

GOOD PRACTICES AND INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES ACQUIRED THROUGH PROJECTS

Gabriela KELEMEN, Ph.D.
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania
gabrielakelemenuav@gmail.com

Abstract: *In the present article I would like to reveal the results of the projects that were conducted by our faculty in the past years. The projects won by our institution brought about high level knowledge, the best experiences, good practices and offered opportunities to develop partnerships between different institution and persons. We have thus partners from different universities from Romania: "Transilvania" University, "1 December" University of Alba-Iulia, and from abroad: Higher School of Education Fafe of Portugal, Marmara University of Turkey, Liepaja University of Latvia, University of Cordoba, Spain as well as partners from different nonprofit institution, like Institute of Health from Luxemburg, Agapsy from France, Trajets from Switzerland, Article 23 from Belgium. The main objective of our projects was the identification of key tools for the development of effectiveness in the field of education. Though the development and implementation of educational projects involved a considerable amount of time, effort, and other resources, the expected outcomes were oriented towards bringing the educational process to a new level of excellence. The projects we have developed, have focused on best practices and also on obtaining more effective and sustainable results.*

Key words: *projects, educational fields, partnerships, relationships, good experience, developing, experience*

1. Project Perspectives of formation through a master`s programme of specialists in the field of early education and young learners on a superior quality level (PERFORMER).

In the last five yearS our faculty has earned some important projects which brought a different and important vision concerning education. One of the important projects was PERFORMER, more exactly *Perspectives of formation through a master`s programme of specialists in the field of early education and young learnerson a superior quality level*. It was a project financed by the Social European Fund through Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013, priority axis Education and training in support for growth and development of knowledge

based society, major intervention area, Quality in superior education. This project aims at elaborating and implementing a master`s programme that is compatible with the requirements of ARACIS – Romania, ISPEF – Italy and to create a profile of competences for the profession of psycho – pedagogue for early education and young learners. By structuring the PERFORMER master`s programme we have elaborated a profile of competences that the master degree student acquired throughout his two years of study. So, the master`s degree that we implemented build up a profile of competences in agreement with ARACIS standards, ISPEF model and PERFORMER structure. The fundamental objective of the master`s programme aims at professionalizing the field of early education and young learners through the development of a functional system of competences based on knowledge and specific abilities in the field of speciality, as well as the development of a system of attitudes that would allow proper and efficient adaptation to imminent changes in pre-university education, especially pre-school and primary school education.

The university that develops the programme is “Transilvania” University of Brasov and the partners are „1 Decembrie” University of Alba-Iulia, „Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad and Istituto di Scienze Psicologiche della Educazione e della Formazione Roma (ISPEF), Italy.

The transnational partnership was made in order to make use of the Italian partner`s experience in the field, by adjusting the experience to our conditions and by increasing the quality of curriculum construction. This will lead to the awarding of a certification from ECE (European Center of Education) along with the master`s degree diploma, which is a real gain for master`s students. This certification confers an international acknowledgement of the acquired competences for the graduates of this master`s programme.

1.1. The innovative aspects of the project

Seeking to implement these standards, we can outline the specific objectives of this master`s programme:

- The extension of fundamental conceptual system specific to early education and young learners and its adjustment to the specifics of preschool and primary school education in order to achieve a holistic and flexible vision upon the institutionalized educational act at that age;
- Understanding the necessity to approach learning through games, a fundamental activity in childhood, specific way of acquiring knowledge at an early age and passing on to specific learning activities;
- Diversifying competences necessary to carrying out educational activities in different fields of knowledge: language and communication,

sciences, as well as to the formation and development of abilities, skills and attitudes towards learning.

- The graduates` ability to successfully implement child/pupil centred educational strategies and to develop the communication and relating abilities of children;
- The graduates` ability to use certain educational practices regarding psycho-pedagogic counselling and solving situations of educational crisis;
- Professionalizing pre-school/ primary school teachers in the field of developing educational projects, educational partnerships and educational marketing so as to involve as many educational factors as possible in children`s education.
- The development of an inter and trans-disciplinary vision of learning at young ages and early education in accordance with the directions of National Curriculum.

1.2.The new dimension of approaching the formation by master degree

The vision of this project involves a new approach to formation based on the four pillars of modern pedagogy: to know, to do, to be and to communicate. Starting from these desiderates, which are considered innovative by the entire academic world, we will try to put them into practice and not use them only theoretically. This way, their usage will bring about the development of creativity and didactic autonomy of trainees. As a consequence, the competences of the master`s programme Psycho – pedagogy of early education and young learner shave been outlined. The curricular construction is balanced, with six modules a year and 60 credits, containing 24 disciplines and 120 credits. Each semester has type A, B, C and D activities (according to ISPEF):

- Area A of formation of the ISPEF model named *Area Lezioni in Aula e Seminari*;
- Area B of formation – *Apprendimento E-learning e ricerca in internet (E-learning and internet research)*;
- Area C of formation – *Stage di sperimentazione et di interveto in ambito professionale* (Experiential strategies and strategies of intervention in the professional environment);
- Area D of formation–*Documentazione etevisione dei per corsi formativi. Stesura della Relazione finale* (Documenting and monitoring of formative paths. Writing of Dissertation).

Regarding the collective learning activities - mainly courses (C) and seminars (S) - Romanian model operates mainly with standards of $2C+1S=3$ hours/week (namely 42 hours per semester) and of $1C+1S=2$ hours/week (namely 28 hours per semester), resulting in an average per semester of 35 hours/discipline, which at 6 disciplines per semester leads to an average of

210 hours/ semester and 42- hours/year. The ISPEF Model operates with an average per semester of 30 hours/discipline, which at 6 disciplines per semester leads to an average of 180 hours/ semester and 360 hours/ year, namely less than the Romanian model with 30 hours/semester and 60 hours/year. Under these circumstances, the only option to maintain constant the value of credits (expressed in number of hours) is to diminish the number of hours allocated for independent/individual learning activities. The curriculum of the master's programme abides the modular manner of organization of contents and teaching-learning activities applied by ISPEF. Therefore:

- the study disciplines and the learning activities are grouped in 12 modules (6 modules per year), each module containing two disciplines and being credited with a package of 10 credits;

- within each module, the first discipline (scheduled in the first semester) has a highly theoretical character or/and of fundamental training in the field, and the second discipline (scheduled in the second semester) has a practical/applied character; this difference is marked also by the forms of didactic activity, for the first discipline being allocated 2 hours of lecture and one of seminar, and for the second one, only one hour of lecture and 2 hours of seminar.

Professional training was designed as a distinctive module (with distinctive disciplines, normed in the academic curricula), in order to adjust the ISPEF model to internal practices (national), that regulate two hours of training in the didactic norm. This was possible by redistributing certain hours from those comprised in area C of formation– *Stage di sperimentazione et di interventio in ambito professionale* (Experiential stages and stages of intervention in the professional environment).

To follow internal (national) standards that require a minimum number of optional disciplines, we have listed in the curriculum three optional courses (a share of 13, 34%) without giving up on any discipline agreed with ISPEF, to follow internal (national) standards that require a minimum number of optional disciplines.

The success of the project can be seen in the continuous of the master, nowadays we have 3 series of master graduated.

2. The ERASMUS Intensive Programme (IP) “Play, Toys and Culture”

This project aims to develop a course for early childhood and elementary education major students which focuses on play, toys and games related to culture. Nowadays, as mentioned by the predecessors Frobel, Montessori and Steiner, the child is regarded as a personality in development, with its own training needs, with the right to education in a favorable environment. Each child is unique and non-recurring. Playing is specific to childhood; through

games children assimilate knowledge, and develop their skills and abilities. So that by the instrumentality of the project structure we had offered courses to students from different countries, five students from each country. The students had the opportunity to review theories of play in different countries and cultures, to research and to learn about the social and cultural heritage, to use traditional types of play, games and toys delivered by the participating countries. The IP of the project aimed to create a multicultural teaching community, as well as teachers and students that promoted the knowledge about using play and also modern and traditional toys as pedagogical tools for 21st century European children. An important trait of the project was the development of a European network that, we thought would promote new strategies of using play and toys between teachers, parents and other childhood professionals. Knowing the importance of the play and toys at early ages, we supposed to be the best advocates of children's right to play and learn through play. The IP of the project "Play, Toys and Culture" has advanced the necessity of development of the following transversal competences of the students, future teachers:

- using a common foreign language (English) in teaching and in the social contexts;
- discovering cultural differences and integrate them in their professional and everyday life;
- developing proper attitudes and skills by collaborating and communicating with others at European level;
- promoting ICT for communication and dissemination of knowledge, good ideas, results, and products of the project.

Integrated idiosyncratic perspectives, ideas, experiences, know-how, and feelings as objectives of the project were materialized in multilateral collaboration in a European space. So the IP integrated five higher education institutions from different countries, namely: Higher School of Education of Fafe (Portugal), University of Córdoba (Spain), Marmara University (Turkey), Liepajas University (Latvia), and Aurel Vlaicu of Arad University (Romania). All the objectives of the project was fulfilled along a two academic years (2012-2013 and 2013-2014), coordinated by the Higher School of Education of Fafe (PT). For developing the structure of the project more than 20 University teachers and 50 students participated from the Higher School of Education of Fafe.

The conception of the project had this structure: the 25 participating students, five of each country, were expected to follow a two-week intensive course. The courses had a series of theoretical conferences and seminars on the role of play and games in children's development, mainly conducted by specialized international scholars from different backgrounds, such as 'Theories of Play and the role of toys within childhood pedagogy', 'The role

of play and toys within Reggio Emilia Approach', 'The role of play and toys within High Scope Curriculum', 'Toys and socialization', 'The role of play in childhood development'. The all conferences were followed by discussions and debates, what promoted students' insights and real learning by reflection and cultural transfer.

The most important part of this project were the visits to different Toy Museums in Portugal, mainly Ponte de Lima National Portuguese Toy Museum and Sintra International Toy Museum. These visits offered the students and professors the opportunity to learn about the history of toys and game. Each visit was followed by student group work, by selecting a research topic that was compared, interpreted and presented by each group of students from the participating countries. The next activity during the project stage in Fafe, Portugal was to plan the adaptation and construction of traditional games and/or toys as pedagogical tools for early childhood and elementary education. Each student group work followed what they had learnt from their visits, but also not forgetting the objective of education, they had to create two games and two toys from educational activities. Beside the knowledge that the students accumulated during the stage, an important aspect of project was at the same time that collaborative work between the students from different countries and culture. They, in an atmosphere of friendly competition, had elaborated and had constructed games and toys shown on the temporary exhibition entitled "Traditional Toys and Games for 21st Century European Children" at IESF.

During the two years of project, the professors and students involved was the opportunities to acquire the main objectives of the project "Play, Toys and Culture":

- to be aware to the importance of play for teaching and learning;
- to be able to use games and toys in the most ingenious way for educational planning in preschool and elementary education;
- to develop in students, future teachers a reflective perspective about using play and toys in their professional practice in an innovative way;
- to elaborate a creative presentation about the value of play in an integrated perspectives;
- to promote traditional and cultural manufactured artifacts and use them wisely in education;
- to be aware about the role of community in education and the importance of the community active citizens;
- to reinforce the vital role of play on children's health in human mentality.

The next step in the IP of the project was the students' outcomes. Back in their countries they had to elaborate articles about their achievements. This was the students' assessment after the learning stages.

For professor the project ended with an International Conference where each partner in the project underlined the most important achievement during the project. Each group of professors and students participant in project had to elaborate two chapters in a book of projects. The professor had to elaborate a material about *Early Education Across European Countries (0-6)* and another one about *Early years teacher training across European countries* and the students had to elaborate a theoretical material about *University students and their international experiences within the ERASMUS Intensive Programme* and another about *University academic experiences within the Erasmus intensive programme*.

3. SPSM- Employability and Mental Health in Europe: urgent needs for training, social integration and employability

The necessity of the project follow the ascertainment that nowadays people who contacted a mental condition at some point in their lives are considered a socially disadvantaged group. European social policies promote direction for improving the life of this category of population. One of them is equal access to initial and continuous training for reintegration in real life. In most times they face serious issues when seeking employment, because of different obstacles like: cognitive disabilities, inabilities, lacks of vocational experience, but also the mentality of the society. Therefore they need constant support and the present project tries to make a small contribution to the improvement of vulnerable people's lives.

The main objective of the project, SPSM- Employability and Mental Health in Europe: urgent needs for training, social integration and employability is the improvement of techniques used by professionals in the social and occupational insertion of people with mental disabilities on the labour market. The project aims the improvement of abilities and practices of all involved parties: beneficiaries, professionals and employers engaged in the labour market insertion and social reintegration of beneficiaries. The project is a plea for reflection, search and implementation of viable solutions for supporting people in vulnerable situations at a certain point in their lives.

The project is based on generally valid humanitarian principles:

- Responsibility of community team;
- the community's involvement;
- Balance between the components of the system;
- Continuous care;
- Minimal restrictive alternatives;

- Emphasis on rehabilitation;
- Specialization of care;
- The involvement of beneficiaries and their families in the process of care.

The improvement of care programmes for people with mental disorders, the steps taken in the improvement of life quality as well as the efforts made for their socio-professional integration have been based on the evidence of clinical and community practice. The National Programme for Mental Health and the Nongovernmental Organizations aim to lower the morbidity caused by mental disorders and the improvement of health parameters. The priority objectives pay attention to:

- raising awareness among decision makers;
- reducing risk and vulnerability factors for mental illness;
- public awareness on the concept of mental health in the value system of Romanian society.

The project SPSM planned to bring together specialists in mental disorders, research centres, universities and experts in the field and all participants had analysed the strong points and the weak points of training offers in this field. The future step is to organize pilot training seminars with mutual methodology for the specialists that work with people that suffer by mental illness (Knapp, M, McDaid, D. & Parsonage, M. (Eds) 2011).

The main aim of the training seminars is to find the proper ways for the professional reintegration of mentally disordered people. Pilot training seminars have to follow a training strategy so that specialists acquire specific abilities needed to change the quality of life of mentally disordered people. The current situation such as inadaptability, lack of courage, shortcomings, failure must be improved through an adapted methodology. The experts in the domain of social work have to identify the shortcomings of the professional integration, aiming strategic orientations that would be centred on six priorities:

- following the disabled people`s needs;
- adapted methodology for training contexts for specialists;
- developing activities according to priorities and objectives;
- constructing the methodology as intervention concerning socio-economic and cultural realities of the community.

Studies have revealed that the main mechanisms that lead to discrimination/stigmatization are mostly:

- lack of funding and efficient management of existing resources;
- insufficient specialists and lack of patience and concern of the staff;
- lack of public information, which turns into prejudice and
- intolerance towards people with mental health problems;

- lack of assistance programs / social inclusion and community services dedicated to people with mental health problems;
- lack or insufficient level of development of social services for people with mental health problems;
- lack of public information.

Responsibility for the improvement of mental health services lies with key actors in the system that have the same goals which they try to achieve in a unitary and persistent manner:

- professionals in health care - psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, doctors and pharmacists - who play the main role in treating people with mental health problems;
- Civil society representatives - representatives of NGOs, teachers, priests, social workers - expected to have an active role in prevention, post-admission monitoring and social inclusion of people with mental health problems;
- central and local authorities, which play an important role in developing policies and strategies, change the legislative framework and financing / developing programs and services addressed to people with mental health problems;
- population.

At this stage of work, we propose for discussion a referential training, built on these six items. We find in them the emergence of the three axes of knowledge: conceptual, technical and relational, which is the foundation of building referential training for specialists in employability:

- a) Conceptual knowledge: of the competences aimed at adapting cultural knowledge and promotes the development of mental structures, promoting strategic and global vision of situations. They promote and develop adaptation capacities to the environment, allowing self-adjustment.
- b) Relational knowledge: These take into account social skills indoors, outdoors and in relations with the hierarchy.
- c) Technical knowledge: These take into account the ability and experience related to the acquisition of methods and tools useful in professional activities.

4.The aim of the research is to point out young peoples' identification of vocational counselling needs, unemployment regional statistics, relevant qualifications on the local labour market, and active national policies for offering employment opportunities to young people. To fulfill the goal of the project's goal, a questionnaire will be developed and distributed via e-mail or face to face meetings to a total of 400 young respondents (100 from 4 participant Countries) and 40 local stakeholders (10 from 4 participant

Countries). The research study will conclude on best practices used by local stakeholders in offering young people a chance to a long term professional insertion. Each of the 6 Partners, will disseminate 10 CDs with the Research to local stakeholders: public and private employment agencies, High schools, local and regional public or private entities that offer vocational counseling to young people. The research study will be posted on OER Platform for free download and it will be presented in a International Conference on topics during the project. This Research aims to identify and evaluate young people's vocational counseling needs, in order to better understand and address young employability best strategies. The research will be our assessment tool for identifying our beneficiary (young unemployed and career counseling professionals) counseling needs in order to receive and offer high quality counseling services in the EU labor market. In this activity there will be involved all Partners. For the best implementation of the project a WRM Cloud will be designed and hosted by the whole duration of the project. This Platform represents a database for all outcomes of the project, financial aspects, technical aspects, documents and back-up files. Each Partner will have full access to all information under an individual user name. WRM Cloud will support Virtual Conferences, e-mails of the project team, a Forum and other necessary resources for Project Management Implementation. All intellectual Outputs are peer-reviewed by the team project on this Platform.

There will be available on the OER website of the project, 6 On-line free courses on Vocational career counselling: Self-assessment, Opportunities awareness, Taking decisions, Transition planning, Career Management and Entrepreneurship, dedicated to vocational career counsellors, trainers, youth workers and any other professional figure that uses career counselling strategies throughout the entire 7 months of the project. On-line courses will have their own curricula, based on the Handbook of Vocational counselling, developed during first two years of the project, by each of the Partners, except X-house. The preparation of curricula, content and quizzes will enroll over a period of 7 months. A selection procedure for beneficiaries will be developed and implemented. Each of the 6 On-line courses will enroll over a period of one month and will end with a Quiz. Participants who earn more than 65 points will receive a Participation Diploma signed by the Partner Career Coach and a YouthPass Certificate. All Partners will be Moderators and will offer online tutoring activities for beneficiaries. After certification, each Partner will assess the impact of learning outcomes on beneficiaries for a period of two months.

The Handbook on Vocational Counselling will consist of 6 Chapters: Self-assessment, Opportunities awareness, Taking decisions, Transition planning, Career Management and Entrepreneurship. It will be structured in

200 pages and written in English. All Partners except X-House will be involved in the activity of designing the structure and elaborating resource materials for a period of 7 months. Each of the six Partners involved will take full responsibility for the development of one of the six main Chapters. The Handbook will be edited under a Romanian Publishing House, then printed and multiplied in 40 copies. Each Country will receive 10 copies, which will consist of their own vocational counselling Methodology. The Handbook will be freely disseminated on OER Platform and will serve as content support for designing On-line courses. The activity of designing and elaborating the Handbook will last 7 months and will involve all Partners except X-House. All 6 Partners will agree on the structure of the Handbook.

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