

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREEDOM SENSE AT THE CORE PROCUREMENT CYCLE THROUGH FORMAL OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** The role of primary school is not only the development of academic skills, but also the development of life skills, that prepare the individual for life. Unfortunately, more and more teachers, enhance the need of literacy and numeracy, neglecting the fulfilment of psychological and social needs of each primary school pupil. This brief study, presents the role of a broader skillset that can be developed within child led activities in the primary school classes. There is also a research part, which shows that in a very small amount of time, the sense of freedom at the cycle of fundamental acquisitions, was developed through activities that belong to formal outdoor education. The main instrument that was used was the questionnaire, addressed to the participant pupils and also the observation protocol that was developed with the help of all participant primary school teachers.

**Key words:** outdoor education, primary school, freedom, pedagogy, independence.

## Introduction

Primary education is the first stage of compulsory education and has as its primary objective the creation of equal opportunities for all children in order to achieve a balanced cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development tailored to individual needs. Primary education includes the preparatory class and grades I to IV, and the preparatory class is the first class of primary education (\*\* M.E.N., 2017)

### **Theoretical foundation**

In Romania, the cycle of fundamental acquisitions is built of three different levels: grade zero or preparatory class, first grade and second grade. The preparatory class, for each child, is a period for school accommodation, a time that allows a good adaptation to the program, the collectivity and the specific requirements of this diverse environment, with the aim of socio-emotional, intellectual and physical development. From a socio-emotional point of view, the preparatory class supports the child to gain confidence in his / her own strengths, to increase self-esteem, initiative and desire to succeed. The preparatory class is part of general compulsory education. As it emerges from its very name, the preparatory class has the role of preparing the pupil for specific learning first and foremost in first grade, but also in the following years of school. Accompaniment with the school environment is made in a most friendly way, the main learning context being play, as a predominant activity for the age of six. In the same register, according to the Ministry of National Education, it can be stated that through the preparatory class, the intellect of each child develops, being prepared to communicate better, to achieve a constant intellectual effort, to benefit from various learning experiences. At the same time, this class offers the conditions of an age-specific program in a stimulating environment that leads to the psychological and physiological development of children. This relaxing environment is also achieved by the child that there is no repeat notion either after the preparatory class or after the first grade. It is the period in which measures are identified regarding the prevention, compensating the inequities manifested in the pupils from disadvantaged environments at the beginning of schooling, identification early learning difficulties and individualized intervention. The evaluation is carried out continuously and, depending on the results, it is immediately and individualized during the whole school year, being able to participate in the School after School program. The preparatory class includes children who have reached the age of 6 until the start of the school year. At the written request of parents, guardians or legal supporters, they may be enrolled in the preparatory class and children aged 6 to the end of the calendar year if their psychosomatic development is appropriate. Analyzing the competences described at this level, it can be seen that cooperation, socialization, learning outside the classroom and participation in activities in as many different contexts is desirable at this level. In the document presented by the specialists from the Ministry of National Education, it is clear that in each of the presented curricular areas emphasis is placed on the use of natural materials, the most familiar and open media, the discovery of self and belonging to various social groups, the discovery of identity nationality and belonging to the city or village environment, the manifestation of curiosity about phenomena, relationships, regularities in the

immediate environment, the manifestation of care for a clean and friendly environment, etc. Problem solving, critical thinking, making observations or comparisons are all required to be carried out in a natural and friendly environment that offers innumerable natural resources. The discovery of sensations or emotions can also be accomplished in the natural surroundings close to the group room, sensing the beauty of everyday life, participating in various games of competition, identifying simple ways of maintaining health, in the familiar environment and many others, are competencies are required to be developed at this age, using also outdoor learning activities, and adapting the content presented to the natural environment, so that adaptation to this educational level is easier and more efficient. (\*\*\*)Progresia competențelor în Ciclul achizițiilor fundamentale) The teacher should constantly pursue the connections between all disciplines by providing learning contexts relevant to the day-to-day reality of the preparatory class student, keeping it in the familiar environment of the learner, and at the same time attractive, instructive and useful. (Dumitrescu, 2013)

The second level of the Fundamental Acquisitions cycle is first grade. At this level, students take part in a curricula that is built on the learning experience accumulated until the age of seven, including in the preparatory grade. For children who have not completed the preparatory class, there is no obstacle to acquiring knowledge and then developing skills. This is because the evaluation is done concentrically and the contents are always resumed. It has been mentioned above that the first level of the basic procurement cycle is meant to accommodate and socialize, but it can be said that the second level, the first grade, is the year of effective integration in the educational environment. There are novelty elements brought about in terms of content, in the sense that some content elements belonging to each curricular area are already studied in the preparatory class, so they are given less time in the curriculum of class I. At the same time, in the fundamental procurement cycle, the emphasis is put on communication, pupils being put in a situation of communicating in concrete contexts, so that learning can be effective in other similar, real or simulated situations. The open and friendly working atmosphere will be created at this level, and the activities will be as varied and fun as in open and varied environments, using as much as possible the natural environment and its relentless elements. Also the game and the toys will be equally used, even the pupils are asked and they make their own resources used in the game and learning themselves. One can therefore see once again encouraging the use of outdoor learning elements as well as the natural environment.

Second grade is the last level among the three inherent in the core procurement cycle. Specifically, by the end of the second grade, the desires of the child's training profile are achieved, and the pupil is expected to be able to:

- Use various ways of communication in real situations,
- Demonstrate creative thinking and ability to adapt to diverse situations,
- Value their own experiences in investigating the natural and social environment,
- Understand and perform social roles within different types of communities,
- Understand and use technologies appropriately,
- To internalize a set of individual and social values to guide their behavior,
- Mobilize their own potential for building a quality life. (\*\*\*)Notă privind elaborarea planului-cadru pentru învățământul primar, Clasa pregătitoare și clasele I – a II-a, 2013)

By thoroughly analyzing the competencies necessary for a student who has completed the second grade and therefore graduated the basic procurement cycle, one can observe the requirement of a dynamic, natural, open education, an education that is in constant contact with the society and its members, but above all an education that is constantly concerned with the environment, natural areas, harmonious physical and cognitive development in the natural environment. We also see encouraging self-discovery and relationships based on communication, sharing, discovery, experience, learning holistic and especially interdisciplinary. The aim of this level of education is to provide the conceptual, psychological and behavioral bases that allow the child to adapt effectively to the next stage of schooling, but especially the social integration as quickly as possible of each individual. All these skills can be gained more easily and faster if each teacher prepares the necessary space and resources for modern learning, starting from the needs and interests of each child. This can be done mainly through the use of outdoor education activities, and even specialists from the Ministry of National Education recommend this at every age level, especially in the fundamental procurement cycle.

### **Directions**

Educators who embrace a pedagogy of freedom will be well rewarded in many ways. They will enjoy rich integrated teaching experiences and will also experience the joy of seeing children reach their true potential in a supportive learning environment which the children and their teacher have created together within a partnership approach to childhood education that is based on mutual respect for the innate wisdom of all learners. (O'Connor, 2012)

We know that we want a balanced classroom environment and students to have a voice. When children are oppressed, they tend to be sullen, until they finally rebel. Whether we are talking about a country or a classroom that is a simple fact of human nature. If you choose to run your classroom like a dictatorship, ruling with fear and oppressing students, you will develop a classroom environment of resentment. When people are given a completely free reign, on the other hand, chaos tends to occur. It is a great responsibility from all educators to prepare kids for life, having a great sense of freedom, even if it is the case of social freedom, or the one that we are going to talk about in this work, the freedom that can be translated in independence and autonomy in learning. However, social change within modern childhood has resulted in many societies espousing social norms that result in children growing up within highly controlled environments with high levels of adult input, supervision, watchfulness, involvement and interference. The level of time spent indoors as opposed to outdoors has also increased dramatically between the last two generations (O'Connor, McCormack, Angus & MacLaughlin 2012). The consequences of this social change are largely unknown as of yet, however, it is unmissable that the impact on the development of skills that require freedom within childhood to flourish is at least a strong possibility.

### **Recent perspectives**

Children's lack of independency is a concern for their levels of physical activity, but also for the broader personal, spatial and social skills. The function of education can be considered as fostering the growth of what is individual in each human being. According to Herbert (1949) this was mainly possible through enabling students to engage with creative processes that are unique to them through the provision of an enabling environment and empowering teacher. According to Wood and Attfield (2005) creative learning occurs when students are provided with freedom to express their ideas and their feelings through exploration and experimentation, so we can conclude that freedom is an intrinsic part of a pedagogy that supports creative development. Freedom is a reoccurring theme in creativity literature. Freedom and space, are essential elements of the creative process. Freedom allows all the described elements of creativity to flourish: discovery, investigation, communication, fluency, imagination, flexibility and originality. (Luquet 2001)

Howard Gardner describes creativity as a process of perception, production and reflection and also stresses the need for freedom to explore the concept of meaningful projects in education that enable students to engage with their own creativity and develop processes and products that were never envisaged by the educator. (Gardner, 1990)

The role that the teacher that plays in the development of student

creativity is one of guidance and no control (Epstein 2009). This can be present through following the next steps:

- by guiding the creative process in a positive way through numerous actions and attitudes
- by creating a creativity fostering environment and atmosphere of openness and sharing
- by supplying access to space and time and materials that allow creative projects
- by adopting an appropriate approach to observation, to facilitation and even, when necessary or systematically required, to assessment
- by being aware of the creative processes and recognising them by verbal input to open-ended questions that will help the students to understand the process rather than be interpreted as a judgment of the product
- by passing control to the learner
- by encouraging co participation between students and teacher in the development of learning strategies
- by encouraging innovative contributions
- by encouraging questioning, inquisitiveness, issue and problem identification
- by encouraging creative learning on both an individual and group basis.

All these can be possible in primary school, or even at younger ages by building interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning into their session plans. In order to help out this process, we found that outdoor learning can come pretty handy. This integration is also another way of bringing learning alive for the children. Alive learning motivates and stimulates the children, helping them to find personal relevance and meaning in their learning which opens up vast vista of creative potential. Using pedagogical approaches that seek to integrate subjects and bring learning alive also results in greater depth of learning and deeper knowledge acquisition, both inherently important aspects of creative development. Expanding the creativity horizons of the children to include access to working with other creative people both in and out of the classroom also stimulates interest and curiosity as well as providing unique educational experiences which are beyond the limits of the teacher. (Nikitina & Mansilla, 2003)

Outdoor education usually refers to organized learning that takes place in the external environment. Outdoor education programs often involve experiences based on wildlife travelers or the near environment where students participate in a variety of challenging adventures and outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, canoeing, rope racing or games group. The John Muir Award

is an organization that encourages and provides opportunities for outdoor education. Outdoor learning is based on the philosophy, theory and practice of experimental education and environmental education. Outdoor education can be defined as a learning experience in, for or outside (Donaldson, 1958).

The outdoor environment is a rich, dynamic and natural space for learning and development in children of all ages. Its value as an essential learning resource has been recognized by many pieces of research. Being outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being and helps all aspects of children's development, offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors, it gives children first-hand contact with weather, seasons and the natural world, offer children freedom to explore, use their senses, and be physically active and exuberant.

### **Research**

The research that was made, lasted for three weeks, and the subjects were in a number of 48 primary school students, belonging to the core procurement cycle, from three different schools from Arad. The schools were chosen randomly, not taking into consideration any aspects. One of the schools was an elite one, one of them was situated at the outer limit of a neighborhood, and the last one was belonging to the rural environment, but also belonging to Arad County. There was also a number of three teachers involved, ones that had already been involved in outdoor learning activities themselves, by participating to outdoor education training. The activities that took place, lasted for three weeks, consisting in 3 activities per week. These were organized according to the curricular requirements of each age level, trying to follow a specific competency for each activity, tracking that the curricular content to be replaced with similar ones, which can be done outside. At the beginning, there was a questionnaire, addressed to children that have participated, and it was repeated at the end, after the participation. The question were about their feelings of freedom before and during outdoor learning activities. There were simple questions, so even the smaller ones could participate in the filling in of these questionnaires. There also were observation sheets, for teachers, were they could give scores to students from each group, before and after the activities. The main topics that were observed, were behavioral competences, those regarding attitudes and of course those involving affections. All these were formulated in order to find out the sense of freedom of children that participated, regarding the types of activities and the place of the activities in which they have been involved. At the end of each activity, teachers have written down their observations on the observation sheet, which was based on Likert Scale, not exceeding score 4, for each question. The scores were introduced in a program and were analyzed statistically, in order to compare the

before and after situation of children sense of freedom.

### Analysis of the results

First, we are going to present the results of pupils' questionnaires after the participating to outdoor activities. The results show the following:

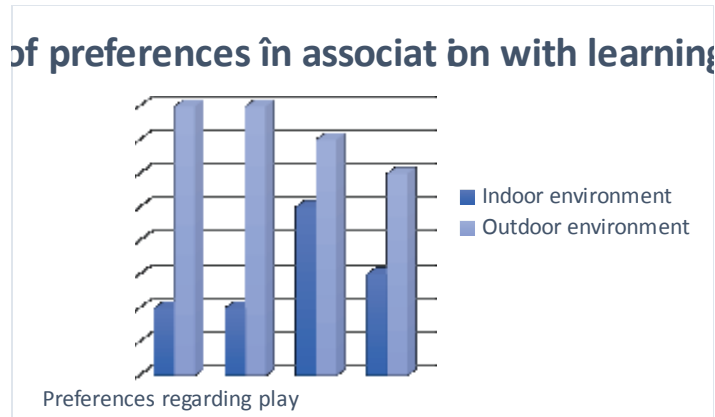


Figure 1. The link between preferences and environments

According to the graph above, we can conclude that there is a clear difference regarding the environments that are preferred by pupils from core procurement cycle, associated with different contents: play, science, languages and math. In every situation, there is a clear delimitation between the two. Children definitely prefer to play outside more, to study science outside more, where they can find their own resources, and find a more freedom in organizing and evaluating their own learning activities. Regarding languages, a bigger number of students declared that they like to study it outside, even if the difference between the respondents is not as big as considering science or playing time. The preferences regarding math are the same, more students prefer to study math outside than inside because they consider that they feel more independent.

All pupils declared that the role of teachers have been diminished significantly during learning in the outdoor area.



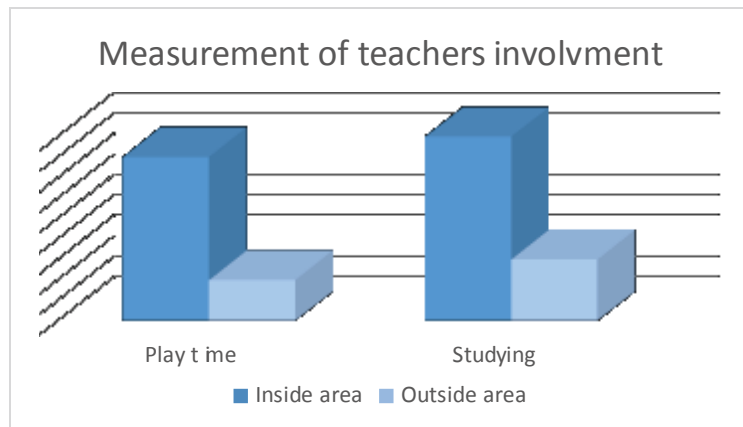


Figure 2. The involvement of teachers in both indoor and outdoor activities

According to the graph presented above, we can see clearly that the teacher's involvement decreases in the outdoor environment, but the freedom of pupils increases once the lessons are held outside. Kids also commented that they feel free to choose their own materials, to take their time, to cooperate with others. They also feel free to move and observe, to search and research all items they need to use in their learning.

When asked why they feel freer outside, even if it is study time and not playtime, pupils that have participated in the study reveal the following:

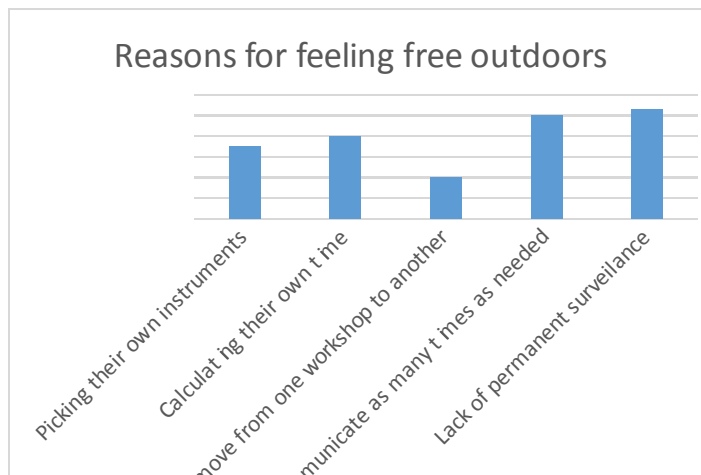


Figure 3. List of reasons of pupils

According to the graphic presented above, we can see that pupils mostly feel free because they feel that they are not permanently surveilled. That is a

great signal for teachers, to develop such learning environments that allow kids to practice freedom and independence. That should also be available in the formal education classes, even in the indoor area. The second place is taken by the possibility of communication at all times during the instructive-learning time. It means that kids have better results by sharing information and experience. This reveals an important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration by teachers, which is the lack of using methods that allow communication between the members of a group. Time management and the choice regarding the working instruments and materials are the following choices of pupils. They feel free when they can manage their own time without being permanently interrupted or stressed by adults that they have to finish their task. They also feel free when they can choose their working instruments from a variety of instruments, which are suitable for the task. They also declared that they feel even freer when they are allowed to pick their materials and instruments, because this freedom gives them the chance to get creative. Creativity is also freedom according to pupils. On the last position, they have chosen to say that the ability of moving from one workshop to another in the same activity, gives them a little sense of freedom.

Going through all these results, we can clearly see that outdoors, with all its resources, gives a wide range of freedom sense at the age of 6 to 8. It is important to engage into outdoor activities, formally, during the learning hours, because as it is known from this present study, even the involvement of teachers decreases regarding control and surveillance, but increases regarding organization and preparation.

The other instrument that was used, was the observation sheet, which was made with the help of teachers, and contained several questions based on the competencies selected from the curriculum of zero to second graders. Scores were given, and the results show the following:

- the levels of autonomy have increased during outdoor activities
- pupils who usually weren't involved in the activities or didn't show interest, started to communicate and get involved
- group communication has also increased and pupils started to cooperate and collaborate in order to solve different kind of tasks
- the level of independence has grown and the involvement of teachers have decreased
- the level of attention and the desire to participate have significantly increased even after the follow up activities from the classroom.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, according to the study and its findings, we can say that the sense of freedom is a must to develop at the most young ages possible. Not

only that we are born with it but we constantly need to be reminded that the sense of freedom is a competency that we have to work on, and the most indicated place to do that is in school through the right type of education. A modern educational system and the teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must provide an education that develops the individual in all its ways in order to prepare him for the social needs.

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