

## **Some Ways to Improve the Programmes of Non-formal Education**

**© Valentin Cosmin BLÂNDUL**

**University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania**

**[bvali73@yahoo.com](mailto:bvali73@yahoo.com)**

Non-formal education (NFE) represents one of the most relevant forms of education which includes all kind of extracurricular activities that can help pupils to better acquired of knowledge taught by their teachers. Even it is seems so easy to put into the practice, NFE required a specific design created by teachers to help their pupils for a effective learning of knowledge from different extracurricular area (arts, sports, technology, literature, science so on). In such circumstances, professors should be well-prepared to better apply of NFE having didactic strategies for an effective teaching of extracurricular activities (ECA). Therefore, in the present study, we intend to briefly analyze a few important programs specific for non-formale education (NFE), trying to establish their main characteristics and generalize them to entire process of extracurricular education

The society where we live every day reserve us a highly diverse range of challenges in different areas such as economic, political, cultural, social one 0etc. Globalization is a phenomenon that cancels the borders between countries, cultures or fields of science and force people to have a holistic and inclusive approach of everything that is happening around them. The formation of such a vision is a complex and lengthy process that is done with the continued support of lifelong learning. The complexity of this phenomenon is given by need to use all forms of education, interdependent with each other in time and space for the achievement of lifelong learning. This means to have a strong functional correlation between binomial education (interdependence between student and teacher), that encourage self-education, namely the mutual conditioning of human development factors - heredity, environment and education - with emphasis on the last one. To emphasize the role of education in the formation of a democratic world, V. Guțu (2013:36) identifies two types of paradigms. The first one is focused, predominantly on the learner and is based on scientific theory of education and instruction. The second educational paradigm in analyzed in terms of interdependence between psycho-individual and the psycho-social factors, basing on scientific theories that can support education and training process as a whole.

From a historical perspective, the discussion about education began with the appearance of man on Earth and knowing multiple approaches evolving over time, depending on various political, social, cultural, economic factors etc. Etymological, the concept of *education* comes from Latin, where *educō / educare* means growth, feeding, care etc. According to this acceptance, education had a triple dimension: support, guidance and cultivation of biological and psychological potential of human beings to lead them to maturity and to help them effectively integrate in social environment (Cucoş, 2006:39).

Turning to provide an own comprehensive definition of education, we can appreciate that this is a specifically human activity, conscious, systematic and complex one, that adult generations, acting on younger one, tries to develop a harmonious personality and creative individuals to enable them to actively integrate in social environment where they live (Blandul, 2014:41).

Trying to analyze the previous definition, we noted that education is a complex process, involving a positive transformation of the human being from a lower stage to a higher development. Moreover, the action of human personality formation is achieved by exploiting its genetic potential or society expectations (Dandara et al., 2010:25). We can infer that, in achieving educational phenomenon, between educated and educator there is a mutual inter-relationship in the sense that, as the investment and teacher expectations will be higher, the trainee will be better prepared and able to live up to the expectations raised, and "educational cycle" can be restarted. Of course, the process can not be reduced to a relationship of "cause and effect" established between those two poles of the education binomial, but we believe it could be an enough plausible structure to build a consistent definition of education.

Trying to analyze the proposed new definition of education, we can point out some of its characteristic elements (Cucoş, 2006:40-41):

- ❖ *Conscious activity* - requires understanding / interpretation by individual objectives / aims pursued;
- ❖ *Complex activity* - is achieved by participation of several interdependent factors (family, school, group affiliation, church, media, children's clubs, civil society);
- ❖ *Systematic activity* - is carried throughout life;
- ❖ *Specifically human activity* - due to the presence of conscious factor;
- ❖ *Adult generations* - people with more experience in a particular field;
- ❖ *Emerging generations* - children, youth, people with less experience;
- ❖ *Objective pursued* - proper integration of the individual in society.

The multitude and variety of situations faced by a person requires the existence of multiple forms that can achieve its education. One of the most important criteria underlying the classification of forms of education is the level of organization and intent of the whole process. According to this criterion, we have the following forms of education (V. Gutu, 2013):

- ✓ *Formal education* - refers to the sum of the influences deliberate, systematic and organized, produced and performed in specialized educational institutions (kindergarten, school, university etc.) in order to form human personality;
- ✓ *Non-formal education* - includes a set of structured educational activities organized and institutionalized, but held outside classrooms or teaching activities took the form optional or voluntary;
- ✓ *Informal education* - includes all unintentional, diffuse and heterogeneous influences facing the individual in everyday practice and which are not selected, organized and processed pedagogical criteria.

For these three forms of education (formal, non-formal and informal ones), pedagogical literature uses the term "parallel education". However, there is no question of any exclusions between them, by the contrary, the three ways of learning are complement and reinforce each other. In the context of holistic vision about education, integration requires a formal education (organized and institutionalized system) with non-formal education (organized, but outside institutions) and informal education (spontaneous and often unplanned). Thus, there are many situations in which knowledge gained by way of formal education are supported and enhanced by the retrieved through non-formal and informal education, but also the reverse situation, the education received in school, family or church is "broken" by the group of friends or the media. That's why is desirable communication between all modes and all factors involved in educational activities, in order to shape human personality that converged with social and educational ideal.

Non-formal education (NFE) includes a combination of structured, organized and institutionalized activities implemented outside the classroom or offered as optional educational activities. NFE completes the formal one and it consists of an extremely large range of flexible activities, which are better adjusted to the needs and interests of individuals. Certain radio and TV programs that focus strictly on training a certain segment of the population can also be included in the category of NFE. As a result, the target group of NFE is extremely large and can include pupils, students, adults, people facing difficulties etc., while the providers of NFE can be educational

institutions, parents' associations, children and youth organizations, non-governmental organizations and so on. The risks involved by this form of education consist of the possible unprofessional implementation of specific activities, as well as in the difficulties that may arise in the objective evaluation of the results. These aspects will be detailed in the following chapters (Blândul, 2008:21).

Although, by its definition, non-formal education seems to be "formless", its implementation is not an unorganized process. Rather, NFE implementation involves following the same rules as the other teaching activities, given the nature of the differences being more relaxed and out of school in which NFE occurs. Most often, this occurs by the implementation of specific non-formal education programs, rigorously designed, with clearly defined educational objectives, well-defined activities or of teaching / learning / assessment interactive strategies. These programs can be implemented by any institution with an educational expertise: school, church, non-governmental organizations, children's clubs, public authorities etc., and activities that may be contained in the NFE are extremely varied and include: visits, trips, artistic activities (dance, music, painting), sports, cooking, environment protection, pleasant spending of leisure time, reading, cinema and theater, learning a foreign language, computer etc. Group of people eligible for NFE programs is extremely vast, from students from preschool to senior adults (Archibald, 2015:138-140). We intend to continue to look at some case studies of successful NFE programs and then we will try to surprise their commune characteristic notes and summarize them for the entire non-formal education.

A first example of successful NFE program is the one proposed by H. Yamata (2010:707-713) which was followed to help Malay children immigrants in United Kingdom for effective learning English. The author has developed a strategy that combined formal, non-formal and informal learning English. The conclusion was that Malaysian students learn best by engaging them in practical English with daily application: social interactions with colleagues, friends and adults, both within school and outside, watching various TV programs in English, computer and the Internet, practicing various computer games (for example, Play Station) etc. By his program, H. Yamata tried to propose students a diverse spectrum of activities in which they are responsible involved, having an intrinsically motivated to learn English.

A second NFE program held in this article was proposed by K. A. Gee (2015:207-216) and aimed to promote equal opportunities in terms of access to education for children, no matter what gender they have. 1203 students participated in the program in Bangladesh and educational activities focused on four domeni: literacy (mother tongue and English), mathematics, science and social sciences. After

completion of the program found that there are not significant differences between girls and boys in school, which means that in terms of equal opportunities, all students are capable of similar performance, regardless of what gender they belong.

Another interesting NFE program note in this article was proposed by M. Kerdphol and T. Worarat (2014:916-924) and aimed to help young people with high risk of relapse to drug use. The program covered risk neighborhoods in Bangkok, Thailand, was divided into 3 stages (pretest, specific intervention stage and posttest) and included a sample of 60 young people, grouped in an experimental group and a control one, each consisting of 30 persons. Program activities included workshops on drug issues, role-plays, meetings with personalities in this field etc., and the results proved that young people from experimental group showed a significantly lower risk of relapse in drug use.

Two other interesting programs were proposed by Werakul and Worarat (2014:903-910), and J. Kalenda (2015:1077-1084) that were monitored involving adults in specific NFE activities. The need for education of these people was once the physical, psychological and social that they hand the desire to make the concerned adults useful for society, regardless of their age. NFE programs aimed to develop language skills, in learning a foreign language or IT skills through the use of computers, Internet and Social Media. The results showed that adults who participated in such a program were more active on the labor market and have integrated more effectively in their communities.

Being aware of the importance of NFE for the development of students' personality, since 2012 the Romanian Ministry of Education has been implementing the program "To know more, to be better!". The program means that in the second semester of each school year students have for a week a different time table, made up mainly of NFE activities. The program aims to involve both students and teachers in extracurricular activities which valorize talents, competences and preoccupations in various fields of interest. The main benefits of the program consist of developing the professional and transversal competences of the educational factors involved, as well as the degree of cohesion, of team spirit, and last but not least, the good mood of all participants. The main partners of the Ministry of Education in the implementation of this program are the Students' National Council, local authorities, as well as other agencies and non-governmental organizations that are usually involved in the life of schools (Bradea et al., 2012). For all the above reasons, a great number of students and teachers consider this program extremely important for thoroughly understanding the knowledge acquired during classes, as well as for bringing schools closer to local communities.

The analysis of these case studies can extract some common notes for NFE programs. First, implementation of these program should respect the same principles and rules like formal education. It starts from the design of educational objectives based on the informational contents, teaching strategies that will be used and concrete forms of organizing of extracurricular activities. Finally, the results will be evaluated and the whole process will be improved. The second observation concerns the fact that NFE programs are based on specific educational needs of the people, covering those areas which embrace formal harder. For example, we can mention artistic activities, sports, entertainment, games and competition, environment protection, language learning, cross-skills training, trips and visits for documentation etc. The third finding conclusion is the facts that while designing NFE programs follow the same rules as for formal education, specific method of application is more relaxed, adapted to the particularities and needs of the beneficiaries. The fourth point concerns that NFE programs address a large target group, in which an important place is for disadvantaged people in a particular area. NFE role is precisely to help them develop and fit better on the labor market and in their communities. Finally, the fifth finding observation refers to intrinsic motivation, which can help the majority of beneficiaries to engage in NFE programs. This can be explained that those programs are closer to the real needs of these persons, generating a favorable enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Based on these findings, we propose a number of solutions to optimize NFE programs:

- ⊗ Providing financial support needed to implement original extracurricular activities (ECA);
- ⊗ Creating conditions for flexible implementing of diverse ECA;
- ⊗ Concluding cooperation agreements with institutions or public authorities for a better organization of ECA;
- ⊗ Awareness of NFE and ECA among potential beneficiaries;
- ⊗ Recognition of qualifications obtained in NFE;

In conclusion, we can say that the results of this qualitative study confirm the existence of strong interdependencies among the three forms of education: formal, non-formal and informal ones. They are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in the informational content, forms of organization and teaching strategies, providing designed educational objectives. Of course, non-formal education seems to be the most complete one, respecting the specific rigor of formal education, but also, the specific flexibility of informal education. This is one of the most important arguments for that we advocate the promotion of NFE by all educational agents, conducting to a harmonious and balanced development of students' personality.

## References

- Archibald, T. (2015). "They Just Know": The epistemological politics of "evidence-based non-formal education. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 48 (1), 137-148.
- Blândul, V. (2008). *Non-formal Education – From Theory to Practice*. Oradea: Oradea University Press.
- Blândul, V. (2014). *Fundamentals of Formal Education*. Bucharest: ProUniversitaria.
- Bradea, A. et al. (2012). *Non-formal Education. Models of Good Practice*. Oradea: Oradea University Press.
- Cucoș, C. (2003). *Pedagogy*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Dandara, O. et al. (2010). *Pedagogy*. Chișinău: CEP-USM.
- Gee, K. A. (2015). Achieving gender equality in learning outcomes: Evidence from a non-formal education program in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40 (1), 207-216.
- Guțu, V. (2013). *Pedagogy*. Chișinău: CEP-USM.
- Kalenda, J. (2015). Development of Non-formal Adult Education in the Czech Republic. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 1077-1084.
- Kerdphol, M., & Worarat, T. (2014). A Non-formal Education Program to Enhance Drug Abuse Resilience Quotient of Youth At-risk of Drug Relapse: The Approaching of the Transformative Learning Theory and the Cognitive Behavioral Modification Concept. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 152, 916-924.
- Werakul, N., & Worarat, P. (2014). The Main Components of a Non-formal Education Program Using Neo-humanist Moral Principles to Enhance Ethics in Caring the Elderly for the Foreseen Aging Society. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 152, 903-910.
- Yamata, H. (2010). Managing Linguistic Diversity through Informal and Non-Formal Education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 7, 707-713.