

Development center for school children, a possible model of education for life

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Abstract:

The Development Center is intended for school pupils in primary education from pre-school class up to the fourth grade, in heterogeneous groups in age, considering that life involves relationship and communication with partners of different ages. The Center aims to answer several students' needs, their parents' and those of the education system, having as an objective to train children for life. The Learning Community that we propose, is based on the philosophy of Montessori pedagogy, by organizing activities focused on the 9 intelligences of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and through approaching education starting from the theory of humanistic psychology. The psychoemotional climate, the way of organizing activities and the learning strategies used will build a school that has as purpose the development of children's individual potential, creating an environment to support life training for the harmonious development of students' personality.

Keywords:

development center, education for life, non-formal education, New Education, Montessori pedagogy, theory of multiple intelligences

Reasoning the need of the center

The Development Center that we propose wants to cover some of the students' needs, their parents' and those of the educational system:

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- supervision and enrollment of children in primary school classes, aged 6-11, in a pleasant and helpful program;
- ensuring a balanced afternoon program, centered on the student's needs (feeding, type of activity);
- home- work for the day;
- detection and practicing the artistic, theoretical and scientific skills through excellence activities.

The Development Center for school children will work with the landmark theory of free education, a main branch of the New Education, the most radical in proclaiming the free development of the child, of a pedagogical non-intervention which requires the educator „to let nature work quietly and slowly.”

It is known that education must provide each student the opportunity to form a trajectory of its own, according to the individual capabilities of each, having the doors open to all those who need education, training and social integration, trying to substitute in some cases the parents' low level of education and in others to develop and exploit their particular skills.

The requirements of contemporary society are moving more and more towards institutions that can provide diversification and individual approach to educational pathways without making the student an individualist, but a person able to develop and capitalize on potential through communication and cooperation with others.

Taking as its starting point the variety of learning situations, different degrees of their actionable intentionality and the distinction between actions and educational influences, the easiest way of translating into reality our project, we consider it to be an institution that provide a non-formal education side.

The non-formal education was defined as any educational activity, willful and systematic, held usually outside traditional school, whose content is adapted to the need of the individual and particular situations in order to maximize learning and knowledge and minimize the problems faced by in the formal system (stress grading in the roll, the discipline imposed, homework etc.¹).

The center we propose deals with this form of education, proposing related activities organized by a group of teachers, in an institutional framework, but outside school, activities in line with the new facets of multiple intelligences organized following Montessori education and approaching education from the alternative theory of humanistic psychology.

The program of activities for children includes also views of exhibitions, shows, movies, visits, excursions, hiking, tourism activities, outside the center, to ensure a comprehensive development, training young people for life.

¹ C. Chisuiu, *After school and school otherwise*, Ed. University "L. Blaga", Sibiu, 2012, p. 7-8.

The architectural structure, the organizing of workshops and centers must provide non-formal education objectives:

- enlargement and completion horizon of knowledge;
- enhancing knowledge in certain areas;
- framework for the practice and cultivation of skills;
- expanding the participants and parties organized leisure, personal training purposes;
- educational and vocational guidance.

The relationship between formal education (held in school) and non-formal education (in the cluster) is complementary in terms of content, forms of organization and accomplishment.

In the center of development, children come on the one hand to reinforce learning accomplished classes at school, through the program of after-school, provided by teachers in special rooms and, secondly, to detect and to cultivate their skills through activities discovery, research study conducted individually or in workshops.

Education in the center has the advantage of an educational space, much more flexible than the strict school, offering individuals greater freedom of action, enabling better selection of information and learning experiences, felt as needed by those who are trained under the guidance of professional teachers.

Attending the activity in the development center, the children will be exposed to a smaller risk to an informal education (education offered by the street, the mass media).²

The educational policy and the need for a non-formal education: out-of-school, extra-curricular, after-school

The 21st century has marked a turning point in the evolution of the concepts of formal and informal education, it is becoming more common in the center of international educational discourse. In Europe, the promotion initiative belongs to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe who worked out a recommendation to member states.³

² Studies in the area suggest that behavioral disorders, deviant behavior, are more common in children of whom formal and non-formal had no impact, they found their place and feeling valued in the informal as a result of education street.

³ On April 30, 2003 in Europe was issued a recommendation to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to member states indicating directions for action related to the recognition as equivalent of business-formal education at formal education in terms of contribution equal to personality development of the child and his social integration.

Accordingly, the out-of-school and the extracurricular activities represent the applicability space that allows the transfer and applicability of knowledge, skills, competences acquired in school activities, an approximation of school learning for life. Through its specific forms, out-of-school and extracurricular activities develop critical thinking and stimulate the involvement of the young generation in the decision making in the context of human rights and social responsibilities of ownership, achieving thus a constructive symbiosis between the cognitive and behavioral component.⁴

The attention we should pay to a unitary approach of the out-of-school and extracurricular activities assumes that complementary educational approach, formal – non-formal education system provides extra value, contributing to a child's life skills. Thus, defining that value the role of education in preparing exercises all children should become active citizens in a dynamic society, changing, while contributing to the ongoing improvement of quality of life.

This approach is vital in the context of complex changes in the family life, the labor market, the community, a multicultural society and globalization, by applying the model diversity by initiating projects that also involve students, teachers on different fields, educational partners, parents, community and media representatives.

The center of educational out-of-school and extracurricular activity is a space able to meet the challenges of contemporary society, in the sense that its design flexibility allows a continuous updating of learning content and teaching student-centered methods, monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning outcomes. At the same time, specific features facilitate the implementation of the new teaching approach in which the student becomes a resource, a producer, an opinion leader, so an active participant.

To stimulate cognitive, spiritual, interpersonal and social-formal education, out-of-school and extracurricular activities has always in mind the need to adjust to individual requirements, different of all children, the interests of their knowledge and potential. The contexts created by the different ways of realizing this type of education in the Center: projects, punctual events, thematic applications etc. It enables interdisciplinary approaches, cross-curricular skills and practice life skills in an integrated, holistic personality development.

Moreover, out-of-school and extracurricular activities benefiting from a more flexible context, can contribute to this change.⁵

These changes will not be achieved only within the education system, but also covers irradiation area of influence: family, civil society, community. Re-

⁴ C. Chisiu, *op. cit.*, p. 10-15.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 2012, p. 16.

covery mechanisms and instruments existing coherent action and create new networks of activity specializing in various sub-formal education, extracurricular would result in raising the quality of education.

The Development Center proposed, through its program and features, is open around the clock, for the participation of parents, local community representatives, the education community. The training activities will be organized for educational partners: parents, teachers from schools where students come, representatives of the educational community, the local community.

One way of achieving these changes is the creation of development centers, that we deal, these action cores consisting of students, teachers, representatives of NGOs, economic, local administration and the community. This practice aims to transform education as a whole, the promoter of progress at a local level.

By satisfying children's desires and their interests for knowledge, the education system will become a resource center for local community development.

From school to community learning. Characterizing the activity of the Development Center for pupils

For the type of education proposed, we need different learning environments, differently designed constructed or organized.

The Development Center is intended for school pupils in primary education from pre-school class until the fourth grade, in groups heterogeneous in age, considering that life involves relationship and communication with partners of different ages. In Montessori pedagogy it is considered that the best teacher for a child is often a slightly larger child who masters a certain skill.

The room that we propose starts from the ideas expressed by the current of new education paradigm, a Montessori way of organizing space, anchoring the theory of multiple intelligences and learning approach according to humanistic psychology.

We propose six workshops, starting from the ideas supported by Dalton system or plan, known as a system of the didactic work in laboratories and school offices, giving up the teaching itself, offering the child the opportunity to build his own learning through personal experiment and also through Winnetka Plan, which takes into account the child's skills and characterized by organizing the learning through work individualization. Each workshop has several centers of interest theoretically supported by Decroly system or the interest centers system, from the new Education trend.

These are:

- Workshop for verbal-linguistic activities, with the centers for Romanian language, creative activities, modern languages: German, English, Chinese;

- Workshop for logic, mathematics and science, with areas of interest for mathematics and logic activities, the center of interest for natural sciences: physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology and the center of interest for history - geography;
- Personal Development Workshop, where will work children interpersonal, intrapersonal and existential intelligence oriented;
- Workshop for music;
- Workshop for movement, rhythm and kinesthesia;
- Workshop for crafts, arts, architecture, construction with the center of interest for creation, where the children with a bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and visual-spatial one will work.

The essential feature of the activity of this center is supported also by the Action Pedagogy.⁶

The center will also include auxiliary spaces where children, along with teachers, peers, parents develop related activities: halls for training activities for homework and other activities according to the children's age level, even games. The range of time in which pupils prepare their homework is not required. Everyone knows, however, that until departure will have to pay attention to this activity, which will be held under the supervision and guidance of teachers and older pupils. The pupil has the right to choose the time and the order of doing his homework, but is responsible for the results obtained at school.

- A dining room. Each school will get a casserole dish, make orders, wash cutlery and leave space ready for the next fellow.
- A rest room, used by those who feel the need to rest on mattresses or chairs;
- A multipurpose room or large hall, capable of hosting a variety of activities and spatial conformations;
- A documentation and information center, a multimedia library designed for the child level to meet his needs as closely as possible;
- An atrium designed as a continuation of the exterior public space which is closed during the cold season, where there are plants, benches, desks, where free activities can take place or those under the teachers' guidance;
- Locker room and a room for correlation between parents and teachers, where each student has a wardrobe. There is a pedagogical observation notebook, in which both parents and teachers write. Here are details of

⁶ Action pedagogy - pedagogical orientation of new education stream, which put a practical extension of educational pursuits. It was launched by the German educator WA Lay in 1911 through the work *Die Tatschule* (school act).

the recorded time that children grant to each center, to homework preparing, to outdoor gardening activities, attitudes and skills manifested.

In the space around the building there are also:

- an evergreen garden, with fruit trees, turf, beds of vegetables and flowers, a fountain, animals: geese, ducks, rabbits, where the children will do easy jobs, that can complete their knowledge acquired in the science lab;
- a pitch for funny games in the open air, with benches displayed in an amphitheatre shape for watching demonstrating activities;
- a space with benches displayed in a semicircle, for debate and dialogue activities.

The theoretical base for this space is offered by the Cousinet Method.⁷ In those six workshops children will work in heterogeneous groups, following Montessori method, learning and supporting one another, asking for the teacher's help only when they couldn't manage alone. In each workshop will work 3 or 4 teachers and assistants. They do not have their own place, specially designed for them. They belong to the environment where the pupils proceed and they intervene every time they are called by the pupils, playing the roles of observer, educational resource, prompter, facilitator and environment designer.

The rooms are large, aired, between 40 and 70 square metres, where children can move freely, bright, with attractive and colourful materials, easily handled by pupils, which offer them the chance of learning through experiments.

Children have direct access to their shelves built according to their height, with attractive items, which respond to the «error control» principle⁸. The walls provide total transparency from hallways, the visual activity developing without being disturbed by those who wish to view the work. It's an extra guarantee that the center is opened to the community.

For an effective personal management the child must learn to identify his errors, to correct mistakes, to produce a change to adjust to the developing of events.

The furniture is of different sizes to ensure physical comfort.⁹

Each child can choose the center that wants to work after they have completed the homework for the next day. If the teacher observes that the pupil had not understood the contents taught at school and has problems, he will suggest activities within the centers to explain misunderstandings using the three-step teaching, typical to Montessori alternative.

⁷ Method Cousinet - guidance current new education, which implies that education is made free of child labor, through cooperation within working groups, the rules of conduct expresses even cooperation requirements. The method was first put in the work *Une methode de travail libre appear groups* (1943).

⁸ C. Chisiu, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁹ M. Montessori, *The discovery of the child*, Ed. Didactic and Pedagogic, Bucharest, 1977, p. 90.

The center is designed as a space favorable for children with special needs. The fact that it respects each child's own pace, their own needs, individual characteristics, it makes it a space in which this category is found, without feeling stigmatized due to differences between them and the others.

With the Parkway Program¹⁰ theoretical foundation, some afternoon activities are conducted in small groups, the students working on organizing projects, partly in the natural environment, but also in libraries, museums, theaters, typical to non-formal education institutions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this center is determined by the needs of society in which we live; Children need to increase flexible, that can harmonize with all providence gives us; individuals living with them reconcile with others and providence; individuals willing to use those own forces, principles, values to enhance mutual wellbeing; emotionally intelligent individuals, individuals with behavioral Christian man.

The center offers a child-centered education, on his native availability, on the interests and needs, aiming his training for life.

The community learning that we propose, is based on the philosophy of Montessori pedagogy, by organizing activities focused towards the 9 intelligences theory of multiple intelligences - Howard Gardner and an education through an approach based on the theory of humanistic psychology.

Organized on the theory of multiple intelligences, ensuring conditions for development, equally children predisposition and interest for mathematics and for language, music and rhythm, movement skills sensory and kinesthetic, communication needs inter and intrapersonal, to teach them to live in harmony with themselves and with the others, to enjoy life, to teach others, through what we call the hidden curriculum, to live beautifully.

Obviously, we do not make illusions that the specific educational practice of our times can be changed by applying theories. Changes are primarily related to social order. Psychology and Pedagogy as sciences can provide critical perspective and explanation for certain variants based applications. But ideas should appear, mature and find an environment where they can become reality.

In that little school land children begin with respect for the self and for the others, a positive attitude towards work, responsibility, communication of basic skills, networking. Behavioral bases made at this stage age are living habits.

¹⁰ PROGRAM PARKWAY- experimental education program, held in Philadelphia in the 70s of last century, as the accepted guidelines and parks "method" for proposing instead that the school, and parks, where activities were held outdoors.

The activities of the center are those which have the time and the proper environment initiating these skills. Knowing each and self-awareness exercises, the workshop of personal development, skills integration can foster child in the group, identifying his comfortable spot, and adjust to the personal needs.

The Development Center for pupils could solve the problem of violence. Violence occurs when the environment hampers the natural and mental growth or lacks the necessary stimuli when every period of this growth.

The Development center is designed so as to attract both architecture by practicality by ergonomic construction and layout, with vivid colors, producing a friendly and functional environment, and at the same time a model for the welfare that can be learned.

Children will find a place that represents them. They will find places specially prepared for them, their needs and interests. The furniture and objects are of different sizes and colors and attractive in their design.

Surrounded by the aesthetic environment of aesthetic facts, they learn to appreciate and contribute to the beautiful and the good of others.

In the proposed center, organization, and climate based on: understanding and tolerance, define a place where children grow in love and love for others, to themselves and splash of God. State of reconciliation will grow with them and those around them prepared to participate in the realization of a society based on moral principles, Christian morality.

Such a center could be built through the combined efforts of several institutions directly responsible for education inspectorates, schools, departments of education and not least the church, each and all together interested to build a different kind of education, closer the soul of the child closer to the needs of society.

The psychoemotional climate, the organization of activities, the learning strategies used, we want a school that although it is new, has no other purpose than what Abraham Lincoln would have wanted for his son more than 150 years ago.

Abraham Lincoln¹¹ addressed a letter to his son's teacher, where he does not require anything else but what we want for our 21st century children: a learning that respects the child's pace, which proposes a learning purpose, develops critical thinking, responsibility, respect, independence.

Here's a part of the letter!

"My son starts school today. It's an adventure you can go across continents, in adventures that probably include wars, tragedy and pain. To live this life requires faith, love and courage. So, dear Professor, please take him by the hand and

¹¹ Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865) – the sixteenth President of the United States and the first Republican president.

teach him things that you need to know, but teaching him gradually if possible. Treat him gently, but do not always take the shelter of your arms because only fire test is one that gives good quality steel.

Let them courage to be impatient, let him have the patience to be brave. Teach him to have sublime faith in himself because then you always have sublime faith in mankind and God¹².

¹² <http://www.financiarul.ro/2013/11/11/scrisoarea-lui-abraham-lincoln-catre-profesorul-fiului-lui/>