of a Romanian school**

**Radu Simion, Alina S. Rusu**

# A qualitative study on the values of moral eco-pedagogy: A case study of a Romanian school

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

experiential education;  
environment;  
civic virtues;  
humane education

The aim of this paper is to present a qualitative study using a focus-group method applied to a group of educators in a private nature-oriented school in Romania (Green School Romania), with the purpose of identifying ecological friendly behavioral models, values and virtues shown by children in relation to the natural environment. The importance of this interdisciplinary study is related to the pedagogical philosophy of the above mentioned Romanian school, which is experiential environment-oriented education, a holistic approach to environmental ethics, considered as a moral education for sustainability, trust and care for life and nature.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Erfahrungsbildung;  
Umgebung;  
bürgerliche Tugenden;  
humane Bildung

Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, eine qualitative Studie unter Verwendung einer Fokusgruppe unter den Pädagogen einer Privatschule in Rumänien (Green School Romania) vorzustellen, um die Modelle, Tugenden und Schutzwerte von zu identifizieren die Umwelt bei Kindern, die einer natürlichen Umgebung ausgesetzt sind. Die Bedeutung dieser interdisziplinären Studie hängt mit der oben erwähnten Bildungsphilosophie der rumänischen Schule zusammen: eine auf die Umwelt ausgerichtete Erfahrungsbildung, ein ganzheitlicher Ansatz zur Umweltethik als moralische Erziehung zur Nachhaltigkeit, Leben und Natur vertrauen und schützen.

## 1. Introduction

Learning can be defined as a process which brings together personal and interaction experiences related to the environment, all these having the potential to influence, modify and structure knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and values of the learners. Experiential learning is situated on the confluence of different theories from educational psychology and pedagogy, putting together elements specific to behaviorism theory, cognitive psychology, but also from social constructivism and situated learning. According to Chapman, McPhee and Proudman (1995), experiential education is characterized by an equilibrium between experiential activities and the reflection on these experiences, that is taking place in an emotional safe space, where the facilitator (educator) is capable of empathy, without unjustified fears and blaming. This way, the facilitator creates a space where the learner can

successfully initiate and participate in activities that fit his needs and interests, discovering the internal motivation for investing time and effort for the success of his/her actions.

In the process of experiential education, the knowledge can be seen as a process rather than a product, because the products of cognitive biases are continuously redefined depending on the nature and the quality of experience itself (Moon J.A., 2004; Wurdinger, 2005). The learning process is more than a banking model of storage information, as Paulo Freire claimed (2005), where he considered that "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor...Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."

## 2. Theoretical foundation



Moral education is a vast concept illustrating a phenomenon consisting of all the methods by which individuals form their moral conscience and behaviour. According to Constantin Cucos (2014), a person is morally educated "*...when the person makes a transition from the stage of moral heteronomy, that is to follow the rules promulgated by others, to the stage of moral autonomy, to the self-imposition of internal rules or values.*" In other words, the process of moral education aims to develop the capacity for free exercise, without constraints and pressures, the capacity for moral self-regulation, the formation of a moral conscience being achieved by focusing on the development of representations and moral notions, conceptions, beliefs and feelings. By the action on the character, the moral will and the moral skills, the moral conduct is formed. In relation to environmental ethics, experiential education may be able to achieve, through a wide range of pedagogical methods and practices, the development of ecological moral awareness and moral conduct in relation to other individuals and the surrounding environment.

The methodological background that facilitates the depiction of moral attitudes and values in relation to the environment is a vast one, encompassing storytelling, role-playing, art in nature, debate, involvement in environmental actions, observing natural phenomena, etc. What is important to remember is that, in the case of experiential education in nature, participants to nature-oriented educational programs and/or activities learn from nature, about nature and for nature how to react and express attitudes, values and aspirations to responsibly take into account the state of the natural environment. Environmental education therefore seeks to understand the dynamics of the environment in order to protect it, proposing to make individuals aware of environmental problems, developing their skills and values to adequately respond to the challenges raised by local, national and international environmental crises. In order to adequately respond to environmental problems, individuals need to be educated, supported and encouraged to approach the environment in all its dimensions (natural, aesthetic, recreational, scientific, technological, social, cultural, economic), while promoting the need for social cooperation to prevent and solve identified ecological problems (Simion, 2019).

### 3. Research methodology

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of educators (based on critical thinking questions) in order to identify behavioral patterns, values and moral virtues of children aged between 3 to 7 years from a private nature-oriented school in Romania, i.e. Green School Romania, Cluj-Napoca (<https://www.green-school.ro/>). This investigation aimed to provide a better understanding of the underlying motivational and practical aspects that drive the children's behavior concerning the relationship with the natural environment.

The methodology that was used to lead this study is the *focus-group method*, a research technique used on a large scale in the marketing area and social psychology, organizational development, and also in medical and educational research (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Each of the participants had to respond to a number of eleven critical thinking questions, which were individually delivered in a paper-pen form questionnaire. The criteria for selecting the participants were: the relevance of their work in the field of environmental outdoor education and the mandatory criteria of using non-violent communication techniques in their work with the children.

The five participants from this qualitative study are educators in Green School Romania, two of them working in the kindergarten section (with children from 3 to 5 years old) and three in the primary school section (with children aged between 6 and 9). They were being told that they have the possibility to voluntarily participate to a study whose subject is the emotional and psycho-social impact of the activity they undertake in Green School Romania. A written informal consent of participation and of data protection was individually signed by the five educators.

The questions included in the questionnaires were developed according to their relevance for the subject of moral eco-pedagogy, consulting an expert in the field of education, evolutionary psychology and human-animals interaction.

The question nr. 1 ("*How do you perceive the importance of your interaction with nature, on a personal and professional level?*") and the question nr. 2 ("*During your childhood, have you had relevant outdoor experiences that you considered to be life-changing for you as a person?*") represents general topic questions, taking into consideration the various outdoor experiences of the participants private life. Question nr. 3 ("*Do you*

consider that the children face exciting and stimulant emotional, physical and cognitive experiences during the educational activities from Green School Romania?”) and Question nr. 4 (“Do you consider that, during the educational activities in Green School Romania, the children consider the natural environment as being a space where they can successfully organize and handle their emotions?”) are related to the values of fascination, wonder and awe in nature.

Question nr. 5 (“Do you consider that during the educational activities from Green School Romania the children initiate, with a positive and proactive attitude, actions that can contribute to the conservation and preservation of the natural environment?”) and the question nr. 6 (“Do you consider that, during the activities from GSR, the children face and observe problems or problematic situations which potentially affect biodiversity, having then the will of showing the others how they can contribute with possible solutions to face the problems?”) are related to the civic responsibility and engagement to both anthropic and biotic communities.

Question nr. 7 (“Do you consider that during the activities from GSR, the experiences from nature help children to create original artistic artefacts and products, responsibly using the resources they have?”) and the question nr. 8 (“Do you consider that during the educational activities from GSR the children develop their autonomy in making some decisions concerning anthropic community, but also taking care of the natural environment and moral patients that populate the natural environment?”) are related to the educators’ perceptions about the level of autonomy of the children, related to creativity, originality and authenticity, patience and appreciation for their attitude and others work in the field of artistic language.

Question nr. 9 (“Do you consider that the educational activities the children are taking part of in GSR support them to identify and to differentiate between different types of interpersonal communication skills, and also to encourage them to use non-violent communication strategies to solve their conflicts?”), question nr. 10 (“Do you consider that the activities from GSR encourage the children to integrate their own emotions into an emotional logic structure?”) and the question nr. 11 (“Do you consider that, having direct contact with the environment, the children from GSR manifest a relational harmony with their own self, showing a visible state of satisfaction, on

which they communicate in a verbal and nonverbal way?”) are related to personal, social and ecological values that are common in a relationship with empathy are relational harmony with the own self, and the others (moral agents and patients).

#### 4. Results

The content analysis of the answers from the questionnaires allowed the identification of four specific categories of topics and subjects:

- *Category nr. 1:* Topics concerning the impact of early-childhood contact with the environment on social, psychological and emotional development of the educators.
- *Category nr. 2:* Topics about how the children from GRS experienced fascination, wonder and admiration towards nature.
- *Category nr. 3:* Topics concerning the development of civic responsibility and commitment toward anthropic and biotic communities.
- *Category nr. 4:* Topics related to the development of creativity, originality and authenticity by interaction with the natural environment.

The first category was related to elements concerning the impact of early-childhood contact with nature on emotional and psycho-social development levels of the educators. It has been noted that the psycho-social development of the educators was expected to be reflected in their answers taking into considerations the early experience they had in nature. Elements like wonder and awe, peace and a sense of relief have been mentioned as beneficial. These elements are vital for a healthy emotional development, been considered as elements which fight against alienation, feed emotional resilience and abilities to explore with trust, the world within. The interaction with the environment started from early age challenged the educators to discover in nature a space of solitude, fantasy, awe and a higher sense of integration and unity, all contributing to the feeling of being accepted in their own world, together with natural elements surrounding him.

Related to *fascination, awe and admiration towards nature topic*, the educators considered that first, children need to understand the unicity, beauty and the

mechanisms of life in nature, to be able to nurture feelings of admiration. As key elements in developing a committed ecological consciousness, balance, harmony and interconnectivity were by far the most valuable. Children manifest curiosity, openness for exploring the surroundings, enthusiasm, love and care for all the entities and elements of life that are present in nature. Furthermore, they experience a feeling of bonding by finding elements in their own habitat which makes possible the connection with their own self and with the others. These results are supported by an analysis done on a three-hundred autobiographies of famous writers, in which Edith Cobb (1959) observes that nature was the source of the creation processes initiated by those, claiming that: *„...these writers say they return in memory in order to renew the power and impulse to create at its very source, a source which they describe as the experience of emerging not only into the light of consciousness but into a living sense of dynamic relationship with the outer world. In these memories the child appears to experience both a sense of discontinuity, an awareness of his own unique separateness and identity, and also a continuity, a renewal of relationship with nature as process.”*

Taking into consideration the analysis of the answers to Questions 3 and 4, nature becomes a space of initiation, in which expressing enthusiasm and wonder become signs of a courageous adventure in a world of learning by play. Having a strong physiological meaning, the way children react to those experiences transform the process of gaining knowledge into a significant learning process, a type of process which connects all sides of human experience. This openness towards experience allows children to access the world by using their senses to gain trust in their capacity to explore and learn, heading towards a state of safety when in nature.

Considering *the topic concerning civic responsibility and commitment toward anthropic and biotic communities*, educators have noticed a clear tendency to see them as being part of the daily routine of children from Green School Romania. Children approach problems and difficult situations they face in nature from a systemic perspective, taking into consideration the connections between biotic and anthropic elements, as well as their holistic impact. In the same time, by caring and cleaning outdoor spaces, children develop attitudes like the will to be involved, courage, to care, the feeling of being useful, availability and good will. These virtues can also be

named *“being rightly oriented towards nature”*, as Rosalind Hursthouse states (2007).

The above mentioned virtue has been explained by Hursthouse (2007) in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, a paper in which she strongly believes that this *“...a radical change in one’s emotions and perceptions, one’s whole way of perceiving and responding to the world, of one’s reasons for action and thereby actions.”* The virtue of being rightly oriented towards nature includes *“... wondering at, looking hard at, finding out more about, rejoicing in, understanding why other people spend their whole lives studying, being anxious to preserve, not dismissing or ignoring or destroying or forgetting or assuming one can always put a price on ... everything in the natural world.”*

In addition, the education for civic responsibility and involvement targets the examination of main environmental threats from a community approach, regional and international, so that children can have a general holistic picture on the effects of the ecological crisis on environmental areas. By being involved in activities of recognizing the ecological threats (like *Fridays for Future*, an event mentioned by one of the educators as being popular among children in school) the children are empowered to take a stand and to be visible in their group, in the same time promoting the necessity of local and national cooperation to prevent and find solutions to the problems these individual identify.

Related to the *topic on developing creativity, originality and authenticity by interacting with nature*, the educators’ answers to Questions 7 and 8, it has been observed a trend in associating this nature-oriented pedagogic model with the capacity of facilitating the access towards originality and multiple intelligence children poses. In the same time, with the support of the educators, the children are encouraged to be autonomous in taking decisions, always having in their mind how their activities can impact the surroundings. By self-directed experiential learning model, children gain skills that allow them to explore, to test and to express themselves as part of a joyful and flexible discovering process.

Experiential learning in nature initiates activities that are meant to stimulate the sensorial development, to be able to respond to life in general in a creative way. Through art in nature activities, children can express their thoughts, emotions and feelings, using a large variety of

techniques and resources to have an enthusiastic approach to their interests and needs.

On the topic concerning *empathy and relational harmony*, experiential outdoor education together with non-violent strategies of communication is capable to lead to positive outcomes in regards of involving children in meaningful relationships with the world, having the trust to reveal themselves and being capable to easily understand the dynamic of the environment, with a greater availability towards helping, involving and caring. Supporting children to express themselves using verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal communication, the non-violent methods lead to a healthier beneficial peaceful relationships. In this qualitative investigation, the educators noticed that the kids give value to the large range of experiences in which they are involved daily, by being drawn to it, developing the ability to manage the conflicts using reasonable compromises. Nevertheless, the overall perceptions of the investigated educators are that nature-oriented programs create healthy emotional charged exchanges out of which the children can autonomously extract the needed socio-emotional resources, accepting the necessity of a mutual co-dependency between humans and natural environment.

## 5. Discussions

Taking into consideration the results, we can observe the beneficial role of the experiences educators had in nature, starting in childhood, which open a unique and transformative perspective over the human being, who is able to create, in the present moment, a patient and demanding self. It has also been noted that childhood adventures in nature had a healthy impact for educators, by being able to develop a realist sense of flexibility towards life, by being raised in the spirit of self-acceptance, self-love and being able to understand and feel the rhythm of nature.

Analysing the answers, it has been noticed a positive perception over the role of experiential education on the development of character traits. The feeling of being drawn to nature, experiencing curiosity, wonder and courage represent ways of developing a higher sense of trust in their own body capacities. Furthermore, in the process of bonding with your own self, Carl Rogers (1961) states that the experiences in which the body exposes freely to move, without any pressure and fear pose as authentic ways of development, which strengthens

the peaceful bond between the man himself and the environment which he is interconnected with. This does not mean that the individuals will be free of experiencing obstacles and difficulties, however they will be able to discover, express and handle emotional reactions, with a tendency towards openness on their own experiences, being „able to permit his total organism, his conscious thought participating, to consider, weight and balance each stimulus, need, and demand, and its relative weight and intensity.” (Rogers, 1961).

Nature-based education is a milestone in gaining knowledge about ecosystems and the relations established inside the biological niches, by developing abilities and feelings which can facilitate the access to identify, recognize, plan and solve previously identified ecological threats. For this type of education to have these positive benefits the educators mentioned, it is necessary that this approach to have a clear overview of the environment- as natural habitat, but also as social, moral, cultural, scientific, aesthetic and historical one.

The lack of critics has an important role in developing self-confidence and autonomy, which creates a safe space where originality is encouraged and the learning outcomes are evaluated individually, by taking into consideration the dominant type of intelligence (Gardner, 2011). The children are encouraged to identify their mistakes as part of the learning process, allowing them to discover the challenges without punitive actions. These challenges can contribute on developing the capacity of freely choosing the objectives to which would like to achieve, objectives with a deep personal meaning. During the learning process, children learn from the consequences, using their own process of reflection and, with the support of their educator, are encouraged to find solutions and to enjoy the benefits of the outcome. Hence, the learning process changes and shapes the connections the individual has with himself and with others in a real, organic, meaningful and joyful relationship.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to collect data concerning the subjective perceptions of the educators whose pedagogical philosophy is experiential outdoor education using non-violent communication strategies, by focusing on developing attitudes and strong moral values in relationship with nature and all the entities from the anthropic community. The aim of this study was



to create a better picture of how children gain and make use of these values in their learning process, with a desire of highlighting their behavioral habits when included in nature-oriented activities.

As a conclusion, a large number of particular behaviors were revealed in the categories and topics identified by the content analysis of the answers offered by the educators, such as: compassion for animal suffering, the will to preserve, the availability of being present when needed, sensibility in regards of the transitional character of the environment, virtues as curiosity to discover new meanings, to be alert, work as a social virtues, civic responsibility, active listening and simplicity (with a minimum use of money, time and other resources).

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Although performed on a small sample of participants, this research has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of specific topics need to be implemented in environmental ethics and experiential outdoor education studies. Environmental education can be seen as a complex structure which gathers human society and biodiversity as well can be seen in a new light of care, beauty, a balance between human and nature needs. The aspects highlighted in this research can function as a leading point to identifying new research grounds to overcome the ecological threats that nowadays affect the society, regardless of the geographical, social and cultural roots.

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# **The Main Curricular Characteristics of the Health Education Programs and Interventions from the Romanian Primary School Educational System**

**Diana-Crina Marin, Muşata Bocoş**

# The Main Curricular Characteristics of the Health Education Programs and Interventions from the Romanian Primary School Educational System

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

Health Promotion School,  
Health Education Programmes,  
decision-making,  
relevant topics of the activities

*Within this study, we proposed to accomplish an analysis of the main health education programs implemented in our country during the last 20 years. In this regard, a series of health education programs and projects implemented at the primary school level of the educational units in our country were analyzed. We proposed to establish an inventory of the most frequently encountered topics of these programs, in addition to the identification of these programs, their initiators and their main partners. Thus, online searches were conducted in order to identify international, national, regional and local educational programs and projects. The main goal of these programs was the formation and development of health education related behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes. Moreover, a series of documents made by primary school teachers were analyzed, in order to conclude which are the main topics of these educational/partnership projects initiated in the scope of health education. The study highlights the importance of implementing such interventions, by identifying effective measures that can be taken in order to successfully organize and implement such programs.*

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Gesundheitsförderungsschule,  
Gesundheitsbildungsprogramme,  
Entscheidungsfindung, relevante  
Themen für Aktivitäten

*Im Rahmen dieser Studie schlugen wir vor, eine Analyse der wichtigsten Programme zur Gesundheitserziehung durchzuführen, die in unserem Land während der letzten 20 Jahre. In diesem Zusammenhang wurde eine Reihe von Programmen und Projekten zur Gesundheitserziehung in wurde das Grundschulniveau der Bildungseinheiten in unserem Land analysiert. Wir schlugen vor, eine Bestandsaufnahme der meisten häufig anzutreffende Themen dieser Programme, zusätzlich zur Identifizierung dieser Programme, ihrer Initiatoren und ihrer Hauptpartner. So wurden Online-Recherchen durchgeführt, um internationale, nationale, regionale und lokale Bildungsprogramme und -projekte zu identifizieren. Die wichtigsten Ziel dieser Programme war die Bildung und Entwicklung von Verhaltensweisen, Wissen und Einstellungen im Zusammenhang mit der Gesundheitserziehung. Darüber hinaus wurde eine Reihe von Dokumenten von Grundschullehrern analysiert, um festzustellen, welches die Hauptthemen dieser Bildungs-/Partnerschaftsprojekte sind, die im Rahmen von Gesundheitserziehung. Die Studie unterstreicht die Bedeutung der Umsetzung solcher Interventionen, indem sie wirksame Maßnahmen, die ergriffen werden können, um solche Programme erfolgreich zu organisieren und umzusetzen.*

## 1. Introduction

The statistical data collected at the national level regarding the health status and the frequency of unhealthy behaviors of the population reveal the need to implement health education programs, consisting of health promotion activities. The right to health is a fundamental right of pupils. Effective health education programs undertook aim to maintain the physical, social and mental well-being of each pupil and parent involved in these programs. The strategic directions adopted by our country must pay special attention to the organization and implementation

of preventive and educational programs for health education, which will contribute to maintaining the well-being of the population. Health education programs initiated and carried out at the school level have the role of consolidating knowledge and developing healthy life behaviors and skills.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

Schools are the ideal space for conducting health education programs, given the high number of participants

who can be included simultaneously in these projects and the positive impact on students' health status of participating in this type of activity (Sherman & Muehlhoff, 2007; Adamowitch, Gugglberger, Dür, 2017; Glanz, Rimer & Lewis, 2002; Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown, & Sowden, 1993). It would be beneficial if, in the early stages of the development of health education programs, schools that enroll in the pattern of Health Promoting Schools (HPS), receive adequate support (Adamowitch, Gugglberger, Dür, 2017). The mode that the concept of "Health Promoting Schools" is understood and implemented has effects on both the behaviors adopted by the students and on the policies adopted at the organizational level (Lee, Lo, Keung, Kwong & Wong, 2019; Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown & Sowden, 1993). The concept of "Health Promoting Schools" was introduced by the World Health Organization. The changes take place both in terms of content and organization of training activities, as well on the aspect of the school space, on the quality of interpersonal interactions and the well-being of all educational actors (Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown, & Sowden, 1993; Rowling, Jeffreys, 2006). Evaluating the effectiveness of health promotion (HPS) initiatives is a complex process, which should be based on predefined indicators (Inchley, Muldoon & Currie, 2006; Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown & Sowden, 1993; Mukoma & Filsher, 2004). Pupils adopt unhealthy daily behaviors, like allocating high time intervals to watch TV shows or play computer games (Dorman, 1997). Griebler, Rojatz, Simovska & Forster, (2014) indicate that participation in school health promotion measures and decision-making process has multiple advantages from many perspectives such as high interest and involvement of the students who generate positive social relationships with teachers and other students and an increased level of competences and knowledge. The involvement of family and other community members ensures the efficiency of educational actions carried out in schools with the purpose to train and to develop healthy behaviors (Samdal & Rowling, 2011; Lister-Sharp, Chapman, Stewart-Brown, & Sowden, 1993). Also, the duration of educational programs implemented by schools is a factor that ensures the success of the activities carried out (Nutbeam, 1998).

The National Program "Health Education in the Romanian School" ([https://gov.ro/fisiere/programe\\_fisiere/program-educatie-sanatate.pdf](https://gov.ro/fisiere/programe_fisiere/program-educatie-sanatate.pdf)) is the most important program implemented

at the national level, in order to carry out teaching activities in the field of health education. The purpose of this program, launched in 2001, was the introduction of the activities of Health Education "in all educational units, as an optional discipline (full offer) and/ or as integrated hours in other subjects, as well as an extra-curricular activity, for training purposes of responsible attitudes among students towards their health and those around them". The main objectives of the program are: promoting the health and well-being of the students, personal development of the students and prevention. Health Education has become an optional discipline since 2004. The discipline is taught by biology teachers or by primary school teachers. In Romania, in the primary education cycle, the discipline "Health education" is an optional discipline, part of the curriculum at the school's decision. However, various contents specific to this discipline are reached through interdisciplinary connections, through the contents included in the school programs of other study disciplines, of which we mention the disciplines in the curricular area "Human and society". The inclusion of this study discipline in the Romanian school coincided with the recognition of the significant impact that the actions of health education realized in school contexts have on the student's health. Often, health education projects are organized at the initiative of non-governmental or governmental organizations, through the partnership agreements. Extracurricular activities are an effective way of achieving the objectives of the health education discipline.

From the analysis of some national and international legislative documents, emerges the need to develop prevention and health education programs. In the document "Health 2020. A European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century" it is mentioned that "a broader multiagency strategy is required, to which people themselves can contribute. A broad range of stakeholders can be mobilized to support programs that promote health, including generational activities. For young people, these can include policies to improve the social and economic status of children living in disadvantaged circumstances; whole-school approaches to school-based activities to develop and protect children's social and emotional well-being, including school-based health literacy programs; peer-to-peer education; and the development of youth organizations. Integrating work on mental and sexual health into these programs and activities is particularly important".

The "National Health Strategy 2014 - 2020, Health for Prosperity"

([http://www.old2.ms.gov.md/sites/default/files/cadrul\\_european\\_de\\_politici\\_sanatate\\_2020.pdf](http://www.old2.ms.gov.md/sites/default/files/cadrul_european_de_politici_sanatate_2020.pdf)) includes information on the need for the implementation of health education programs in pre-university education in our country. Thus, it is considered that it is necessary to carry out early information activities among the students on the topic of health education, with the purpose to prevent and combat risky behaviors and to contribute to the formation of a healthy lifestyle. For the implementation of the strategic directions set out in the National Health Strategy 2014 - 2020, Health for Prosperity, the Integrated Multiannual Health Promotion and Health Education Plan has been developed. This framework document was prepared by the Presidential Administration, UNICEF Romania, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, the National Institute of Public Health, the National School of Public Health Management and Improvement in the Health Field. The Plan mentions the fact that the activities of health promotion and health education, can be carried out in schools or kindergartens, through close collaboration with doctors and nurses from the family medicine cabinets and school medical cabinets, units of secondary and tertiary care, community nurses, teachers, pharmacists, students of post-secondary medical schools, students of medical faculties, midwives, members of non-governmental organizations, social workers, volunteers from the community, etc. The authors of this document outline that although schools do not have a coherent program to ensure health education, they must provide the necessary framework for carrying out activities, adapted to their age and development needs.

### 3. Research methodology

During this research, the method of consulting documents prepared by various educational institutions in our country and published on the Internet was used. Within the study, we set out to answer questions such as:

1. What have been the themes of the activities included in the health education programs, who were implemented at the national level in the last 20 years in our country, at the initiative of the school units, of the Ministry of National Education or other governmental or non-governmental organizations operating in our country?

2. What are the main educational partners of the educational school units, in the implementation of health education programs/projects?

3. What were the main themes of the educational projects carried out in the Romanian schools, starting from this theme?

### 4. Results

The National Program "Education for Health in the Romanian School" ([https://gov.ro/fisiere/programe\\_fisiere/program-educatie-sanatate.pdf](https://gov.ro/fisiere/programe_fisiere/program-educatie-sanatate.pdf)) aims to achieve learning activities in formal, non-formal or informal contexts, starting from topics such as:

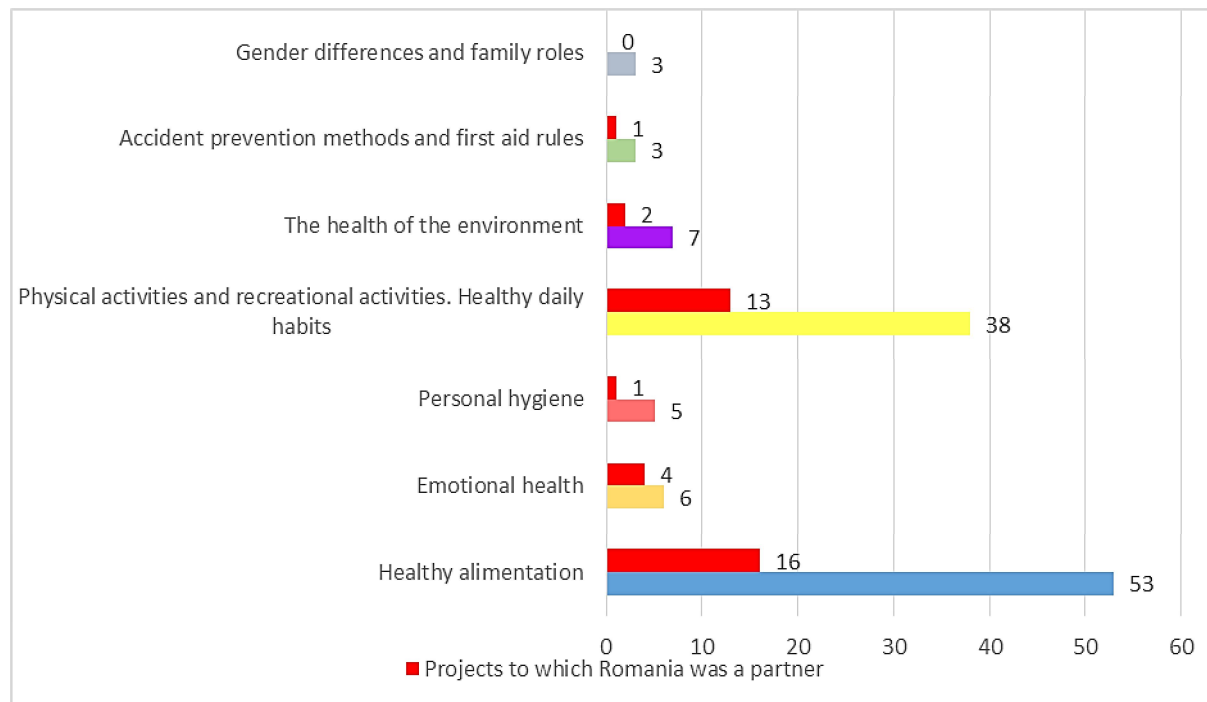
- Healthy alimentation;
- Emotional health;
- Personal hygiene;
- Physical activities and recreational activities. Healthy daily habits;
- The health of the environment;
- Accident prevention methods and first aid rules;
- Gender differences and family roles.

Also, among the large projects carried out by various NGOs in our country, there is the "Healthy Choices" program, initiated by the non-governmental organization "Save the Children Romania". The main topics of the activities were balanced nutrition, physical movement, emotional health, sexual education, prevention of the consumption behaviors of dangerous substances. Other projects identified by us addressed topics such as personal hygiene, healthy eating, and healthy life habits.

The website [www.eTwinning.net](http://www.eTwinning.net) has been consulted in order to determine if there are any projects on health education to which Romania was a partner. Thus, between 25 March and 30 March 2020, were searched specially designed projects for the age group of 6-11 years in the section "Health studies". The search returned 861 results. 115 projects (mostly in English) were selected. The selected projects were focused on developing awareness of the importance of health education, developing healthy behaviors or positive attitudes towards their own or others' health (see figure no. 1). Most of the projects to which

educational institutions in our country were partners have addressed the issue of healthy eating (16 projects) and aspects related to maintaining a healthy lifestyle through

physical exercises and adopting healthy behaviors (13 projects).

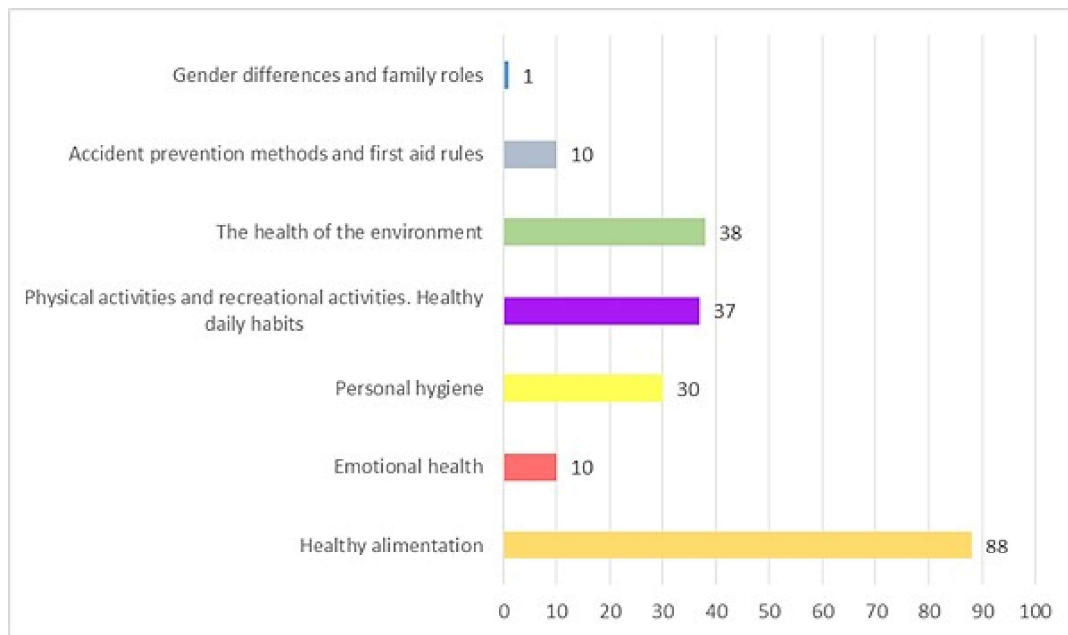


**Figure 1.** Topics of the projects identified on the eTwinning platform

The educational platform [www.didactic.ro](http://www.didactic.ro) was used with the purpose to establish which are the main topics of the health education projects carried out in schools in our country. Thus, between 20 and 25 March, a series of school documents (including educational partnership projects) were analyzed, which consisted in the planning or presentation of educational activities carried out in the

field of health education. To generate the results were used keywords such as: "health" (145 results), "healthy" (141 results), and "health education" (54 results). Most projects address topics such as balanced nutrition, the health of the environment, healthy habits of life and personal hygiene (see figure no. 2).





**Figure 2.** Themes of educational projects implemented in schools and posted on the *www.didactic.ro* platform

From the analysis of the content of the documents analyzed on various educational platforms or online sites, we reached the following conclusions:

- most educational projects are focused on the healthy eating habits of the pupils;
- a large part of the teachers paid special attention to the protection of the environment, highlighting the impact of these actions on the health of the children;
- most of the projects were carried out by the primary school teachers for a short period (1-5 days), and the rest of the projects were carried out during a semester or even during a school year;
- the main partners of the educational institutions in the implementation of these projects were: town halls, other schools in the country or abroad, County Public Health Departments, NGOs, local medical cabinets (pediatric doctors or dentists).

We believe that effective health education programs have the following characteristics:

- are created in collaboration between educational units, medical personnel (school cabinets, family doctors or pediatricians, hospitals, medical offices, etc.), local authorities and other members of the community;
- contain informative sessions that should be addressed to both students and parents;

- allows pupils to access to accurate information on adopting a healthy lifestyle;
- consist of the active involvement of school counselors and close collaboration with other teachers in the educational unit (for example, biology teachers, physical education teachers);
- they consist of actions in which the health status of the pupils is evaluated and the preventive behaviors are formed;
- the activities are carried out by teachers, who have been trained in advance on how to effectively organize health education activities;
- benefit from good funding and teaching resources (including high-quality didactic materials);
- they are realized in the medium or long term and they approach various topics, with contents adapted to the age and interests of the students.

#### 4. Discussions

In March 2020, a legislative proposal was adopted amending and supplementing Law 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. Thus, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health will implement a strategy on education for health and nutrition, applicable from the 2020-2021 school year (according to the Mediafax press agency). The implementation of at least once a semester of health education programs will

become compulsory in schools in Romania. The revision of the curriculum of the "health education" discipline is necessary, in the context in which the curricula of the primary education have been modified, and some of them have taken contents associated with this study discipline. Research starting from this topic should be continued, by outlining easy-to-apply and effective health education programs, based on close collaboration with specialized medical personnel. Also, it would be useful to find out what is the percentage of schools in Romania that have decided in the last years to introduce the discipline "Education for health" at the level of primary education, within the Curriculum at the School Decision.

## 5. Conclusions

Health education programs are of particular importance, given that the right to health is a fundamental right of the pupils. They support the adoption of a healthy lifestyle by pupils and their families, contributing to a higher quality of the life of the children and reducing risk behaviors for society. In establishing the strategic directions and decisions regarding how health education programs can be organized and carried out efficiently, should participate decision-makers, children and parents representatives, experts in the area of education and health policy, as well as representatives of civil society which are active in the field of health education.

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# **Investigative Study on the Self-Perceived Level of Teachers' Professional Development Correlated with the Attitude Toward the Continuous Training in Romania**

**Horatiu Catalano, Ion Albulescu, Emanuel Sebastian Turda**

# Investigative Study on the Self-Perceived Level of Teachers' Professional Development Correlated with the Attitude Toward the Continuous Training in Romania

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

Teachers,  
Continuoustraining,  
self-evaluation,  
professional training,  
quantitative method

Professional development throughout continuous training programs has a major role in teachers' career path. The effectiveness of these programs can be acknowledged by every teacher, as long as the aims of the programs are proper for one's professional needs. Teachers' attitude towards these programs is also very important. The study we conducted probed the opinion of a non-probability sample consisting of 118 teachers from urban and rural areas as concerns their capacity to correlate the level of professional training with the attitude toward the need for continuous training in their career.

By choosing a quantitative method, the investigation on the basis of a questionnaire was used with the intention to find out not only the ability of self-evaluation reported at the level of the training, but also the motivation, attitudes and teachers' expectations regarding the need for continuous professional development. The self-evaluation questions provided respondents' perceptions of the investigation thus, allowing us to further understand issues related to their internal nature. Therefore, sometimes these items involve difficulties in establishing the accuracy of the answers provided as regards finding a correspondence between the actual respondents' opinions and those expressed in the suitable or not so suitable answers.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Lehrer Weiterbildung,  
Selbstausswertung,  
Professionelles  
Training, Quantitative  
Methode

Professionelle Entwicklung in der kontinuierlichen Ausbildungs Programme hat eine wichtige Rolle in der Lehrer Karriere. Die Wirksamkeit dieser Programme kann geschätzt werden, indem jeder Lehrer, solange die Ziele der Programme die richtigen sind für seine/Ihre professionellen Bedürfnisse.

Die Lehrer Attitude Ihnen gegenüber ist auch sehr wichtig. In der Studie, die wir initiiert haben, wird nachgefragt nach der Meinung eines nonprobabilistischen Stichprobe, bestehend aus 118 Lehrkräfte aus städtischen und ländlichen Gebieten über Ihre Fähigkeit zu korrelieren. Die Ebene der professionellen Ausbildung mit der Haltung, die die Notwendigkeit für eine kontinuierliche Weiterbildung Ihrer Karriere garantiert.

Quantitative Methode, die wir verwendet haben. Die Untersuchung auf der Grundlage des Fragebogens, durch die wir versucht haben nicht nur die Fähigkeit zur selbst - Evaluation-berichtete auf der Ebene der Ausbildung, sondern auch die Motivationen, Einstellungen und Erwartungen auf die Notwendigkeit für die Ausbildung und auf die Entwicklung Ihrer Karriere. Die Fragen der Stellungnahme erfasst die Aspekte, die ihn seine eigene Wahrnehmung der einzelnen Teilnehmer an der Untersuchung, die Wahrnehmung, dass die Informationen über Ihre inneren Natur.

Also manchmal beinhalten diese Elemente Schwierigkeiten bei der Genauigkeit der zur Verfügung gestellten Antworten, erfuhren wir aus dem Briefwechsel die wirkliche Meinung ausgedrückt von den guten oder schlechten Antworten. Die wir erhalten haben.

## 1. Introduction

Continuous professional development refers to the training activities carried out in formal and non-formal environments, distinct in their essence, which can be ordered on an axis, depending on the distance from the requirement to solve the nonconformities and the consequences of the results of the evaluation and self-evaluation processes. Professional development, therefore, is no longer seen as something 'visited' by teachers from outside, but as something in which they actively

participate, and from which they take usable skills and knowledge that have immediate currency in their classrooms (Riding 2001). It also implies setting goals centered on self-knowledge, self-assessment and the development of career planning skills, and career progression which involves monitoring the degree of accomplishment.



Continuous training aims at updating and developing the competences of teaching staff, keeping them in line with the educational needs and the developments in the educational curriculum as well as the requirements for adapting teachers' competences to changes in education (Catalano, 2015). According to its main destinations, continuous training is aimed at:

- updating and developing, through periodic training / development programs, competencies in the field / fields of specialization corresponding to the didactic functions obtained through initial training;
- developing competences that support the evolution of one's teaching career through training and obtaining teacher training certificates;
- acquiring or developing leadership, guidance, control, evaluation in the structures and organizations of the educational system;
- acquiring new skills through retraining / re-qualification programs for new specializations and / or new didactic functions other than those obtained through initial training;
- acquiring complementary or extensive competencies that broaden the range of activities and functions that can be provided by the teaching staff (teaching in the E-learning system, teaching in various foreign languages, educational counseling and career orientation, adult education, etc.);
- developing and expanding transversal competences as regards social roles and personal and professional development, interaction and communication with the social and the pedagogical environment, assuming responsibilities for organizing, leading and improving the strategic performance of professional groups, self-control and reflexive analysis of their own activities. (EACEA, 2019).

Professional development is expected to be an "outdoors" process in which the information needed to change behavior or growth comes from outside authorities, delivered through lectures, readings, demonstrations, and verbal advice from colleagues, supervisors, coaches or consultants (Catalano, 2016). Later on, professional development is ideally advancing to become an "in-house" process in which individuals retain responsibility for directing their own growth and continuous improvement by continually studying best practices and personal goals in collaboration with colleagues (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009).

Professional career represents the professional evolution of an individual throughout his life. Within the same profession, a person's career may be subject to specializations, refinements or professional promotions. Career can also be viewed from an economic, sociological or psychological point of view:

- from an economic point of view, the career is a succession of professional positions occupied by a person, as a result of his training and professional merits;
- from a sociological point of view, it represents a succession of roles played by a person, each of them underlying the next;
- from the psychological point of view, the choice of roles and the success of their endeavor depend on the aptitudes, interests, values, needs, previous experience and aspirations of the person concerned (Pitariu, 2000).

The teaching career can be approached from two different perspectives. One that has an internal nature and is focused on the individual's interpretation of objective experiences through his subjectivity, which involves a series of stages of training, modeling, development, refining of attitudes and skills and promotion of values specific to the profession. The second dimension of the definition of the teaching career has an external nature and involves a succession of positions or functions over time, in a gradual manner, in accordance with certain legal provisions: debutant teachers, definitive teachers, teachers who have second degree and teachers who have first degree.

The teaching career can be structured and organized in a number of different ways, and for a number of different reasons. While most continuous training experiences might be considered as means of introducing or enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes, it cannot be assumed that this is uncontested (Kennedy 2005). Eraut (1994) argues that it is not merely the type of professional knowledge being acquired that is important, but the context through which it is acquired and subsequently used that actually helps us to understand the nature of that knowledge. Analyzing the means through which continuous training for teachers is organized and structured may help us to understand not only the motivation behind such structures, but also the nature of professional knowledge and professionalism itself.

In order to reveal the importance of professional development, Bruce Joyce and Beverley Showers (2002) promoted the following ideas:

- In addition to the development of knowledge, skills and effective implementation, professional training should allow people to learn how to be more effective learners.
- Training consists of four main components: developing knowledge, through exploring theory to understand the concepts behind a skill or strategy; the demonstration or modelling of a skill; the practice of a skill and peer coaching.
- The more complex the desired outcomes and the greater the degree of transfer required, the more necessary it will be to use all four training components; however, a multi-faceted design is necessary whatever the desired outcome.
- In order for the teachers to become effective learners, they need specific attitudes and skills, including persistence, understanding of the transfer of training, understanding of the need for theory and the ability to use peers productively.
- Peer coaching not only contributes to the transfer of training; it also facilitates the development of new school norms of collegiality and experimentation.
- The primary activity of peer coaching is collaborative planning and development.
- Feedback can become evaluative and supervisory and training for effective feedback can be time consuming.

Teacher development occurs when these aspects of development are occurring: personal, professional and social development. This is because teacher development is a learning process, so emotions give a direction on how the brain functions; positive emotions (like motivation) boost engagement in learning.

The various definitions of professional development found in the literature imply an ongoing process of developing opportunities or activities for the improvement of teacher qualifications. The qualifications relate specifically to knowledge in the teacher's content area. Also, there is an expectation that a relationship exists between a teacher's professional development and the teacher's practice in the classroom (Meagher, 2011).

Burchell, Dyson, and Rees (2002) sustain the importance of teaching staff development in order to promote school improvement. Reynolds, Bollen, Creemers, Hopkins, Stoll, and Lagerweij (1996) and

West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) remind us that for a school's development plan to have an impact on pupil achievement, the link between the development strategies, and modifications in curriculum or teaching needs to be in place.

Concerning the needs for professional development activities, Badri & al. (2016) state that teachers learn best through professional development that addresses their needs (Meissel, Parr, and Timperley, 2016). The theoretical framework of adult learning theory shares the need for ongoing quality professional development, which requires teachers to become lifelong adult learners (Villegas-Reimers 2003; Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler 2002). Professional development needs include many different activities. Some activities focus on students with special needs and managing the classroom.

What should good training be trying to accomplish? The authors start from the premise that training needs to enable people to learn new knowledge and skills and to transfer these into their practice. Of equal importance, they suggest, is the need for training to help people to learn how to become more effective learners. The way to do this is to identify the outcomes which the training is intended to achieve and to select those training components (knowledge and theory, modelling, practice and peer coaching) most likely to succeed in achieving them). The range of possible targeted outcomes they identify are: knowledge or awareness of educational theories and practices, new curricula or academic content, positive attitude changes, for example towards their own role, different groups of children and aspects of the curriculum, the development of skills, for example in designing and delivering questions, transfer of training and 'executive control' – generating consistent and appropriate use of the new skills and strategies in classroom practice. This, the authors stress, is the critical point at which staff development impacts on student achievement. The authors show how some outcomes are easier to achieve than others because they are closer to teachers' existing practice. The newer they are, the harder to achieve. Similarly, some outcomes are more complex than others. Trainers need to be able to gauge the difficulty level to help plan the intensity and duration of training and select the components they will use accordingly (Bruce and Beverley 2002).

Being motivated to choose a teaching career and being motivated to remain in the teaching profession are

important issues on which many researches have been done, as reality shows that more and more teachers are considering a career change.

In the attempt to meet the teachers' professional development needs, decision-makers and practitioners need to consider both how to support and encourage participation, and how to ensure that opportunities match the needs perceived by the teaching staff (OECD, 2009).

## 2. Research methodology

Our interest in pursuing this line of research is also, in part, a reaction to the way in which issues of implementation of the vocational educational and training reforms seemed to be commonly reduced to instrumental problems concerning the role of teachers in the process. Teachers are positioned as not having the necessary knowledge and skills to meet this new situation. They therefore require professional development in order to implement change.

In Romania, continuous training is a right that is achieved through training and professional conversion, and the career development of the teaching staff in pre-university education is achieved by passing the final exams and obtaining the second and first didactic degrees.

Granting second degree in teaching means the acquisition by the teacher of a plus of professionalization, confirmed by the results obtained with evidence specifically designed to highlight added value acquired in the period since the completion of the studies.

In the study we initiated, we surveyed the opinion of a non-probability sample (sample of convenience) consisting of 118 pre-university teachers with a basic function in urban and rural schools compared to their ability to correlate the level of professional training with the attitude towards the need for continuous training specific to the development of the teaching career. The

sample consisted of teaching staff who passed the exam for obtaining the second didactic degree.

The aim of this study was to identify the relevant factors that influence the development and progress in the teaching career. The hypothesis of the study is the following: *a positive attitude towards continuous development of the teaching staff correlates significantly with their ability of self-appraisal which contributes to the formation of an adequate perception of professional development.*

The quantitative method we used was the survey based on a questionnaire through which we attempted to capture not only the self-appraisal capacity related to the professional training but also their motivations, attitudes and expectations towards the need for development in the teaching career, and the processing and interpretation of data was accomplished through the SPSS program, one of the most used in statistical data analysis.

In terms of practical approach, certain relationships can only be studied through correlational design, as is our study by which we correlated two variables using a questionnaire. Due to ecological validity, the relationship identified in the correlation study can be used more effectively in prediction of behaviors than the one identified through the experiment. The advantage of such an approach is that the scores on both variables reflect a multitude or a range of variables that the subject has already experienced.

In order to determine whether there is a relationship between *the attitude towards the continuous development of the teaching staff and their ability of self-appraisal*, we have made a correlation between the two variables using the Pearson ( $r$ ) linear correlation coefficient. The closer  $r$  is to one of the extreme values (-1 or 1), the stronger the link between the two variables. The result is presented in the table below:

**Table 1.** The matrix of correlations between the attitude towards the continuous development of the teaching staff and their ability of self-appraisal

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>1. The attitude towards the continuous training of the teachers</b>	36.69 (3.9)	-		.14
<b>2. Capacity of self-appraisal of teachers</b>	20.02 (2.47)	.38*	-	

\* Correlation is significant at probability level  $p < 0,01$ .

There is a significant positive correlation between the attitude towards the continuous development of the teaching staff and their ability of self-appraisal ( $r_{(116)} = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). As  $r$  represents an expression of the effect size, referring to Cohen's criteria (1998), turns out that relationship between attitudes towards the continuous

training of the teachers and their capacity of self-appraisal is a moderate one. Calculating the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  we obtained a  $R^2 = .14$  that means 14% of the variance of the attitude towards the continuous training is explained by the teachers' self-appraisal capacity.

Table 2 shows the minimum and maximum scores, the averages and the standard deviation of the two correlated variables.

**Table 2.** Scores, averages and standard deviation of the variables

	N	Min.	Max.	M	AS
<b>1. The attitude towards the continuous training of the teachers</b>	118	28	44	36,69	3,90
<b>2. Capacity of self-appraisal of teachers</b>	118	14	25	20,02	2,47

In our study, the measurement of the standard deviation directly targets the estimation of the population deviation to which the sample belongs.

To determine the degree of homogeneity of the sample, we calculated the coefficient of variability  $V$  obtained by reporting the standard deviation to the sample average.

-  $S$  is the standard deviation: 6.37

-  $M$  is the average: 56.71

$$- V = (6.37 / 56.71) * 100 = 11.23\%$$

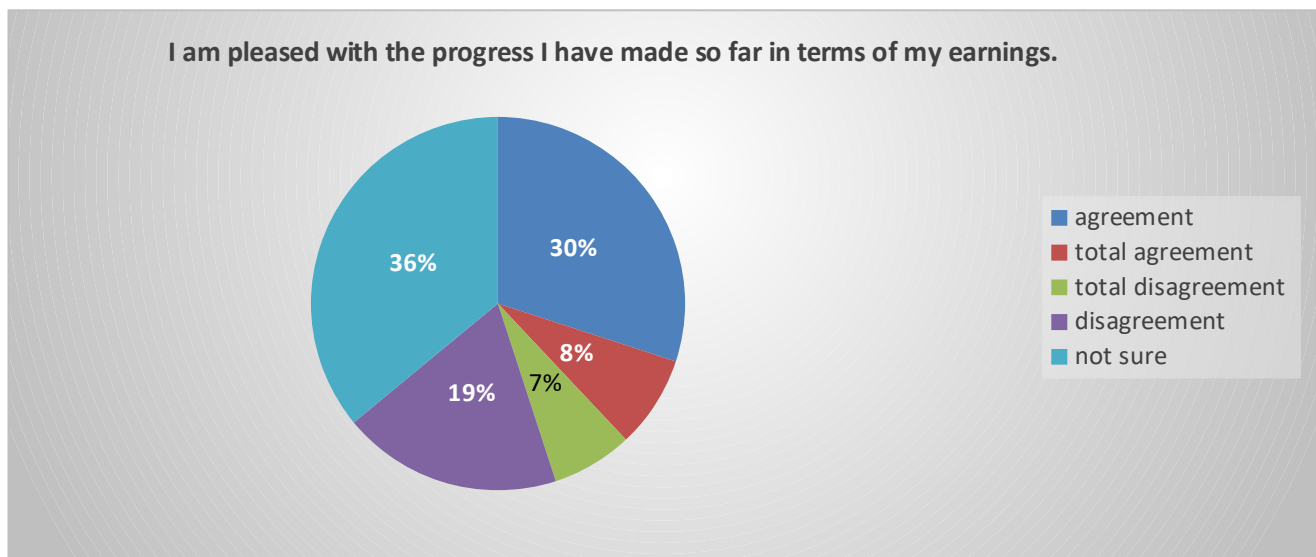
The interpretation of the variability coefficient is based on the values obtained: if the value of the coefficient is between 0 and 15%, as in our case, the average is representative because the measured sample is homogeneous.

Frequency distribution to the item < I am pleased with the progress I have made so far in terms of my earnings.> from the scale for assessing the teachers' self-appraisal is

set out in chart no. 1. Thus, most of the respondents (36%) are not very sure of the progress they have made in terms of revenue, and 8% of the participants in the investigation are satisfied with the material progress and 7% are totally disagreeable with the progress made. There is an almost equal score between those who are totally in agreement with the material progress and those who are totally

disagreeable. These scores can be attributed to the fact that up to this level of careers, financial motivation is not in line with the cognitive effort and time that teachers reserve for the preparation and support of specific teaching-learning activities (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** First item scores



The distribution of the frequency to the scale item for evaluating teachers' self-appraisal capacity, related to the perception of the respondents concerning the obtaining of the second didactic degree and its consideration as a determinant for the professional development is set out in

figure 2, which shows that 81 % of the teachers participating in the research consider that obtaining the second didactic degree is a priority factor in the professional development.

**Figure 2.** Second item scores

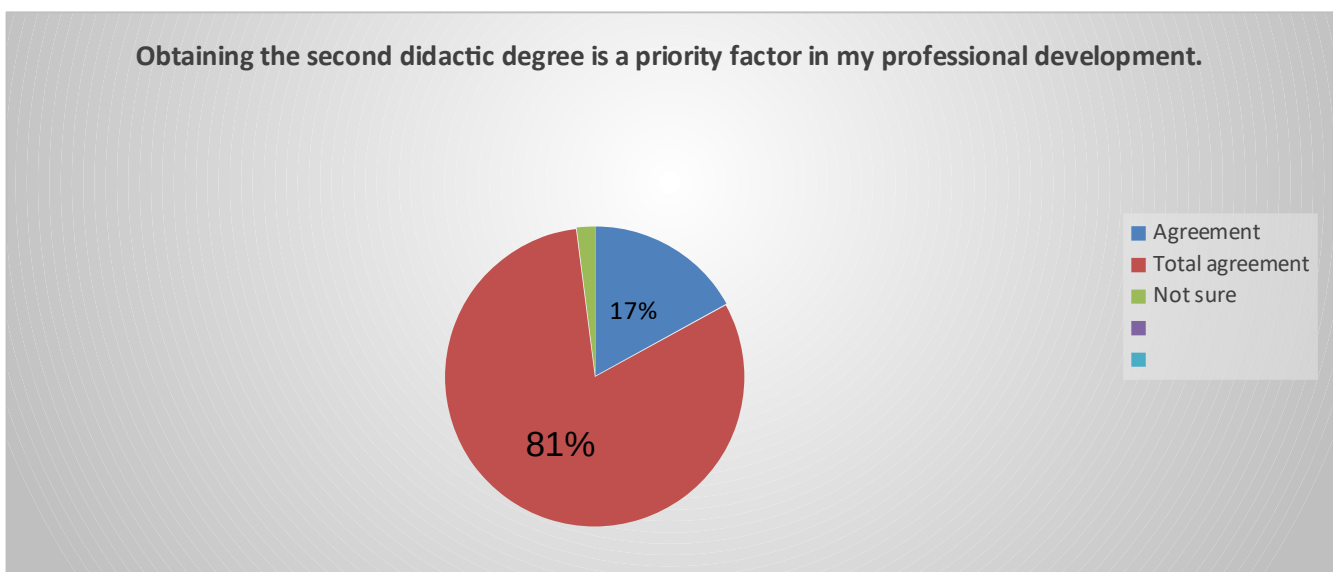


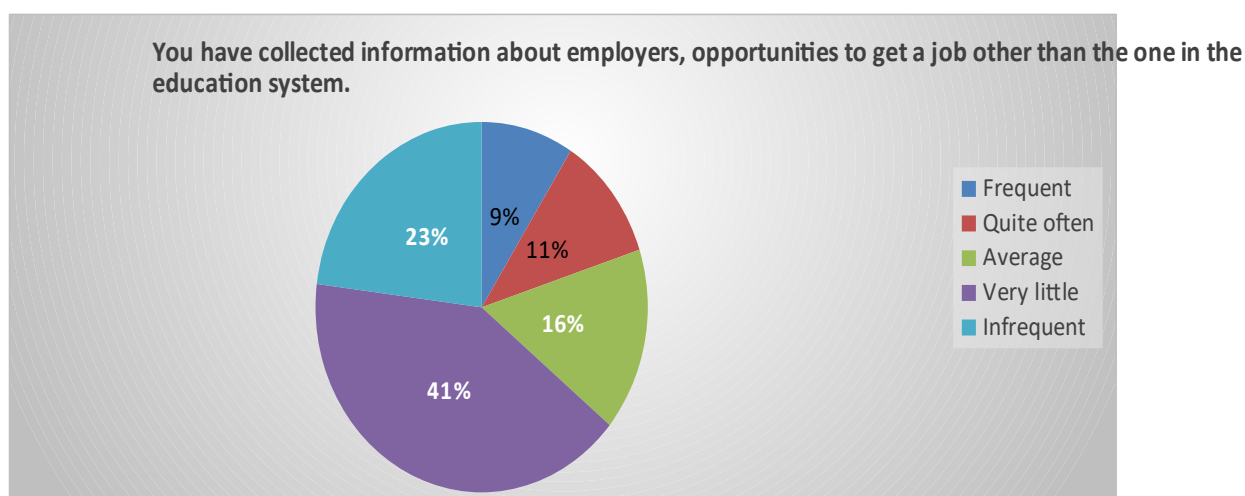
Figure 3 shows the results obtained from the scale item for assessing attitudes towards continuous development of the teaching staff, which measured the frequency with which they collected information about employers or the

opportunities to get a job other than the one in the education system. We observe the obvious conservative tendency in most of the respondents, 64% who showed very little or occasionally the tendency to look for another job outside the education system and a clear attempt to



change their teaching career is attributed to a percentage of 9 % of respondents.

**Figure 3.** Third item scores



being followed by a salary increase.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the perception that respondents have on the correlation between obtaining the second didactic degree and the three types of variables with which this type of progress in the teaching career is associated. The most obvious correlation is with the variable economic implications, i.e. the obtaining of the second didactic degree is perceived by 64% of the respondents as

Variable professional development is perceived in the second position as the correlation level with the didactic degree and the third variable, the cognitive development has a modest degree of correlation with the first two variables. Consequently, for only 8% of the respondents the research correlates with the first variable in the perception attributed to the three listed variables.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	1st	64	54.2	54.2	54.2
	2nd	18	15.3	15.3	69.5
	3rd	6	5.1	5.1	74.6
	4th	30	25.4	25.4	100.0
	Total	118	100.0	100.0	
Total		118	100.0		

**Tabel 3.** Economic implications

**Tabel 4.** Professional development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
<b>Valid</b>	1st	44	37.3	37.3	37.3
	2nd	58	49.2	49.2	86.4
	3rd	8	6.8	6.8	93.2
	4th	4	3.4	3.4	96.6
	5th	4	3.4	3.4	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>118</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
<b>Valid</b>	1st	8	6.8	6.8	6.8
	2nd	26	22.0	22.0	28.8
	3rd	26	22.0	22.0	50.8
	4th	54	45.8	45.8	96.6
	5th	4	3.4	3.4	100.0
		<b>118</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>118</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

*Table 5. Cognitive development*

### 3. Study boundaries

The questionnaire survey method reveals through questions of opinion aspects pertaining to the perception of each participant in the investigation, a relative perception of their inner universe, mood, and sometimes these items imply difficulties in the accuracy of the answers given, the consistency between real views and those expressed by suitable or unsuitable, true or false answers.

We believe that the limited sample of teachers we used in this research, compared to the large number of pre-university teachers, could be another limit of our investigation.

The results of the survey based on the questionnaire show that the majority of the investigated teachers correlate positively the achievement of the second didactic degree with the development in the didactic career, and the attitude towards the continuous training and their capacity for self-appreciation positively influences the perception regarding the professional and personal development, seen as a personal growth through the accumulation of cognitive and motivational experiences.

The respondents' answers allow us to confirm that Blended Learning programs can improve adult education generally and particularly it can contribute to the increase of efficiency and the visibility of continuing educative programs made for teachers by establishing of new, Blended Learning based methods.

### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Although at European level there are concerns about the professional development of teachers, many studies that have been developed proved that it is difficult to identify their pragmatic effects. Djoub (2018) interprets teacher identity in a holistic fashion and goes beyond focusing only on the professional aspects of being a teacher. The author maintains the integrity between the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of teacher identity that can lead to a "new wholeness" Palmer (1998). According to him, this wholeness does not mean perfection, rather "it means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am (Palmer 1998, 13). Research has therefore attempted to explore the relationships between teacher identity and several related components that contribute to its development, e.g., teacher knowledge, professional development, language learning, and the role of emotions. To explore the personal or invisible side of teacher's identity, teacher knowledge, beliefs and emotions are to be accounted for.

Professional development is positively correlated with personal development when the individual needs, objectives and exigencies are linked to the educational policies promoted by the state authorities. Therefore, in the didactic profession, the motivation of the person, the intrinsic motivation, dependent on the personal desire and the beliefs of self-efficacy, are in a relationship of interdependence.

There are a range of life skills that assist teachers in coping with the challenges of everyday living. Getting organized, solving problems, engaging and caring about students are among the key life skills that teachers need in the profession.

Regarding the findings, we have also identified similarities with other studies. Therefore, Kramarski and Michalsky (2009) propose that such programs should focus on the three key elements found here to influence teachers' professional growth: empowering teachers' skills, strengthening their pedagogical knowledge, and shifting teachers' perceptions to a student-centered approach toward learning and teaching.

The didactic career is double-dimensional, on the one hand the objective side which implies the development and progress of the teaching staff and, on the other hand, the subjective side which represents the proper professional path, consisting of the assumption of a very complex ensemble of knowledge, skills, aspirations and

individual motivations, relative to the requirements of the education system.

It is very important to be aware of the fact that personal development is a powerful tool to reach a well-defined and healthy sense of self as teachers (self-concept enhancement), which can result in positive self-esteem and self-confidence. Besides, it enables teachers to recognize, understand and manage their emotions thereby having good intrapersonal skills (emotional intelligence).

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# **Variables that influence teachers' attitude regarding the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream school system**

**Claudia Crişan, Ion Albulescu, Emanuel Sebastian Turda**



# Variables that influence teachers' attitude regarding the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream school system

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

inclusive education, special needs in education, continuous training, mainstream school system

„Education for All” is the concept intended to lift all barriers found in educating all children, especially, those vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Therefore education for all represents the ideal of maximum flexibility and tolerance regarding diversity. The study conducted on 130 teachers, from 5 Romanian counties (Cluj, Mureș, Sălaj, Maramureș, Bistrița-Năsăud), had the purpose of identifying the attitudes of the teachers towards the educational inclusion of children with CES. We wanted to find out if there were significant differences in perception between counties but also related to the teachers' age/experience. The results didn't show any difference in perception between counties, as well as the way the teachers' attitudes were influenced by their age/experience.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Schulische Inklusion, Kinder mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf, Fortbildung, Schule

„Erziehung für alle” ist das Prinzip, das den Zugang aller Kinder in der Schule unterstützen soll, durch die Entfernung der Erziehungsschranken, besonders für die Kinder, die von Exklusion und Randerscheinungen gefährdet sind. Schule für alle heißt also der Wunsch auf maximale Flexibilität und Toleranz was Diversität betrifft. Das Studium wurde durchgeführt mit 130 Lehrern in 5 Kreisen Rumäniens (Cluj, Mureș, Sălaj, Maramureș, Bistrița-Năsăud) und hat als Ziel, die Identifizierung der Einstellung dieser gegenüber der schulischen Inklusion der Kinder mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf. Wir wollten erfahren, ob es große Einstellungsunterschiede in den verschiedenen Kreisen und abhängig von Alter und Arbeitserfahrung im Lehramt. Die Resultate haben Unterschiede in den Einstellungen gegenüber Kindern mit besonderem Förderungsbedarf zwischen den Kreisen und auch inwieweit das Alter die Anschauung der Lehrer beeinflusst.

## 1. Introduction

Over time, the international community has systematically built the vision upon education. Today education is considered a human right and not a privilege. „Education for all” is the concept launched in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), a concept intended to lift all barriers found in educating all children, regardless of gender, religion, linguistic, psychological, physical and socio-cultural differences, especially regarding children that are vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Therefore education for all represents the ideal of maximum flexibility and tolerance regarding diversity, while also looking for solutions that will efficiently meet the learning needs of children, related to their learning rhythm and style, abilities, competences, interests, facilitating their development and expression according to their personality traits.

Conventions, declarations, and resolutions regarding inclusive education constitute the framework for the development and establishment of the politics and inclusive practices, supporting principles of equality and social participation of children and people with disabilities. Among these, we can mention The World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien (1990); The Salamanca Statement (1994); The World Education Forum, Dakar (2000); The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); The Oslo Summit on Education for Development (2015), etc.

In this context, the UNESCO political orientations related to inclusive education (2009) have highlighted the aspects that require the most consideration, specifically at the educational level. Inclusive school need to develop teaching methods that fit the individual differences of all children; from a social point of view: inclusive schools demand a change in the attitudes towards diversity,

forming the base for a nondiscriminatory society; at the economic level: inclusive schools keep all children together, eliminating the complex system of specialized schools for different groups of children (Furfurică Băiescu, 2013).

## 2. Theoretical foundation

Inclusive education seamlessly combines the universal principles of a child-centered pedagogy, and the individual differences are seen as natural. From this point of view, the role of the educational system is that of identifying ways of adapting to those differences and of answering to the educational needs of the students. Therefore when discussing the integration of special needs children in the mainstream school system, it is important to identify solutions that help the adapting and socializing process (Băiescu, 2013).

In order to develop a suitable framework for the successful integration of these students in the educational environment, Loreman (2007) presented seven main factors that are found at the basis of this process, which are: (1) a positive attitude; (2) inclusive politics and leadership; (3) school and class management; (4) flexible curriculum; (5) continuous training and resources; (6) community involvement; (7) reflection upon performance. Therefore, the success of the school inclusion, depends greatly on the positive attitude of those involved in this process, especially that of the teachers, students, parents, managers, community, etc. (Gelheiser, Meyers, 1996, Niemeyer, Proctor, 2002, Van Laarhoven, et. al., 2007 apud Cullen et al., 2010). It also depends on the existing of specialized personnel, resource specialists who are able to offer counseling, support and willingness to collaborate with the teachers from the mainstream school system (Wolery et al., 1994; Wesley, 1997), and nevertheless on the existing of the psycho-pedagogical assistance services (Hammond, Ingalls, 2003), on the necessary space and logistics in order to satisfy the educational needs of all children (Wolery et al., 1994), and on the continuous training of the teachers (Loreman, Deppeler, 2002).

Băiescu (2013) thinks that the teachers' attitude towards inclusive education is greatly determined by their personal experiences in dealing with children with disabilities, initial training, the existence of some form of support, the number of students in a class and the responsibilities that the teachers have at the institutional level. Hobbs și Westling (1998, apud Loreman, 2007)

have highlight that the success of school inclusion is sustained by the positive attitude, aspects that have also been reviewed by Shanma (2008 apud Cullen, 2010), who mentioned the fact that teachers that have a positive attitude towards inclusive education are also more open to the adaptation and change of ways of teaching, suited to the needs of the students.

On the opposite side, negative attitudes towards inclusive education have been correlated with low expectations regarding the academic success of children with disabilities, which, could also have a negative impact on others' performance (Wilczenski, 1993, Forlin et al., 1999). According to Murphy (1996), the teachers' negative attitudes regarding the inclusion of special needs children are difficult to modify because these have at their core negative experiences, fear of novelty and resistance to change. Therefore the teachers' initial and continuous training regarding the process of inclusion is very important because it is a context of developing positive attitudes towards the social and school inclusion as well as their benefits. This fact is also supported by Loreman (2001) who showed that the teachers' needs: the need for specialized support; the need for constructive partnership between teachers and specialists, and also the teachers' need for professional training and development.

Additionally, the same author pointed out that the lack of suited resources and logistics is a barrier against school inclusion (Loreman, 2001). Among other obstacles, scientific literature mentions also lack of knowledge, lack of competences regarding the best practice design solution for school inclusion and the fear of taking responsibility in educating this category of children (Worrell, 2008; Orr, 2009). The previously negative experiences often determine teachers to show a skeptical attitude (King-Sears, 2008) towards the benefits of school inclusion.

## 3. Research methodology

The *purpose of this research* was to investigate the perception of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs

This *study's hypotheses* are the following:

- The opinions of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs will be differ by age and seniority.

- The opinions of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs will be differ by county.

### 3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 130 female teachers from five counties (Cluj, Sălaj, Maramureş, Bistriţa-Năsăud and Mureş) having the age between 25-60 years old ( $M_{age}=42$  years old and 5 months,  $SD_{age}=10.3$ ).

**Table 1.** Distribution of participants included in the study by age and county

		County					Total
		Cluj	Bistriţa Năsăud	Maramureş	Sălaj	Mureş	
<b>Age</b>	25- 30 years old	4	0	2	10	1	17
	31-40 years old	6	8	5	1	11	31
	41-50 years old	15	6	11	6	22	60
	51-60 years old	5	6	2	3	6	22
	<b>Total</b>	30	20	20	20	40	130

### 3.2. Instruments

*Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC, Cochran, 1998)*

The STATIC was developed by Cochran (1997) to measure the attitudes of teachers who teach students with special needs and to identify relationships between the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion and towards disabled or special need persons in general.

The instrument contains 20 questions which are divided in four subscales; these are (1) Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusive Education, (2) Professional Issues, (3) Philosophical Issues, and (4) Logistical Concerns. Items are evaluated on a 1-5 point Likert scale where 1 represents „strongly disagree” and 5- „strongly agree”.

Following a factor analysis, Cochran (1999) found that for the overall scale, the reliability was to be around  $\alpha = .89$ . This coefficient is both for teachers in special and general education, but also for teachers in elementary and secondary school. Instead, the reliability coefficient for individual subscales were: Advantages and Disadvantages  $\alpha = .87$ , Professional Issues  $\alpha = .83$ , Philosophical Issues  $\alpha = .57$ , and Logistical Concerns  $\alpha = .62$ .

The STATIC has been used in numerous studies investigating teacher attitudes toward inclusion (Martin, 2010; Parker, 2009; Pierre, 2009; Ross-Hill, 2009; Royster, 2011; Smith, 2008; Walpole, 2008).

*Attitudes Towards Teaching All Students Instrument (ATTAS-mm, Noto & Gregory, 2011)*

The ATTAS-mm contains 9 statements and requires educators to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a seven point Likert scale, ranging from “agree very strongly” (1) to “disagree very strongly” (7).

Each statement in the ATTAS-mm instrument corresponds to one of three scoring subscales for the instrument to address the three theoretical components of attitude: cognitive, behavioral, and affective (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945; Ajzen, 1985). The first three statements are designed to measure the cognitive dimension of attitude, which is defined as “believing all students can succeed in general education classrooms”. The next three statements measure the affective dimension of attitude and is titled “developing personal and professional relationships”. The final three statements assess the behavioral aspect of attitude; this subscale is referred to as “creating an accepting environment for all students to learn” (Gregory & Noto, 2012).

To test the validity of the revised version of the instrument, in 2012, the authors of the ATTAS-mm selected 27 items for a pilot test of the instrument. An initial factor analysis was conducted to identify and retain only those items with initial correlations of .7 or greater on a rotated component matrix; that is, those items that were closely related to other items in this attitude measurement instrument. A principal components analysis

(PCA) was conducted by the authors of the instrument on the remaining 12 items to identify those that related to or loaded most strongly on one of the three components or factors. Nine of the twelve items were retained, and an additional factor analysis was run on these items. The unstandardized Cronbach's alpha reliability statistic for the remaining nine-item ATTAS-mm scale was calculated by the instrument's authors to be .833 (Gregory & Noto, 2012); a value of at least .8 is considered to be acceptable (Cardinet, Johnson & Pini, 2010, p. 5).

### 3.3. Procedure

The current study had a correlational and quasi-experimental design, thus the principal purpose was to investigate the perception of teachers regarding the inclusion of children with special needs.

### 4. Results

For testing the first hypothesis we calculate the Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate whether there is an association between teachers' perception of inclusion by age and age.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
age	2,66	,90	130
seniority	3,44	,98	130
Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	23,6	2,43	130
Professional Issues	14,6	2,32	130
Philosophical Issues	15,07	2,53	130
Logistical concern	13,51	2,48	130
Cognitive dimension	12,10	2,89	130
Affective dimension	15,47	5,43	130
Behavioral aspect of attitude	14,80	2,53	130

**Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients for the measured variables**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. age	-								
2. seniority	.54*	-							
3. Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	-.13	-.10	-						
4. Professional Issues	.016	-.15	.18**	-					
5. Philosophical Issues	-.14	-.19**	.43*	-.040	-				
6. Logistical concern	.38	-.10	-.36*	-.10	.56*	-			
7. Cognitive dimension	.03	-.05	.23*	-.09	.28*	.32*	-		
8. Affective dimension	-.24*	-.28*	.17**	-.06	.34*	.11	.23*	-	
9. Behavioral aspect of attitude	-.15	-.20**	.28*	-.08	.51*	.31*	.54*	.35*	-

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To verify if there are significant differences regarding teachers' perception of inclusion according to the county, we applied the one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA).

**Table 4. Descriptive indicators for measuring variables**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Advantage Cluj	30	22,6	2,25	,411	21,75	23,44	19,00	27,00

and disadvantage of Inclusion Education	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	24,7	2,73	,61	23,4	25,98	19,00	29,00
	Maramureş	20	23,7 5	2,12	,475	22,75	24,74	21,00	29,00
	Sălaj	20	24,5	1,67	,37	23,71	25,28	22,00	28,00
	Mureş	40	23,2 7	2,59	,40	22,44	24,10	18,00	28,00
	Total	13 0	23,6 0	2,43	,21	23,17	24,02	18,00	29,00
Professional Issues	Cluj	30	14,1 6	2,49	,45	13,23	15,09	9,00	20,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,9	2,93	,65	13,52	16,27	6,00	20,00
	Maramureş	20	14,4 5	2,06	,46	13,48	15,41	11,00	19,00
	Sălaj	20	14,7 0	1,68	,37	13,90	15,49	12,00	18,00
	Mureş	40	15	2,27	,35	14,27	15,72	11,00	19,00
Philosophic al Issues	Total	13 0	14,6 6	2,32	,20	14,25	15,06	6,00	20,00
	Cluj	30	14,8	1,62	,29	14,22	15,43	10,00	18,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,9 0	1,83	,40	14,04	15,75	9,00	17,00
	Maramureş	20	14,1 5	3,82	,85	12,35	15,94	9,00	20,00
	Sălaj	20	16,9 0	1,44	,32	16,22	17,57	14,00	19,00
Logistical concern	Mureş	40	14,9	2,68	,42	14,04	15,75	9,00	19,00
	Total	13 0	15,0 7	2,53	,22	14,63	15,51	9,00	20,00
	Cluj	30	13,3	2,60	,47	12,32	14,27	8,00	18,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	14,8 0	1,60	,35	14,04	15,55	11,00	17,00
	Maramureş	20	12,1 0	3,62	,81	10,40	13,79	5,00	18,00
Cognitive dimension	Sălaj	20	13,7 0	1,30	,29	13,09	14,30	11,00	15,00
	Mureş	40	13,6 5	2,23	,35	12,93	14,36	9,00	19,00
	Total	13 0	13,5 1	2,48	,21	13,08	13,94	5,00	19,00
	Cluj	30	12,2 3	2,16	,39	11,42	13,04	7,00	15,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	12,6 5	2,36	,52	11,54	13,75	9,00	16,00
Affective dimension	Maramureş	20	11,2 0	4,60	1,03	9,04	13,35	3,00	19,00
	Sălaj	20	11,7 0	2,27	,50	10,63	12,76	8,00	14,00
	Mureş	40	12,4 0	2,82	,44	11,49	13,3	7,00	17,00
	Total	13 0	12,1 0	2,89	,25	11,60	12,61	3,00	19,00
	Cluj	30	14,5 6	3,01	,55	13,44	15,69	9,00	21,00
	Bistriţa- Năsăud	20	15,4 5	2,01	,45	14,50	16,39	13,00	21,00
	Maramureş	20	15,0 0	5,04	1,12	12,63	17,36	7,00	21,00
	Sălaj	20	18,7 0	11,45	2,56	13,33	24,06	11,00	66,00



Behavioral aspect of attitude	Mureș	40	14,8	2,45	,38	14,01	15,58	9,00	20,00
	Total	130	15,47	5,43	,47	14,53	16,41	7,00	66,00
	Cluj	30	14,60	3,06	,56	13,45	15,74	7,00	20,00
	Bistrița-Năsăud	20	14,70	1,75	,39	13,88	15,51	12,00	19,00
	Maramureș	20	15,10	3,41	,76	13,50	16,7	10,00	21,00
	Sălaj	20	15	2,27	,50	13,93	16,06	12,00	19,00
	Mureș	40	14,77	2,13	,33	14,09	15,45	9,00	19,00
	Total	130	14,80	2,53	,22	14,36	15,24	7,00	21,00

*Table 5. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Teachers Perceptions by county*

		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
<b>Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education</b>	Between Groups	75,07	4	18,76	3,40	,011
	Within Groups	690,12	125	5,52		
	Total	765,20	129			
<b>Professional Issues</b>	Between Groups	13,991	4	3,498	,64	,634
	Within Groups	681,117	125	5,449		
	Total	695,108	129			
<b>Philosophical Issues</b>	Between Groups	87,31	4	21,82	3,68	,007
	Within Groups	739,91	125	5,91		
	Total	827,23	129			
<b>Logistical concern</b>	Between Groups	75,86	4	18,96	3,28	,014
	Within Groups	722,60	125	5,78		
	Total	798,46	129			
<b>Cognitive dimension</b>	Between Groups	29,57	4	7,39	,87	,480
	Within Groups	1054,91	125	8,43		
	Total	1084,49	129			
<b>Affective dimension</b>	Between Groups	255,51	4	63,87	2,2	,068
	Within Groups	3550,91	125	28,40		
	Total	3806,43	129			
<b>Behavioral aspect of attitude</b>	Between Groups	4,01	4	1,0	,15	,962
	Within Groups	828,17	125	6,62		
	Total	832,19	129			

## 5. Discussions

Analyzing the means from table 2, a neutral, slightly positive attitude of teachers regarding the inclusion of special needs children into the mainstream school system can be observed. Therefore teachers don't feel they are

sufficiently prepared in taking the responsibility of teaching special needs children, but they show a high openness towards developing personal and professional relationships which can facilitate the process of inclusion.

Following the completion of correlation analysis between the considered nine variables, according to table 3, it can be observed that there is a negative correlation between the following: aspects regarding philosophical issues of the inclusion of special needs children in the mainstream school system and seniority ( $r(128)=-.19$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), affective dimension and age ( $r(128)=-.24$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and seniority ( $r(128)=-.28$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and between attitudes towards creating an accepting environment for all children in the mainstream school system (behaviour) and seniority ( $r(128)=-.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). According to these results, we can state that educators with higher seniority don't manifest a positive attitude towards the philosophy of special needs children inclusion in the mainstream school system, age having a negative correlation to affective dimension and the behavioral aspect of attitudes regarding the inclusion, data that partially confirm the working hypothesis.

According to the descriptive data from table 4 a skeptical attitude of educators regarding the advantages/disadvantages of the inclusion with a 23,60 total score of mean can be observed; the philosophy regarding inclusion (Mean=15,07); the necessary logistics (Mean=13,51); beliefs regarding the success of special needs children inclusion in the mainstream school system (Mean=12,10). Regarding beliefs, a difference in perception among counties can be observed, in Maramures and Salaj counties it can be observed beliefs against inclusion. Also concerning the philosophy of inclusion, it can be observed that the educators from Salaj county have a more optimistic attitude, with a 16,90 mean, when compared with the rest of the educators, from example those from Maramures who have a 14,15 mean.

The positive attitude of educators was observed in the segment of the development of personal and professional relationships which can facilitate the inclusion of special needs children (Mean=15,47), the highest scores are in Salaj (Mean=18,70) and the lowest in Cluj (Mean=14,56). The positive attitude of educators was also observed regarding the wish of creating an inclusive learning environment for all children (Mean=14,80), with the highest scores in Maramures County (Mean=15,10) and the lowest in Cluj County (Mean=14,60).

It is also observed that the educators are not feeling sufficiently prepared for accepting the special needs children into the mainstream school system

(Mean=14,66), which led to beliefs against the inclusion (Mean=12,10).

According to the obtained results (Table 5), it is concluded that significant statistical differences are depending on the variable county regarding the educators' perception towards the inclusion of the special needs children – subscale: advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion ( $F(4,125)=3,40$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), philosophical issues ( $F(4,125)=3,68$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and logistical concern ( $F(4,125)=3,28$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In order to verify among which counties there are significant differences, we calculated the post-hoc t Tukey test. The results showed the existence of significant differences between the Cluj-Bistrița-Năsăud counties (Tukey  $t=2.21$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and Cluj-Sălaj counties (Tukey  $t=2.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), for Advantage and disadvantage of Inclusion Education scale, for Philosophical Issues scale between Cluj-Sălaj, Maramureș-Sălaj (Tukey  $t=3$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Sălaj-Mureș (Tukey  $t=3.74$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and for Logistical concern scale between Bistrița-Năsăud and Maramureș (Tukey  $t=2.28$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Therefore the second hypothesis is only partially confirmed.

## 6. Conclusion

The results obtained in the study confirm international results. Therefore older people, despite their experience, show reluctance towards special needs children inclusion into the mainstream school system. This is due to the reluctance towards change, to difficulties in understanding the philosophy of this paradigm and to old professional training paradigms they were educated in. As Worrell (2008) and Orr (2009) stated, the lack of knowledge regarding the inclusion and the fear of accountability appears frequently in the cases of older educators, where the change of attitude and the modification of cognitions is hard to achieve. More than that, the educators, regardless of county, are feeling totally unprepared from their professional training point of view, considering that there is the need for practical training courses and examples of good practice, which can help them build self-professional confidence that they are able to assume the responsibility of teaching these children. We believe that the offer of continuous training courses that emphasize the practical component adapted to the class needs will easily eliminate the reluctant beliefs against inclusion and will facilitate a greater openness of educators towards this category of students.

The fact that most of the results show a neutral approach of teachers regarding inclusion indicates the lack of trust in the success of teaching as a result of the few positive experiences in dealing with this category of children and of course the lack of professional training courses and the lack of necessary resources and logistics in designing activities adapted to the learning needs of this category of children.

We consider more than necessary to carry out continuous training courses focused predominantly on examples of good practice, to facilitate cooperation/partnership between teachers and specialists in various areas of special education and to provide support in carrying out curriculum adaptation by providing methods and techniques appropriate to the needs of training of special needs children, providing educational institutions with the necessary equipment and promoting the benefits of educational inclusion for both special needs students and other students, teachers, parents, and the community.

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# **Objectives of the Early Education in Romania – A Theoretical and Practical Teleological Curricular Study**

**Valentina Souca, Bianca Pop-Ignat, Muşata Bocoş**



# Objectives of the Early Education in Romania – A Theoretical and Practical Teleological Curricular Study

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

early education, early education curriculum, early education objectives, derivation of kindergarten objectives

In Romania, early education is undergoing an intense process of curricular reform which began during the school-year of 2005-2006, when the first attempts had been implemented by the Minister of Education at the time, university professor dr. Mircea Mică (with the support from the World Bank, UNICEF, universities and NGOs), continued in the following years through the implementation of two projects (PETI and PRET, with the support of UNICEF), and culminated with the publication of The Ordinance by the Ministry of Education no. 4.694 of 2nd August 2019 regarding the approval of the curriculum for early education. It was by this ordinance that the Educational Plan as well as the Teaching Methodology and the Teaching Programme for early education were enacted. Thus, new objectives were established for the early educational system, capable of reflecting the changes in our society, the recent contributions from the learning psychology, as applicable to preschool education, and able to conform to the reform and the general principles of the Romanian educational system, to the contemporary orientations regarding the educational objectives, and, last but not least, build rapport with the specific objectives of the other levels of education, and with the international educational legislation and practices.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Frühpädagogik, Frühpädagogik-Curriculum, Frühpädagogik-Ziele, Ableitung von Kindergartenzielen

In Rumänien durchläuft die Frühpädagogik einen intensiven Prozess der Lehrplanreform, der im Schuljahr 2005-2006 begann, als die ersten Versuche vom damaligen Bildungsminister, Universitätsprofessor Dr. Mircea Mică (mit Unterstützung der Weltbank, der UNICEF, der Universitäten und der NGOs), wurde in den folgenden Jahren durch die Umsetzung von zwei Projekten (PETI und PRET, mit Unterstützung der UNICEF) fortgesetzt und gipfelte in der Veröffentlichung der Verordnung des Bildungsministeriums Nr. 4.694 vom 2. August 2019 über die Genehmigung des Lehrplans für die Früherziehung. Mit dieser Verordnung wurden der Bildungsplan sowie die Lehrmethodik und das Lehrprogramm für die Frühpädagogik erlassen. So wurden neue Ziele für das frühe Bildungssystem festgelegt, die die Veränderungen in unserer Gesellschaft, die jüngsten Beiträge der Lernpsychologie, wie sie für die Vorschulerausbildung anwendbar sind, widerspiegeln und mit der Reform und den allgemeinen Prinzipien des rumänischen Bildungssystems, mit den zeitgenössischen Orientierungen bezüglich der Bildungsziele und nicht zuletzt mit den spezifischen Zielen der anderen Bildungsebenen sowie mit der internationalen Bildungsgesetzgebung und -praxis in Einklang stehen.

## 1. Introduction

The educational reform that the Romanian educational system is undergoing at the moment proposes a new fundament for the quality of the educational system, in general, and of the educational process, in particular, by setting new strategic targets for all its levels.

Among the sustainable development goals set by the UN in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN, 2015), Goal no.4 proposes an inclusive and equitable education for all, as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Thus, in accordance with the above mentioned document, until 2030, all countries must ensure

that all the girls and the boys will have access to early development, personal care and quality pre-primary education, so that they are prepared for primary education.

This led to the modification of the Education Act no. 1/ 2011, through art. 16 (1) of the Ordinance no. 56/ 2019, as follows: "Compulsory education is comprised of primary education, secondary education and the first 2 years of upper-secondary education. Upper-secondary education and the upper kindergarten group of preschool education will become compulsory by 2020, at the latest, the middle kindergarten group by 2023, and the lower kindergarten group by 2030".

The data contained in the Report on the State of the Pre-university Education in Romania from 2017-2018, published on the site of the Ministry of Education, page 9 shows that: "The gross data of children enrollment in preschool education, as calculated during the school-year of 2016-2017 compared to the total number of children of corresponding age, had increased slightly as compared to the previous year with 0,7 points, up to the value of 91,6%. A greater percentage was registered in the urban areas (97, 4%) compared to the rural area (85, 0%)."

On page 57 of the above-mentioned Report, it is stated that: "The participation in preschool education of the children aged between 4 and the official age of entering compulsory education is an European indicator that has as target, for the year 2020, the value of 95%. The most recent comparative data at European level published by Eurostat for all countries refers to the year 2016. The UE-28 average regarding this indicator was of 95,3%, on a steady increase as compared to the previous years. The highest levels were registered in France and the United Kingdom. The countries that registered the lowest levels are Slovakia, Croatia and Greece. In Romania, a major increase was registered from 67.6% in 2000 to 88,2% in 2016."

## **2. An analysis of the curricular teleological component of the curriculum for early education**

Education Law no. 1/ 2011 with subsequent amendments and additions, art. 67, paragraph 1, states: "The national curriculum for early education is focused on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of the children, respectively on the early correction of any developmental deficiencies."

According to the Curriculum for early education (2019, p. 4), early education is based on a series of principles that indicate, in essence, the promoted fundamental values:

- "The principle of child-centered education (knowledge, respect and appreciation of the uniqueness of the child, its needs, requirements and characteristics);
- The principle of respecting the rights of each child (the right to education, the right to free expression, etc.);
- The principle of active learning (designing learning experiences in which the child participates actively and can also choose and

influence the way the learning activity is carried out);

- The principle of integrated development (through an integrated approach to activities, multidisciplinary / interdisciplinary);
- The principle of interculturality (knowledge, recognition and respect of national and other ethnic values);
- The principle of equality and non-discrimination (the development of a curriculum that will ensure, in equal measure, opportunities for development of all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status);
- The principle of education as interaction between educators and the child (the results of education depend on both parties involved in the process, both on the individuality of the child and on the personality of the educator / parent)", as well as the principles that guide the practices / methodological choices of the teachers (Curriculum for early education, 2019, p. 5):
- "The principle of individualization (activities are organized taking into account the child's own pace of development, his / her needs, ensuring the children's freedom to choose activities and tasks according to their needs);
- The principle of play-based learning (playing is the activity through which the child develops naturally, therefore it must be at the basis for didactic activities of all types);
- The principle of diverse learning contexts and situations (offering an educational environment of different learning contexts and situations, which require the child to be involved in as many aspects as possible: cognitive, emotional, social, motor);
- The principle of alternating the forms of class organization: frontal, in small groups, in pairs and individually as well as of the learning strategies;
- The principle of sustaining a partnership with the family and with the community (it is necessary that a partnership is established between the educator and the family, which would ensure the continuity and coherence of the educational process; the family is an active partner, not simply a recipient of the information provided by the educator regarding the progress made by the child; moreover, understanding the value of education is paramount for the community, as well as the

participation of the community in the early development period)."

The objectives of early education concern a number of behavioral aspects of preschoolers, which constitute the basis for the key competences that are formed, developed and diversified during subsequent schooling. A regulatory component of the National Curriculum is represented by

the Graduate Training Profile, which describes the expectations in relation to the pre-school graduate, but also to the 4th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade graduates.

The details regarding the behavioral aspects of the graduates of preschool education for each personality dimension are shown in table no. 1.

**Table 1.** *Training Profile of the Preschool Graduate*

<b>Cognitive Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Operating with elementary mathematical representations (numbers, numerical representations, calculus, concept of space, geometric shapes, understanding of models, measurement) in different learning contexts;</li> <li>- Using information about the environment and the world, through observation, manipulation of objects and investigation of the environment;</li> <li>- Expressing curiosity for the exploration of the natural and social environment;</li> <li>- Expressing interest in using technology, while raising awareness of how it improves and affects life.</li> </ul>
<b>Socio-emotional development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in adequate interactions with adults and children, by showing initiative and applying simple rules for communication and connection;</li> <li>- Developing awareness of the inner personal changes as well as those that occur in the environment, by identifying differences and similarities;</li> <li>- Accepting responsibilities within the various membership groups;</li> <li>- Being able to identify basic elements regarding personal identity (name, age, gender, physical appearance, date and place of birth, home address);</li> <li>- Exercising the ability to control emotions, positive and negative experiences;</li> <li>- Recognizing and sharing one's feelings/emotions in the relationship with others, in different forms.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical development, health and personal hygiene</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating regularly in various physical activities (movement games, running, dancing, sports games);</li> <li>- Using the fine motor skills of hands and fingers in various activity contexts;</li> <li>- Consciously using the senses and interacting with the environment;</li> <li>- Manifesting, autonomously, habits of preservation of personal health and hygiene;</li> <li>- Respecting the rules of behavior and personal security in different situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Developing language and communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exercising the ability to pronounce correctly sounds and words;</li> <li>- Identifying / recognising sounds, letters, words; matching the corresponding sound – letter;</li> <li>- Formulating simple messages while communicating with others, respecting basic rules of correct oral expression;</li> <li>- Manifesting interest in listening to stories or story-telling, respecting the sequence of events;</li> <li>- Showing interest in books and reading.</li> </ul>
<b>Development of skills and attitudes in learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manifesting curiosity and interest regarding changes/phenomena/ events in the immediate vicinity, so as to experiment and learn new things;</li> <li>- Demonstrating initiative in interacting and performing activities;</li> <li>- Demonstrating the ability to concentrate and be persistent during learning activities;</li> <li>- Demonstrating creativity in games and daily activities.</li> </ul>

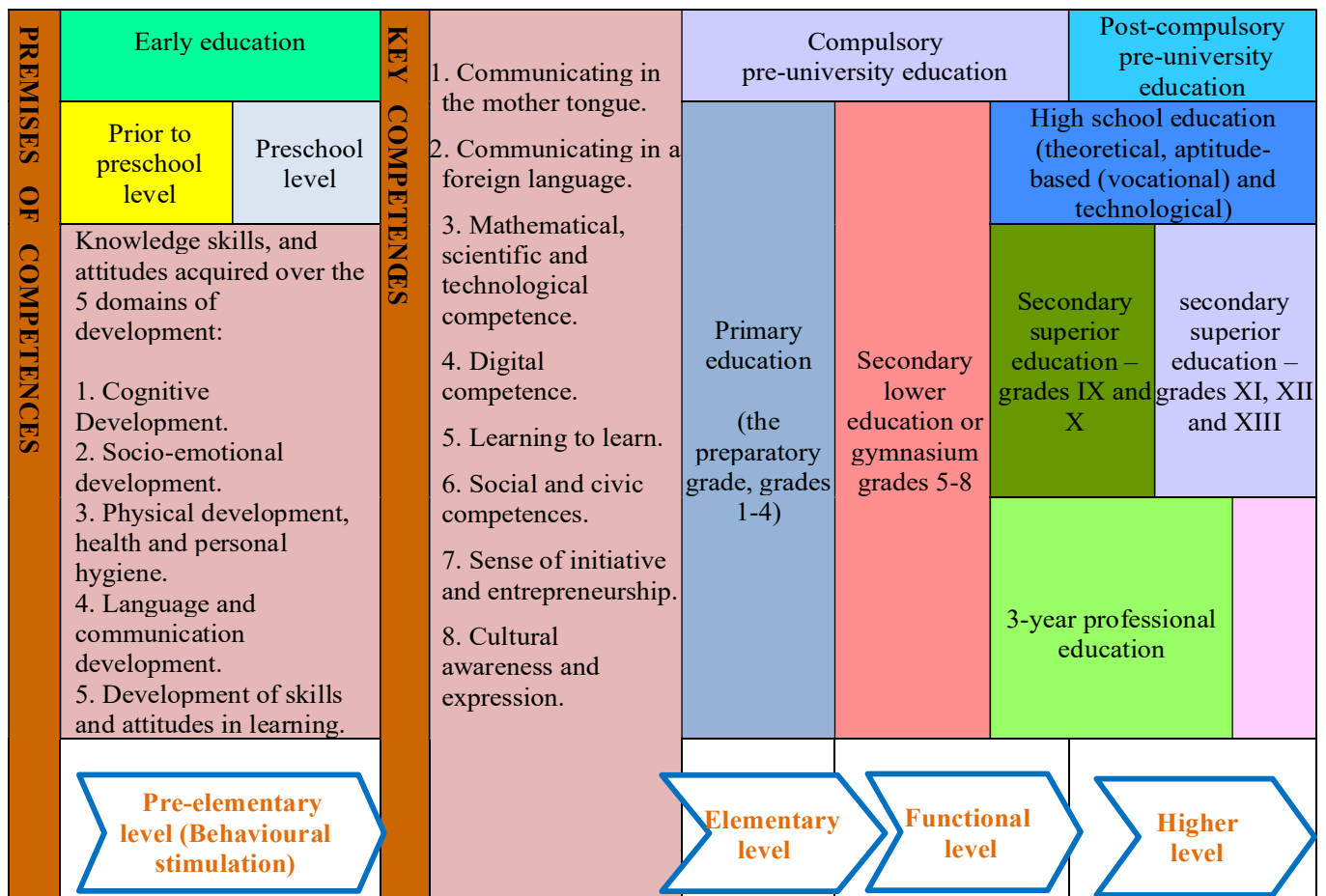
In the Curriculum for Early Education (2019, p. 14) the objectives of early education are stated. Thus, the document certifies that these objectives "address a series of aspects which constitute the basis for the key-competences which are formed, developed and diversified during subsequent schooling cycles":

- The free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, according to his/her own pace and general needs, supporting his / her autonomous and creative training.
- Development of the capacity to interact with other children, with adults and with the environment to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours;
- Encouraging exploration, exercises, tests and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences;

- The discovery, by each child, of his / her own identity and autonomy and the development of a positive self-image.
- Supporting the child in the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes required for his / her school entry and throughout life.

Figure no. 1, below, taken from the Curriculum for Early Education (2019, p. 15), highlights the importance of early education in the formation of the key competences, explicitly addressed on the other stages of pre-university education. Early education stands at the basis of the development of these competences, as, through the knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired over the 5 domains of development (Cognitive Development, Socio-emotional development, Physical development, Health and personal hygiene, Developing language and communication, Development of skills and attitudes in learning) the basis for the future competences are laid.

**Figure 1.** *The structure of the pre-university educational system correlated to the level of achievement of the key competences*



### 3. An illustration of a means of pedagogical derivation of the objectives in preschool education, starting from the official curriculum (personal contribution)

In early education, given the particularities of child development up to 6 years of age, using the concept of *competence*, understood as an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitudes is not appropriate. Therefore, the axis of the specific curriculum for early education constitutes of: domains of development – dimensions of development – behaviours, as basis for the future competences.

"By capitalizing on this axis, the educators will make the necessary pedagogical derivations and, starting from the domains of development targeted in the *Curriculum for early education* and detailed in the Fundamental guidelines for the learning and development of the child from birth up to 7 years of age, - they are to select the dimensions of development, for each domain of development, according to the age and level; they are to transfer into didactic practice and are to «operationalize» the chosen behaviours by designing appropriate learning activities." (*Curriculum for Early Education*, 2019, p. 15).

### An example of pedagogical derivation in view of designing the activities carried out in kindergarten:

**Stage 1** – One has to select from the *Curriculum for early education* (2019) the domains of development, more precisely, in our case,

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world
- C. Learning abilities and attitudes

**Stage 2** – For each domain of development, one has to select at least a dimension of development (but there can be more than one), in our case:

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world
- E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world;
- C. Learning abilities and attitudes
- C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

**Stage 3** – For each of the dimensions selected one has to choose the behaviours specific to the activity, in our case,

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world;



E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world;

E.3.2. To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, the Earth and the Space

C. Learning abilities and attitudes

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

C.2.1. To perform the work tasks consistently

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties in accomplishing.

**Stage 4** – One has to formulate the operational objectives for each of the selected behaviours. For the integrated activities one or more operational integrative objectives can be formulated. In our example, we have elaborated two integrative operational objectives for C.2.1. The second is marked with an asterisk, as it can be optionally used during the activity, depending on the interest of the children or on the psycho-individual and group characteristics. As illustrated below:

*E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world*

*E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world*

E.3.2 To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, the Earth and Space

- to compare the component parts of the two flowers, identifying at least a similarity and a difference between them;

- to practice taking care of the two plants by placing them in a luminous area, in the heat and imitating watering with watering cans;

C. Learning abilities and attitudes

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

C.2.1. Performing the work tasks consistently

- to reconstruct from the elements provided the structure of the two flowers (chrysanthemum and button poms) by correctly using the gluing technique, naming each component part (root, stem, leaves, flowers);

- to reconstruct from the elements provided the structure of chrysanthemum and tufa flowers by the correct use of the gluing technique indicating for at least one of the component parts of the plant its importance in the flower's development.

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received, for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties with.

- to request / accept the help of a person (educator, colleague) during the individual activity so as to complete the task.

**Adequate learning activities are devised:**

**Stage 5** – One has to identify the experiential domains, and then the category of activities within which the children are to practice the behaviours detailed above and the means of accomplishment, in our case The Science Domain – knowledge of the environment – observation, more precisely The Man and Society Domain – practical activities – gluing.

**Stage 6** – The theme of the activity is established and the most suitable didactic strategies for accomplishing the operational objectives are identified by the educator, by devising the activity plan, in compliance with the suggestions of the Ministry of Education, through the support methodologies, contributing to a better design procedure of the activities carried out with the children in kindergarten.

We exemplify, below, the **introductory component** of a planned didactic activity:

*The Upper Group*

*The annual study theme:* When, where and why it happens?

*Thematic project:* Autumn – the paradise of warm colours

*Sub-theme / Theme of the week:* Scent of Autumn

*The experiential domain:* Science, Man and Society

*Category of activity:* Activities on experiential domains

*Title of the activity:* the Chrysanthemum and the button poms

*Didactic procedures:* observation, gluing

*Dimensions of development:*

E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

*Targeted behaviors:*

E.3.2. To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, of the Earth and Space;

C.2.1. To performs tasks consistently;

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties with.

*Type of activity:* mixt

*Category of activity:* integrated activity

*Aim:* to familiarize children with characteristic elements of the surrounding world (with focus on autumn flowers) and to exploit them in various learning contexts.

*Operational objectives:*

- to compare the component parts of the two flowers, identifying at least a similarity and a difference between them;

- to practice taking care of the two plants by placing them in a luminous area, in the heat and imitating watering with watering cans;

- to reconstruct, from the elements provided, the structure of the two flowers (chrysanthemum and button poms) by using the gluing technique correctly and naming each component part (root, stem, leaves, flowers);
- to reconstruct, from the elements provided, the structure of chrysanthemum and button poms by using correctly the gluing technique, and indicating at least one of the component parts of the plant, and the importance it has in the flower's development;
- to request / accept the help of a person (educator, colleague) during the individual activity, to finish the work.

*Didactic strategies:*

- *Teaching methods and procedures:* observation, educational game, exercise, explanation, demonstration, problematization, cube, Venn diagram.
- *Didactic means:* a flower garden in which there are pots with chrysanthemums and button poms, plant-care tools, colored paper parts of the chrysanthemum and the button poms, gluing paste, work table, a film presenting the conditions for plant-caring and the effects of their neglect, video projector, laptop.
- *Forms of organization:* frontal, individual, in pairs, in groups.
- *Evaluation techniques:* oral evaluation, analysis of preschool activity products.

*Time:* 40 minutes

#### 4. Conclusion

The legislative changes in the field of early education are welcome and may lead to better results in terms of the quality of education offered to children.

The resolution of gradually introducing the upper group, the middle group and the lower group into compulsory education will construct the legal framework for all children to benefit from this type of education. Consequently, in order for the measures to be implemented successfully and to lead to the expected results, the need arises to review the educational financial management at macro level.

The existence of the teleological curricular component in the *Curriculum for early education* (2019), respectively of the inventory of the educational objectives instituted for children, from birth to 6 years of age, offer a balanced and coherent vision on the expected results, summarized in the training profile of the graduate from pre-school level. In the long-term perspective, this component is a benchmark for affirming early education as a basis for lifelong learning and as a basis for individual, social and economic well-being.

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The authors have equal contributions to this article.

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# **Techniques for Increasing Group Cohesion in the 5th Grade**

**Ștefănescu Andreia, Albulescu Ion, Iacob Lucica, Feldrihan Claudia**

# Techniques for Increasing Group Cohesion in the 5th Grade

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

group activities, cooperation, cohesion, cohesion techniques of the student group

The study sets out an exploratory research that aimed at testing some techniques for increasing the cohesion of the 5th grade student group. The techniques were included in the classes of counselling and personal development through group tasks in which the whole group of students was involved. The activity took place during the first school semester of the 2019-2020 school year. Following the application of the techniques, their viability was tested through a focus group discussion with 10 form teachers involved in the research. They described how the activity was carried out and the results obtained in the cohesion of the student class. The investigation is preliminary to that extended to the level of several schools, aiming to make the built techniques more efficient, in order to be widely applied, to the students in the secondary school cycle.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Gruppenaktivitäten, Zusammenarbeit, Zusammenhalt

Die Studie enthält eine explorative Untersuchung, die darauf abzielte, einige Techniken zur Verbesserung des Zusammenhalts der Schülergruppe der 5. Klasse zu testen. Die Techniken wurden in die Stunden der Beratung und persönlichen Entwicklung durch Gruppenaufgaben einbezogen, an denen die gesamte Gruppe von Studenten beteiligt war. Die Aktivität fand im ersten Schulsemester des Schuljahres 2019-2020 statt. Nach der Anwendung der Techniken wurde ihre Lebensfähigkeit durch eine Fokus Gruppendiskussion mit 10 an der Forschung beteiligten Führungskräften getestet. Sie beschrieben, wie die Aktivität durchgeführt wurde und welche Ergebnisse im Zusammenhalt der Schülerklasse erzielt wurden. Sie beschrieben, wie die Aktivität durchgeführt wurde und welche Ergebnisse im Zusammenhalt der Schülerklasse erzielt wurden. Die Untersuchung ist vorläufig für diejenige, die auf das Niveau mehrerer Schulen ausgedehnt wurde, um die gebauten Techniken effizienter zu machen, damit sie für Schüler im Sekundär Schulzyklus allgemein anwendbar sind und -praxis in Einklang stehen.

## 1. Introduction

The educational systems and their policies in the contemporary period emphasize the importance of support for those who educate and for those who are educated, to understand that the science accepted by the present society is a professional approach whose preconceptions are related to the evolution of future generations. Thus, the dimension of education has to be re-shaped around an authentic educational society (Ionescu, 2007). Numerous studies reveal the existence of changes at the cultural level, predominating the preoccupations for the post-materialistic axiological orientations the self-expression, the quality of spending free time, the socialization experiences that children and young people have and so on (Robu & Ceranfil, 2018). In trying to include these elements in the educational context, we outlined a study whose overall objective is to increase group cohesion in the class of students. The choice of this theme is based on

the fact that the high level of cohesion within the educational teams integrates all the elements with considerable impact on the learning process, namely, efficient relationships, socio-affective climate, group performance, group decision making and so on (Pânișoară, 2015)

In order to carry out this study, a series of techniques have been devised with the purpose to be used in the classroom. They were designed to change group dynamics in order to increase group cohesion. Their use during the lessons assigned to the subject "Counselling and personal development" aimed at accomplishing common tasks in which the whole group of students was involved. The techniques used allowed the students to become aware of the qualitative examination of the school contents and to respect the formal normative system in schools. The extent to which the requirements of the techniques were met were quoted with points that the students accumulated



for a common budget. Depending on the total number of points accumulated by the entire group, a decision was made at group level regarding the reward they could receive from a service offer made available by the head teacher. It is important to emphasize that, as a result of the application of the materials, a pressure effect of the group has been installed on all the members where the common task has become a priority over the competition.

The article summarizes the main results of the activities carried out during the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year, and the centralization of the proposals for optimization of the elaborated materials, so that they can be extended at the level of several schools, to classes in secondary education.

## 2. Particularities of cohesion in the class of students

Formal education is one of the environments in which the individual can find recognition and social acceptance. On this subject, Weiss (2001) indicates that there are five types of social recognition: recognition as a member of a group; recognition in an assigned role; recognition in an acquired role; recognition in a public role (school performance ideally meets this requirement); the recognition of one's personal identity, of the uniqueness of each one. From the point of view of the principles that guide the theory and practice in the field of contemporary education, the emphasis falls on a series of values promoted by the postmodern paradigm, reflecting perspectives and solutions complementary to the classical and modern ones, adjusted to the needs of current societies in change, new directions, opening the need for educational projects adapted to them (Dahrendorf, 2010; David, 2017; Scott, 2006). The quality of learning, reflected in the European and internationally agreed quality indices, according to modern methodologies (Amundson, 2003; Moore, 2006; Scott, 2006), is often associated with a high quality of school group relationships, that is, motivated as a result of group interaction and thus achieve performance (Gilbert, 2010; Mullen & Copper, 1994). This is possible in the presence of a high level of cohesion.

Cohesion describes the attraction force that a group exerts on the component members, through functions of control, influence, pressure towards uniformity and so on, and the result is the feeling of belonging and unity, respectively "we" (Dion, 2000). Pânișoara describes cohesion as "a phenomenon of the spirit of closure in the

group", and for Festinger this is "the result of all the forces that act so that the members remain in the group" (Pânișoara, 2008, p. 230). As a psychosocial phenomenon, cohesion generates a series of psychosocial effects that are defining for the quality of life of a social group (Cristea, 2015). Cohesion is a fundamental characteristic of the syntax. This concept is introduced by Cattel to "distinguish and oppose the personality of the group from the personality of the individual", and in the school context "the class sense is a qualitative result, always something beyond and beyond the mere reunion of the distinct individualities" (Nicola, 1974, p.199). According to Krâșiko (2007), cohesion indicators are shown, on the one hand, by the level of sympathies expressed in the group, specifying that the higher the number of individuals who like each other, the higher the cohesion, and on the other hand, the extent to which there is a phenomenon of attraction of the group for its members, rendered in the number of people satisfied by their presence in the group, than of those who participate as a result has the advantages offered by the group. Cohesion was described in the 1950s as a "system of forces" acting on individuals to remain in the group (Festinger, 1947, beside Ilut, 2009), the concept being seen, from the 1960s, as an interpersonal attraction ("force") within groups (Lott & Lott, 1965, Cote Dion, 2000). The multifunctional models of cohesion were present in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s in social psychology and psychology, being famous for Carron's hierarchical model (1988, beside Dion, 2000), and after the 2000s the focus falls on how cohesion dimensions can be quantified for application in research and intervention. Thus, two-dimensional models of analysis (task and social cohesion, vertical and horizontal cohesion, belonging and morality, personal attraction versus social attraction) are built. The importance of studying this social phenomenon in the context of the school groups lies in the fact that, on the level of cohesion, the way in which the dynamic activity in the school is carried out (Sălăvăștru, 2004). Research in the field (Beal, Cohen, Burke, McLendon & Christy, 2003; Mullen & Copper, 1994) has shown strong correlations between cohesion and performance. The performance obtained by the group is a synthetic indicator of the evaluation of the extent to which the basic social functions are fulfilled (Neculau, 2007). In this sense, it can target the social, professional, educational plan, etc. (Cristea, 2015). In all aspects of cohesion, it can be added that emotional experiences and especially emotional closeness play a mediating role in the feeling of belonging

to the group. Also, motivation is an essential vector in obtaining the performance and legitimizing the value of the individual in relation to the others (Weiss, 2001), previously mediated by the feeling of group cohesion (Dion, 2000; Rouchy, 2000). A research on the opinion profiles on the mechanisms by which the interpersonal relationships are built (and the social capital is developed – at its bases there is the feeling of belonging), carried out in 12 European states (England, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), which interviewed 1490 adults of both sexes from different social categories over 18 years, indicated that the education system - formal and informal - is considered the most important environment for friendship (cohesion) but also for result and performance orientation (Van Oorschot, Arts & Gelissen, 2006). In addition, research is consensual about the fact that when group members feel satisfaction (motivations of several types), mental comfort and a feeling of security, cohesion increases (Rouchy, 2000).

Based on the results of the theories and studies synthesized above, the program proposed by the present research aims to verify the degree of certainty with which the educational programs carried out in the classroom can increase cohesion and thus optimize adherence to the school environment and school performance.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1. The purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is materialized in the testing of the efficiency of some educational intervention techniques in order to increase the group cohesion in the 5th grade.

#### 3.2. The research objectives

The objectives of the research consist of the following:

O1. Design of educational intervention techniques that stimulate the change of group dynamics in the class of students in order to increase the group cohesion.

O2. Outline an educational program to increase the cohesion of the group on the techniques of educational intervention.

O3. Continuous training of leading teachers in order to apply the techniques of increasing cohesion in the classroom.

O4. Applying the techniques to the 5th grade learners during the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year, at the subject "Counselling and personal development".

O5. Evaluation of the efficiency of the proposed techniques through a focus group among teachers

#### 3.3. The research hypothesis

The educational program applied to the 5th grade learners at the subject "Counselling and personal development" will lead to the modification of the group dynamics in order to increase the group cohesion.

#### 3.4. Research methods and tools

In order to test the efficiency of the techniques of increasing cohesion, the focus group method was used, through an interview guide.

The interview guide applied to the completion of the activities carried out during the semester was structured on the following topics of discussion:

- a) How did the proposed activity (map in Romanian language class, menu for observing the rules, accumulation of points, followed by the purchase from the mall) go to your class? In what way have you succeeded in introducing these tasks into the flow of educational activities to the class you are in charge of?
- b) How do you generally evaluate these types of activities? Are they interesting, do they make a real contribution to students in interpersonal relationships and communication, group cohesion? Explain in which areas they are beneficial or quasi-useless and why.
- c) Were the students sufficiently motivated to complete the tasks? If yes or no, why do you think this has happened?
- d) The way the students used the materials was creative, they got involved, they looked for solutions, or they just tried to carry out for the task without motivation? Please describe how they manifested themselves (for both situations).
- e) Thinking about the relationship between co-operation and group cohesion, what can you tell us

about how the students manifested themselves during their activities? To what extent did one dimension or another prevail? Why do you think this has happened? Describe possible causes, influencing factors.

- f) Regarding the aspects of communication and networking in this activity, mention some problems (weaknesses) that you have encountered, respectively some benefits (strengths).
- g) If this is the case, what would you improve on the activity / this type of activity?

The tools used in the research targeted the techniques that include the school content for the subject "Romanian language and literature", one material that targets the normative system and another that constitutes the reward system for the class group.

The first technique built was to create a special map for Romanian language classes, which includes a route similar to an itinerary sprinkled with fun tasks and rewards in case of success.

Regarding the assimilation of effective rules of relation by the students, a funny "menu" was created in such a way as to stimulate the cooperation within the classroom. Actions are grouped into categories of rules to be followed and each reward is offered a reward, respectively for each violation, a penalty. Rewards and punishments are at points converted into money (euros), obviously fictitious, but with psychological value and potentially stimulating for the whole class to feel that they have accumulated "power" and have the capacity to enhance the group's successes and to legitimize the competence of the whole class (the feeling of cohesion). Penalties are also converted into money losses.

Following the accumulation of points by the whole group, the reward consists of purchases from the school mall, the options for the desired things being evaluated through the collective analysis of needs and priorities, and after the negotiations of the moderate class of leadership (argumentation of different points of view, discussions free items) will be purchased from the important items considered important for the whole group, depending on the amount accumulated through the effort of each student.

### 3.5. The group of subjects

The sample of exploratory qualitative research consisted of: the group of the form teachers - 10 subjects - from Bistrița-Năsăud county, from the rural and urban areas. They were offered working materials consisting of the techniques built with the mentioned purpose, as well as the activity chart. With the leaders there was a preliminary training for their activity with the students, to apply the techniques to the classroom and to standardize the evolution of the activities, as well as the results obtained during the 1st semester. At the end of the period, a focus group was organized with the teachers involved to gather relevant information on the efficiency of the class cohesion program.

### 3.6. Research procedure

In the exploratory phase of the research, the aim was to regulate the mechanisms by which the school motivation is stimulated by cooperation in order to obtain the group performance. The continuous training of the teachers in the research project integrated in this study aims to prepare the teachers who are at the same time form teachers for the development of the educational program in the class of students. The practical objective of this approach is to identify flexible psycho-educational intervention techniques in line with the optimization of the relationship between cohesion and performance, which take into account the characteristics of the group of students and at the same time facilitate the continuous training of teachers. The first stage of the exploratory research targeted the executives in order to develop their competence to use the techniques intended for efficient relationships, focusing on increasing the cohesion of the group (in the classroom), through a program of playful techniques, based on the relational dynamics between the students. In the second phase of the exploratory phase, at the level of the students, the main objective was the evaluation of school motivation in a group context, correlating the feeling of responsibility (belonging) with that of reward (motivation), through some mediating purpose-factors: performance and cooperation. The executives had to apply to their technical classes and to write down weekly the results, the changes observed at the class level and the problems encountered.

*Presentation of the focus group with the teachers.*

As a qualitative research endeavour, the focus group with leaders is useful in the pre-testing phase of the built

techniques, in view of possible modifications of the strategy or of content elements of the working tools to be applied at a wider level, in schools. The focus group method is devoted to social sciences, the tool being very useful for collecting data from participants in order to rectify, complete and carefully analyze the methodological variables and factors from the exploratory phase that will be considered in the subsequent research (Chelcea, 2008), as well as at the end of some investigations, in order to collect qualitative data and thus enrich the conclusions (Rotariu & Iluț, 2006). In this research the focus group method for exploratory research was used, prior to the actual one. Therefore, we have now limited ourselves to recording the way in which the application of these techniques (mode of development, interest and motivation of the students) is received and the problems at the level of the effective tools, so that the research strategy can be improved before administering the techniques to extended scale.

The experiences described and the suggestions from the participants to the focused discussion came as a specialized complement to the strategy and methods initially conceived, in the idea of perfecting both the techniques and certain constituent elements of the proposed activities but also of identifying the registered vulnerabilities of the activity of increasing the cohesion of the class.

### 3.7. Creating the focus group

Several participants were invited: Participant 1 (P1) - F, teacher of Romanian language, rural school; Participant 2 (P2) - M, teacher of Romanian language, urban school; Participant 3 (P3) - F, teacher of religion, school rural; Participant 4 (P4) - M, teacher of geography and history, rural school; Participant 5 (P5) - F, democrat teacher, rural school; Participant 6 (P6) - F, Romanian teacher, urban school ; Participant 7 (P7) - F, mathematics teacher, urban school; F, Romanian teacher, urban school; Participant 8 (P8) - F, Romanian teacher, urban school; Participant 9 (P9) - F, teacher of Romanian language, urban school; Participant 10 (P10) - F, teacher of education / social sciences, school urban environment.

*Audio recording:* with miniport and written observation notes.

*Duration of the focus group:* 1.45 h

Period and place of the performance: 19.02.2020 (starting at 14.30), within a lower secondary school in the town of Bistrița, Bistrița-Năsăud county.

*Rules of conduct:* Presentation of the organizer and the moderator;

Presentation of the focus of the group and the topic of discussion: the participation of the leaders in the exploratory research project that aims to identify the most suitable techniques for increasing cohesion in the classroom, with the mention of the importance given to the honesty of the answers, in this way being able to improve and adapt the methods and strategies developed until now, in the exploratory stage, to the real needs of the students in order to increase the performance and the interest for the school through the feeling of cohesion. Ensure that the personal data of the participants are confidential and the results will be used only for the aforementioned purpose, in accordance with the ethical principles agreed in the scientific community.

Then, the participants' self-presentation took place in the focus group (institutional affiliation, taught disciplines / function). The questions were addressed to each one, one at a time, in order of the presentation. The participants had 2-3 minutes to answer each question. The duration of the entire discussion was 1 hour and 40 minutes. At the end of the discussions, the most relevant conclusions on each topic addressed were drawn. The ten participants intervened, circularly, on almost all the proposed themes. Where they had nothing to add to what the previous speakers had said, this was noted. The conclusions for each topic addressed were unanimously outlined, mentioning the reservations or completions of some of the participants. I mentioned in brackets the code of each member of the focus group (P1 - P10) where their interventions are cited or synthetically reformulated.

## 4. Results

In the rows below we present the main ideas that emerged after the group meeting, with the synthesis of the intervention of the participants. The full focus group responses are included in the detailed research report. As some questions were inevitably raised as intersecting topics, being discussed by the group members at another point during the discussion, we will outline below sections with the central topics that have been addressed. The references and the extension to the other topics, within them, made the subsequent resumption unnecessary (by



addressing the question), these topics being dealt with at the appropriate moment in the course of the discussion.

The focus group topics are described below:

**Table 1.** *The way of carrying out the tasks, their integration in the flow of activities*

P	Summary of the intervention	Relevant transcripts
1	It points to the difficult management of time allocated to extracurricular activities and the initial reluctance of students to other tasks assigned to the class.	We encounter many problems with time management, because there are many activities to be done outside the hours and the students see almost any proposal as an extra task and not as a useful fun. Because students often have problems concentrating, it took about a week until they understood exactly what to do and up to date the whole class.
2	It does not indicate problems of introducing the activity within the other school and extracurricular tasks.	The approach was coherent, practically the class organized almost by itself, after they had understood what to do.
3	It shows that from the point of view of time management there are many problems, because it has an extremely competitive class, oriented to individual success (stimulated by parents) and few of the performers want to participate in anything other than formal hours.	The children reacted with interest and we succeeded in managing all the steps to make the required recordings. Time is limited, although students have found time to participate and advance with the accumulation of points. The workload is high at all times, so it was not possible to keep track of how these techniques worked.
4	He states that the tasks have been completed without problems, and the activities have integrated harmoniously into the flow of the others provided in the curricula and in the extracurricular ones.	The students were very interested in the menu for compliance with the rules and asked many questions that helped me organize the program during the classes. Through the positive stimulation of the participants the flow of activities went by itself. They dealt with themselves practically.
5	It does not mention problems with the way it is organized or organized.	The proposed activity was very interesting to my 5th grade students, as they are curious about everything that is new, they have become more responsible, they helped each other a lot among themselves. There were no organizational problems.
6	It is noted that the problem of the flow of tasks / the repeated training addressed to the students and the problem of monitoring (the task of the class leader or other designated student, the observation sheets being centralized by the principals) are important.	The map for the Romanian language and literature discipline and the menu for observing the rules were extremely useful. The flow of tasks was more difficult to introduce because I had to give further explanations. The most troublesome was the monitoring part.
7	No problems in the organization are reported.	The map for the Romanian language and literature discipline and the menu for observing the rules were extremely useful. I had no problems with the management of the activities, it was fun and exciting.

8	It indicates the effort put into management but appreciates the benefits of the program at the motivational level and in the results (notices the enthusiastic atmosphere in the classroom).	I teach Romanian language in four V grades (including the class I am the form teacher to), and with the map I had a lot of work, but it was worth it because they were more aware of what they are learning, they had a visual support that reflects their instructive course and so were motivated. Once a week we tell them how many euros the class has accumulated. The children were always very excited.
9	No problems in the organization are reported.	The activity proceeded normally, the students attended carefully, they showed seriousness and interest.
10	No problems in the organization are reported.	I managed to apply the map to the classroom by using Romanian language in collaboration with the teacher and the students managed to raise Euro for the homework, paying attention to the time and the learning. At the time of the management the students accumulated Euros for cleaning, discipline in class and breaks.

**Table 2.** *Evaluation of activities in several aspects*

P	Summary of the intervention	Relevant transcripts
1	It shows how the students engaged in cooperation, how they managed to organize themselves but also how they helped each other, the importance of group leaders who acted cohesively.	The activities are useful and helpful. The students who had the highest degree of initiative were involved from the beginning, so I saw that they were able to come together if they had a common purpose and were motivated. The money motivated him and behaved as if it were real. It's an age when I get these kinds of activities. The shyest ones did not manage to maintain the step from the beginning, but were pressured by the others to keep up with them.
2	It describes the enthusiastic way in which the students received the map in Romanian language, the amusement aroused by the menu of norms was launched from the beginning, but keeping the spirit of fair play in relation to colleagues who did not accumulate enough points (money).	In my opinion, children should be involved more often in such activities because it creates a good atmosphere for cooperation, a balance. They like the money and have enjoyed the sum collected as something real. They just waited, at the end of each week, to see what they could buy.
3	It describes how the class is segregated into very good students and very weak students, which created from the beginning a barrier to class cohesion as a whole.	Some have given up their interest because of the very good learning leaders who have made great progress in the beginning and thus they have lowered the confidence of the weakest.
4	It stresses the usefulness of techniques in personal development and on the dimension of social integration.	They are useful in broadening the horizon of knowledge and self-knowledge. I think the most useful ones are in the curricular area of "Man and society"



5	It indicates the interest of the students precisely because of the playful aspect and the fact that being an extracurricular activity it attracts children. Emphasizes mutual assistance in carrying out tasks.	The proposed activity was very interesting to my 5th grade students, as they are curious about everything that is new, they have become more responsible, they helped each other a lot. Such activities are welcomed, as they somehow bring students out of the area of strictness, rigidity.
6	It mentions the benefits of developing individual skills.	The activities are interesting, stimulate creativity, ambition and the courage to take on an answer or solve an exercise.
7	Such activities are considered interesting and useful.	Through motivation and responsibility, the students were hired until the end in the program, in fact he continued now, after theoretically it was over ... the techniques are challenging and I have really noticed a change.
8	It emphasizes the importance of establishing a common goal and describes the positive dynamics and interest expressed by the student for this program.	The tools you have provided me with have been a means by which students really feel rewarded for their effort to learn and behave responsibly. Being the form teacher of a 5th class that, in the first weeks, raised a number of small but disturbing problems, I used the idea presented and I managed to motivate them positively because they had an immediate purpose that they could achieve only with all having inappropriate behaviour. I also gave fines, but I bought from the school mall a Halloween party, a week in which they stayed in the banks with whom they wanted, a week without a uniform, an hour of running with interesting games, postponing a test. And all with great enthusiasm from the children.
9	It insists on the benefits on the cohesion dimension and the motivation of the students through the exciting nature of the proposed techniques.	I find these types of activities interesting, being appreciated by students. They develop both their communication skills and their relationship with others. During the counselling hours, these activities were beneficial because it helped them to be more united, following the rules of the class, so as to accumulate as many points.
10	It indicates the attractive means (rewards) through which the communication and networking was achieved within the class.	The students were delighted with the idea of earning euro and spending it further. They connected and communicated wonderfully with each other for the purpose.

**Table 3.** *Synthesis of the interventions to improve the program: Strengths / Weaknesses - Proposals to improve the techniques*

P	Summary of the intervention	Relevant transcripts
1	Strengths: spontaneous participation.	The strong point is that the students actually participate in this activity, without stimulating it further. The weak point is the lack

	<p>Weaknesses: insufficient time.</p> <p>Sanctions should be established and felt as a group loss.</p>	<p>of time for activities outside the curriculum.</p> <p>It would be good to think that the non-observance of the group norms should be amended more seriously, so we educate them to be more aware of those around them, of the needs of others.</p>
2	<p>Strengths: self-assessment, skills testing and easy integration of information.</p> <p>Weaknesses: organization and control.</p> <p>The suggestion of making maps for other disciplines, and the techniques to be developed in such a way as to cover several levels of difficulty.</p>	<p>The strengths would be that the students can evaluate themselves, translating for them the points obtained and can be corrected without receiving directions from outside.</p> <p>The weaknesses are the organizational ones and the control of the situation.</p> <p>Maps to other disciplines would be welcome. There are students who come with big gaps in the primary classes and even functional illiteracy. It is difficult to explain to them a more complex game that they can play just like the others. I think it would be good to develop techniques with different levels of difficulty, if you reach a level to move on to the next and so on ... to work differently with children, as we do at hours, depending on the capacity of each.</p>
3	<p>Strengths: interesting and participatory game</p> <p>Weaknesses: Propose additional game themes to enhance class cohesion.</p>	<p>It was a lot of fun from the start and a few weeks ago this was the topic in all the breaks. The game should include fines in case of fraud (...) in case of sabotage of colleagues, for example. Let's not encourage fierce competition.</p>
4	<p>Strengths: team cooperation</p> <p>Weaknesses: large number of students.</p> <p>It has no improvement proposals.</p>	<p>As a strong point I would mention the cultivation of the team spirit. The weak point I would say is the large number of students in the classroom that affects any activity, it is not possible to work effectively in classes with over 30 children.</p>
5	<p>Strengths: beautiful materials, responsibility, cohesion created through activities.</p> <p>Weaknesses: -Making maps on several subjects.</p>	<p>The strong points are the beautiful materials, the responsibility of the students, the unity between the colleagues, I saw how they collaborate, how well they relate to reach their goal. Such a map would also be useful in mathematics.</p>
6	<p>Strengths: group stimulation, attractive activities</p> <p>Weaknesses: the resource of time</p>	<p>The strong points are the stimulation of all the students and the attractive activities</p> <p>Weak points are not too much, but we are facing a lack of time.</p>
7	<p>Strengths: the game aspect of the activities</p>	<p>The strong point is that everything becomes a play and is not felt as a task for students. The weak point is that they fail to collaborate effectively, the whole class (...) small groups that</p>

	Weaknesses: low class cohesion	compete with other groups.
8	<p>Strengths: positive effects on cohesion, networking and communication, team feeling.</p> <p>Weaknesses: time resource, activity management and monitoring.</p> <p>Enriching the list of products to stimulate motivation.</p>	<p>The strong point is certainly that these tools increase the cohesion of the group because it involves the whole class, and the fine received by a student influences the budget of the whole class. The students practiced negotiation, communicated effectively and collaborated, feeling that they were a team.</p> <p>The weak point is the lack of time and the management of the monitoring by the Romanian teacher or teacher.</p> <p>It would be ideal to have material and time resources that allow us to offer students in "mall" more attractive products to increase their motivation.</p>
9	<p>Strengths: stimulating materials, useful and enjoyable way of assimilating through the game.</p> <p>Weaknesses: Loss of self-esteem in those who have not accumulated points.</p>	<p>The strengths were at the level of stimulation, the students creatively used the materials involved in the given tasks. Applying the map to the Romanian language, learning was no longer a pain for the students, but it was a real pleasure. The students were aware that all information can become interesting, which will be useful later. As a problem, in the activities we encountered problems such as the loss of self-esteem if the students did not reach their goal or lost the first place.</p>
10	<p>Strengths: effective communication and networking, easy way to insert tasks through the game</p> <p>Weaknesses: lack of covering other disciplines. Suggestion: Development of the program to adjust to several disciplines.</p>	<p>The strong points were the good communication, the effective relations, the easier way of accomplishment of the activities through the game.</p> <p>I propose to develop the applicability of the techniques in several disciplines.</p>

## 5. Conclusions

The main findings from this study are detailed in the following: the proposed techniques prove to be useful and attractive to students. The motivation for involvement in the game is high. The students feel an optimal balance between rewards and punishments, in order to assume responsibility but also to positively legitimize the good

behaviours and results. At group level, tasks involve cooperation and succeed in creating the feeling of cohesion. However, there have been situations in which problems of class segregation arisen, mainly due to the large differences in academic skills. The factors of increasing the cohesion that are shaped by the research are: the common purpose, the functional competition, the

feeling of control by self-evaluation, the rewards and legitimation of the effort, respectively the sanctions for violating the norms. Depending on the environment in which the students come from, certain specificities emerge. In this regard, it has been proposed to develop different techniques, by degrees of difficulty, to cover the category of students who fail to participate in complex games from the beginning. Due to the success of the map from the Romanian language, several leaders have proposed the creation of such materials and other school

subjects. The exploratory research described above has highlighted the importance of flexibility and contextualization, which is in agreement with the trends mentioned in the literature. This implies a joint effort by the researchers: to prepare the techniques, to carry out adapted trainings with the teachers and to follow the results at the level of the cohesion indicator of the class of students, followed by specific indicators of school performance.

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# **Influences of Social Psychology in the Pedagogical Approach of the Class of Students**

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# Influences of Social Psychology in the Pedagogical Approach of the Class of Students

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## Abstract

The study synthesizes the influences of social psychology on educational practice within the school context and circumscribes pedagogical and psychosocial perspectives that deal with the phenomena involved in the dynamics of the class-group. The class of students is the most interactive type of group and thus susceptible to instructive-educational training and psychosocial development, which makes this area of study extremely fertile for the psycho-educational policies oriented towards the formation of students with a view to optimal integration in their school environment.

### Keywords:

school groups, group dynamics, group roles, teamwork, cooperation

## Zusammenfassung

Die Studie fasst die Einflüsse der Sozialpsychologie auf die pädagogische Praxis im schulischen Kontext zusammen und umschreibt pädagogische und psychosoziale Perspektiven, die sich mit den Phänomenen befassen, die an der Dynamik der Klassengruppe beteiligt sind. Die Klasse der Schüler ist der interaktivste Gruppentyp und daher anfällig für die pädagogische Ausbildung und psychosoziale Entwicklung, was diesen Studienbereich für die psychopädagogische Politik, die auf die Bildung von Schülern im Hinblick auf eine optimale Integration in ihr schulisches Umfeld ausgerichtet ist, äußerst fruchtbar macht.

### Schlüsselworte:

Schulgruppen, Gruppendynamik, Gruppenrollen, Zusammenarbeit, Zusammenarbeit

## 1. Introduction

Studying the class of students from a pedagogical perspective has undergone various changes over time due to the development of the domain targeting the individual approach. If traditional pedagogy has placed the class of students at the center of its research, as a didactic and organizational process, contemporary pedagogy extends its focus on studies targeting socio-relational aspects and on complex dynamic structures that allow the connection of cognitive, affective, social and educational factors (Iucu, 2006). The latter approach can be supported by analyzing the branches of psychology, which can offer, in accordance to the principles and results of the research, an added value, possible to consider in order to optimize the instructive-educational context.

Social psychology exerts its influence on the educational process, and it considers the attempts to identify the problems of individual, relational and social

nature, in order to optimize the quality of life. The Romanian psychosociologist Chelcea (1997) considers that social psychology represents "the study of the interaction of human psychic behaviours and processes, as well as the results of this interaction: collective mental states and processes, group situations, personality" (quoted by Iluț, 2009, p. 35). These elements are found in the class of students.

The purpose of the present study is to identify the elements brought by social psychology in approaching a class of students as a social group, in order to identify its relevance to the educational process. The interest in this topic is provided by the data found in the literature that underline the importance of the confluence of pedagogy with the social psychology in the formal educational context. In his studies, Zlate (1972) quotes the authors and their works: Piaget (1939) pointed out the need for the exchange of principles and techniques between the two fields, Debesse (1955) identified the need for a pedagogy

supported by the data within psychology, Pieron (1957) outlined psycho-pedagogy on the basis of a pedagogy founded on child psychology and Oleron (1964) indicated that education developed through research focused on the psychology of learning represented an interest in the psycho-pedagogical context (authors quoted by Zlate, 1972).

The content reveals a comparative analysis of the class of students from the pedagogical point of view and of the social psychology in order to highlight the confluence between the two fields, to explain the path taken by social psychology in the study of the school groups and underline the influences brought by this field in the educational practice in the formal educational context.

The results of the paper are aimed at the contribution that social psychology has made to the study of the class group by identifying the elements that have developed and are preserved within the school and the educational context.

## **2. Essential milestones of the psychosocial analysis of the class of students**

If pedagogy offers the overall image of the class, from the perspective of the dimensions that outline a specific profile, respectively a) ergonomic; b) psychological; c) social; d) normative; e) operational and, f) innovative (Iucu, 2006), social psychology identifies the existence of dynamics, functions, tasks, purpose, interactions, structures, processes and psycho-social phenomena, norms, group behaviours and performance (Cristea, 2015). They are important in relation to the class of students because a group should not be seen as a static entity. On the contrary, it has a certain dynamic, it goes through the stages of formation and evolution, it is subject to classification criteria and acquires its own characteristics.

From a pedagogical point of view, the ergonomic dimension considers the need to ensure the physical frame, by arranging the furniture and the appropriate arrangement of the classroom to correspond to the physical, biological and medical parameters. The psychological one emphasizes the importance of knowing the psycho-individual and age particularities, as well as the capacity to learn in different stages of human development. The social side offers the image of the class of students as a group within which an informational and relational structure is developed and maintained. The

normativity encountered in the class of students has a constitutive role as it regulates the modalities of conducting school activities. The procedures, strategies, methods and means chosen by teachers for the purpose of carrying out interventions aimed at conformity and compliance, behavioural changes for ameliorative purpose and so on, are included in the operational dimension. In trying to launch the concept of "changing education", defines innovation as "that change in the field of educational structures and practices that aims to improve the system." At the educational level, the innovative dimension is realized in the three levels of knowledge: a) past and present educational practice; b) the tendencies and traditions that underlie the educational activities; c) identification of the waiting horizons of the students (Iucu, 2006, p. 97).

The class of students, without disregarding elements belonging to the educational field, can be subjected to an analysis from the perspective of social psychology. The dynamics reflect "the development in time of the process of setting up and functioning of the group as a system" (Cristea, 2015). After 1940, the research of Lewin and his school, together with Lippitt and White, led to the emergence of the "group dynamics" theory (De Visscher & Neculau, 2001, p. 11). The concept of "group dynamics" is used for the first time in articles written by Lewin, between 1944 and 1947, where "Dynamics: this word (...) denotes all the adaptive changes that occur in the overall structure of a group as a result of changes in the group. In some part of this group (...) in a group (...), something similar happens with the self-distribution of forces in a physical force field" (Krech & Crutchfield, 1948, pp. 22-23, quoted by De Visscher & Neculau, 2001, p. 17). The functions highlight the role of the group in the whole of sub- and subordinate systems, with direct reference to the social integration, the accomplishment of the tasks, the differentiated satisfaction of the psycho-individual needs of the members, the assurance of the process of maintenance, development and maturity. The task is the key element of a group because its characteristics directly influence the formation and maintenance of relationships of a communicative, socio-affective, functional nature and so on. The purpose is the result of overlapping the characteristics of the tasks with the individual and collective motivations of the members of the group. The interactions, manifested at the communicative, informational, socio-affective, motivational level, for the purpose of interpersonal

knowledge or for carrying out the task, concern all the relationships that are established between the members. Following these configurations, which become stable over time, psychosocial structures are formed. In their background, the types of interaction take the form of psychosocial communication processes, socio-affective, motivational-attitudinal and so on. The observable results of the development of psychosocial processes are the psychosocial phenomena, respectively cohesion, leadership, psychosocial climate and so on. Cohesion describes the attraction force that a group exerts on the component members, through functions of control, influence, pressure towards uniformity and so on, and the result is the feeling of belonging and unity, respectively "we". This is accompanied by group norms that are indispensable for establishing the members' behavioural benchmarks, depending on them being able to define positive phenomena such as conformity and compliance, or negative, such as deviance or delinquency, and group behaviours describe the development of group life. The performance obtained by the group is a synthetic indicator of the evaluation of the extent to which the basic functions are performed. In this sense, it can target the social, professional, educational level etc. (Cristea, 2015).

A common aspect of the sciences of social education and psychology is the study of groups, under particular aspects, and their dimensions. The definition given to the group of students, according to Webster's Dictionary (1989), is materialized in "reuniting a number of people, who have unifying relationships but also common characteristics. It presents itself as a living, dynamic, self-regulating system, which involves shared perceptions, multiple interactions with the school organizational environment" (quoted by Ionescu, 2007, p. 275). From a pedagogical perspective, the class of students (the group) represents "a dynamic ensemble in which formative processes are subordinated to the fundamental purpose, teaching, learning certain sets of information, attitudes and behaviours and which is constantly subject to the educational influences exercised by the school" (Iucu, 2006, p. 52).

### 3. Consequences of the educational practice

Influenced by theories that outline the definition of personality as a product of the interrelation between the social and cultural environment, to which is added the central idea of social constructivism, according to which individual knowledge and thinking are the direct result of

the interactions and interdependencies that are created between the individual and the others, the socio-centric system arose (Vgotski, 1930; Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1969; Pieron & Ruchlin, 1973; Buner, 1985; Bloom, 1969; 1971 - authors quoted by Cerghit, 2002). This model envisages the formation of the "social student" in the delimited space of the school formations under the influence of the education process, and this is possible to achieve if a number of conditions are met: a) the individual and social factors are equally important; b) the acceptance that the students' cognitive progress is influenced by the psychological and sociological variables; c) a "full" training is the result of a balance between the experiences acquired individually and those accumulated through social action (Cerghit, 2002).

The approach of the class of students from a psychosocial perspective aims at its association with the social group. This research direction is present in the literature from Romania and worldwide. Thus, Durkheim (1922), Wallon (1959), Jacard (1962), Girod (1962), Cantoni (1966), Chobaux and Filloux (1968) emphasize the importance of the process of "inter-influence" between the two fields, the sciences of education and social psychology (authors quoted by Zlate, 1972). The Romanian authors who have contributed in this field are Constantinescu (1966), Stoian (1966), Cazacu (1966, 1968), Zlate (1972), Păun (1982), Nicola (1996). The transfer of research data on small groups in the sphere of school groups was slow, because the focus was rather on explaining group phenomena and less on the formative nature of the group. Due to these coordinates, different authors such as Hopkins (1941), Baxter and Cassid (1943), Bradford and Lippit (1948), Trow (1950), Cunningham (1951), Passow and Mackensie (1952), started studying the dynamics of student groups (authors quoted by Zlate, 1972).

Romanian research in the field of social psychology has undergone similar stages of evolution with those of Western Europe or the USA, according to observations made by psychosociologists such as Tucicov Bogdan (1984), Chelcea (1998), Golu (2000), Neculau (1996), Zamfir (1997), Boncu (2002) and Cristea (2000) (authors quoted by Popoviciu, 2013, p. 23). Different influences of currents and schools, such as the pedagogy of the education groups and the sociometric technique, have made their mark on the investigations carried out in our country, but the socio-cultural values that influence the

types of relationships have led to the emergence of some reflections and original literature, including teamwork, action group and mutual aid, types of aid from the rural world, emerging as a need for people to they resist together under adverse social or natural conditions (De Visscher & Neculau, 2001).

The preoccupations of the social psychologists in Romania have expanded on the educational field, respectively, the class of students. In 1928, Professor Bârsănescu (quoted in De Visscher & Neculau, 2001) conducts a "pedagogical inquiry", which helped him to highlight the existence of phenomena specific to the class of students he calls "psychosocial entity". He discovers the existence of "informal norms" by observing that "the teacher's use of the solidarity of the class members can lead to the formation of a psychic community of the class, to the orientation of the collective activity according to this common specific and the functioning of norms that he does not know and he only understands them." (De Visscher & Neculau, 2001, p. 13). A research implemented by professor Petru in 1918, communicated in 1924 (quoted by De Visscher & Neculau, 2002, p. 15), inspired by the social pedagogy of work, shows that the organization of the class was based on some coordination structures: the class council, the court, the judiciary committee, etc., and the functions were exercised by the students, chosen by the group. Basically, the behavior of the group members is shaped and modelled by practicing the interaction patterns imposed by the group dynamics.

This information is currently under the name of "group roles". Ten years later, between 1932-1939, Professor Popescu Teiușanu organizes "extracurricular activities", inspired by Sanderson's models in England and Peterson's in Germany. In 1938, Professors Narly and Zapan implement the "Vocational Observation Sheet" method that allows the evaluation of each student in the class in which he is integrated. In 1940, Herseni published a "Guidance for school sociograms", and in 1967, starting with the sociologist Mișu's essay on sociometry, the study of school groups aroused considerable interest (authors quoted in De Visscher & Neculau, 2001). Psychological and sociological influences emphasized the education and training of children in the spirit of social solidarity, "replacing selfish competition and excessive rivalry with collaboration". These elements have become prerequisites for "new methods of education and training: teamwork in school communities and school groups, self-management

of the class (informal leader) and of school, school courts, country education homes etc." (Bădina & Neamtu, 1970, p. 20).

It is worth mentioning that "until the education reform of 1948, social psychology in Romania was more important, consuming western social psychology than producing native psychosociology, which does not mean that no significant field research has been done, natural or laboratory experiments. The most representative Romanian psychosociologists of this period have done specialized or doctoral studies abroad: Dimitrescu-Iași, Rădulescu-Motru, Herseni in Germany; Drăghicescu, Ralea and Pavelcu in France" (authors quoted in Chelcea, 2013, p. 79).

In the previous reports, references are made to the specialists' concerns regarding the socio-psychological context in which the students are integrated. The mode of social interaction, the quality of the relationships and their effects on the optimal development of the students has been a common research topic for Durkheim, Hubert, Leroy, Lewin, Anderson and Wittmer (apud Iucu, 2006, p.14).

Social psychology has made its mark on the educational sciences through the offered functional character, identified at the following levels: a) elaboration of pedagogical theories based on psycho-sociological phenomena, such as the teamwork of children, formulated by Cousinet, Freinet & Peterson and "non-directivism pedagogical", implemented by Rogers (apud. Zlate, 1972, p. 104); b) explaining the dynamics of the group of students by identifying the behavioral changes in the conditions of handling an educational variable, such as "teacher-centered teaching", "student-centered teaching" or "group-centered teaching"; c) offering intervention methods, adapted to the characteristics of the group of students; d) continuous training of teachers (Zlate, 1972).

The teacher-centered approach is based on "class leadership and control, understanding, cooperation, involvement, problem solving, affection and mutual respect" (Albu, 2002, p. 95). The directions of action consider the following proposals: "a) designing and planning ahead of the educational process, facilitating the introductory elements that will prepare the students/students for the acquisition of the new contents; b) clear highlighting of the criteria of progress by the teachers and granting the appropriate learning time; c) use of discourse



or lecture, explanation and demonstration as methods of transferring new content, to facilitate understanding-based learning; d) the involvement of students in collective discussions that will lead to the clarification of new contents and their integration in the old system, so that they can be used in daily life; e) concern for working in the bank or alternative activities, thus creating the road to individualized training; f) formulating homework, from the perspective of consolidating the learning process, but also of the involvement of parents" (Anghel, 2011, pp. 286-287). Snyders (1978) considers that the school population does not exhibit the psychological fragility that Rogers encounters in the psychiatric ward. Thus, "the teacher sets his goal to look at himself, to leave any point of view or personal judgment, to be as receptive to what others express, this being the meaning of acceptance" (Snyders, 1978, p. 112, quoted by Sălăvăștru, 2009, p. 118). Glasser (1992) believes that effective education occurs when students feel that they have the control to influence learning according to their needs, respectively, power and influence in the community, survival, to feel freedom, belonging and affection, to make choices, to play and entertainment. Glasser promotes the school that presents an educational offer corresponding to the needs of students' knowledge, and the information finds its applicability in everyday life. But in the classroom the teacher has a double role. On the one hand, it intends to develop the intellectual capacities that ensure the academic performance, and on the other hand, it is actively involved in the complex process of interaction and socialization within the class group (Babad, 2009). The interaction, communication and management of the student class are a set of elements that outline the competence of group-centered educational intervention. This is indispensable for a teacher because "keeping the class as a whole that works together and is oriented towards common tasks and establishing a learning-friendly environment are basic components of the successful management of the group of children or adolescents undergoing the learning process" (Anghel, 2011, p. 290). The interaction with the group is based on different rules, procedures, monitoring and guidance strategies, both in terms of school content, and in the sphere of individual and group behaviours, within the institutionalized framework of the school.

#### 4. Discussions and conclusions

The pedagogical perspective considers the group represented by the class of students through the formative-educational processes of the school system, but it does not neglect the background of the group dynamics and the psycho-social influences generated by the interactions between the various actors. In studying the class of students, social psychology has focused on the way of social interaction, the quality of relationships and their effects on the optimal development of students. The influences of social psychology have led to the development of the concepts of "teamwork", "action group" and "types of help from the rural world", elements that are used with increasing frequency within the class group. Thus, the emphasis lies on social solidarity, respectively the replacement of competition and excessive rivalry with collaboration, which in the context of the present theoretical analysis implies group cohesion. Given that the school group is by its very nature a dynamic one, it is important to outline goals, types of norms (formal and informal), forms of leadership and "self-leadership of the class" through the informal leader and the roles underlying the formation of social profiles. Going forward, psychosociologists (Glassner, 1993) have developed a series of theoretical perspectives with practical openings on group cohesion, influence, decision making, interaction and communication, organizational models, the degree of autonomy and conformity, permeability or stability, with promising openings in studying these dimensions in the class of students. The pedagogical inquiry and the vocational observation record are tools designed to highlight social phenomena specific to the class of students, and its role was to stimulate the involvement of the group members in order to establish and function the informal norms, specific to each class of students. On the applicative level, inspired by Sanderson's models in England and Peterson's in Germany, in 1932-1939 Popescu Teiușanu (quoted by De Visscher & Neculau, 2001) begins to organize extracurricular activities in Romania. At present time, this activity has become a relatively common practice within schools. The innovation embedded in the idea of "changing education" implies the integration of complex dimensions of knowledge (including research): previous and contemporary educational practice, socio-cultural context and levels of expectation, respectively the types of expectations of students.

As an applicative contribution on the instructive-educational dimension, social psychology has studied the

dynamics of the class of students through the manipulation of some educational variables, respectively student-centered teaching, group or teacher and pedagogical non-directivism. For education sciences, the practical purpose of these approaches resides in identifying flexible intervention methods that consider the characteristics of the group of students and at the same time facilitate the life-long training of teachers.

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# **The Importance of Theater Pedagogy from a Student's Perspective. An Empirical Study in a German-Speaking Elementary School in Romania**

**Mirona Stănescu, Daniel Andronache**

# The Importance of Theater Pedagogy from a Student's Perspective. An Empirical Study in a German-Speaking Elementary School in Romania

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

theatre pedagogy, education, personal development, social development, aesthetic development

Could school and theater be seen as a symbiosis? The roots of the school theater go back to the 15th century. Early on, the educators recognized the importance of drama for the development of the students. But what do the students think about the theatrical education for their own development?

This paper presents the results of a qualitative research designed to explore the role of education through theater for the personal, social skills and aesthetic development of the students. For this purpose, a semi-structured interview was used. In our qualitative study we examined the effects of theatre education from the perspective of the students. We interviewed 20 primary school students of the German-speaking school in Cluj-Napoca, who had theater pedagogy as optional courses for four years about their personal experience with theatre. Results demonstrate the development of personal, social and aesthetic skills. The data obtained show that students themselves recognize the significant and positive impact of the education through theatre regarding the emotional, social and aesthetic development (as components of personal development), and the relationship between them.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Theaterpädagogik, Bildung, persönliche Entwicklung, soziale Entwicklung, ästhetische Entwicklung

Können Schule und Theater als Symbiose gesehen werden? Die Wurzeln des Schultheaters reichen bis ins 15. Jahrhundert zurück. Schon früh erkannten die Pädagogen und Pädagoginnen die Bedeutung des Theaterspiels für die Entwicklung der Schüler und Schülerinnen. Aber was denken diese selber über die Theaterstunden für ihre eigene Entwicklung?

Die vorliegende Arbeit präsentiert die Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Forschung, die die Rolle der Theaterpädagogik für die persönlichen, sozialen Fähigkeiten und die ästhetische Entwicklung der Schüler und Schülerinnen untersucht hat. Zu diesem Zweck wurde ein halbstrukturiertes Interview verwendet. In unserer qualitativen Studie haben wir die Auswirkungen der Theaterpädagogik aus Sicht der Schülerinnen und Schüler untersucht. An der Studie nahmen 20 Grundschülerinnen und -schüler der deutschsprachigen Schule in Cluj-Napoca/ Rumänien teil. Diese hatten vier Jahre lang Theaterpädagogik als Wahlfach und wurden über ihre persönlichen Erfahrungen mit dem Theaterspiel befragt. Die erhaltenen Daten zeigen, dass die Probanden selbst die signifikanten und positiven Auswirkungen der Theaterpädagogik in Bezug auf die emotionale, soziale und ästhetische Entwicklung (als Bestandteile der persönlichen Entwicklung) und deren Beziehungen untereinander erkennen.

## 1. Introduction

During the last 30 year the value of drama classes within the Romanian schools has recorded increasing appreciation. More and more teachers, especially primary school teachers, are using methods of theatre pedagogy in their classes, because they recognize the potential of playing theatre and acting. And yet the official recognition of the performing arts classes in general and the drama classes in particular at ministry level is sidelined and the official introduction of theatrical education in the national curriculum has never taken place. In many schools the theatrical art can be found only as an optional course, offered under different names.

The present article presents the results of a qualitative research designed to explore the role of theatre pedagogy for the personal, social skills and aesthetic development of the elementary school students from their perspective. Also, this work is intended to be a plea for the official introduction of theatrical art in the national curriculum for undergraduate schools.

The new educational policies and priorities aim to place the students at the centre of its own learning. The child-centred approach prioritizes the child's emotional needs over the mere requirement to absorb knowledge and facts. Children are seen "as unique individuals" (Jones, 2003, p. 54) and learning has to be "the product of the active relationship between individuals and the environment" (Jones, 2003, p. 54).

In Great Britain The Newsom Report acknowledges the role and the place that the arts should have in the school curriculum. In their opinion, the arts can help children "to come to terms with themselves more surely than by any other route" (\*\*\*, 1967, p. 157). Jensen points out the importance of dramatic arts for supporting the development of the students: "The real driving force behind dramatic arts is what it does for the emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities of the student" (Jensen, 2001, p. 76)

The playful character of the theatre enables the students to live out their fantasies, to transgress their own biographical boundaries and to transform and present themselves in an artistic space of freedom. Theater is not just fiction and games, but also a real experience. Theatre always implies the presence of the public, who relate to the theater play through their own perception of reality and own associations and interpretations. Thus, in addition to the art of acting, the art of watching is very important. By investigating the world through play and through active approaches, the children understand the world both rationally and emotionally. Theater education with a focus on aesthetics includes watching and learning theatre techniques and forms and students learn to experiment with different theatrical expressions. It is about a combination of personal, social and aesthetic processes.

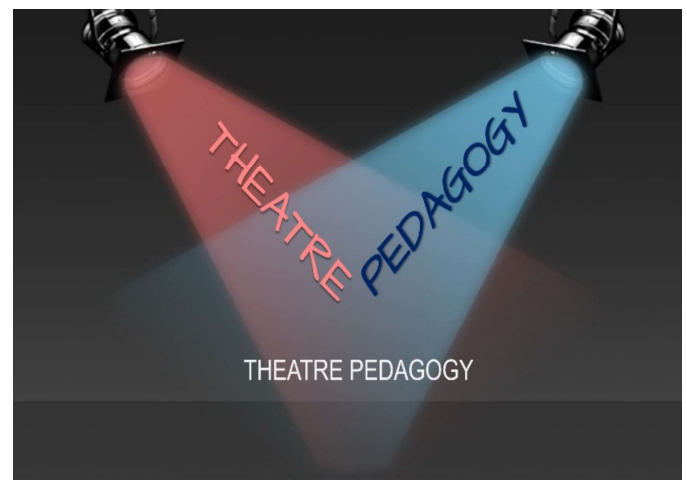
## 2. Theoretical foundation

### 2.1. Theatre pedagogy

Theatre Pedagogy (in German "Theaterpädagogik") is a discipline that combines both theatre and pedagogy. Through the paradigm shift of the 80s, the aesthetic and artistic qualities are placed at the center of the reflection of theatre education. Theatre pedagogy has developed separately from school theatre and drama education. Its main distinction is the integration of both art and education to develop personal, social and aesthetic competences of the students. The focus of the drama education is on the learning of performance and emphasizes the process of playing, without highlighting the theatrical-artistic moments, but theatre pedagogy goes beyond the notion of play and focuses on the "aesthetic perception and production in the sense of the theater in its narrower, especially acting-artistic form" Vaßen, 1997, p. 64). The theatrical processes, the aesthetic experiences

and the experiences of the players are taken into account to the same extent.

The theatre pedagogy subsumes - as the name implies - both theatre and pedagogy. These include, besides the pedagogical concepts, the artistic aspect of theatre and its aesthetics. Belgrade even claims that education without these skills remains "ignorant" and the theater without pedagogy remains "commonplace" (Belgrade, 1997, p. 107). For this reason, not only the pedagogical conceptions are important for the theatre pedagogy, but also it demands a confrontation with theories of acting.



**Figure 1.** Relationship between theatre and pedagogy (Stănescu, 2012, p.15)

Theatre pedagogy focuses on the initiation of learning and experience processes through theatre. The basis of the theatre pedagogy is the holistic approach that tries to see people in all their dimensions and life contexts. The human being is understood as a unity of mind, body and soul, which is why all three areas are addressed and promoted.

### 2.2. Personal, social and aesthetic development: theoretical approaches

Many drama theorists (Ritter, 1987; Nickel, 2005; Czerny, 2004) regard the role play as having the potential to develop the personality of the player, and at the same time offers the possibility for cross-curriculum work.

The main purpose of theatrical work with students is the personal, social and aesthetic education of students, as revealed by 40 years of published work. In particular, Czerny (2004) took this into account in her theatrical

didactic model SAFARI. According to Czerny, theatre pedagogy leads to a personal, social and aesthetic development of the players, because it not only enhances the individual self-shaping abilities, but also develops the aesthetic consciousness and appeals to social responsibility. In Czerny's theatrical model, the three educational aspects mentioned are not treated separately, but they are understood as a whole.

### 2.2.1. Personal development

At the centre of the theatrical process is the student. Fundamental for the theatrical work is the acceptance of one's own personality and the assessment of one's own abilities. The students learn to consciously perceive their own ego, get to know their possibilities and limits, with the goal to train their "I-the actor" ("Spieler-Ich"). The process of personal development unfolds when paying attention to each student's perception, imagination, emotion and movement. Personal development is achieved only once the students become aware of these abilities, when they relate those to previous perceptions and sensations, and can interpret them.

### 2.2.2. Social skills development

For a better understanding of the importance of acting for the development of the social skills of the students, we should determine what we mean by "social skills". There are numerous definitions, but for our purpose we take into consideration those of Hersen and Bellack (1979), of Phillips (1978) and of Libet and Lewinsohn (1973).

Hersen and Bellack (1979, p. 169) state that "social skills are interpersonal behaviours which are normative and/or socially sanctioned".

Phillips (1978, p. 13) defined social skills as "the extent to which he or she can communicate with others, in a manner that fulfills one's rights, requirements, satisfactions, or obligations to a reasonable degree without damaging the other person's similar rights, satisfactions or obligations, and hopefully shares these rights, etc. with others in free and open exchange".

Libet and Lewinsohn (1973, p. 304) defined social skills as "a complex set of behaviours making up the ability both to emit behaviours which are punished or extinguished by others".

Although many authors are using the concepts "social abilities", "social skills" and "social competence", there is a difference between them. Jovaiša (1993) (apud. Jurevičienė, Kaffemanienė, Ruškus, 2012) and Lepaitė et al. (2003) (apud. Jurevičienė, Kaffemanienė, Ruškus, 2012.) show different stages in the formation of any act, the lowest stage being the ability, while the highest being the skill. The capacity to apply the social skills represents the social competence (Lepaitė et al 2003). Social skills are part of a superordinate construct: social competence. Whereas social skills are generally viewed as being specific behaviours or activities that lead to desired social outcomes, social competence is a summary term based on judgement from others reflecting how a person's implementation of social skills is viewed in terms of adequacy (Merrel & Gimpel).

Gresham, Sugai and Horner (2001, pp. 333-334) classifies social skills in five dimensions:

- peer relations skills,
- self-management skills,
- academic skills,
- compliance skills
- assertion skills.

The social skills are relevant only when individuals are part of a group. That is why the ensemble playing in theatre pedagogy is essential. The students are not only confronted with their own perceptions, feelings, ideas and thoughts, but also with those of their fellow players. The encounter, as well as the confrontation with the other players, requires not only empathy, but also the ability to cooperate throughout the playing process. Social education can emerge when commitment, solidarity, coming together, tolerance and acceptance of the other's opinion and person can be taken for granted in the theatre play.

### 2.2.3. Aesthetic development

Aesthetic education has an important role in the current theatre pedagogical discussion. The term aesthetics (aesthesis) comes from the Greek and means "sensory perception". In everyday language, the term "aesthetical" is used as beautiful, which is understandable when one considers that aesthetics has long been understood as the theory of the beautiful. However, Kant changed this point of view because the focus of his aesthetic theory is not only on the traditional category of the beautiful but also on the category of the sublime. It is judged as beautiful that

which creates a feeling of pleasure in the subject, although it is neither useful nor morally correct and it triggers an interesting pleasure. In line with Kant's theory of aesthetics, Friedrich Schiller posed for the first time the theoretical question of the meaning of art and artistic activity in his book *About the Aesthetic Education of Man*, published in 1795.

In today's discussion about aesthetic education, two categories are recognized: (1) the perceptive and creative examination of art and (2) the sensitizations of the senses when dealing with every day and designed offers of perception.

For our work, Henschel's (2000, p. 13) understanding of aesthetic education is considered, e.g. that aesthetic education is understood as the "engagement of the subject with itself in the medium of art", because the focus is on the process of theatre play by the layperson.

But what are the special qualities of theatre in the process of educating students?

A special feature is the double role presence, that of actor and character. According to U. Henschel (2000), "standing in between" is characteristic of the relationship between player and character.

Even in the transformation from actor to character, the areas of self-development become effective in order to empathize with other people and situations. If self-development is primarily about experiencing oneself, playing theatre is about experiencing as a character. The aim is to acquire "foreign" experience which should enhance the processing and expressing of one's own and other experiences in such a way that it can become public. In this area of aesthetic education, it is especially important to make one's own experiences usable for the transformation into figures. The impersonation of a character also allows exploring and staking of personal boundaries. In this phase, the actors have the opportunity to experience themselves in a character or another and to discover the many forms of the "I". In the space between what is and what might be, your individual "scope" unfolds. This scope also enables the student to be authentic because they can always redesign their identity.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

A number of  $N = 20$  participants were involved in our research, students in the same class at the German School "George Cosbuc", Cluj-Napoca, Romania, where every subject is taught in German, although the mother tongue of the students is Romanian. All the subjects took part in the optional course of theatre pedagogy for four years, between 2015-2019. Their average age at the time of the interview is  $M = 10$  years old, and all of them come from urban areas.

Because of the long period of time we worked with the students, we managed to build and maintain a close relationship, based on trust, which encouraged the students to be very honest in their answers.

#### 3.2. Research design and procedure

*The hypotheses* of the study was the following: Theatre education has a positive impact on the emotional, social and aesthetic development of the students.

To explore the role of education through theatre for the personal development of the students, a *qualitative research* design was developed, aiming to identify the relationship between the emotional, social and aesthetic development. As Creswell (2013) points out in a qualitative research, the researcher does not bring a preconceived notion of the result, but the participants share their experience and their perspectives. The flexible format of a qualitative research "permits open-ended interviews, if properly done, to reveal how (participants) construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to a researcher's specific questions and own implicit construction of reality" (Yin, 2012, p. 10). Because qualitative researchers do not rely on one single data source (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2012), we collected data also from a questionnaire and from our own observations. We developed and used a semi-structured interview aiming to evaluate the level of emotional, social and aesthetic development of the subjects. Note that the construct validity of the interview protocol was assessed by two independent experts from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

*The data obtained were qualitatively and descriptively analysed*, categorising the answers, following in-depth probing and questioning subjects based on their responses, but also understanding their motivation and feelings.



The interviews were conducted individually, lasted about 30 minutes and the participants were explained that their participation in the study is voluntary. The researcher was the one who organized and conducted the interviews.

All interviews were recorded with a mobile phone with no external microphone. The advantage of this device was that the respondents did not feel disturbed or intimidated by large equipment. The transfer to the computer was possible without loss of voice quality, so that hardly any unclear places or dubious statements emerged during the transcription. All interviews were transcribed by the researchers without noting the non-linguistic expressions and voice modulations (louder/quieter, faster/slower, higher/lower) and pauses.

We accept that the complexity of the answers may have been affected by the fact that the interview was done in German and not in their mother tongue.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

Following the analysis of the interviews, the answers were centralized, and three main categories were formulated: (1) personal development, (2) social skills development and (3) aesthetic development.

##### 4.1. Personal development

Due to the complexity of the answers, this category was divided into four other subcategories:

- self-confidence and self-esteem,
- self-expression and self-reflection,
- expression managing and regulating of emotions,
- learning German (as foreign language).

##### 4.1.2. Self-confidence and self-esteem

*I learned to get to know myself. (M.F.)*

Within this subcategory the students referred to aspects such as: speaking in front of an audience, self-confidence and self-esteem. From the answers given and our observations along the four years it was found that students have experienced increased self-esteem and self-confidence due to the participation in the optional course "theatre pedagogy".

Among the most important moments and aspects of the four years of the course, students often mentioned the improvisation games, which gave them the opportunity to learn to trust their first instinct. At the same time, they

were put in a position to accept the challenge of playing and presenting themselves in front of a smaller audience (in front of their classmates) as well as in front of a wider audience (parents, teachers, friends). As a consequence of students having to perform in front of a larger audience arose the ability to speak in public. For the theatre performances, the students had to memorize some lines and tell them in front of the audience, which made them feel important and proud of themselves.

From our own observations it became apparent that after four years of theatre pedagogy, students were more confident in expressing their own thoughts and ideas. The appreciation of the others contributed to the proliferation of positive experiences, so it gave confidence to all the students, especially to the shy ones, who became aware of their value and strengths.

Self-esteem is an intricate part of a healthy psychological development (Bandura, 1997) and it can be defined as the extent to which one values themselves (Blaskovich & Tomaka, 1991). Self-esteem and self-confidence affects how students perform academically, emotionally, and socially (Scott, 2011). Introducing theatre pedagogy into the school core curriculum we could encourage students to be more self-aware, to enhance their self-esteem and to have more self-confidence.

##### 4.1.3. Self-expression and self-reflection

*I learned how to express myself better. (A.H.)*

For the subcategory "self-expression and self-reflection", students talked about discovering new methods and abilities for expressing themselves and about presenting what they had learned and accomplished in front of the others.

During the interview some of the students mentioned that they learned to reflect on their own work and their feelings about the work of the others. The reflection accompanied the entire work process, because at the end of each theatre lesson there was a reflection phase in which the students were encouraged to think and to verbalize their whole experience. This allowed them to detach themselves from their individual perception and feelings, so that new experiences could arise. The new experiences lead to a new perception of reality. According to Scheller (1998, pp.18-19), experiences arise when one processes an experience in the sense of a reaction to a

situation in which one is physically, emotionally and intellectually involved.

The theatre art form is one of the purest forms of self-expression. It has been demonstrated that theatre education has an impact on students, both academically and socially (Deasy, 2012). By playing theatre students are likely to be more self-aware and more expressive. Also, they are more reflective, so they increase their awareness of their strengths and abilities. "We define self-expression as expressing one's thoughts and feelings, and these expressions can be accomplished through words, choices or actions." (Kim & Ko, 2007, p. 325).

#### 4.1.3. Expression of emotions and emotional awareness

*I've learned to show feelings that I don't feel at the moment. (M.T.)*

Social life requires diverse and differentiated skills and abilities in the emotional-social area, such as respecting the wishes and needs of other people or helping each other. Goleman defines Emotional Intelligence as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships." (Goleman, 1998, p. 316). According to Goleman there are five components of emotional intelligence:

- self-awareness,
- motivation,
- self-regulation,
- empathy
- adeptness.

The students talked in the interviews about being able to express their feelings and emotions and dealing with them better after the drama class. Also, they spoke about other aspects of emotional awareness, such as: being less shy, being aware of their own emotions, having the courage to express their emotions and adapting the expression of their feelings to different situations.

From our own observations, we managed to determine that the students were able to release internal blockages, learn new truths about themselves and exceeded their own limits. They were also more willing to express their feelings and thoughts.

Theatre pedagogy allows students to experience the expression of different emotions and reflect about them.

By playing different roles the pupils can recognize not only the emotions of the character but also their own. Emotional intelligence requires not only to recognize your emotions, but also to be able to regulate and manage them. Drama needs teamwork. That means that the players need to work with each other and to interact with each other. They have to understand their own emotions as well as the emotions of others and how to interact and communicate with each other.

#### 4.1.4. Learning German (as foreign language)

*As a character I could speak in German without fear that I would say something wrong, because it was not I who made the mistake but my character. (T.P.)*

The interviewed students attend the German schools for the German minorities. However, 85% of them are Romanians and Hungarians and they don't have German speakers in the family. As such the only contact with the language of study is at school.

In order to learn a foreign language, you need one thing above all: oral language practice. Language is used specifically when speaking. When talking to other people, language has an immediate effect on the audience and the speakers feel that they have an impact. The didactic approach focused on meaning complements the traditional and systematic teaching of a foreign language, which mainly turns to the written language and is therefore primarily oriented towards formal and structural aspects of the language. In drama classes communication and pragmatic language use are in the foreground, creating speaking opportunities in action-oriented, situational, natural and targeted contexts in which the learners can activate and apply their theoretical language knowledge. In addition, the necessary pragmatic means, and strategies are conveyed in order to develop the ability to communicate spontaneously with a conversation partner.

The language skills of the students were greatly improved as a result of the drama course, an aspect noticed both by the students and the instructor. The students gradually progressed from responding during the reflection phase entirely in Romanian (although spoken to in German), to expressing complex feelings and emotions freely and entirely in German. Moreover, they were confident enough to contribute to the development of the dramaturgy and to write the lines. For every performance the students wrote the dialogues by themselves.

## 4.2. Social skills development

*This class was about me with myself and with the others. (E.B.)*

As described above, social skills are needed by individuals to interact and communicate with each other and are essential in building relationships and to adapt to social situations. Social skills are components of the social behaviour.

When asked to report the impact of the theatre class on their social skills development, the students mentioned the following ideas:

- teamwork
- making new friends
- sharing important tasks with colleagues
- sharing joy with colleagues
- empathy
- the importance of the group as a whole
- reaching a consensus
- everybody is equally important
- I am not the centre of the universe
- everybody is involved in the same thing
- the good organisation in the group.

This mentioned social skills can be summarized into following categories.

- cooperating and negotiating with others,
- initiating and maintaining friendships
- solving problems,
- understanding the needs and feelings of others,
- articulating one's own needs and ideas,
- expressing their own emotion.

According to our observations during the four theatre project years, we can say that as a result of the drama classes the pupils were more willing to work and cooperate with each other. Also, the teacher of the class confirmed our observation: the students were working better with each other during the other classes and they were playing much more often group games during breaks.

## 4.3. Aesthetic development

*On stage I am another person. And I may like or dislike this person, but I have to understand him/her. (S.P.)*

Theatre pedagogy is also one of the areas of aesthetic education. According to Czerny (2004), theatre pedagogy promotes aesthetic awareness and develops aesthetic behaviours: attention, wonder, openness, synaesthesia and conscious sense of time. The goal is to promote self-understanding and understanding of others by empathizing, introducing and imagining the characters. Both the "I-the actor" (Spieler-Ich) and the "I-the character" (Figuren-Ich) are important components of acting, because the experiences of the "I-the actor" flow into the game of the "I-the character". Czerny (2004) notes that the subjective experiences do not "get stuck" in the area of self-experience but are objectified by the played character.

In the interviews the students talked about their feelings impersonating a character. They observed that by immersing themselves into the character, they could better understand different kinds of thinking and acting in various situations. They were better equipped to understand themselves and others through empathy and mental transfer into a character.

For the students it was particularly important to have the opportunity to observe each other during the improvisation exercises. Czerny (2004) also highlighted the importance of improvisation in allowing the students to discover and promote their own creativity and imagination. The players had the opportunity to improvise spontaneously based on a topic, text or figure, without fear of "embarrassing criticism from a foreign audience" (Weintz, 2008, p. 197), because the participants are both actors and spectators. During the improvisation exercises the students encountered both sides of aesthetic experience: the role of the actor and the role of the audience. This is an important aspect of the theatre pedagogy because the spectators "become co-discoverers, co-inventors, co-creators of the action" (Weintz, 2008, p. 175). The active role of the viewer demands that he "remains open in perception, sees connections, correspondences and information in completely unexpected places, which makes the previously discovered appear in a completely different light." (Weintz, 2008, p. 175)

At least some of the students were able to identify the differences and similarities between the professional theatre and their own form of theatre, and the whole experience changed the way they perceived theatre performances of professional actors and asked themselves

where the directors got their ideas from, how the actors learned their lines, how they decided which costume they should wear.

The reading and deep understanding of these literary texts and the accomplishment of creating their own adaptations of these texts for the stage, contributed to the aesthetic development of the students. The 4 literary texts with which they worked during the project are: "The Queen of Colours" by Jutta Bauer, "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak, "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp" from the Arabian Nights, "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The 4 texts were adapted and presented in front of a larger audience at the end of every school year.

## 5. Conclusions

As a result of enrolling in the theatrical education course, the students developed from a personal, social and aesthetic point of view. So, taking into consideration the results described above, we can say that our hypothesis was confirmed.

The theatre classes encouraged the students to explore and experiment with the different forms of body motion, movement, speech and expression in a structured and secure environment. At the same time, they were trained to recognize their own emotions and the different ways to express them.

As actors in a theatre play, the students embark on aesthetic processes with their whole being. They experienced human situations in another "reality" that reflects their own world like a mirror. In this "other world" the pupils were able to express themselves with body, language and facial expressions and transform themselves in different ways. Through reflection, they were able to better understand their own world, their own actions and the actions of their peers.

In particular, the positive effects upon the students' self-confidence should be emphasized: The way we perceive ourselves influences our behaviour and our understanding of the actions of the others.

Acting plays an important role in extending the linguistic competence: In hardly any other area is so much emphasis put on a clear and loud pronunciation as in drama.

During the four years of the theatre project, the students were encouraged to become more independent and to take responsibility for their actions: they had to develop their own ideas for the performances, they had to write the texts for the characters (in groups) based on literary works, they had to decide the costumes and props and to actually manufacture them.

Using theatrical education one can trigger a positive process that combats aggression, social exclusion, racism and other negative phenomena. Acting can have a positive influence on conflict resolution ability, problem solving, teamwork and empathy. Introducing theatre pedagogy in school curriculum for undergraduates could have a positive effect on school life and life in general beyond the theatre area.

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# **The Influence of Gender on Assertiveness, Behavior Control, Peers Social Skills and Task Orientation Of Preschoolers Aged 5-6**

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# The Influence of Gender on Assertiveness, Behavior Control, Peers Social Skills and Task Orientation Of Preschoolers Aged 5-6

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

early education; outdoor education; gender; personal and social development; performance

Outdoor education begins beyond the door of the classroom and promotes outdoor learning. Because it takes place in the natural environment, outdoor activities are more attractive, more appreciated by children, for which they are more motivated to become actively involved in the proposed work tasks. The research proposed and carried out by us aims to investigate the training and informative valences of an educational intervention program based on outdoor type experiential activities in preschool education, ages 5-6. Although this concept is at the beginning of the road in Romania, studies conducted abroad and the educational reality of other education systems have shown that outdoor education has many benefits for educators of all ages. Our research aims to highlight the impact of experiential outdoor activities on preschoolers. The present article aims to verify whether there are significant differences in gender regarding assertive behavior, behavior control, peer social skills and task orientation.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Früherziehung; Outdoor-Bildung; Geschlecht; persönliche und soziale Entwicklung; Leistung

Der Outdoor-Erziehung beginnt außerhalb der Tür des Gruppenraums und fördert das Lernen im Freien. Da sie in einer natürlichen Umgebung stattfinden, sind Aktivitäten im Freien attraktiver, werden von den Kindern mehr geschätzt, von denen sie sind motivierter, sich aktiv an den vorgeschlagenen Aufgaben zu beteiligen. Die Forschung, die von uns vorgebracht und durchgeführt wurde, zielt darauf ab, die formativen und informativen Valenzen eines pädagogischen Interventionsprogramms zu untersuchen, das auf experimentellen Aktivitäten des Typs Outdoor in der Vorschulerziehung für die große Gruppe basiert. Obwohl dieses Konzept in Rumänien im Anfangsstadium ist, haben im Ausland durchgeführte Studien und die pädagogische Realität anderer Bildungssysteme gezeigt, dass die Outdoor-Erziehung viele Vorteile für Lernende aus allen Altersstufen hat. Unsere Forschung zielt darauf ab, die Auswirkungen von Outdoor-Aktivitäten auf Vorschulkinder zu untersuchen. Der vorliegende Artikel soll überprüfen, ob es signifikante Unterschiede im biologischen Geschlecht hinsichtlich des Durchsetzungsverhaltens, der Selbstkontrolle, der sozialen Fähigkeiten und der Arbeitsorientierung gibt.

## 1. Introduction

Education, as a process of training and informing the individual, has been and remains the main task of educational institutions. Although it is a lifelong process, without overlapping exclusively the schooling period, kindergarten and school are responsible for forming and developing autonomous and creative personalities, ready for successful integration into society. Even if the educational process is usually carried out in the classroom, we must not limit ourselves to this space, but take into account the fact that there are many other situations or environments beyond the group/ class door, which can provide learning experiences to children/students, exploiting their potential.

Outdoor activities that can be carried out successfully with preschoolers (especially ages 5-6) are: excursions, sports activities, various games, practical-household activities, creative workshops, learning activities adapted

to the external environment. Each such activity tries to put preschoolers in a position to collaborate with colleagues, to find solutions, to develop their creativity, to strengthen their self-confidence in completing the task and to achieve the expected result.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

The praxiological dictionary of pedagogy defines outdoor activities as "activities that promote outdoor learning, recreational and fun activities, personal and social development programs, nature trips, mountain trips, environmental education, etc. Thus, these activities have the following main characteristics: they offer the possibility of direct contact with nature, of living experiences in nature; stimulate the joy of staying in nature; support the learning process of students with various learning difficulties; develop team spirit, self-help and fairplay; they offer countless physical, emotional, mental benefits, which subsequently contribute to the

well-being of the individual and the group". (Bocoș, 2016, p. 43).

In our opinion, outdoor activities are outdoor learning activities that involve practical learning experiences, aimed at training and developing the skills of the participants, as well as acquiring knowledge and applying them, capitalizing on the resources of the natural environment.

Of all the characteristics of outdoor education, the most important refers to the place of development: the natural environment. The name of this concept, „outdoor education”, indicates the different location from the usual educational environments. The natural environment offers many learning opportunities, but it also requires knowledge of certain information and skills.

Compared to the traditional classroom, the outdoor environment has its own characteristics:

- by participating in outdoor activities, children/ students are exposed to possible risks (for example: harsh weather, possible medical events or accidents regarding the transportation of participants, etc.);
- teaching outdoors requires certain skills from the teacher (for example, teachers must be prepared at all times to manage risks or possible accidents);
- outdoor activities often require equipment and certain materials;
- teaching in outdoor activities requires a longer period of time than in the classroom, more effort and sometimes involves higher costs.

The outdoor activities aim at effective learning environments, valorise the experiences of the participants in the learning process and develop the sensitivity of children/ students to the environment. According to Gair (apud Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin and Ewert, 2006), education in the natural environment encourages the development of relationships, the development of new interests and skills, and facilitates the connection between theoretical and practical knowledge, aspects that are sometimes neglected in the traditional curriculum. Outdoor activities connect the "to know" and "to do", highlighting the importance of practical experience.

Outdoor education is based on experiential learning. This aspect has been highlighted over time by educators such as Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Dewey. The importance of action-based learning, the child's ability to

interact directly with the environment for developing strategies and finding solutions to solve the task, regardless of its nature, is highlighted by L. B. Sharp (1943), a pioneer of outdoor education: "What can be learned best inside classrooms, there should be taught, and what can be learned best through experience, operating directly with indigenous materials and life situations outside of school, there should be learned". (Educational Project Outdoor Education, 2016).

In this context, great importance is given to children's experiences, real-life experiences, which underlie learning. They can be carried out in both school and nature (parks, courtyards, botanical gardens, etc.), but the exploitation of the child's potential, his involvement and the achievement of the expected results will be more pronounced outside the educational institution, primarily due to the more attractive nature of the proposed activities.

Outdoor education:

- is experiential;
- takes place outside the classroom („out-of doors”);
- appeals to all senses and fields of knowledge;
- is based on an interdisciplinary curriculum (there is a transfer between the knowledge belonging to the different fields of knowledge, the theoretical knowledge is applied for a better understanding);
- exploits the interrelations (educable-educable, educable-teacher, educable-natural resources).

Through its specificity, outdoor education contributes to the personal and social development of the child, appealing to the senses and to forming and developing a solid relationship with the surrounding nature (this benefit both the individual and the entire community). Through the research undertaken, we wanted to highlight the formative valences of outdoor activities and their impact on both the personal and social development of the preschool (assertiveness, behaviour control, peer social skills), as well as on the preschoolers' performances (task orientation).

### 3. Research methodology

*The purpose* of this research is to study the impact of organizing outdoor activities on the personal and social development of pre-schoolers (assertiveness, behaviour control, peer social skills) and on their school performance (task orientation).

The experimental approach aims to verify the following *hypothesis*:

There are significant differences at the gender level regarding assertiveness, behaviour control, peer social skills and task orientation.

*The research variables are:*

*Independent variable:*

- organizing and conducting by the teacher for the preschool education a system of experiential activities of outdoor type, while complying with the curriculum for preschool education;

*Dependent variables:*

- the level of assertiveness;
- the degree of behaviour control;
- availability to form peer social skills;
- the degree of task orientation.

*The methods* used by us in conducting the research are the psycho-pedagogical experiment and the observation method. The participatory observation made was carried

out in natural observation situations, using, as a research tool, the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS) 2.1. Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS) 2.1., made by Hightower and Perkins, is a concise scale of objective assessment, specially designed for use by teachers to evaluate children's behaviour and the school difficulties they face. This scale is composed of 32 items and evaluates the preschoolers' task orientation, behaviour control, assertiveness and peer social skills.

In the case of the proposed research, a sample of 104 large preschools (5-6 years) and 6 teachers, from 4 state and private preschool units (one group from each unit), with an extended program, from Cluj and Sălaj counties, was involved.

*The sample of content* valorised in the accomplishment of the formative experiment aims at outdoor type experiential activities, focused on the experiential domains with which the Curriculum for the preschool education (2008) operates and, starting with the 2019-2020 school year, the Curriculum for early education (2019).

The proposed activities took place between October 2018 - May 2019 (except holidays), once a week, these being integrated into the daily program of preschoolers.

#### 4. Results

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics*

Gender	Assertiveness	Behavior control	Peer social skills	Task orientation
Boys	M = 25.63	M = 26.92	M = 27.45	M = 26.87
	AS = 6.51	AS = 6.44	AS = 6.79	AS = 6.72
Girls	M = 28.16	M = 29.91	M = 30.89	M = 30.67
	AS = 5.33	AS = 5.51	AS = 5.86	AS = 6.27
Total	M = 26.97	M = 28.50	M = 29.27	M = 28.88
	AS = 6.02	AS = 6.13	AS = 6.51	AS = 6.73

**Table 2.** Pearson correlation coefficients and coefficients of determination  
for measured variables

Variable	1 (R <sup>2</sup> )	2 (R <sup>2</sup> )	3 (R <sup>2</sup> )	4 (R <sup>2</sup> )	5 (R <sup>2</sup> )
1. Assertiveness	-				
2. Behavior control	-.02	-			
3. Peer social skills	.65** (.42)	.42** (.17)	-		
4. Task orientation	.68** (.46)	.22* (.05)	.67** (.45)	-	
5. Gender	.21* (.04)	.24* (.06)	.26** (.07)	.28** (.08)	-

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Noting the table 1, we find the following: girls are more assertive than boys, (M=28.16, AS=5.33 versus M=25.63, AS=6.51), they have better self-control than boys (M=29.91, AS=5.51 versus M=26.92, AS=6.44), they present a greater willingness to train social skills than boys (M=30.89, AS=5.86 versus M=27.45, AS=6.79) and have a higher degree of task orientation than boys (M=30.67, AS=6.27 versus M=26.87, AS=6.72). We mention that of the 104 preschool participants, 49 are boys and 55 are girls.

Analyzing table 2, we notice that there are significant correlations between the measured variables:

- a correlation coefficient  $r_{(102)}=.65$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $R^2=.42$  was obtained between peer social skills and assertiveness (42% of the variance of the peer social skills variable is explained by the variable assertiveness);
- a correlation coefficient  $r_{(102)}=.42$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $R^2=.17$  was obtained between peer social skills and behavior control (17% of the variance of the peer social skills variable is explained by the variable behavior control);
- a correlation coefficient  $r_{(102)}=.68$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $R^2=.46$  was obtained between task orientation and assertiveness (46% of the variance of the task orientation variable is explained by the assertiveness variable);
- a correlation coefficient  $r_{(102)}=.22$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $R^2=.05$  was obtained between task orientation and behavior control (5% of the variance of the task orientation variable is explained by the behavior control variable);

- a correlation coefficient  $r_{(102)}=.67$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $R^2=.45$  was obtained between the orientation task and the peer social skills (45% of the variance of the task orientation variable is explained by the peer social skills variable).

Considering Cohen's (1988) criteria, we can say that gender is a predictor variable in the development of the following abilities: assertiveness ( $R^2=.04$ , that is 4% of the variance of the gender variable is explained by the assertiveness variable), behavior control ( $R^2=.06$ , that is 6% of the variance of the gender variable is explained by the behavior control variable), peer social skills ( $R^2=.07$ , that is 7% of the variance of the gender variable is explained by the peer social skills variable) and task orientation ( $R^2=.08$ , that is 8% of the variance of the gender variable is explained by the task orientation variable). After calculating the coefficients of determination, it is found that *the relationship between the gender and the measured variables is a moderate one. Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed.*

## 5. Conclusions

As a result of the study, we find that, in our case, there are gender differences in terms of: assertiveness, behavior control, peer social skills and task orientation. Girls have developed these skills better than boys. Analyzing the data obtained, we find that the largest difference between the means is identified in the case of task orientation, while



the smallest difference is found in the case of assertiveness.

We consider that the relatively small number of preschoolers participating in the study may be a limitation of this research. A larger sample of participants would be an advantage in testing such a hypothesis. Also, in our study all preschoolers come from urban areas. We consider that it would be recommended to carry out such a study with preschool participants from rural areas and, subsequently, to make a comparison.

Another educational recommendation is related to the verification of this hypothesis at other age levels (primary, high school, high school and even at university level). In addition, it would be interesting and useful to add the motivation variable in a similar study and see to what extent the level of motivation changes depending on the gender.

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# **A Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Approach of Sandplay in Preschool Education**

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# A Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Approach of Sandplay in Preschool Education

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

narrative, Sandplay Therapy, ludic approach, zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Narrative is central for human beings and it is an instrument for organizing our entire experience. Personal, familial, organizational and national identity is being shaped by the narrative. It gives meaning to the world around us. Play is a specific tool that can be used to straighten young children's narrative. A free, symbolic, creative play such as Sandplay can be adopted to maximize the opportunities of observing and sustaining preschoolers' narrative. Dora M. Kalff is the founder of Sandplay Therapy, being influenced by "The World Technique" of Margaret Lowenfeld but playing with sand has always been attractive both to children and adults. In preschool educational settings telling stories in the sand offers educators a way of extending children's narrative by using open questions, dialogues and by developing children's awareness that story fictional world can be enriched.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Erzählung, Sandspieltherapie, Sandspiel in der Vorschulerziehung, Zone der proximalen Entwicklung (ZPD)

Die Erzählung ist für den Menschen zentral und ein Instrument zur Organisation unserer gesamten Erfahrung. Die persönlich, familiäre, organisatorische und nationale Identität wird durch die Erzählung geprägt. Sie gibt der Welt um uns herum einen Sinn. Das Spiel ist ein spezifisches Werkzeug, dass zur Begradigung der Erzählung von Kleinkindern eingesetzt werden kann. Ein freies, symbolisches, kreatives Spiel wie das Sandspiel kann eingesetzt werden, um die Möglichkeiten der Beobachtung und Aufrechterhaltung der Erzählung von Vorschulkindern zu maximieren. Dora M. Kalff ist die Begründerin der Sandspieltherapie, die von der "Welttechnik" von Margaret Lowenfeld beeinflusst wurde, obwohl das Spielen mit Sand war schon immer attraktiv für Kinder und Erwachsene auch. In der Vorschulerziehung das Erzählen von Geschichten im Sand bietet Pädagogen eine Möglichkeit, die Erzählung der Kinder durch offene Fragen zu erweitern, Dialoge und durch die Entwicklung des Bewusstseins der Kinder, dass die fiktive Welt der Geschichte bereichert werden kann.

## 1. Introduction

The urge to tell stories, to express thoughts and feelings, verbally, visually or by using body language, has been defining the human being from ancient times. Today the oldest "story" ever told, lays on a stone fragment found in cave Blombos, in South Africa, dating year 75 000 BP, the artwork was created in ochre using the cross-hatching technique.

In its primordial and instinctual form, the narrative, a social and affective phenomenon, is a resource for making ourselves known and for getting to know others. It's sculpting our human identity at a personal, familial, organizational, or national level, giving meaning to the world around us. The narrative defines the human being and it's a tool for organizing its entire experience.

The narrative implies any way of expressing (verbally, visually, or by body language) as well as the narrative context, defined by the complex interaction provided by answers to questions like Who? When? Where? Why? How? What? etc. "Note one further thing about narrative 'allure. Stories, again unlike logical propositions, cannot

be context-free, cannot live in a vacuum. Even when a story is intended only as a fable, it is always located in a cultural setting [...] To borrow Claude Levi Strauss's apt definition, culture is comprised of the ordinary ways and means by which we routinely and without much quarrel carry out our exchanges with each other, whether the exchange of good, services, respect, affiliation, whatever" (Bruner, 2010, p. 40).

The term narrative is currently being used within a multitude of fields such as literature, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, history, politics, cinematography, fine and digital arts and lately in computer games or even industrial fields, using, for instance, 3d animation to explain products and technologies. The wide spreading of the term, outside of the literature framework and, into multiple other fields, has flattened its meaning, while at the same time, paradoxically, it has enhanced it, adapting entirely to all contexts so that "the term has come to mean anything and everything" (Riessman, Speedy, 2007, p.428 apud Sørly, Blix, 2017, p. 47).

"There are countless forms of narrative in the world. [...] Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated

language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. [...] Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural" (Barthes, Duisit, 1975, p. 237 apud Sørly, Blix, 2017, p. 26).

Same way as the symbols in dancing form a narrative path, or as admiring a painting inspires a whole interior monolog, sand play, on a beach or in an established pedagogical/therapeutic environment, encloses a story told by the one playing, a part of her/his identity. Studies consider that narrative is very important in shaping children's identity, starting from a very early age. "The way in which they conceive of a story is critical in determining how they generate and organize their entire narratives [...] To the young child, a story may be any piece of important topic the child wants to talk about" (Bamberg, 2010, p. 17).

Playing is a specific method of organizing young children's narrative. The adult becomes a partner who has the role of containing and sustaining the child's effort to make sense of reality. Playing is an interpretation of the narrative, in which a "fictional pact" (Umberto Eco) is made between the partners.

The ludic approach is used as an instrument that maximizes the possibilities of observing and sustaining preschoolers' narrative, accessing the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

In this article, we'll distinguish between *Sandplay* – as a therapy method and *Sandplay in Preschool Education* – as a didactic instrument.

## 2. Theoretical background of the term narrative

The pioneers of narrative theory, starting with Plato (third Book of the Republic) and Aristotle (Poetics) and even Claude-Levi Strauss, T. Todorov, U. Eco, Vladimir Propp, etc. were preoccupied with the study of narrative regarding literary genres, Vladimir Propp laying the foundation of modern narratology with his book *Morphology of the tale* (1928). Roland Barthes and Claude Bremond have raised the term narrative to the status of a "semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media" (Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, 2005, p. 470).

Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, published for the first time in 2005, highlights the fact that in the last decades, there has been a distinct increase in the interest granted to the narrative term, which has gradually

come to the attention of many different fields of human knowledge.

In more recent studies and conferences (The International Society for the Study of Narrative (ISSN) with its annual conferences, of which the first conference took place in 1986 at Ohio State University), people from different domains that are preoccupied with the potential of narrative theory, try to find common ground (<http://narrative.georgetown.edu/>).

According to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, the narrative term generally supports two explanatory tendencies, with some authors trying to define the term, and others trying to describe it instead. The descriptive tendency is generally consistent, the descriptions written by different authors completing each other: "narrative is a fundamental way of organizing human experience and a tool for constructing models of reality (Herman, 2002); [...] narrative is a particular mode of thinking, the mode that relates to the concrete and particular as opposed to the abstract and general (Bruner, who distinguishes 'narrative' and 'scientific' thinking); [...] narrative is a mold in which we shape and preserve memories; narrative, in its fictional form, widens our mental universe beyond the actual and the familiar and provides a playfield for thought experiments (Schaeffer, 1999)" etc. (Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, 2005, p. 471). Bruner also states that "Narrative is rather an all-purpose vehicle. It not only shapes our ways of communicating with each other and our ways of experiencing the world, but it also gives form to what we imagine, to our sense of what is possible" (Bruner, 2010, p. 39). Deborah Schiffrin and Anna de Fina capture in an artistic manner, a complex and general sense of the narrative term while writing the introduction to *Telling Stories, Language, Narrative, and Social Life* (2010): "Narratives are fundamental to our life. We dream, plan, complain, endorse, entertain, teach, learn and reminisce by telling stories. They provide hopes, enhance or mitigate disappointments challenge or support moral order, and test out theories of the world at both personal and communal levels" (Schiffirin, De Fina, 2010, p. 1).

In contrast, the tendency which aims to define the term is characterized by many disagreements. "A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator and his or her audience. A narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end. It has an internal logic that makes sense to the narrator. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence" (Herman, 2002 apud Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, p. 471). J.A. Holstein and J.F. Gubrium connect the narrative term to the historical, institutional and interpersonal context, C.K. Riessman wishes to emphasize the existence of a clear distinction between the narrative

term and storytelling, but the same author returns to this difference in more recent works (2008) overlapping the two terms, E.G. Mishler considers that the narrative term has psychological, social and cultural functions (Sørly, Blix, 2017).

The complexity of the narrative term has determined, depending on the approach and the field in which it was defined or described, an exceptional derivation, generating a multitude of related terms, such as *small stories* (Bamberg, 2007) - an umbrella term for stories, past, ongoing, future, hypothetical or imagined events, but also discussions, letters, etc.; *big stories* (Bamberg, 2007) - memoirs, autobiographies, life stories, etc.; *embodied narrative* - The Theory of Embodied Cognition; *mental mapping of narrative* - inspired by cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology, etc. (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, 2005).

To illustrate the exceptional derivation of the term, it is sufficient to mention some of the entries in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005): artificial intelligence and narrative, atomic and molecular narratives, biblical narrative, cognitive narratology, computer games and narrative, courtroom narrative, dance and narrative, digital narrative, drama and narrative, dream narrative, education and narrative, emotion and narrative, ethnographic approaches to narrative, film narrative, Holocaust narrative, identity and narrative, image and narrative, institutional narrative, media and narrative, medicine and narrative, medieval narrative, music and narrative, narrative as a cognitive instrument, narrative games and play, narrative in poetry, narrative intelligence, narrative semantics, narrative structure, narrative therapy, oral cultures and narrative, prison narrative, science and narrative, sociolinguistic and narrative, travel narrative, visual narrativity, etc.

We consider that the term narrative is relevant regarding preschool education from a linguistic and psycho-pedagogical perspective. Narrative shapes children's identity develops their vocabulary and, it offers us, educators, a precious tool in supporting the focus on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and in forming strong, close and healthy relationships with the children. Sandplay (playing is regarded as an organizer of the narrative in preschoolers) has the potential to become such an instrument because it meets the necessary conditions to provide an organized observational framework. This type of play does not limit the manifestation of creativity and the psychic of the preschooler. It involves non-intrusive adult interventions, aimed towards achieving pedagogical objectives.

### 3. Sandplay – the educational versus therapeutic approach

The first to use Sandplay as a therapeutic technique was Margaret Lowenfeld, inspired, by H.G. Wells' book *Floor Games*. Lowenfeld called this technique "The World Technique" and found that this technique helped children to manifest their feelings and emotions without the need of an adult intervention (Zoja, 2013).

"The World Technique" will influence Dora M. Kalff, a Jungian therapist, to create the therapeutic method known today as *Sandplay*. She described the processes involved in working with this method from the perspective of analytical psychology, receiving Jung's support. The Sandplay therapeutic method was first described in 1966 in an article entitled *The archetype as a healing factor*.

"Sandplay therapy is a therapeutic method developed to provide a means of helping children with mental suffering. It is non-verbal play therapy that intentionally creates a space for the unconscious to manifest [...] Sandplay is now used with adult clients as well. The Sandplay method consists of the psychotherapy client's creation of a three-dimensional picture using miniature figures in a tray of sand" (Turner, 2017, p. 1).

This method of therapy requires that the space in which the psychotherapist operates is equipped with two boxes of sand (approx. 50/70/10 cm.), one for the use of dry sand and the other for wet sand, as well as a generous collection of miniatures (small collections containing up to 200-300 figurines, the bigger ones adding up to several thousand).

Starting from the basic Sandplay technique, several new approaches have been developed over time. In Romania, there is the Romanian Association for Sandplay Therapy, endorsed by the Romanian College of Psychologists and affiliated with the International Association for Sandplay Therapy. Since 2018, it offers continuing educational training, accredited by the Ministry of Education.

Next, we will distinguish between Sandplay Therapy, and *Sandplay in Preschool Education* to distance ourselves from the therapeutic method. We also do not want *Sandplay in Preschool Education* to be confused with playing in the sandpit or with playing in the Sand and Water Centre/Area. However, the therapeutic function of play and the therapeutic function of Sandplay is not disregarded.

Sandplay Therapy has been adapted to the educational framework by Kristin Unnsteinsdottir (Iceland), a psycho-pedagogue and a Sandplay therapist at the *Ártúnsskóli* Learning Center in *Reykjavík*. She used it as a therapy method and initiated a recovery program for primary school children struggling with different learning, emotional and behavioral difficulties. Her observations



have been included in her doctoral thesis as well as the book *Sandtray Play in Education: A teacher's Guide* (2015), which she co-authored with Barbara Turner, a former student of Dora Kalff and the founder of Association for Sandplay Therapy.

Sand, water and even mud are very attractive playing materials for preschoolers. These are the most natural play materials one can think of and are very easy to find. In our pedagogical practice, we have used Sandplay with preschoolers in different pedagogical and didactic situations, this instrument is characterized by great flexibility.

It has been proven useful in a social-emotional development program, conducted over a school year. The participants were given the possibility to create different scenarios, stories or situations which allow greater visibility to the relationships between children, in an organized framework, using concrete data collection tools.

Sandplay has supported our pedagogical efforts during the children's adaptation period from the beginning of the school year, the potential of this type of play being fully used in creating feelings of confidence and emotional safety in a very short period.

Using concrete objects (miniatures and small toys), Sandplay is a valuable tool for preschool educators because it facilitates the dramatization of stories, helps children in retelling stories, allows them to create their own stories and it supports the complex mechanisms involved in the process of memorization. Preschool children learn faster and better if a text is accompanied by images, but they learn even faster and better if they are given objects that duplicate the concrete nouns of the text (characters and objects from a story/fairytale).

Regarding the involvement of shy, anxious or insecure children in different activities, Sandplay proved to be a very valuable pedagogical tool.

#### **4. Narrative perspective of Sandplay in Preschool Education. Didactic approaches**

The performing perspective on the narrative includes also physical movement, culture, and socialization in the definition of the term. This means people's stories are seen as "a bodily communicative event and activity that involves other – embodied – persons and the social and cultural situation" (Hydén, 2013, p. 235 apud Sørly, Blix, 2017, p. 55). The narrative involves the body with its senses, gestures, movements, as well as other people. It is something that the human being not only thinks or says but also something that produces through body language (Sørly, Blix, 2017). The narrative of a person is interlaced with the narrative of people with whom he or she

communicates. This highlights the importance of the mirror neurons' role (Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese & Fogassi, 1996) and peripersonal space (Iacoboni, 2008).

These concepts are relevant to educators in general, but also particularly concerning Sandplay in Preschool Education. Mirror neurons are responsible for simulating the virtual reality of another person's actions, a simulation that helps us understand the behavior and emotions of other people, as well as to have insight into other people's actions and be capable of empathy.

When it comes to Sandplay in Preschool Education, the adult uses his words, his body posture, gestures, mimic, and paralinguistic to make the child feel accepted and appreciated. The image created by the child in the sandbox is very valuable and the educator must mirror the child's emotions and feelings. Sandplay in Preschool Education is not something that can be evaluated as correct or incorrect and does not require that children possess any specific skills, it is something every child can do. The feelings of confidence, emotional safety, high self-esteem that are developed through this type of play lead to creating a state of mind that is favorable to learning. The miniatures used, the image in the sand, the adult, in other words, everything that is included in the peripersonal space of the child is integrated into his or her neural maps (Turner, Unnsteinsdottir, 2011). This is important also for educators not only for therapists.

In the interpretation of the visual narrative, of the final product, not only the symbolism of the used objects and the overall image is important to take into account, but also the process that leads to the final product and the relationship between adult and child. In our vision, Sandplay with miniatures in preschoolers is multidimensional and can be analyzed and made use of on many different plans that complement each other:

- the concrete plan (actions and dialogues)
- the symbolic plan (miniatures and the different ways of using the sand)
- the therapeutic plan (emotions, feelings, and desires)
- the pedagogical plan (the different goals that the educator sets)
- the narrative plan (organization/ interpretation/ dramatization of the narrative)
- the relationships plan (child-adult relationships; child-child relationships)
- the potential plan (D.W. Winnicott – potential space).

Regardless if it's about memorization, retelling or creating a story, common dialogues and interactions, the adult influences the organizing of a child's narrative. In this regard is important to consider narrative as a tool for shaping identity but also a tool for language development.

It is well known that learning is facilitated by engaging children in play and storytelling but children need guidance in this regard.

Unnsteinsdottir (2011) discovered that stories created by children are similar in many ways to the traditional stories. She paraphrased Max Lüthi, saying that he observed that the traditional stories have only one dimension, in which the real world merges with the magic world, characters miss the biographical and psychological depth and motivation, the realistic details are most often absent, there is a tendency towards extremes and strong contrasts, they contain fixed formulas and the relationships between characters lack complexity and duration.

When children retell a story or they create one, they often drift away offering a perfect opportunity for the adult to approach the situation by helping the children to "fill in the gaps" as Umberto Eco said... "For the moment, let us note that any narrative fiction is necessarily and fatally swift because in building a world that comprises myriad events and characters, it can not say everything about this world. It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps" (Eco, 1997, p. 2). Characters can receive a short autobiography, motives can be found for their behaviors, "the gaps" of the text can be filled by applying a narrative approach to Sandplay. Children create in the real world, with their own hands, the fictional environment of the story. They give the characters a chance to interact in the real world, by positioning and manipulating them and they also imprint onto this "new world", a part of their psychic. In other words, they reinvent the story, creating a narrative circuit extremely valuable from a pedagogical, psychological and linguistic point of view.

The adult's role is to sustain this effort and to help children explore the text's elasticity or extend the narrative. By extending the narrative, we understand, not only enriching children's descriptive vocabulary, but also developing the children's awareness that the characters can be invested with emotions and feelings, with more characteristics, and that their actions are triggered by a reason, etc.

The extending of the narrative is achieved based on the story illustrated in the sand, by asking open questions to the children, by building on the clues they give us, exploring the latent content of the story. Knowledge, thoughts, and emotions are visually transferred into the sand, while at the same time the educator develops a culture of listening pedagogy (Reggio Emilia). What do children really talk about? What are they thinking about? How can children be engaged in extended dialogs and how can the efficiency of these dialogs be evaluated?

Sandplay in Preschool Education can be used to develop individual learning paths, focused on the child's interests and needs. Children are more interested in something they have built themselves. Creating a story using sand and miniatures makes them more receptive to new information. It's known that in preschool, a child can learn almost anything through stories, even, for instance, decomposition of number five, especially if it's illustrated in the sand using five cute little mice that try to, one by one, cross on the other side of a fence.

Conversations between adults and children can facilitate reaching many subjects, highlighting the children's interests and also offering a cognitive challenge, the adult's suggestions can encourage exploration of new possibilities other than the obvious ones.

Aside from the pedagogical goals, the educator must oversee other aspects of Sandplay, that might offer additional information about the child: the theme illustrated in the sand, the level of child's confidence, the child's relationship with the sand, the miniatures, with the other children and the adult. More information can be found in the miniatures symbolism, the content of the tray, and the quality of the dialogs and nonverbal language.

The thematic analysis of the stories illustrated in the sand and the analysis of the psycho-pedagogical process that went on in Sandplay is extremely significant.

## 5. Conclusions

Sandplay in Preschool Education has important benefits: it is a wonderful tool for shaping the children's narrative, develops language, encourages problem-solving, stimulates imagination and creativity, develops fine motor skills, promotes a state of relaxation and brings to surface (in a safe manner) the negative emotions children might have experienced at some point.

From a cross-disciplinary narrative perspective, Sandplay in Preschool Education is a useful didactical and psycho-pedagogical tool. This kind of play helps shape the children's narrative from a cognitive and affectionate point of view. Storytelling in the sand helps build strong social bridges between adults and children and amongst children. "The «truth» or «accuracy» of narratives takes a back seat to what is socially accomplished through storytelling" (Holstein, Gubrium, 2012, apud Sørly, Blix, 2017, p. 113). Regardless if we call it Sandplay in Preschool Education or storytelling in the sand, this kind of playing offers us a glimpse into the rich inner world of young children.

**Author note:**

The authors have equal contributions to this article.

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# **Emotional Identity in the Process of Evaluation in Primary School Children. School and Family Expectations**

**Anca-Georgiana Simion, Cristian Stan**

# Emotional Identity in the Process of Evaluation in Primary School Children. School and Family Expectations

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

evaluation, assessment, emotional identity, emotions, wellbeing, family expectations

School years have an important role in defining a person for the world he will live in. The influence that the school environment has on defining a person for the future is something that teachers and policy makers take into consideration when developing strategies for learning and equally important in the evaluation process. The evaluation process is an integral part of the education process and the connections between evaluation, assessment of learning and learning constitute a focal part of the educators. School performance is not solely a function of student's aptitude set, but also covers the optimal cognitive and affective-motivational resources in relation to certain tasks. Emotional competence, along with the social competence is important in the development of positive relationships and emotional feelings of security in creating a positive self image for young people. Young people with a positive self image will have a greater disposition to learning. For children learning about themselves happens within the context of their families and community and it includes all the type of relationships they forge with their peers, places and things in relation to the actions and responses from others. Experience is the one that shapes the emotional responses that children have in regards to all the things happening around them and inside them, at a self-understanding level. This paper aims to understand the way emotional identity of children helps them focus on the evaluation task in various contexts of every day school life.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Bewertung, Bewertung, emotionale Identität, Emotionen, Wohlbefinden, familiäre Erwartungen.

Schuljahre spielen eine wichtige Rolle bei der Charakterisierung einer Person für die Welt, in der sie lebt. Der Einfluss, den das schulische Umfeld auf die Charakterisierung einer Person für die Zukunft hat, wird von Lehrern und politischen Entscheidungsträgern bei der Entwicklung von Lernstrategien berücksichtigt und ist gleichermaßen wichtig im Bewertungsprozess. Der Evaluierungsprozess ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Bildungsprozesses, und die Zusammenhänge zwischen Evaluierung, Bewertung des Lernens und Lernen bilden einen Schwerpunkt der Pädagogen. Die schulische Leistung hängt nicht nur von der Eignung des Schülers ab, sondern deckt auch die optimalen kognitiven und affektiv-motivationalen Ressourcen in Bezug auf bestimmte Aufgaben ab. Emotionale Kompetenz ist neben der sozialen Kompetenz wichtig für die Entwicklung positiver Beziehungen und emotionaler Sicherheitsgefühle, um ein positives Selbstbild für junge Menschen zu schaffen. Junge Menschen mit einem positiven Selbstbild werden eine größere Neigung zum Lernen haben. Für Kinder geschieht das Lernen über sich selbst im Kontext ihrer Familien und ihrer Gemeinschaft und umfasst alle Arten von Beziehungen, die sie zu Gleichaltrigen, Orten und Dingen in Bezug auf die Handlungen und Reaktionen anderer knüpfen. Erfahrung ist diejenige, die die emotionalen Reaktionen der Kinder in Bezug auf all die Dinge, die um sie herum und in ihnen geschehen, auf einer Ebene des Selbstverständnisses prägt. Dieses Schriftstück soll zum Verständnis bringen, wie die emotionale Identität von Kindern ihnen hilft, sich auf die Bewertungsaufgabe in verschiedenen Kontexten des täglichen Schullebens zu konzentrieren.

## 1. Introduction: Emotional identity and the evaluation process

Relationships are the foundation for the construction of identity which responds to existential questions - 'who I am', 'where I belong' and 'what is my influence?'. Experiences in early life have a capacity for providing a set of mechanisms built to encourage the development of moral growth at a later age (Thompson, 2017). The author also makes a valid point regarding the existence of milestones in the child life that are a precursor for emotional understanding and relational experience.

Children's emotional and social development is an important aspect that is not neglected this being also the case for cognitive development in young children (0-2 years). For healthy emotional development, the child must possess previously acquired skills, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, curiosity, motivation, perseverance and self-control. These skills develop in the context of a balanced family, where the child develops harmoniously, the relationship between the child and the parent being an important aspect for future skills. The results of the studies carried out by Lozada and Halberstadt (2015) show that emotional competence is closely linked to social competence, this connection being conceptualized with



the phrase "affective-social competence" (Schaffer, 2010, p.149). Self-awareness in children has the function to make children more psychologically self-conscious social actors who also possess greater insight into others.

The concept of "emotional identity" incorporates an energetic and ever changing conduct at an emotional level that presents the role of helping the child in coping and handling either pleasant or stressful situations. In the general sense "emotional identity" represents the way in which people identify themselves through emotions (Sturkenboom, 2014). The way in which children use emotions in any setting, in general, and school environment in particular, is highly informative of the way they have developed a certain mechanism that will help them in any difficulty. Emotions have an important role in helping the child be productive both socially and culturally when engaging into school and home life. When addressing the role that relations play in constructing emotions in teachers, Michalinos Zembylas (2005) he insists in the exploration of the "personal, cultural, political, and historical aspects of teacher identity formation". In this aspect we can also extrapolate this "exploration" of all aspects of child emotional development for his identity formation. Attempts in defining emotional identity formation have revealed that group/team activities play an important role in establishing certain tasks (Simion and Stan, 2019) that help children in their attempt in finding a balance between using emotions and expressing emotions.

The teacher has the important role of "designing" a vision for the purpose of elaborating on the personal and common objectives of evaluation in the classroom. The way he uses the particularities of each child in his classroom can have an impact on the outcomes of the tasks meant for evaluation. The structure of the education process was conceived (decades ago) as having only two main components: the teaching, carried out by the teacher and the learning, carried out at the level of the student, the didactic evaluation being regarded as external and subsequent to the course the teaching-learning interaction.

Children prefer having feedback for the task they perform at school or at home and they need this feedback for both correct and incorrect actions shown in a study for determining the type of corrective feedback in a computerized task (Garcia-Blanco et al., 2016) and if learning is to occur feedback is essential (Imants and Veen, 2010). Teacher's role of reflecting on student

performance, work and tasks promotes professional development and will help guide the student's in the right direction towards goal fulfillment.

## **2. Theoretical foundation: Wellbeing and evaluation: exercise or emotional identity**

The UE has mainly been focusing on the standardization and ratification on the new school curriculum that focuses on the child and this means that policy makers have an extra influence in creating a teaching environment that benefits the child and also the teacher. All the participants in the teaching process have a commitment in promoting wellbeing for children in the school environment and this is associated with specificities regarding functioning in physical, behavioural, social and cognitive areas. Teachers have a responsibility in creating a collaborative space for their pupils in the classroom and they have to improve on their active listening skills and acquire expertise so that they will actively and effectively respond to the diverse and challenging situations in the classroom space (Thorburn and Dey, 2016). Different limitations in one field (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.) don't necessarily mean limitations in all areas. Focusing on developing one specific mechanism or characteristics can narrow the vision and one could focus only on determining one aspect of wellbeing when in fact the threshold was wrong to begin with. Novel situations appear all the time in the learning process and teacher have a task at hand to use all the necessary means to improve their skills such as: active listening, task managements, evaluation feedback, learning feedback, effective problem solving.

Teacher and parents have different views on the way the children should and could experience the learning and evaluation process. Different focuses means different abilities necessary from the children's developmental process. A certain level of expectations has the capacity to demand certain outcome from school performance and the set of mechanism set in motion by these expectations from the teacher's part as well as parent's tend to neglect the aspect of emotional expression. Pressures exercised on the child are felt on the emotional level with different intensity and this depends on the experience that the child has with learning and evaluation tasks. Wellbeing has an important component of a relaxed approach in task performing. Appropriate instruments used by the teacher in the evaluation process could set the starting point for a balanced outcome or burnout. Parents' satisfaction with school quality is reflected in test-based measures even

though the wellbeing of the child is unrelated with school performance or school status (Gibbons and Silva, 2010). With the strategies well organized by the teacher and an open mind from parents' children can form an emotional identity that will help them in a better coordination and balance in concern to interactions with their peers, their teachers and their parents for better awareness of their own understandings. This in return will constitute a powerful tool when children have to transpose themselves in the evaluation mode.

The current study focuses on the perceived emotions during evaluation tasks and outcomes, subjective and objective interest in school. Research hypothesis: The systematic use of concepts specific to the socio-emotional development in the evaluation of primary school children leads to the improvement of the emotional identity and well-being in the context of the evaluation process.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

In the study, 85 children (50.6% female) from one primary school in Cluj-Napoca enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> (19%) and 4<sup>th</sup> grade (66%). From the 85 students the mean age at the beginning of the study was 10.15 years (SD = .608 months). Participation in the study was voluntary.

#### 3.2 Instruments

Demographic variables were: age and gender.

##### *School-interest*

Students' school-interest regarding the forthcoming test was self-reported on a five-item scale ranging from 5 (completely disagree) to 1 (completely agree). Students indicated the extent to which they are interested in the school classes. The key item was "I am interested in school classes".

##### *Evaluation-emotions*

To assess students' evaluation-emotions students rated on a five-point scale ranging from 5 (completely disagree) to 1 (completely agree) on a questionnaire how they feel about the qualifications they receive. The key item was "If an evaluation test is easy I feel happy".

##### *Test-score-emotions*

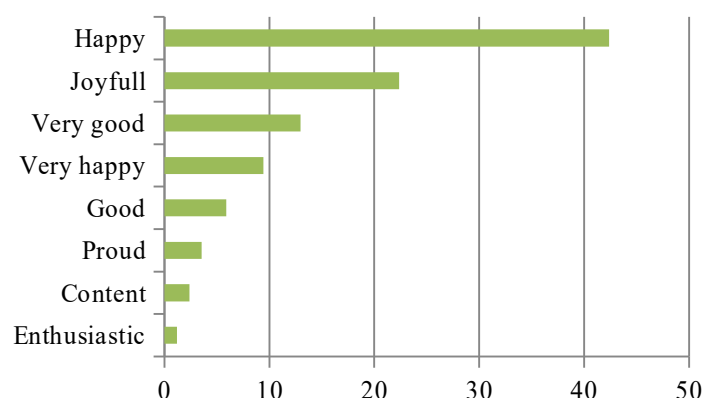
Students' emotions after grading of tests self-reported with an open-ended question. The key item was "If I get the grade I want I feel...". The children named their emotions using a single word.

*The Profile of Emotional Competence* was measured with the 20-item PEC that allows assessing emotion identification, expression, understanding, regulation and use, separately for self and others' emotions. It was developed by Brasseur and Mikolajczak (2015) in order to measure *intra-personal EI* and *inter-personal EI* separately. It assessed the five core emotional competences (identification, understanding, expression, regulation and use of emotions) distinctly for one's emotions and others' emotions. The short version is not intended to provide the subscales scores, but only the factor scores (intra- and inter-personal EI) and the global score.

### 4. Results

The results of the study are presented as follows. We first present some descriptive data concerning school subjects that are favoured by the children from the school subjects that they have weekly (Figure 1). Both female and male participants have favoured mathematics among their choices.

**Figure 2.** What the children chose for evaluation items



#### 4.1. School-interest

We calculated means for school interest and we can see the data presented in Table 1. The results indicate that children perceive at a greater level their interest in school in comparison with their colleagues.

**Table 1.** Means for school interest

Item	Coefficient
School-interest	M (SD)

<b>The teacher listens to my opinion in class</b>	1.81(.715)
<b>I am interested in school hours</b>	1.64(.079)
<b>My colleagues are interested in school hours</b>	2.31(.833)

#### 4.2. Evaluation-emotions

The scale for evaluation for emotions during evaluation process is depicted in Table 2. There were differences among the female and male groups, but a correlation between the gender and scores did not show a significant correlation ( $p=.283$ ,  $p=.125$ ).

*Table 2. Means for evaluation of emotions*

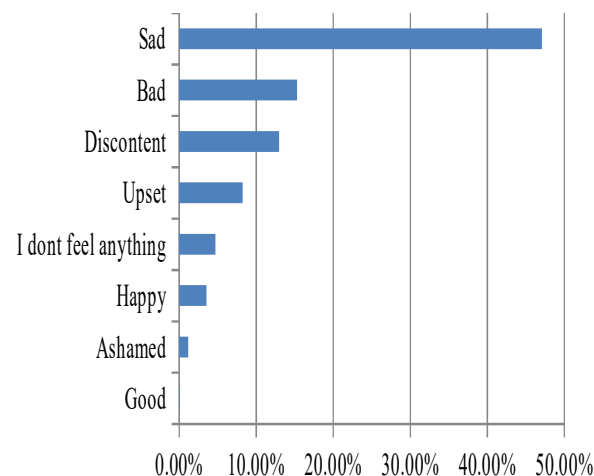
Gender		During the evaluation test there is a pleasant atmosphere	I am interested in the grades i obtain	If a test is easy I feel happy:
Female	Mean	2,0000	1,3256	1,3721
	Std. Deviation	,89974	,71451	,78750
Male	Mean	1,7619	1,6190	1,5476
	Std. Deviation	1,12205	1,01097	,94230
Total	Mean	1,8824	1,4706	1,4588
	Std. Error of Mean	,11027	,09554	,09401

#### 4.3. Test-score-emotions

We aimed in finding how the participants feel if they either receive a "bad" grade (see Figure 3) or a "good" grade (see Figure 4) The initial assessment reveals that the children feels mostly either "sad" or "bad" when the grade is lower than they would "calculate" in receiving. Expectations tend to give a false hope and together with already present consequences they shape a rather unpleasant for the profile of the child.

**Figure 3.** How children feel when they receive a grade lower than the one they expected in the evaluation test

**Figure 4.** How children feel when they receive a grade that they want for the evaluation test



#### 4.4. The Profile of Emotional Competence

We used the reduced 20-items **PEC** in order to measure intra-personal EI and inter-personal EI separately as total score (Table 4). Bilateral Pearson's correlations were performed on the 2 factors scores and the global score. Results (Table 5) for the intra-personal level, correlations are strong (.76 and .78). At the inter-personal level, correlations within inter-personal scales are moderate to strong (.76). For gender there is no significant correlation with either factor score or global score, there was a lower effect of age on EC for intrapersonal EC (.19)

**Table 4.** Means, standard deviations of the PEC subscales and factors for female and male participants ( $n = 85$ )

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Intrapersonal EC</b>	Female	3,4047	,605
	Male	3,3286	,444
<b>Interpersonal EC</b>	Female	3,1349	,520
	Male	3,0476	,493
<b>Global score EC</b>	Female	3,2698	,563
	Male	3,1881	,469

**Table 5.** Correlations between PEC factor score and total score ( $n = 85$ )

	Age	Gender	Intrapersonal EC	Interpersonal EC	Global score EC
Age	1	.256**	.193*	.070	.172
Gender	.256**	1	-.072	-.087	-.102
Intrapersonal EC	.193*	-.072	1	.201*	.787**
Interpersonal EC	.070	-.087	.201*	1	.763**
Global score EC	.172	-.102	.787**	.763**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

## 5. Conclusions

The XXI century has brought a change in the curricular paradigm and the child is the focus of the modelling of the new curriculum almost in all the educational systems. The new skills and competences of this century have been a product of the interaction with the real-life necessities and the preparation of the future adult for the challenges of the world.

The evaluation process is essential in the development of the emotional identity (EI) because the students are main actors in all the dimensions of the educational process, not only in the training process. Thus, with this vision all the actors participating in the educational process will be able to practice with meaning and active each component of the learning process met in the formal system. A major impact on primary school children's lives is the home environment and the way parents manage to provide them with a balanced environment in which the student can develop both cognitively and emotionally.

Teacher must adapt their methods and their instruments for a more dynamic assessment in evaluating and modifying cognitive functioning simultaneously through mediation and intervention. Collaboration with the students and between the students offers an opportunity for emotional and social development thus conducting towards emotional identity. Without pressure but with specific goals the teacher and the parent have the power to reinforce in the minds of the children viable criteria for self-assessment and self-realisation. Letting students compose their own items for evaluation they are made part

of the learning process and together they will make sense and facilitate learning.

The main premise of the optimization of the educational process from at least two points of view: firstly because in this way it becomes possible to effectively combine the effort of the student and the teacher in the direction increase in school performance and secondly because the relationship congruence self-evaluation-evaluation transforms the student into a subject with full rights of the action educational, a subject that is thus really motivated for engaging in the endeavour permanent self-realisation.

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# **The Role of Extracurricular Activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs in the Development Of Key Competences**

**Kerekes Jenő**

# The Role of Extracurricular Activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs in the Development Of Key Competences

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## Abstract

**Keywords:**  
extracurricular, science  
and technology,  
creativity,  
complementarity,  
competencies

The extracurricular educational activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs are carried out on the basis of goals that are implemented through a student-centred educational strategy. The content, methods and tools used are student-centred, differentiated according to the abilities and interests of the children. The activities are flexible, optional, and complementary to formal education and help to develop personality, creativity and competencies.

The extracurricular activities are student-centred and focus on the formative side of learning by identifying effective ways of organizing and guiding student activity. The teacher must become a facilitator, a mentor – through his activities students will acquire knowledge, develop competencies and skills, aptitudes, attitudes through which the theoretical knowledge can be transposed into practical knowledge and helps in the integration into contemporary society.

This questionnaire investigates the role, importance and complementarity of extracurricular activities. It studies the factors that influence the participation of the students in the extra-curricular activities offered by the Children's Palaces and Clubs. The study was conducted on a national level among children, an online questionnaire with 19 questions was applied (N = 3945).

The results show us the important role of non-formal activities, activities that together with formal education help to improve results and are complementary in the development of competencies. The study helps to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of extracurricular education, the results shed light on the children's needs children, and to what extent the use of the student-centred educational strategy will help to achieve better results in education, and probably to reduce school dropout.

## Zusammenfassung

**Schlüsselworte:**  
außerschulisch,  
Wissenschaft und  
Technologie,  
Kreativität,  
Komplementarität,  
Kompetenzen

Der außerschulische pädagogische Unterricht innerhalb der Kinderpalais und clubs fußt auf Zielsetzungen welche durch erzieherische Strategien, mit dem Schüler im Mittelpunkt, erzielt werden. Der Inhalt, die Methoden und Arbeitsmittel sind auf den Schüler zentriert, differenziert je nach den Fähigkeiten und Interessen der Schüler. Die Aktivitäten sind flexibel, wahlfrei und fakultativ, sie sind komplementär mit dem formalen Unterricht und tragen zur Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit, der Kreativität und der Kompetenz bei.

Die außerschulischen Aktivitäten stellen den Schüler in den Mittelpunkt und legen den Schwerpunkt auf das formative Lernen, indem effiziente Modalitäten für die Organisation und Anleitung der Aktivitäten der Schüler identifiziert werden. Der Lehrer muss ein Moderator, ein Supervisor werden und die Schüler sollen sich durch ihre Aktivitäten Kenntnisse aneignen, es sollen sich Fähigkeiten, Geschicklichkeiten, Einstellungen bilden, mittels deren sich theoretische Kenntnisse in praktische umwandeln und somit können sie zur Integration in unserer Gesellschaft beitragen.

Der gegenwärtige Fragebogen untersucht die Rolle, die Wichtigkeit und die Komplementarität der außerschulischen Aktivitäten. Es werden die Faktoren untersucht welche das Mitmachen der Schüler bei außerschulischen Aktivitäten in den Schülerpalais und clubs beeinflussen. Die Untersuchung wurde bei Kindern auf nationaler Ebene durchgeführt und es wurde ein Fragebogen online mit 19 Fragegebeben, (N=3945).

Die Ergebnisse zeigen uns die wichtige Rolle der nonformalen Aktivitäten, welche zusammen mit dem formalen Unterricht zur Verbesserung der erzielten Resultate der Schüler beitragen und diese sind komplementär für die Entwicklung der Kompetenzen. Die Studie hilft uns bei der Analyse der Stärken und Schwächen des außerschulischen Unterrichts, die Ergebnisse machen klar welches der Bedarf der Kinder ist und in welchem Maße die Verwendung der didaktischen Strategie, mit dem Schüler im Mittelpunkt, dazu beiträgt bessere Ergebnisse im Unterricht zu erzielen und wie diese wahrscheinlich zur Verminderung der Zahl der Aussteiger aus der Schule beitragen.

## 1. Introduction

Children's Palaces and Clubs must become, in view of a modern education that values orientation of knowledge and is based on the selection of economic, political, scientific, technical, cultural values according to the

criteria established by communities and common interests, a formative institution in which the needs of the child are paramount. The knowledge society we live in is based on the accumulation and use of data in the form of information and knowledge at a social level. Knowledge is information gained through education and experience,

through the educational process, including formal, non-formal and informal education. Exploiting this knowledge and translating information into practice, increasing interest in science and technology are some of the aspects that extra-curricular activities have to offer participants in non-formal activities. The specificity of non-formal education is achieved through the interference of the educational forms with the requirements of the local community, the specificity of the area and the use of student-centred teaching strategy. The extracurricular activities centred on the student are more than the accumulation of as much information as possible; these activities focus on the actions that help to consolidate the theoretical information and their application in practice (Cristea, 2016).

Children's lack of interest in natural sciences, chemistry, physics, biology, technology, technical-scientific activities is a huge problem in the education system in the EU, fact confirmed by several studies (Behtoui, 2019). In Romania the teaching strategies, the school syllabus, the lack of equipment, the lack of interdisciplinarity are some aspects that keep pupils and students away from these activities, and will trigger or has already triggered an acute lack of interest towards the technical disciplines, a lack of specialists in the field, lack of children in vocational schools and lack of specialized teachers in the area of mathematics, natural sciences and technology.

The role of extra-curricular education is to stimulate children's interest in the technical and scientific fields, to motivate children to rediscover the beauties of life through the prism of chemistry, physics, biology and technology to experience their importance in everyday life and to progress, develop towards becoming supporting pillars of modern society. The motivation of the students can be achieved by increasing the complexity of the educational act, whether formal or non-formal, through the interaction of sciences, the flexibility and open character of education, research in the field of educational sciences, globalization, with an education that requires the introduction of the interdisciplinary character (Albulescu, 2008).

Increasing children's motivation towards science and technology, interdisciplinarity, developing key competencies, cultivating interests for this type of activity, spending leisure time in a useful and educational way – this can be achieved through the interaction of the three forms of education: formal, non-formal and informal.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

Romania prides itself with children being awarded at International Olympics in the field of natural sciences, children who build robots and compete with their toys

internationally, and yet we can state that on national level – based on national and international studies – mathematical and science curricular areas have lost ground to other curricular areas (Kitchen, 2017). It cannot be said that students are motivated to learn chemistry, physics, biology, technology even at the level of non-formal activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs, the disappearance of the technical-scientific circles can be clearly stated.

The acute lack of teachers in the respective curricular areas (in 2019, in Covasna county there were no registered candidates for chemistry, physics or technology), the lack of modern teaching materials, the discrimination between children from rural and urban schools, but also between 'elite' schools and neighbourhood schools are not a good environment for the curriculum area. The modern world needs specialists in this field as well, and to relaunch these curricular areas, extracurricular activities – this is largely in the hands of teachers and in investing in equipping laboratories with modern equipment and specialized educational software. The role of the pedagogical society in the natural sciences, technology is to know the way of thinking of the contemporary generation, to find the factors that have led to the departure from the respective subjects. Motivation towards natural sciences, technology, the development of logical thinking, creativity, rediscovering the beauty of chemistry, physics, biology, technology, extracurricular activities in which the sense of beauty develops, skills are some of the points for which answers are sought (Daniel, 2015).

In the modern knowledge-based society, in the sphere of information and in the technological world, it is necessary to attract even from primary education the interest of children towards natural sciences, technology and to apply the student-centred interactive learning. (András, 2010)

The interest and motivation of children in natural sciences, technical-scientific circles can be kept if we apply modern teaching methods, we have a modern material base and an advanced technology. These requirements become the pillar of support for education. (Cristea, 2016)

Non-formal education, complementary to formal education, contributes to the partial or complete development of competencies and complements the information, knowledge, skills and attitude offered by formal education but loses ground in a system already overloaded.

The characteristics of extracurricular education must be explored from the perspective of the different forms of education and require their investigation as non-formal activities must be considered complementary to formal

education and help to develop the personality and achieve the educational aims proposed for the integration of the educable in a modern society (Bocoş & Jucan, 2019; Flueraş, 2014).

On a national level, non-formal activities are included in the national educational system since the 1950s, in Covasna county, the Children's Palace in Saint George, also called the Pioneers' Palace, is for the benefit of the community and children since 1954 and offers a wide range of extracurricular activities.

Non-formal education through its practical activities based on a non-formal student-centred curriculum was the lever that made the transition from the subject-centred curriculum to the student-centred curriculum materialized by the National Education Law no. 1 of 2011 and later on the introduction of school programs for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, contained in Annex 2 of OMNE (Order of Ministry of National Education) no. 3393 / 28.02.2017, which is applied in the education system starting with the 2017-2018 school year, school programs focusing on key competencies in which there are some changes that help children to be motivated and to prepare the respective subjects.

The non-formal education within the Children's Palaces and Clubs is regulated by M.E.R.S. (Ministry of Education, Research and Sports) order no. 4624/2015 - amending the annex no. 1 to the Regulation of the units offering extracurricular activity. According to the National Education Law, non-formal education, together with informal education, are integrated forms of the planned activities, do not follow a particular curriculum and are complementary to formal education. Children's Palaces and Clubs are state education units specialized in extracurricular activities within which specific instructional-educational activities are performed that develop and practice key competencies making good use of children's free time. The activities must be carried out in such a way as to be complementary to the formal education and to avoid the parallelism or overlapping with the content of the programs specific to the formal education.

The quality and efficiency of the activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs depend on the following of certain rules and principles, and must form and train the competencies that the formal education forms.

The purpose of extracurricular education is the development of the key competencies, the development of the children's personality through the use of learning strategies, of the methods that favour the development of knowledge and personality, and creativity of the child (Albulescu, 2008).

The characteristics of extracurricular activities in Romania that take place within Children's Palaces and Clubs for which non-formal education militates and which are also governed by regulations, are centred on students, on the real learning needs, thus facilitating a better adaptation of the non-formal educational process. Another positive aspect through its autonomy is that it is adapted to the community, the group and is centred on its own learning pace. The curriculum of non-formal activities, the development programs are structured and organized by areas of interest and not by years of studies or academic disciplines, they have clear learning objectives, they allow moments of abstraction by extracting knowledge from real life, they are complementary activities to formal education (Bocoş, 2017). The flexible contents, the period of achievement of results are shorter than in formal education and the satisfaction is higher among the children. Diversification, extension of the learning framework, flexibility of learning space and time is the duty of the circle leader. The respective activities complement the formal education, respectively the accumulation of knowledge, skills, attitudes that help the personal development of the children. The demands of children and the community, motivating students to participate in non-formal activities in addition to other activities likely to be more interesting or relaxing, requires efficient management and a modern pedagogy focused on competency through education that emphasizes the consolidation of theoretical information through their practical applications (Chiş, 2005).

Play as a teaching method represents a set of actions and operations that pursue the objectives of intellectual, technical, moral, physical training of the child. Incorporated in the extracurricular didactic activity, the 'play' element adds a livelier and more attractive character, it brings variety and a functional good mood, joy, of relaxation, which prevents the appearance of monotony, boredom, fatigue (Albulescu & Catalano, 2018). The didactic game is a specific type of activity by which the circle leader consolidates, specifies and even verifies the students' knowledge, enriches their sphere of knowledge, enhances and trains their creative abilities (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019).

Changing the place of the activities reduces monotony, routine; the laboratories, the workshops, the circles of non-formal activities must offer an alternative. The flexibility to see other forms of education, to compare positively or negatively with what is happening in school, requires a change of place of activities. Children's Palaces and Clubs come to help shape the personality of the child, the place of "play is within the institutionalized framework, but outside the educational system, in institutions that do not have an explicit educational destination" (Bocoş & Jucan, 2017, p. 25).



The educational perspectives of non-formal activities highlight the more relaxed, closer relationship between the teacher and the students. Even if the teacher facilitates the whole didactic process, the students can manifest themselves spontaneously and freely. The teacher or the circle leader does not impose his point of view, at the most he suggests, cooperates and supports them to become good organizers of their own activity. The range of varied teaching strategies offers the student the opportunity to accumulate life experiences through direct contact with people, with the phenomena of material and spiritual culture. The educated person becomes a resource, a producer, an opinion leader, in other words, an active participant in his own learning (Lazăr & Cărășel, 2008).

As with formal education, non-formal education aims to develop appropriate behaviours that are conducive to continuous learning, to acquiring a volume of information and transferring it to various fields of knowledge, developing critical thinking, multiplying positive experiences. The extracurricular education has its role, supporting the efforts of those who wish to increase the coherence of the instructional-educational process through practical educational activities and with a prospective orientation of the extracurricular education.

The development of key competencies, children's life skills, and stimulation of cognitive, spiritual, interpersonal and social development should not take into account the gender of children. Teachers play a particularly important role in developing the ability to understand gender roles in childhood. There is a wide variety of studies from several countries that have shown that parents and teachers tend to encourage children - boys and girls - to participate in activities that do not require practical or technical skills, although the uniform development of key competencies is crucial in the knowledge society. In order to be able to avoid gender barriers coming from adults regarding the education of children, we need to be aware of these differences, to know them, to accept them, and to act so as to avoid stereotypes and gender-cataloguing of children. The perception that children have of themselves is considered to be a crucial element in choosing a non-formal activity. All those involved in the education of children, from parents to teachers must know the problem of gender differences and the need to use or compensate these differences (Balica & Fartușnic, 2004).

Thus, the idea that only certain activities and behaviours are appropriate to a certain gender is reinforced. That is why limits are set instead of improving the non-formal curriculum in the direction of equal opportunities (Skelton, Francis, Valkanova, 2007). The differences between boys and girls in terms of the type of activities they prefer determine differences in the environment, with broad implications for personal development. A number of studies have focused on the

type of activities involving girls and boys during play periods and have noted that girls prefer structured activities to a much greater extent than boys (Hutson and Comeaux, 2002). If girls choose well-structured activities, they will have more experience in maintaining structures and providing answers within these structures. Boys, not choosing structured activities, will have more experience in creating their own structures. They will adapt and will have difficulty coping within structures already created (Santrock, 2001).

The study analyzes the positive and negative valences of these "shortcomings" listed above and the factors that generate disinterest in the natural sciences and technology and how they are "affected" by the non-formal activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs.

### 3. Research methodology

The *online questionnaire* was completed between February and March 2019 in 38 counties in Romania on a sample of 3945 children attending formal education and different forms of non-formal education. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS24.

*The research questions* to which the answers were expected:

- What do children think about the activities organized in the Children's Palaces and Clubs?
- What are the reasons students choose to spend their free time at Children's Palaces and Clubs?
- To what extent do non-formal activities in the technical-scientific field contribute to the development of the competencies of the key competencies?
- What are the factors that influence the participation of students in the scientific and technical activities?

*The purpose* of the questionnaire is to highlight the role of extracurricular activities organized by the Children's Palaces and Clubs in developing the key competencies and in spending free time through education and play. Drawing the attention of teachers based on children's responses to the regression of natural sciences, technology and activities within the technical-scientific circles. Achieving more meaningful visions among teachers in mathematical curricular areas and natural sciences, technologies, circle leaders in the respective fields on the factors that influence student participation and motivation for the respective subjects and finding solutions to achieve better results at national and international assessments (PISA), to find those teaching strategies that will stimulate to study the respective fields and to participate in extracurricular activities, to realize the importance of knowing phenomena, of modern technology and to reduce functional illiteracy among children.

The introduction of the school programs for the secondary education included in Annex no.2 of the OMNE no. 3393/2017 focused on the 8 key competencies also brought changes in extracurricular activities. Non-formal activities through complementarity with formal education can help develop key competencies through specific extracurricular activities. First of all, it has to intervene in the motivation of children to develop those skills that are the strengths, and the ones where there are difficulties, and to find those solutions that will help to obtain the best results in the national and international assessments, but also in finding a hobby for to spend their free time developing their personality, ability, attitude (Cărășel & Lazar, 2008). This process requires from the teachers an extra effort by reorganizing the teaching strategies by combining the traditional methods with the modern learning-assessment methods in order to get closer to the generation of the modern world.

#### 4. Results

**Table 1.** Percentage of students who attend extracurricular activities in different levels of education

Levels of education			Extracurricular activities		Total
			Yes	No	
Levels of education	Primary school students	Count	809	136	945
		%within level	29,6%	85,6%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	12,4	-12,4	
	Secondary school students	Count	1134	538	1672
		%within level	41,3%	67,8%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1,9	1,9	
	High school students	Count	796	532	1328
		%within level	29,1%	59,9%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-9,2	9,2	
Total	Count		2739	1206	3945
	%within level		100%	69,4%	100,0%

$N_{\text{Primary}}=945$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\text{adj.resid}>3$ ,  $N_{\text{Secondary}}=1672$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\text{adj.resid}>1,5$ ,  $N_{\text{High school students}}=1328$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\text{adj.resid}>3$ ,  $N=3945$

Based on the research it can be observed the increase of the importance of non-formal activities with the increasing age of students due to the increase of autonomy towards their parents. Primary school students participate almost 29.6% in extracurricular activities often chosen by their parents or proposed by the school. The extracurricular activities preferred by the students in primary education are educational instructional processes that mainly develop motor skills. The respective activities must be approached through play, students can discover

The extracurricular activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs in Romania are based on an Organizing Regulation, are an integral part of the national education system and are free. The complexity of the activities, the selection of children according to their age and intellectual capacity or ability, is realized by the circle leader based on a selection procedure approved by the methodical commissions and the board of the institution. The interest of the students for non-formal activities increases with the age of the children, which is confirmed by the study. The extracurricular activities must be complementary to the formal education and respond to the recreational and training needs of students. This implies that students will be consulted in advance about the nature and purpose of a particular activity in order to avoid any abuse arising from the enthusiasm of some to perform the activities only to highlight at any cost a particular student or group of students or for personal interest.

truths, they can train their ability to act creatively, to know the strategies of the game which are essentially heuristic strategies, in which cleverness, spontaneity, inventiveness, initiative, patience, daring are manifested (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019).

The biggest contribution to non-formal activities comes from secondary school students. They participate in a percentage of 41.3%, in these interdisciplinary activities that are complementary to the formal education, are free and develop their personality, skills, creativity. At

adolescence, children try all kinds of extracurricular activities until they find the ones that they are attracted to. Non-formal activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs attract 42.1% girls and 41.8% boys to these activities in which they spend their free time actively. The motivation of the students to participate in a certain activity depends very much on the personality of the circle leader and on the didactic strategy he uses to increase the interest in these often rebellious, sometimes aggressive children, who do not like to follow the rules, but they are eager to achieve something and to stand out.

The role of extracurricular activities decreases significantly when accessing higher education, only 29.1% participate among those surveyed in non-formal activities. High school students participate in these activities based on those declared to develop self-esteem, practical knowledge and to dedicate themselves to a hobby. Within

the activities they socialize with students from other schools and learns to self-evaluate, to make comparisons with students from other high schools, locally and countrywide. The wide range of educational activities offers the necessary framework for students to get to know their limits, so that they can pass beyond them, which helps them in future social and professional integration.

One general objective at all levels of education was to stimulate creativity in order to modernize the didactic approach and to carry out a quality educational act, by stimulating the interest for the in-depth study in the targeted fields, developing the capacity of documentation, communication and the use of media in order to make the discoveries accessible, teachers' awareness of the need to use new learning and evaluation methods, promotion of teachers' experiences in a multidisciplinary context.

**Table 2.** *The proportion of students who choose to do an extracurricular activity by themselves*

Levels of Education	At the choice of the teacher or parents	When choosing the child
Primary school students	92,9%	7,1%
Secondary school students	45,1%	54,9%
High school students	9,3%	92,7%
N=3945		

The choice of extracurricular activities organized by Children's Palaces and Clubs, the increasing autonomy of choosing leisure activities is directly proportional to the age of the children. In primary education, children choose non-formal activities that teachers suggest in partnership with parents (92.9%). In the secondary education, things start to change, the students choose their activities through which they want to develop their strengths and which helps to develop their skills in the respective field. Parents need to help, inform and find out the weaknesses of their children in order to develop those skills, those lacks of knowledge, attitudes that are needed in the children's

future and which can be corrected through extracurricular activities.

Secondary school children choose their activities voluntarily in proportion of 54.9% of those interviewed. Those in high school education have a broader vision for the activities they want, they choose 92.7% non-formal activities that they want to follow and that will help develop competencies. They follow the activities that have become their hobbies such as music, modern dance, folk dance, and rarely there are students passionate about electronics or natural sciences.

**Table 3.** *The proportion of students according to the levels of education and the gender of the children*

Levels of Education					Total
Gender		Primary	Secondary	High	
	girl	591 26,0%	955 42,1%	725 31,9%	2271 100,0%
	boy	354	716	604	1674

	21,1%	42,8%	36,1%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>	945	1671	1329	3945
	24,0%	42,4%	33,7%	100,0%

N=3945

The proportion in which girls or boys participate in these non-formal activities depends on the field of the activity. In extracurricular activities, the composition of the sexes depends on the field of the activity, girls are more likely to choose cultural-artistic and the sports-touristic activities, while boys like the sports-touristic and technical-application ones. Based on the questionnaire, it is possible to state a slight shift in the participation of girls in non-formal activities. The study corresponds to the research carried out in the respective fields in Europe, girls in primary education participate in a proportion of

26% as compared to 21% of boys in non-formal activities. In secondary education it cannot be said that girls or boys are keener to spend their free time doing extracurricular activities, it is 42.1% girls and 42.8% boys. High school education brings a slight shift towards the more active participation of boys 36.1% and girls with 31.9%. Overall, the participation of girls in these activities is higher, which corresponds to other research done. The following question investigates the reasons why students participate in extracurricular activities.

**Table 4.** *Reasons of the students for participating in extra-curricular activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs*

	Primary school students		Secondary school students		High school students	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	No
<b>It helps me in teaching</b>	55,5%	44,5%	47,4%	52,6%	46%	54%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	5.6			1.0		1.7
<b>It's a nice way to spend your free time</b>	80,9%	19,1%	78,8%	21,2%	66,5%	33,5%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	8.9		4.9			7.5
<b>Because that's what parents want</b>	92,9%	7,1%	83,4%	16,6%	78,6%	21,4%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	13.4			1.2		6.4
<b>I I'm bored at home</b>	40%	60%	29,6%	40,4%	17,8%	82,2%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	7.4		1.8			9.2
<b>My friends are there</b>	50,1%	49,9%	42,3%	57,7%	35,1%	64,9%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	6.0		1.7			3.7
<b>I prefer a healthy lifestyle</b>	74%	36%	64,8%	35,2%	60,4%	39,6%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	7.3			1.4		4.8
<b>It helps me in my daily life</b>	73,1%	26,9%	73,3%	26,2%	67%	33%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	3.4		4.6		4.4	
<b>I feel better than at school</b>	88,1%	11,9%	78,2%	21,8%	70,6%	29,4%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	9.8			1.1		7.5
<b>I can stand out</b>	78,6%	21,4%	73,6%	26,4%	67,8%	32,2%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	8.0		2.4			4.3
<b>Other</b>	72,4%	27,6%	57,2%	42,8%	50,7%	49,3%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	9.6			1.9		4.6

N=3945

The extracurricular activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs occupy an important place amongst the educational influences. Participation in this type of activity broadens the cultural horizon of the students,

completing the volume of knowledge acquired in the formal education with new concepts. It constitutes a means of forming competencies, contributing to the moral, aesthetic, technological education of the students,

disciplining their actions and extending their cultural-artistic, technical-scientific horizon. Extracurricular activities are a means of training students' skills to use their free time rationally. They are favourable to the spirit of independence and initiative.

The results of the study conclude with the above mentioned. Students often participate in the respective activities for a better understanding of the lesson learned in formal education and to have better school results.

To observe the significant differences in the choice of extracurricular activities, the adjusted standardized residuals are followed for each cell. In primary education 55.5% of the children who answered the questions participate in a form of non-formal activity because it helps in learning, and 80.9% think it is a good way to spend their free time. The results of the research confirm that in primary education there is a closer attachment of the pupils to their parents. The pupils in primary education participate in non-formal activities being influenced by their parents, 92.9% attend an activity because their parents want them to. At the secondary level 78.8% of the participants believe that the respective activities are a pleasant way to spend their free time. The organization of free time and healthy life begins to take shape at the secondary level, within the reach of parents (83.4%), they

prefer to follow an activity within the Children's Palaces and Clubs because they prefer a healthy lifestyle (64.8%). The purpose of extracurricular activities in high school, with greater autonomy in terms of spending free time, is the development of special skills, the cultivation of interest for socio-cultural actions, the facilitation of integration in the school environment, the value of personal talents and the correlation of aptitudes with the characteristic attitudes (67%). Through these activities students are offered another way of learning about life, positive values of life, moral values and not only and thus feel better than at school (70.6%) and can also stand out (67.8 %).

Probably the lack of educational alternatives at secondary level, the curiosity about these activities attracts an increasing number of children who want to combine the educational game with the increase of school and sports performance. High school students have a more eloquent chance to pursue their hobbies within Children's Palaces and Clubs through creative and recreational activities. The results of the research are supported by other research carried out within the extracurricular activities at national and international level (Ionescu & Popescu, 2012, Eschelman, Madsen, Alarcon, Barelka, 2014).

**Table 5.** *The proportion of students participating in non-formal activities in curricular and gender areas*

	Extracurricular activity		Extracurricular activity	
	Technical - scientific		Culturally - artistic	
	Not participating	Participate	Not participating	Participate
<b>Girls</b>	46,5%	43,5%	34.5%	65,5%
<b>Boys</b>	44,6%	55,4%	55.6%	44,4%

N=3945

Non-formal education is innovative, attractive and fun. Involves participants in practical and creative activities and supports students' communication and networking skills through team activities. Parents have the responsibility to identify and guide their children's needs so that they have the skills to cope with situations they will encounter in life, but also to have a successful career. Parents should use their children's free time so that they can develop, find those activities that reflect their age and skills, help them express themselves more easily, gain

confidence in themselves, and take initiatives both at school and at home.

The lack of alternatives for boys play an important role in the non-formal activities of the Children's Palaces and Clubs. A particularity of the extracurricular activities, of real importance, is their connection with the practical side. The application of knowledge in extracurricular activities has the value of a developing exercise in developing students' skills. Important in carrying out these activities is the fact that students can be trained in both initiation



and organization, as well as in the way they are carried out.

According to the analysis of the quantitative data, the boys' participation in the technical-scientific activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs is 55.4%, and 65.5% of the girls prefer culturally artistic activities. Students prefer these activities to improve school performance, even if the time allocated to them is at the expense of their free time or doing homework.

The technical-scientific activities are attended by 55.4% of which 26.9% boys from primary school, 22.8% from secondary school and 12% from high school. These

data are in line with statistics from the Council of the European Union in 2019 (Kitchen, 2017, Behtoui, 2019). Studies come and reinforce the aforementioned and demonstrate that extracurricular activities help to build a positive attitude towards learning, encourage teamwork and solidarity, but also the ability to find solutions and solve problems more easily.

**Table 6.** *Factors that influence students' participation in the technical-scientific activities*

	Primary school students		Secondary school students		High school student	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Teachers do not keep up with technology</b>	26,1%	73,9%	30%	70%	30,6%	69,4%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>		2.8		2.6		5.2
<b>The equipment from the laboratories is obsolete</b>	86,2%	13,8%	73,4%	26,6%	67,7%	32,3%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	10.1			1.6		5.3
<b>The exercises / exercises are too demanding</b>	29,3%	70,7%	33%	67%	34,7%	65,3%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>		2.2	2.5		3.8	
<b>The time of realization / exercise is too long</b>	24,8%	75,2%	33%	67%	39,9%	60,1%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>		6.1		3.3	5.8	
<b>I have no friends in circles</b>	31,6%	68,4%	37,2%	62,8%	41,5%	58,5%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>		4.3	2.4		3.4	
<b>They are not useful</b>	39%	61%	38,1%	61,9%	40,1%	59,9%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	2.4			3.0	3.8	
<b>Teachers are not well trained</b>	46,4%	53,6%	41,7%	58,3%	42,9%	57,1%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	2.1			2.0		1.3
<b>Other</b>	46,4%	53,6%	41,7%	58,3%	42,9%	57,1%
<b>Adjusted residual</b>	2.1			2.0		1.3

Table no. 6 refers to activities that will stimulate students to pay greater attention to the disciplines in the curricular areas of science and technology, whose curricula are based on the idea of education using five different disciplines: chemistry, physics, biology, technology and mathematics, and presupposes cohesive learning based on real-world demands, integrated into a cohesive, interdisciplinary learning paradigm and not the study of four different disciplines.

What distinguishes the technical-scientific activities within the Children's Palaces and Clubs from the traditional education (based on science and mathematics)

is the mixed learning that demonstrates to students how the scientific method can be applied in everyday life. They develop their calculation-based thinking and focus on solving problems by applying real-life solutions. This type of education can be applied starting from the smallest classes, secondary school, high school and until college, also included (Kerekes & Barabas, 2019).

The scientific-technical circles within the Children's Palaces and Clubs have activities that help to develop the basic competencies in science and technology. These activities are complementary to formal education and are non-formal in nature. The activities are interdisciplinary in

which the artificial boundaries between the disciplines of mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, technology and other disciplines are exceeded and problems, can be solved more easily due to their practical relevance (Albulescu, 2008). Practical activities such as aero-modelling, applied electronics, carting, and experimental chemistry are some circles that lose ground to humanistic circles.

And yet, despite all the efforts of the teachers to carry out motivating activities, the students ignore the technical-scientific activities. The results show that the message for the correct and coherent reception of the information, the methods, the procedures, the mode and the modalities used as the pedagogical tact of the circle leader represent the strong point of this kind of activity.

The equipment of laboratories, of the technical-application circles are the main barriers that make the pedagogical act difficult and is an important reason for which the secondary school students (73.4%) and high school students (67.7%) do not attend the respective circles.

Attention and patience is one of the major problems of the contemporary generation that develops with time, patience and hard work. Instead, children have a natural curiosity about the surrounding world, the human being, at every stage of its development, has needs, needs, interests, and later on aspirations that have certain specificity. Their knowledge and respect ensure the child's involvement in these educational activities. The child is motivated to learn if what he is learning is related to reality, if it is useful and helps him in his daily life, if he starts from what he knows and what corresponds to his experience. He learns by doing, interacting directly, acting practically, applying, analysing, appreciating, observing, drawing conclusions, that is, if he is actively involved mentally and, especially at a young age, through sensory and motor skills. Effective learning is carried out in a pleasant, supportive atmosphere, where the child feels he can decide, that he has a certain degree of freedom, in which he is allowed to make mistakes and in which he is supported to correct the mistakes, not criticized for them or be compared to others. At a young age, and not only, the playful aspect of learning is very important and motivating (Albulescu & Catalano, 2019).

The respective activities must be managed in such a way, using didactic strategies to motivate them, to not require long time to achieve, to perform, and not to be too demanding (Barabas, 2019).

Children, especially in primary education, think that the activities are too demanding (70.7%). As they get older, work and exercises have to be done, more sophisticated problems have to be solved – high school students do not participate in these activities because they are too demanding (67%), they think that the introduction

into the sophisticated world of technology must be progressive. The time of accomplishment and exercise is another impediment that is not to the liking of the students, 67% of the secondary school participants consider the time too long to carry out a work or an exercise fact confirmed by high school students (60.1%) as well.

Learning has an important relational side, which is why connecting the circle leader and the parent with the child, appreciating the effort put into the task and not the end result, encouraging, trusting that he/she will succeed are important elements in learning, especially in the repetitive, difficult, frustrating times of the learning process.

The attitude of the circle leader, of the parents, regarding learning and ensuring a proper study climate contributes to the increase in motivation in learning. The students appreciate the use of modern learning methods, such as the online educational product which have the role of presenting the information from the school syllabus in a pleasant way (Kerekes, 2018). These are means that students really like and which can be masterfully introduced by teachers. It helps children, because technology is part of their lives, and its use by circle leaders means making learning attractive, friendly, taking into account their concerns and interests. Students consider that the teachers are well trained (53.6% in primary education, 58.3% in secondary education and 57.1% in high school education).

The results of the study are also confirmed by other research which shows that participation in extracurricular activities is generally considered beneficial (Shannon, 2006, p. 400), while Barnett (2007, p. 316) notes that some schools encourage students to participate in various extracurricular activities, such as athletic activities, vocational clubs, etc. International studies on the effects of extracurricular activities at high school level are positively correlated with higher grades, positive attitudes towards school (Fredricks and Eccles 2008).

Results consistent with other studies show that students who generally participate in extracurricular activities are positively correlated with school performance, personality and acceptance by their peers, thus emphasizing both academic and social benefits (Fung and Wong, 1991, pp. 155-160).

## 5. Conclusions

The scientific research was carried out on a sample of 3945 children from 38 counties of Romania who answered the online questionnaire regarding the participation in extra-curricular activities. The study highlighted the importance of extra-curricular activities organized within the Children's Palaces and Clubs, activities that are complementary to formal activities.

Our questions focused on the role and importance of the extracurricular activities specific to Children's Palaces and Clubs, of the school environment, of the factors that influence the participation in the respective activities. The respondents seem to devote time to extracurricular activities and consider that non-formal education is consistent with formal activities and participation in extracurricular activities did not adversely affect their school performance (grades). The data of the research carried out are in accordance with the results of the researches carried out in Luxembourg, Cyprus, Hungary and Romania, boys prefer activities that develop more the competencies in the field of science and technology, and girls mainly attend the artistic cultural circles (Olaru, 2015)

Another question addressed was related to the students' preference for choosing different forms of non-formal activities. According to our results, secondary school students participate in a higher proportion than the primary and high school students in extracurricular activities. In the choice of activities, the choice of parents for those in primary education dominates due to the young age of the children. Regarding secondary school students we can see that the same activities are chosen almost equally by both parents and students, while in high school education the student chooses the preferred activity. Students attend extracurricular activities because they are innovative, attractive and fun. It helps to apply the theoretical information in daily life by involving the participants in practical, creative activities and supports the communication and networking skills of the students through team activities. The activities are more relaxing, the way of highlighting through competitions, shows, visits to different societies is greater than in formal education.

The competencies in science and technology along with the ones in mathematics are indispensable to the knowledge society. Forming competencies in science and technology is a complex field, which can have a strong influence on children's development. During these activities, children have the opportunity to know, to handle various tools and materials. They are curious, clever and eager to create, to experiment. By motivating students, they become interested in everything around them, they become eager to try, create, carry out a successful activity and have confidence in their own strengths. The lack of equipment of the technical circles is in the way of the students to form and develop skills, abilities and practical aptitudes.

Adapting the extracurricular activities to the national and international standards and to the current necessity of society will be a qualitative leap in the non-formal education offered by Children's Palaces and Clubs. The quality of educational services to spend their free time, motivating children to participate in the respective

activities, will generate the use of interactive teaching strategies with a diversified methodology, based on combining learning activities and independent work with the cooperative activities, intensely involving all psychic and knowledge process of students, ensuring optimal conditions for individual and team affirmation, developing critical thinking, motivation for learning and allowing evaluation of their own activity.

The study shows us a positive attitude towards extracurricular activities within Children's Palaces and Clubs. These activities help students to develop a positive attitude towards learning, have higher academic performance, and have diversified practical skills and good problem-solving strategies.

Extra-curricular activities are a way to spend your free time learning. Our follow-up research will study in more depth the factors that influence the frequency of these forms of activities.

#### Author note:

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# **Educational Communication under the Influence of Digital Changes**

**Adriana Denisa Manea**



# Educational Communication under the Influence of Digital Changes

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

communication,  
education, technology,  
digitalisation

The reforming dynamism that the technological revolution supports has influenced the educational system. The reform of educational systems as innovative, coherent and flexible entities also meant digital transformations, educational technology systems aimed both at the educational space and the means/instruments of learning. Computerised systems have allowed for emphasised digital communication within the educational field, for mediated learning, self-control and self-adjustment. Consequently, education and self-education in the digital society have urgently called for the building of digital skills, technological abilities for all learners

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Kommunikation,  
Bildung, Technologie,  
Digitalisierung

Die reformistische Dynamik der technologischen Revolution hat das Bildungssystem geprägt. Die Reform der Bildungssysteme als innovative, kohärente und flexible Ensembles setzte gleichzeitig digitale Transformationen voraus, Ensembles der Bildungstechnologie, die sowohl auf die Bildungsräume als auch auf die Mittel / Werkzeuge des Lernens abzielten. Computergestützte Systeme haben eine akzentuierte digitale Kommunikation im Bereich Bildung, vermitteltes Lernen, Selbstkontrolle und Selbstregulierung ermöglicht. Daher haben Bildung und Selbstbildung in der Computergesellschaft dringend die Bildung digitaler Fähigkeiten und technologischer Fähigkeiten auf der Ebene aller Lernenden erforderlich gemacht.

## 1. Introduction.

The information knowledge and society are components of the same educational set that cannot be separated: knowledge is meaningful information and acting information. For this reason, knowledge society will not be possible unless it engrafts on information society, as the two cannot be set apart. At the same time, knowledge society is more than information society through the major part that information plays- knowledge within society. The best meaning of knowledge society is probably that of information society- knowledge society (Iancu, 2009).

"Knowledge society grants new dimensions to the learning process. This is no longer exclusively located in educational facilities. By and large, learning is transferred, progressively, from schools towards companies and institutions, from learners and students towards workers. In nowadays society, one promotes educational systems that are projected according to the features of a dynamic and open society: market economy, democracy, administrative decentralisation, digitalisation, using ecology as an adjustment measure between man and nature etc. The aim of education is to cultivate individuals

with abilities to adapt and integrate in the workplace and in community, to communicate efficiently in a variety of shapes and contexts, to access, analyse and manage data by using ICT and mass-media, to collaborate and partake in team work, to adapt to various roles and responsibilities, to stimulate creativity, intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and receptivity of novelty, to show respect for diversity and difference, social responsibility etc." (Albulescu, 2019, p.17).

## 2. The typology of communication in the knowledge society

Knowledge cannot be supported outside effective communication. Communication is an evolving process in close relation with the development of the human species, an essential process to maintain interpersonal relations, the exchange of information, ideas, feelings, connections that stand at the basis of social organisation. We differentiate, from the point of view of concepts, three types of communication with which we operate in the school and social environment at the same time, namely human/interpersonal communication, educational communication and didactic communication.

Human communication represents a fundamental method of psychosocial interaction between individuals, which takes place in complex systems and languages (verbal, nonverbal, paraverbal language, gestures, symbolism of colours, rhythm or artistic expression, mathematical), where the exchange of information is enabled by generalized meanings and symbols in view of preserving stability or in order to generate attitude-behavioural changes.

Educational communication is the basis of all educational processes, at all levels, regardless their content and complexity, shapes or partners involved in the process. It encompasses a system of interpersonal processes in which educational agents are directly engaged in educational endeavours and within which there are reciprocal exchanges of messages, meanings, decisions, value judgments, emotional states and influences regarding the educational processes, with the help of components/elements of personal communication repositories, with the purpose of reaching educational finalities. It must be noted that in the educational context, communication may also be unpersonal when it is computer mediated, namely, it is performed via IT devices (digitalised technology). According to the aimed objective, the educational context allows the use of group educational communication (communication between the teacher and students), mass communication (communication between the teacher and parents at an extracurricular activity, meeting, conference communication, etc.)

Didactic communication a particular form of educational communication, is specific to didactic activities and endeavours, meant for systematic and assisted learning. It represents the exchange of information between teachers and students who are in a particular educating context. Didactic communication takes place as a "complex, multiphase transfer and through several information channels between two entities (individuals or groups) that simultaneously or successively take over the roles of transmitters and receivers, signifying desirable contents in the context of the instructive-educative context" (Cucos, 2002, p.178). Didactic communication is both instrumental (with the intention of causing an effect in the interlocutor) and consummatory (without such intention) because "the act of educational communication is not performed mechanically, but based on an interhuman climate that contains and mimics all the

data referring to interpersonal relationships" (Ezechil, 2002, p.10).

Educational communication and the didactic communication may be considered specialised forms of the extremely complex and dynamic phenomenon of interpersonal communication.

In the current educational context, as a result of the technical-scientific revolution, the three types of communication above-mentioned may also add digital communication. The meaning of digital communication refers to the interaction that takes place in a virtual environment and requires the sharing of messages (which may be emoticons, emails, SMS, posts etc.) between the source (transmitter) and the receiver, by means of digital devices. Modern educational means create various opportunities to enable digital communication, and specialists estimate an increase in resource digitalisation as well as an expansion of customised apps. We may thus note, to exemplify, the existence of digital textbooks and their occurrence in the Romanian educational system, as well as e-books, electronic educational materials, PowerPoint presentations, educational platforms, forums, videoconferences, social networks etc.

### 3. Educational realities in the digital age

Being under the print of mechanisation, nowadays society is characterised by seed, increased information flow, rapid and significant changes. Hence, it is necessary to introduce mechanisms that facilitate change, respectively adaptation and re-adaptation. The high interest of university teachers for continuing education shows there is an awareness of the teacher's need to face the change, the complex and the new situations that might occur (Manea, 2014). The easy adjustment to the digital society of the future requires a development of digital skills within all teachers, which may be ensured through initial and ongoing training, building scientific skills that are necessary for the selection and efficient use of information (Manea & Stan, 2016). Within the educational field, the progress of digital technologies has marked the accessibility of learning through the occurrence of virtual libraries, learning/training performed by a teacher/specialist who is thousand kilometres away, essential decrease in the costs for self-development and ongoing training (Manea, 2014). "Technology and technological elements are able to support the completion of transversal objectives that are so important in the

process of developing a young person's personality and his/her becoming autonomous (intellectual curiosity, joy and pleasure to learn, the feeling of controlling things and mastering knowledge and skills, identifying valid sources of information, managing data according to specific issues and structuring the information)" (Manea, 2019, p. 32).

Educational facilities have constantly made use of audio-video educational resources in order to improve the understanding of information and to correctly operate with it. Therefore, the learning process in our digitalised society is carried out with and throughout technological resources, technological instruments that are specific to the didactic process of teaching-learning-evaluation. This way, we may find such elements both from the perspective of digitalised infrastructure (sending/ receiving information, storing information materials, registration of personal data, generating learning reports) as well as the actual learning environment (class/ virtual learning community).

The use of modern technologies in education gave birth to a revolution in the field of learning, one that seems to be in constant movement. Given that teachers and school institutions are under a permanent pressure to move away from the types of static education/learning, related to textbooks and physical location, students become avid data and information consumers, who require guidance and input customisation. In this respect, digital literacy functions as a bidirectional means of matching offer and demand available on the educational market of content and methodology (Mudure-Iacob, 2019). The use of NICT (New Information and Communication Technology) in learning and knowledge can be found under various shapes, from computer-assisted learning, e-learning, electronic lectures, distance-learning and training etc., to multimedia based learning. In audio-visual education or multimedia based learning, solving theoretical and practical issues of training mainly belong to the use of new information and communication technology, of equipment that allows class-and distance- display of image and sound, in view of improving understanding and maintaining of the taught information. The existence of a variety of educational levers is meant to enable users to make more efficient use of mass-media instruments, the Internet and computers throughout their entire lives, in order to gain access to information and to master the means of accessing valid, reliable and scientific data. (Uzunboylu & Sarigoz, 2015). Consequently, digitalisation requires the building of digital skills and

abilities that allow individuals to make use of the digital resources. The set of key-abilities (digital learning skills, digital data searching skills, digital responsibility, digital collaboration, productivity and digital creativity) includes those abilities to make proper and secure use of information technology, a vital learning and knowledge instrument for the workforce market, for one's leisure time and used in communication. (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15688&langId=en>).

At the level of educational reality, the restructuring that took place is both under the print of tech revolution and the multiplication of educational dimensions (curriculum design -inter and transdisciplinary, adaptability, creative/ innovative learning), better retention of educational action (life-long learning, self-education) and emphasis on the prospective character of education (by linking nowadays education to the education of the future). School institutions must be in charge of instructing students regarding the development of a proactive attitude towards learning, the building of a constructivist approach centred on self-learning and self-education, especially since self-education means self-awareness, self-control and self-guidance (Manea, 2015, p. 171). Accordingly, there is a need for an increased mobilisation in order to design and implement new educational models, to accomplish effective didactic communication that is in close relation to the intellectual and skill potential of the students, time resource, socio-cultural mobilities and the scientific-technological realm. This multidimensional and complex endeavour also calls for active and responsible engagement of the trainer and trainee from the point of view of cognition, metacognition and creativity. Moreover, the trainer-trainee couple needs to identify the intellectual, material and temporal resources in view of generating psychosocial behaviours that correspond to the requirements of the current and future society, by promoting personalities characterised by dynamism, flexibility and adaptability (Manea, 2018).

#### 4. Conclusions

The acquisition of the communication skill expressed in all its forms (oral, written, digital) is a consequence of learning, of experimenting and exercise practiced in the presence or absence, of the capacity to communicate as native gift. Therefore, the interhuman communication exercise, be it educational or didactic, generates the communicativeness that is expressed through availability

towards the other, through generation of direct interaction and sociability. When engaging in a form of efficient educational communication, communication that is constantly under the pressure of transforming factors of the digital age, it is necessary to maintain communication interactivity through satisfaction of knowledge needs empathy practice and assertiveness. Therefore, communication skills, which are so necessary in a knowledge society, may be acquired only by means of joint effort from the state institutions and communication actors at the same time.

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# **The Continuing Training of Beginning Teachers of Mathematics**

**by Ioan Ioja**

**Reviewed by Muşata Bocoş**



# The Continuing Training of Beginning Teachers of Mathematics

by Ioan Ioja

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At the present time, an increasing emphasis is placed in Europe on further understanding the relationship between teachers' professional training and the students' performance. In this respect, researchers point out the paramount role played by efficient initial teacher education as well as by continuing professional development. Because pre-service and in-service training are regarded as processes that are found in a continuous and interdependent relationship, this contributes to adapting teachers' training to the dynamics of the educational processes and systems. Consequently, the quality of teachers' professional preparation represents one of, if not the most important factor which determines the quality of students' academic achievement and education. Thus, teachers' effectiveness has as common denominator both the period of initial teacher training and the continuing professional development.

The book entitled *The Continuing Training of Beginning Teachers of Mathematics* written by Ioan Ioja, PhD, focuses on the novice mathematics teachers' continuing educational programmes as a starting point towards improving the quality of the Romanian educational system by making use of a framework that provides teachers with teaching approaches that are assessed, improved and adapted to the requirements imposed by the socio-cultural context. This framework consists of a structured training programme (which envisages direct, collaborative in-service training, professional dialogues, class monitoring, deliberate practice to implement in class what they have learnt while being guided by a mentor), in order to improve both teachers' and students' performance. Therefore, this book

approaches a highly relevant and complex topic, of current interest, both from a theoretical and a fundamental perspective as well as from the point of view of practice and implementation.

The design of the book is well defined, illustrative, with a general-to-specific order of presenting data and written from an actional viewpoint. Moreover, its structure is balanced in what concerns the content and the relation between the theoretical underpinnings and the experimental research. The book presents data in a logical manner and it illustrates and supports the main ideas intended for analysis.

The section based on theoretical and conceptual substantiation of the actions that have been taken is well articulated and documented (with contributions brought in the curriculum, the educational and the legislative policy). The author demonstrated ability to manage a wide array of bibliographic resources and engage in critical reflection, analysis and synthesis. In addition, the author managed to explore the two analytical perspectives (synchronic and diachronic) and he undertook dynamic retrospective and prospective analyses, through an analytical and critical practice that emphasized his own didactic and management experience.

The next section includes a description of the planned research implementation and describes a research situation that comprises two components:

- The observational research that intended to provide an analysis of the training needs of beginning teachers who have to consider, as anticipated, the possibilities for continuing their professional development. The

results obtained at the exam for permanent teacher certification (definitivat exam) and the recertification test of the prospective teachers of mathematics in Bistrița-Năsăud County between 2012-2015 have been considered for this analysis. The conclusions of the analysis, pointing to the specific training needs of beginning teachers, offered the author the possibility to indicate some objectives for the structured continuing training programme that he proposed, experimented and later validated as a mechanism to improve the academic performance of teachers of mathematics and of their students.

- An action research meant to improve the continuing training programme for beginning teachers of mathematics in Bistrița-Năsăud and Maramureș counties, where the proposed programme has been implemented. The added value of the book is mainly assured by the contribution of the author to the continuing training programme that has been experimented: the efforts to substantiate the programme according to a system that complies with the curriculum and educational policy principles, the detailed presentation of the continuing training programme, the didactic and the organisational perspectives; the clarity and correctness for the establishment and standardizing of the structural components of the programme as well as the emphasis on their interrelationships within the system; the validation of the programme as a consequence of the methodological system which has been integrated and combined with the appropriate research methods, the validated research instruments found in the literature as well as the author's own ideas.

The case studies carried out are relevant and illustrative, delivering important research data, and also pointing out the author's professional and personal qualities such as his passion for the academic work he performs and his self-responsibility.

The theoretical and practical value of this book resides firstly in the fact that it presents a robust and valuable curricular construct, i.e. a continuing training strategy that is viable inside the Romanian educational system. Therefore, it offers to teachers, managers, students, parents, and to decision-making factors in education many opportunities for reflection. Its potential resides in providing methodological support, guidelines for the development of the curriculum and directions for educational and legislative policies. Thus, it offers to

readers high standards of reflexivity, action and educational added value.

In conclusion, through its contributions to theory, illustration, methodology, practice and implementation as well as educational research, the book *The Continuing Training of Beginning Teachers of Mathematics* written by Ioan Ioja, PhD, has a real epistemic value and succeeds in offering educational and didactic considerations, educational, methodological, curriculum and didactic analyses as well as in proposing scientifically based and pertinent legislative and educational solutions, opening new horizons towards reflection, action and scientific research.

Reviewed by

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