

## TEACHER – PARENT COLLABORATION IN PLANNING AND PRACTICING OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** *The present brief study is based on the issue of planning and practicing outdoor education in primary school. We have enhanced the role of adults in planning, which means projecting and preparing space, time and resources. Also, we have underlined the aspect of including parents in all aspects, starting from the planning phase and also to be actively present in the practicing part. In the second part of the article, we have included research, about the role of adults in outdoor learning activities in primary school. In this matter, we are going to present the results of a focus group, organized both with parents and teachers from a primary school in Arad County. The preliminary results show the fact that parents expect better communication from teachers in order to get better prepared and involved in the outdoor activities of their children.*

**Key words:** *collaboration; primary-school; outdoor; education; parents.*

### **Introduction**

Collaboration between schools and families refers to the process of working together to support the education and development of children. It involves a partnership between teachers, administrators, parents, and other family members to create a supportive learning environment for children. Collaboration between schools and families can have a positive impact on children's academic, social, and emotional development. It creates a supportive environment that promotes student success and helps to bridge the gap between home and school. (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008, Cerghit & Petcu, 2018)

There are many ways in which schools and families can collaborate, including:

- Regular communication: Schools and families can keep in touch through newsletters, emails, phone calls, and parent-teacher conferences to discuss the progress of the child and any concerns.
- Volunteer opportunities: Parents and family members can volunteer at the school to support activities, events, or classroom activities.
- Parent education: Schools can offer educational workshops or sessions for parents to learn about child development, effective parenting strategies, and ways to support learning at home.
- Shared decision-making: Schools can involve families in decision-making processes, such as developing policies or setting goals for the school.
- Home-school partnerships: Schools and families can work together to create a home-school partnership to ensure that children receive consistent support and reinforcement of learning goals. (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997)

Good communication between schools and parents has many advantages, including improved academic performance, when parents are informed about their child's progress, they can work with teachers to support their child's academic success. This can lead to better grades and higher achievement. Parents who are involved and informed about their child's behavior at school can work with teachers to reinforce positive behavior and address any concerns before they become bigger problems. Good communication can help parents feel more connected to their child's school and education, which can lead to increased participation in school activities and events. When schools and parents work together, they can build positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect. This can lead to a supportive and welcoming school environment for all students. Good communication allows schools and parents to identify any concerns early on, which can lead to early intervention and support for the child. (Dughi, 2020) Effective communication can help parents better understand the curriculum, learning objectives, and school policies, which can improve their ability to support their child's learning at home. In summary, good communication between schools and parents is essential for promoting academic success, positive behavior, parental involvement, positive relationships, early intervention, and enhanced understanding of school policies and procedures. (Buzducea & Manu, 2018, Ciucă & Bărbulescu, 2017)

### **Theoretical foundation**

Outdoor education is an approach to learning that takes place outside the traditional classroom setting. It involves experiential learning activities that take place in natural environments, such as forests, mountains, rivers, and oceans. Outdoor education programs can include a wide range of activities, such as camping, hiking, canoeing, rock climbing, and environmental studies. These activities are designed to provide students with hands-on experiences that allow them to learn about themselves, others, and the natural world. The goals of outdoor education are to promote personal growth and development, environmental awareness, and leadership skills. Outdoor education programs are often used to complement traditional classroom learning and provide students with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a practical and real-world setting. Outdoor education has been shown to have many benefits for students, including increased confidence, improved social skills, enhanced academic performance, and a greater appreciation for the environment. It can also help to foster a sense of community and teamwork among students and teachers. (Wardle, 2019; Waite & Pratt, 2020)

Outdoor education is not yet fully integrated into the Romanian school system, but there are some initiatives that promote experiential learning and outdoor activities. Some Romanian schools have introduced environmental education programs that include outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and exploring nature. These programs aim to promote environmental awareness and appreciation, as well as to provide students with an opportunity to learn in a hands-on and engaging way. There are also several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Romania that specialize in outdoor education and provide programs and resources for schools to incorporate into their curriculum. These organizations work with schools to organize outdoor activities, provide training for teachers, and develop educational materials that promote experiential learning. In addition, some universities in Romania offer outdoor education courses and programs for future teachers, which provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate outdoor education into their teaching practice. Overall, outdoor education is still developing in the Romanian school system, but there are some initiatives and resources available for schools to incorporate experiential learning and outdoor activities into their curriculum. (Buburuzan & Duca, 2019, Dobrescu & Danciu, 2017)

### **Recent perspectives**

Planning and projecting outdoor educational activities involve careful consideration of several factors, including the purpose of the activity, the

target audience, the location, and the resources required. Here are some steps to help you plan and project successful outdoor educational activities:

- Define the objective: Begin by defining the objective of the activity. What do you want your participants to learn or experience? Is the activity intended to build teamwork or leadership skills, or to teach a specific subject such as biology or geology?
- Choose a location: Once you have defined the objective, you can choose a location that is suitable for the activity. Consider the environment, the accessibility of the location, and the facilities available.
- Determine the resources required: Determine the resources required for the activity, including equipment, transportation, and personnel. Make sure you have everything you need to ensure the safety and success of the activity.
- Create a detailed plan: Create a detailed plan for the activity, including the schedule, activities, and any necessary instructions or guidelines. Be sure to include contingency plans for unexpected events, such as inclement weather.
- Obtain necessary permissions: If the activity is being held on public or private property, be sure to obtain any necessary permissions or permits.
- Communicate with participants: Communicate with participants before the activity to ensure they are aware of any necessary preparations or requirements, such as appropriate clothing or gear.
- Conduct the activity: Conduct the activity according to your plan, ensuring that everyone is safe and engaged. Be flexible and adapt the plan if necessary to ensure the best possible experience for all participants.
- Evaluate the activity: After the activity, evaluate its success and make note of any areas for improvement. This will help you plan future activities more effectively.



Fig. nb. 1. Steps in planning outdoor activities

### *Involving parents in the planning and activity phases*

Involving parents in outdoor learning activities can be a great way to enhance the educational experience for students. Some ways in which this can be achieved is to permanently communicate the importance of outdoor learning and share with parents the benefits of outdoor learning and why it is an important part of their child's education. This can help them understand the value of their involvement in such integrated activities. (Roman, 2014, Dughi et al, 2022, Roman & Bran, 2015)

Also, invite parents to participate in outdoor learning activities, such as field trips, nature walks, or outdoor projects. This will give them a firsthand experience of what their child is learning and provide an opportunity to engage with their child in a unique and meaningful way.

It is very important to encourage parents to volunteer their time and expertise to support outdoor learning activities. This could involve assisting with logistics, providing specialized knowledge, or serving as chaperones on field trips.

When thinking in terms of planning, it is important to provide opportunities for parent-child activities. Plan outdoor activities that involve both parents and students, such as camping trips, nature scavenger hunts, or community service projects. This can help strengthen the parent-child relationship while also reinforcing the educational content. (Gurney et al, 2017)

Not the least, it is mandatory to share resources and information: Provide parents with resources and information about outdoor learning activities, such

as recommended books, apps, or websites. This can help parents support their child's learning outside of school and encourage further exploration of the natural world.

After the activities are over, it is important to ask for feedback on outdoor learning activities and how they can be improved. This demonstrates that their opinions and involvement are valued and helps to strengthen the partnership between parents, students, and educators. (Young et al, 2020, Cojocaru & Popescu, 2018)

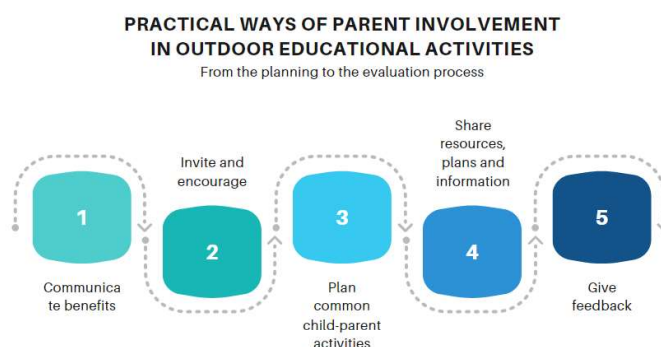


Fig. nb. 2. Practical teacher-parent collaboration in outdoor educational activities

### Research questions

1. How can teachers involve parents in the planning process of outdoor educational activities?
2. What is the real situation of Romanian primary schools in terms of collaboration with parents, regarding outdoor educational activities?
3. How do parents respond to the requests of teachers regarding outdoor educational activities within the schooling process?

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of the present study is to find out at what extent teachers involve parents in the planning and the process of outdoor educational activities, and how parents respond to these invitations.

### Research methods and research instruments

The main method used in the present study was the focus group, and the main instrument was the focus group interview. There have been two different focus groups, one with the teachers and one with parents of children studying in the same schools where teachers come from.

In the meetings that were designated for teachers, there has been 2 meetings, and in both meetings, there were 14 teacher participants, all from primary schools from Arad County. In the parent focus groups, there were 54 participants (both male and female) in 4 meetings.

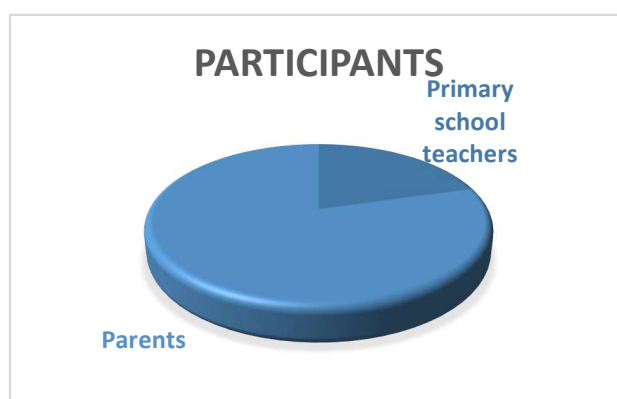


Fig. nb. 3. Participants in the focus group meetings on outdoor education and collaboration between teachers and parents

During these meetings, the main topic was outdoor education and the main ways in which this new education type can be used properly in the teaching learning process, in order to bring more and better results. After the separate meetings ended, we have found it necessary to have a common meeting with parents and teachers, in order to discuss on the main topics and to find new ways of communication, collaboration and sharing ideas and resources, all for the benefit of pupils.

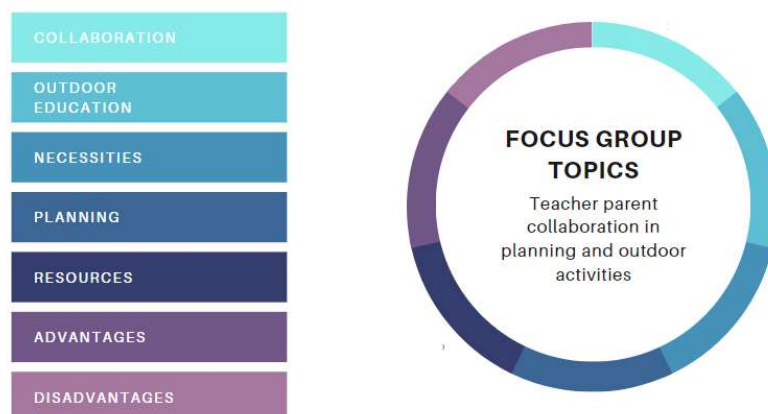


Fig. nb. 4. Topics of the focus group meetings

### Findings

At the teachers' meetings we have found the following:

- A number of 10 primary school teachers out of 14, engage at least monthly in outdoor educational activities;
- All primary school teachers are familiar with the concept;
- Teachers responded that they are in search of new communication methods in order to include parents in the planning process of outdoor education;
- The main needs that were enhanced are presented as it follows: better communication system that are sustainable, resources and instruments, financial help, transportation, moral support, openness to new ideas, motivation for kids.

At the parents' meetings we have found the following:

- 80% of parents, consider that teachers do not involve them properly in the planning and activities that take place outdoors;
- 92% of parents have not been explained about the benefit's outdoor educational activities;
- 75% of parents think that the risks in outdoor education are more that the benefits;
- 92% of parents consider that teachers never give enough explanations about the activities that are going to be planned;
- 90% of parents consider that after engaging in activities, teachers haven't given them feedback about the results;
- 82% of parents would offer to volunteer in outdoor educational activities if being asked;
- 97% of parents, consider that they would be able to donate resources if being asked;



- 100% of parents are present on the classroom groups and are open to receive demands regarding outdoor activities for their children;
- 98% of parents would feel safer to leave their children to engage in outdoor learning activities if they could volunteer to be present too. (Torkos & Egerău, 2022)

After the meetings the following aspects have changed in the cooperation system between teachers and parents, in the matter of outdoor educational activities, from planning to the actual activities:

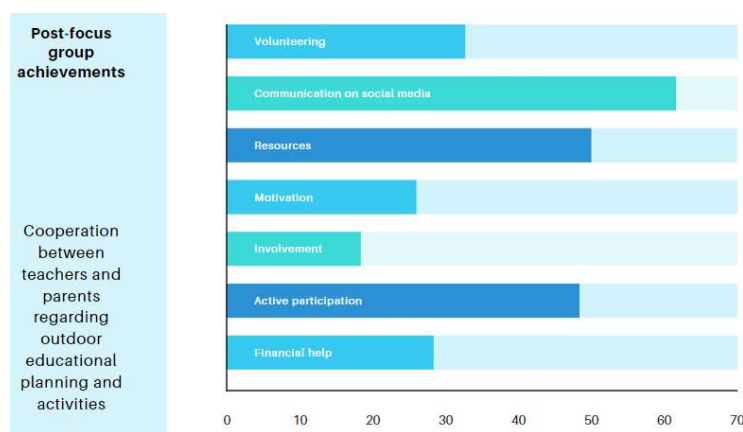


Fig. nb. 5. Post focus-group achievements

## Conclusions

Teacher-parent communication is an essential component of any learning environment, including outdoor learning. Teachers should establish clear communication channels with parents, such as email, newsletters, or a class website. Parents should be provided with relevant information on what will be taught during outdoor learning, the benefits of outdoor learning, and any safety precautions that will be taken. Regular check-ins with parents can help teachers keep them informed about what their child is learning and how they are progressing. These check-ins can be done in person or through phone calls, emails, or video conferences. Teachers should communicate the learning objectives and outcomes of outdoor learning activities to parents. This can help parents understand the value of outdoor learning and how it contributes to their child's overall development. Teachers can provide parents with resources and suggestions for outdoor learning activities that can be done at home. This can help parents continue to support their child's learning outside of school. Also, teachers can encourage parent involvement in outdoor

learning activities by inviting parents to join in on field trips or volunteering to help with outdoor activities. This can help parents feel more connected to their child's learning and provide them with a firsthand look at the benefits of outdoor learning. (Băban & Fătu, 2018, Zainea & Sorescu, 2019, Popescu & Cojocaru, 2019)

Overall, effective teacher-parent communication is essential for successful outdoor learning. By establishing clear communication channels, sharing learning objectives and outcomes, and encouraging parent involvement, teachers can ensure that parents are informed and supportive of their child's outdoor learning experiences.

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