

Originative Educational Protocols in the Post Pandemic Period in the Romanian Primary Schools

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Abstract: *The pandemic period had left deep traces on the educational processes all over the world. Schools had to reevaluate their approach towards education in general, replacing methods and strategies with adaptable ones to this new situation. Now, in the post-pandemic times, there are new challenges that educational systems and families have to face. Due to social distancing, children have specific fears regarding group activities in the classrooms. Some of them refuse to completely get involved and participate in the daily routines, especially when the activities are built in an interactive manner. Considering these facts, we have created this article which contains a few original educational practices that are based on outdoor learning activities that are carried out in the outside areas, in order to promote healthy interactions between pupils. In the first part of the article, we present a few theoretical and conceptual bases of outdoor education, the way it is practiced in the primary schools from Romania and some of its advantages. In the second part, we are presenting some innovative good practices that are based on outdoor education and that are dedicated to primary school pupils. The main results of implementing these protocols in the practice show that children are more open to participate in the solving of common tasks, also they cooperate more and socialize, also developing transversal competencies.*

Key words: innovation, post-pandemics, outdoor, protocol, primary school.

Introduction

Under the special conditions imposed by the pandemic with the new Sars-cov-2 coronavirus, educational institutions reopened all over the world for the 2020-2021 school years. The central and local governments were thus confronted with unprecedented challenges in the last century in managing the education process, which traditionally involves groups of children and young people under the best possible physical distance, the basic premise to limit the spread of the new virus. (Vancu&Egerău, 2022)

The pandemic has had a significant impact on education and has exacerbated the region's existing social inequities. (Schembri et al, 2021).

Schools are not only places for academic education, but also for developing social and emotional skills, interacting with others, and receiving social support. Governments, ministries, and schools are faced with the challenge of planning the educational process during extremely busy times. Following a significant disruption to the educational process caused by school closures and quarantines, states have the restrictions gradually

lifted while essential protection measures, particularly those related to distancing physics, were maintained. However, because the virus is still circulating worldwide and no vaccine has been developed, societies are preparing for a "new normal," in which education will be different from what students, teachers, and families are used to. Some states are preparing a variety of scenarios for the new academic year, including school reopening and distance learning.

Literature review

In order to provide essential and quality education at all times, schools have to go from closure to recovery. In times of educational recovery when every educational specialist tries to adapt to the new, and to create and implement original educational protocols in the post pandemic period, Romanian institutions have tried also to answer the main questions that still stand. (Egerău et al, 2020)

One of the protocols that have been proposed, and the one that we are going to discuss in the following article is that the Ministry of Education has been launching a call for projects dedicated to educational activities outside the classroom. The purpose of launching this call is to increase the participation rate in primary and secondary education and develop integrated prevention measures, as well as improve the skills of teaching staff, so that quality educational services are ensured, in harmony with the needs of students and the promotion of an inclusive school. Children can develop completely and harmoniously if, in addition to classroom subjects, they have the opportunity to express themselves through art, music, sports, or if they receive guidance in various

knowledge they need in life in the outdoors. (Dughi & Roman, 2008, Roman & Co arbă, 2020)

Outdoor education and play promote emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development. Students who learn outside develop a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity, decision-making and problem-solving skills, empathy for others, motor skills, self-discipline, and initiative, according to studies. Outdoor experiences can allow to explore, discover, and appreciate the natural world while also being active, strengthening fine and gross motor movement skills, pushing your physical limits, and getting dirty. Time spent outside should be an important part of every child's daily routine. (Beery, 2020).

When asked to recall their favorite childhood memories or those related to their way of playing, each child recalls with affection and involvement at least one instance when they played outside in the bushes or grass, pretending to be food and using twigs and leaves in their activity. Others describe sitting under a tree and gazing up at the sky, meditating and relishing the moments of peace and silence. A few enthusiastically recall times when they climbed trees or ran around at dawn inventing all kinds of games with no resources or materials other than those found in nature. Despite the positive memories associated with outdoor play, some teachers are hesitant to incorporate outdoor education activities into the instructional-educational process. Most teachers refuse to take the initiative to remove students from the classroom because they claim they do not understand this type of education well enough, which may lead to a decrease in learning effectiveness. Others avoid these

activities because they are uncomfortable in a completely new environment, and they are afraid of disruption and dirt. In addition to providing students with pleasant and lasting memories, outdoor education and experiences in nature provide many more benefits to children than those listed above. Vigorous physical activity can reduce obesity, improve concentration, and foster the development of social skills.

The physical environment can contribute to children's well-being, happiness, creativity, independence, and the free expression of their experiences and opinions, all of which are linked to learning quality. Choices made in a formal educational setting, such as educational resources, materials, spaces, layout, air quality, lighting, and access to a variety of indoor and outdoor experiences, have a direct impact on the quality of learning opportunities for students. (The indoor & outdoor environment policy, 2013).

It is critical for young children to have frequent and consistent opportunities to explore and learn in their surroundings, and this should not be viewed as an optional activity. There has been a cultural shift in our society in recent years that has reduced access to and use of outdoor spaces by many children and young people. Growing adult concerns about children's safety are contributing factors, as are technological advances that have resulted in an overabundance of sedentary activities performed indoors, such as watching television, using video games, and playing computer games. (Waite, 2009)

Some of the most important reasons of using outdoor education in the post pandemic educational activities

are presented as it follows:

- encourages the development of a healthy and active lifestyle in children by providing opportunities for physical activity, freedom of movement, and the promotion of a sense of well-being;
- provides children with contact with the natural world and unique experiences such as direct contact with natural phenomena and the seasons;
- encourages children to understand and respect nature and the environment, as well as the interdependence of people, animals, plants, and the life cycle;
- supports problem-solving skills and encourages creativity, imagination, and inventiveness;
- provides space for exploration, experimentation, discovery, and activities that develop physical capabilities.
- develops the brain and neural networks for students who prefer to learn through movement;
- provides a safe and free framework for students to develop their managerial and risk assessment skills;
- increases interest and enthusiasm through efficient resource use;
- increases children's joy, enthusiasm, and desire for discovery.

Recent perspectives

Outdoor recreation's contribution to health can be considered in the context of overall well-being. The World Health Organization (NANA,

2003) defines health as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than simply the absence of disease or infirmity. The concept of wellness, or optimal health, entails a balance of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social health, and then lists a wide range of dimensions, beginning with fitness, nutrition, and stress management and progressing to meditation, education, and relationships. Outdoor education affects all aspects of students' health and can improve not only their physical but also their emotional well-being. (Godbey, 2009)

The emergence and rapid development of new technologies can be obvious distractions for children, even from infancy. The variety of television programs and applications designed for children and young people has both advantages and disadvantages. Regardless of how these facts are addressed, it is critical to understand that patterns of active or sedentary behavior begin to form very early in childhood and that habits of unhealthy technology use are passed down into preschool, school age, and then adolescence. Even more if we take into consideration the pandemic situation, which has made children and entire families isolated and unable to not engage in physical activity, that can certainly lead to obesity and other health issues. (Little, 2020)

From a medical standpoint, it has been discovered that sedentary lifestyles caused by spending too much time using modern technology are associated with decreased bone mass in children, a disease that can result in frequent bone fractures. Obesity can also be exacerbated by a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity is a

growing concern in most countries around the world, despite widespread awareness of these facts. Physical activity is well known to reduce the risk of weight problems. Overweight people who are physically active have a lower risk of developing 21st-century diseases than people of normal weight who are not active. A preschool age child spends an average of over 85% of their time engaged in activities that force them to adopt a sedentary position. Because of this, modern playgrounds have been built in most neighborhoods. The problem with these constructions is that they are artificial and do not motivate the child to move enough. Instead, hills and forests or uneven terrain are real challenges, requiring children to use all their physical strength. Children who play in the forest or other green areas have much more developed motor skills than those who spend time on artificial playgrounds, being healthier and happier due to direct exposure to air and natural light. It has been found that learning that takes place in nature has faster and more sustainable results over time. (Watts, 2020)

There is mounting evidence that being close to nature is beneficial to one's health. As sedentary behavior tends to occur indoors, unventilated, with small, stuffy spaces, exposure to natural environments reduces pollution-related health problems. People who spend their time outside move more than those who spend their time indoors. Students in the twenty-first century spend the majority of their time indoors, and the only time they spend outside is on their way home from school, if they do not use public transportation. The school is the only institution that can be responsible for allocating outdoor time to students. Children and parents must

be aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of outdoor learning. A modern education of the future is constantly concerned with both the education and health of children, developing educational programs that combine learning with movement and spending time outside the classroom. (Davies & Hamilton, 2018)

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to present originaive outdoor educational protocols for primary schools, in order to develop transversal and key competences.

Research methodology

Given the fact that the present brief research is based on the observation of the needs of educational institutions, the main research instrument was the observation sheet. It contained criteria based on which we have analyzed the needs regarding the development of competences of primary school pupils, in order to establish the outdoor activities that will be used during the research.

Originaive outdoor educational protocols for primary schools

There are many protocols that can be used in order to achieve outdoor education in the pot-pandemic period. The first one presented in this study is storywalk. Storywalk is a unique and enjoyable way for pupils and students to enjoy reading and being outside at the same time. Laminated pages from a children's book are attached to wooden stakes and placed along an outdoor path. They are directed to the next page of the story as you walk the trail. A Storywalk is a fun, educational activity in which a story for children (literally an unfolded book) is placed along a popular walking route in the

community or a forest. The ideal book contains little text, illustrations that do not cross the center of the page, and a compelling story. For this project, smaller cards work best. It employs nature-themed cards that can be used throughout the year. Students work in groups to read the given story page, find the next tab, and complete the challenges along the way. (Quai et al, 2020).



Image nb. 1. Storywalk protocols

The second outdoor protocol, that we suggest using in the post pandemic period as an innovation, which helps students enjoy outdoor learning and adapt better to the new school era, is nature weaving. Nature weaving is an art and handwork activity that is done after a walk in nature. Gather leaves, twigs, weeds, flowers, feathers, grass, and other natural materials for the project. Alternate weaving the gathered items over and under the string, in order to pique people's interest. This outdoor activity develops:

- hand-eye coordination and concentration are improved as a result of this activity.
- problem-solving abilities
- comprehending patterns and sequences, which are required for future literacy and numeracy development.
- language abilities such as color naming and language concepts such as "in," "out," "up," "down," and so on.



Image nb. 2. Nature weaving follow up activity

The third protocol that we consider as being innovative, is a *multidisciplinary workshop*, called nature elements, that is based on team work in nature. The following are the steps of the workshop:

1. *The group is divided into 4 teams, according to the element of nature to which it belongs:*

- Water (Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces)
- Air (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius)
- Earth (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn)
- Fire (Aries, Leo, Sagittarius)

2. *Students receive the assignments, found in 4 envelopes:*

- Create a multi-sensory outdoor activity, (where you hang how more of the 5 senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) for the team opposite to the natural element (water-fire; earth-air), in which to use to your fullest potential the natural element you belong to and its features, its uses. In your endeavor, you will use any natural/artificial resource that can be integrated into the activity proposed. The activity can be intended for students of any age.

BONUS: In the activity, you will have to enter the item surprise discovered in the envelope.

3. *Students present the results of the workshop.*

4. *The inter-evaluation of the activities is carried out.*

The activity can be adapted to any age, any content or curricular objective or



Image no. 3. Outdoor sensorial workshop

Conclusions

Outdoor education is a modern learning strategy for new disciplines that can significantly develop students' transversal skills. It is also a way to achieve learning acquisition in an organized but enjoyable way in a free, uninhabited environment.

The benefits of outdoor education are recognized at multiple levels of the education system: physical, emotional, cognitive, and psychosocial. In this century of speed and content overload in schools, a teaching strategy is needed to facilitate the educational process. Outdoor education assists teachers through activities that take advantage of the unlimited resources of the natural environment through different formats and settings. (Bilton, 2010)

Outdoor education is the basis of teaching theory on which modern learning theory is built. These, developing and adapting to the needs of today's society, develop the critical and cross-sectional competencies necessary for the life of postmodern learners. Through personally engaging activities, they also develop life skills and facilitate access to course content.

Outdoor education serves as the interface between formal and non-formal education, improving the teaching process by expanding the teaching and learning environment into a unified functional whole for the full development of each individual.

In the post pandemic period, outdoor education is a great tool for teachers and parents to use in the daily educational activities, in order to motivate children to

participate in the solving of common tasks, also to cooperate more and socialize, also developing transversal competencies. (Spiteri, 2020, Quai et al, 2020, D'Isanto & D'Elia, 2021)

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