

COMPLEX APPROACH OVER OUTDOOR LEARNING IN THE MAIN FORMS OF EDUCATION: FORMAL, NONFORMAL AND INFORMAL

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Abstract: In the modern educational systems, there have been debates over the place of outdoor learning, as an interactive teaching-learning strategy in the three main forms of education. Formal education has adopted it as a modern interactive method, while in the non-formal educational areas, it is used more frequently because of its basic ways of implementation. In the area of informal education, it can also be found under its different forms, from which the most known one is gaming. The present article, is a brief study that comes in help of teachers that are interested in using outdoor learning activities in the formal educational environment.

Key words: outdoor learning, formal education, informal, non-formal, strategy

Introduction

“The current debates on the role of education and school in the contemporary society have led to developments and movements within the theoretical space of the education sciences.” (Păun, Potolea, 2002, p. 13) Today's society demands, more than ever, intelligence and capacity. Therefore, since ancient times, education has been a permanent concern of society.

Education is a particular type of human action, intervention or guidance, a fundamental category of pedagogy, through which the conscious development of the human biopsychic potential is desired and the formation of a personality type required by the present conditions and the perspective of the society. The educational environment in Romania has been invaded lately by terms such as: outdoor education, teaching and learning in nature, nature kindergarten and the forest school. The concept is so vast that a clear conceptual and semantic delineation is required. In the Romanian educational system, for the description of the concept, the terms are used mainly: outdoor education, outdoor education or outdoor learning.

Outdoor education can be done during classes or during after-school programs, respecting the national curriculum. The activities within it, can be done as a complement of the classroom hours, or they can be carried out independently, provided that the contents set in the school curricula for each age level are respected. It is important to note that outdoor play or recreational activities cannot be included in the field of outdoor education, because they do not pursue the objectives of learning acquisition, and they are not organized for educational purposes.

Theoretical foundation

From an etymological point of view, outdoor education refers to an organized learning situation, which takes place in the external environment. Activities in outdoor education can often involve travel-based experiences in the immediate environment, by participating in a variety of outdoor adventures and activities, such as hiking, climbing, boating, rope racing or group games. Therefore, outdoor education is based on the philosophy, theory and practices of experiential education.

Broadly speaking, outdoor education is a process, care includes modern strategies for learning care and learning is required in the outdoor environment. It can appear as a complement to the national curriculum to replace some activities in the classroom or outside celebrities, it can function independently of the system, so that it can be carried out entirely in the external environment, and with curricular information to be fully adapted to the natural space. The objectives of using the tip of education, to learn and to create learning situations in the external environment in care, implying learning organization and experimentation implications. The necessary resources, appearing entirely in the care environment are learning situations, the methodology being adapted to be able to provide an education advice, to be able to take into account the curricular requirements, and to finish taking on learning acquisitions.

The intended purposes of outdoor learning may include: knowledge and understanding of geographical processes or plant growth techniques, attitudes

towards the future or society, values and feelings related to the environment or self, assimilation of skills such as orientation in space or communication, behaviors such as personal and group interactions, coping strategies, personal development and self-confidence development. Outdoor learning locations may include: school grounds or gardens, wilderness areas, urban areas, rural farms, parks and gardens, natural centers, etc. (Bilton, 2010)

Direction and causes of the problem

Postmodernism in education as existential-humanistic approach, brings along a new paradigm, which places the person, the individual, the pupil and actor in its center. (Roman, 2014) Formal education, together with non-formal and informal education, represents a set of pedagogical actions or influences carried out simultaneously or successively in the formation of the human personality. Following the analysis of the formal education in comparison with the non-formal education one can observe advantages and disadvantages of each one. We consider this analysis necessary because outdoor education is an interface between the two forms of education and is present in each of them.

Formal education usually takes place in an educational institution, being regulated by certain norms, having the following characteristics: institutionalized and hierarchical; it works according to rules and norms; it is organized chronologically; it is run by the MEN; the learning process is teacher oriented; the evaluation is carried out by the teachers; the relationship between teacher and student is formal; authority and discipline are usually imposed by coercion.

Non-formal education works outside the structures and routines of the formal education system, being an out-of-school education. (International Dictionary of Education) The characteristics of non-formal education are: they minimize the constraint specific to formal educational institutions, maximize the educational process; it has immediate practical utility of the acquired knowledge; has a flexible framework and content; the skills and interests of the students are emphasized; involvement is stimulated; participant orientation; assessment made by the educator; it is based on experience; the authority being non-imposed stimulates human relations and teamwork.

Informal education refers to everyday learning, it does not involve certification but the diversity of the actors involved. Informal education is connected with terms such as daily learning, unconventional learning or cultural learning. Non-formal education is usually carried out through the following areas: workplace; mediate; advertising; the public sector; through parents, children and different social groups.

All three types of education presented above, contribute to the formation and integral development of the personality of those involved by developing

their character, in a positive way. Correlating the multiple valences of the three forms of education presented is difficult, but none of its forms should be neglected, completing them throughout the life of the educator, manifesting itself to a greater or lesser extent depending on age and educational level of each person. (Şerban, 2014)

Non-formal learning, analyzed as a concept, is widely used and debated in the educational field. (Păun, 2017) It uses a wide variety of principles, methodologies and approaches to learning in the education sector, emphasizing the intrinsic motivation of the educator, voluntary participation, critical thinking and democratic involvement of students. Non-formal education offers unique learning opportunities to millions of Europeans daily.

The glossary of the European Knowledge Center for Youth Policy describes non-formal education as follows:

Non-formal education is based on objectives but it is voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations where learning is not the main objective. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transient, activities and courses taking place, may be coordinated by professional facilitators (such as trainers) or volunteers (such as youth leaders), and the courses or topics addressed are usually addressed to some specific target groups. (Glossary on Youth, Council of European Union) Unlike formal education, in non-formal learning, the educated person has control over the contents, resources and modes of development, over the program, these being chosen according to needs, purpose and possibilities. (Kelemen, 2014)

In recent years, the academic requirements have gradually changed the position of non-formal education, which in 1974 was defined by Coombs and Ahmed as any organized and systematic educational activity, carried out outside the structure of the formal education system, in multiple learning situations, continuous and structured learning between multiple dimensions of formal, non-formal and informal education. (Chrisholm 2007, Cooley et al. 2003). Over the years, non-formal education and education have become priorities of the European Council, and in 2005, the European ministers responsible for youth expressed the importance of recognizing the skills acquired through non-formal education and the contribution it has made in lifelong learning.

Outdoor education as a discipline in new education and as a startup used in formal education, is most often used as a fundamental part of non-formal education in most institutions of the world. Steve Bowles (Bowles, Lehtonen, 1998), stated that non-formal education is a learning experience, initiated voluntarily, situationally and experientially, being difficult to divide into measurable phases from a teaching point of view and thus difficult to quantify in results of learning. Outdoor education is a significant part of non-formal learning that conglomerates learning processes outside the classroom. Recent

research on outdoor education and its practice has shown that some competences and skills related to identity growth and social integration are developed during these activities. This fact is all the more true as the activity is sufficiently developed as a duration, well prepared, followed by follow-up activities, evaluated and linked to the formal education curriculum.

The definitions of non-formal education are based on the theory of student-centered education, which in turn is based on the philosophy of pragmatic learning, constructivist education, social pedagogy and community work. Even if certain activities essentially belong to formal, non-formal or informal education, they may also include elements from the other two types of education, interrelating continuously. The criteria that differentiate between the three types of education were given by Cooley, Hodkinson and Malcolm in 2003 and appear as follows: the relationship between teacher and educators; location; goals and planning; evaluation; motivation; the nature of knowledge; the purpose and interests of meeting marginalized or dominant groups; pedagogical approaches; learning mediators; time; context-specific learning or transferable learning.

Following these criteria, the authors (Cooley et al., 2003) propose the use of four dimensions of formal, non-formal and informal learning. They narrow down the list to process, location, purpose and content. There are clear links between formal and non-formal education and the role of the latter is complementary, alternative or autonomous. In analyzing the complementary role Chisholm (Chisholm et al., 2006) emphasizes that there is no opposition between the two types of education because there are no exact barriers between the two types of education. Regarding the alternative role of formal education, one can notice an opposition between the two concepts, in that the formal education is based on a single objective interpretation of the world, while the non-formal one is based on several relatively true interpretations. Formal education is based on the role of the teacher, the non-formal one negotiates this role. The context of learning in formal education starts from the curriculum and school books, and the non-formal one from the society and the phenomena that take place there. (Juha, 2003)

The concept of non-formal education autonomy is approached by Theodore Adorno who uses the following example to explain his vision: it is more important to learn Latin than to make a class trip to Rome. This can be translated by the fact that there is a wealth of content that can be better learned through activities organized within formal education, and some that require personal involvement and experience. (Feșteu, 2006)

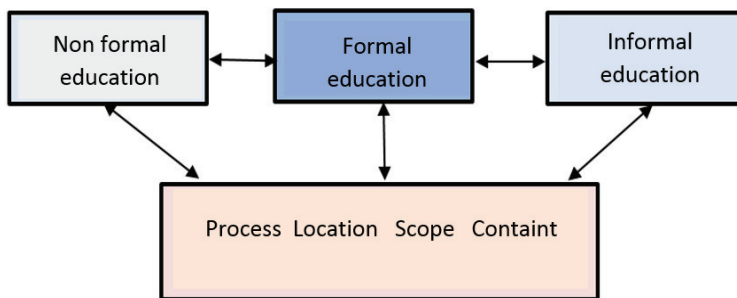


Figure no. 1. Dimensions of formal, nonformal and informal learning

The question therefore arises whether non-formal learning is really needed. Studies show that the need to approach non-formal education is due to its promotion for the benefits it offers as a complement to those of formal education, namely the assimilation and development of skills, abilities and attitudes necessary for life in the context of the 21st century. According to the specialized literature, (Sahlberg, 1999), in non-formal educational organizations, skills are needed for study, work and life in general. Socialization and the acquisition of social skills are promoted, thus increasing the level of active participation in the community.

Manuela du Bois-Reymond emphasizes the added value of non-formal education in personal experiences and the critical reflection of citizen education. Therefore, this type of education enriches and complements formal education through the importance given to social learning, its connection with real life and its values. Through art programs, manual work and new technologies, young people who do not have a job are motivated to set their occupational goals and develop the skills and practical skills needed to apply for a job. Last but not least, non-formal education also offers benefits in terms of communication and intervention. Research shows that in formal education the common interests between students and teachers are increasingly lacking, and educators feel that the school is concerned with irrelevant topics and contents, which are not useful in continuing education, and teachers are not competent in counseling, regarding their interests in life and their vocational perspectives. In contrast, according to young people, leaders and coordinators who are part of non-formal education have a much more positive image. (du Bois-Reymond, 2011)

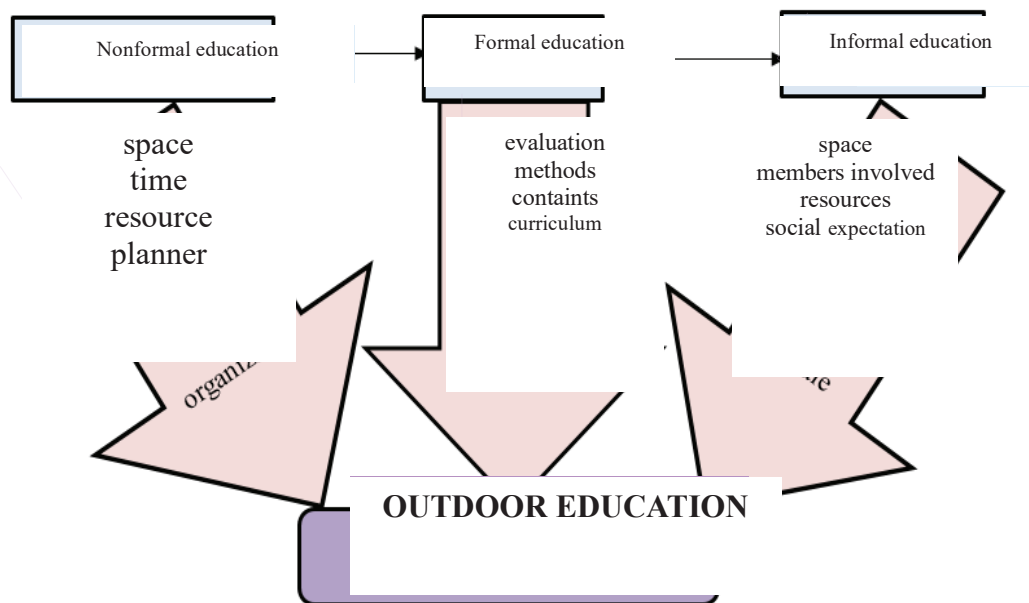


Figure. no. 2. Outdoor education as an interface between main types of education

Recent perspectives

Outdoor education, as an interface between the three forms of education, is considered to be much more motivating and stimulating, having a greater impact on the learning process among students. Outdoor education receives elements of each type of education, functioning as a learning strategy within the new education. After the incursion of the existing forms of education it can be deduced that outdoor education is folded over to non-formal education, because it is based on active participation. At the same time, it maximizes the learning process, minimizing the school-specific constraint and having a flexible structure and planning. The modern tendencies are based on the interaction between the other forms of education because, when incorporated, they lead to a much more valuable educational system from a qualitative point of view, ensuring long-term advantages and covering a much wider range of competences. In the following, we will present a figure-synthesis of the place that outdoor education occupies within the established types of education, and how it works within the Romanian educational system.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

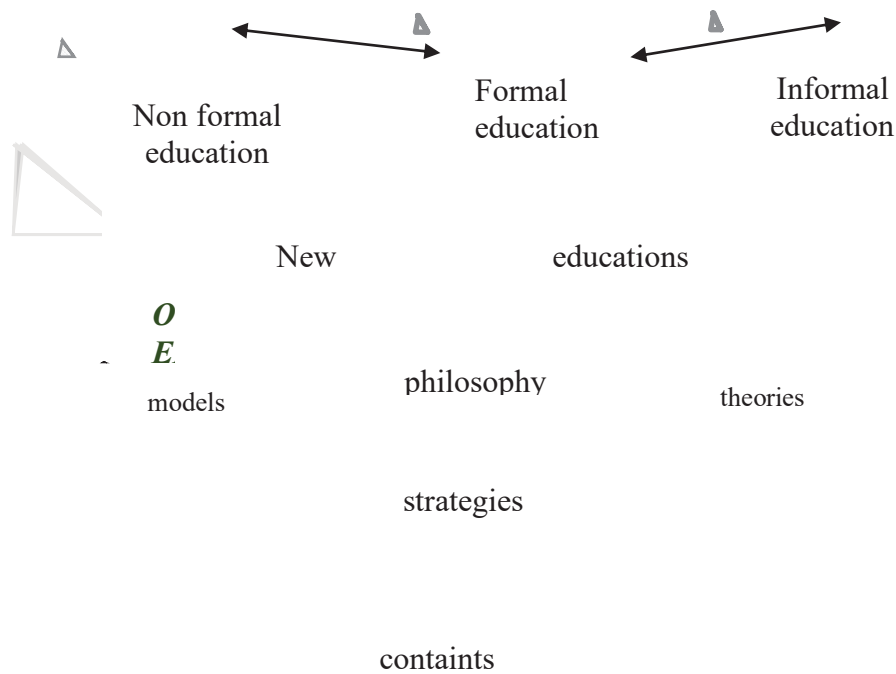


Figure. no. 3. Outdoor education within the Romanian educational system

Conclusions

As a conclusion for all the data presented above, we can state that there has to be a permanent communication between the formal educational system and the non-formal one. It is important that the two to be seen as one, cooperating and completing each other. In order to achieve this, the educators have the main role.

If the educator has specialty competences such as good communication with society and all institutions that offer non-formal education, success is guaranteed. (Brez, 2019)

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