15th Edition of the International Conference on Sciences of Education,
Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education, ICSED 2017,
9-10 June 2017, Suceava (Romania)

Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education

Non-formal and Informal Education Activities in Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language

Ileana Silvia CIORNEI

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.icsed2017.11>

How to cite: Ciornei, I., S. (2017). Non-formal and Informal Education Activities in Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language. In O. Clipa (ed.), *Studies and Current Trends in Science of Education* (pp. 100-106). Suceava, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings
<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.icsed2017.11>

© The Authors, LUMEN Conference Center & LUMEN Proceedings.

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

Non-formal and Informal Education Activities in Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language

Ileana Silvia CIORNEI¹

Abstract

Education is defined as an institutional organized activity with educational finalities having three fundamental forms: formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal education is a structured activity whose explicit purpose is teaching students in a school environment. Non-formal learning is a planned activity, with learning objectives and different duration which does not follow a curriculum or lead to certification. Informal learning is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure, not organized in terms of objectives, time and learning support, in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. Communication in foreign languages also is related to key competences such as competence in foreign languages, social and civic competences and cultural awareness and expression. It is very important for learners who study a foreign language to experience real communicative situations in order to develop their language proficiency. Non-formal and informal education activities create the opportunities for the international students who learn Romanian to interact in ways that allow developing knowledge and skills. The activities organized with the international students develop in many directions-Christmas and Easter events, meetings with Romanian students, The International Student's Day, the Scientific Conference and extra mural activities. We may affirm that these types of educational activities play an important role in the learning of Romanian language by the students in the Preparatory year. Despite certain disadvantages, they help to develop social relationships, to improve cross-cultural and language skills and contribute to personal fulfillment and future social inclusion in the Romanian society.

Keywords: non-formal education, informal education, teaching, linguistic competences, intercultural communication.

1. Theoretical Preliminaries

Education is generally defined as the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself for mature life, namely a long process which implies the transformation of the human being in a positive way and with certain finalities.

¹PhD Lect, University of Pitesti, Pitesti, Romania, silviaciornei@yahoo.com.

Etymologically, the word "education" is derived from the Latin *educatio* ("A breeding, a bringing up, a rearing") from *educio* ("I educate, I train"), a word related to his homonym *educio* ("I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect").

The term education is defined by Gaston Mialaret (1976, p.81, as 1) an institutional organized activity according to some educational finalities, 2) a product of the activity, adaptable to the society demands, 3) a process in which several humans involved in different mutual communication and shaping relations while C. Cucos in his Pedagogy defines it as "a planed activity following a social project which implies a personality model" (2006, p. 40).

Taking into account that education also defined as the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits is related to instruction, schooling and learning being "the sum of learning sequences followed by an individual to acquire knowledge, skills or competences" (www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf), according to the intentional criterion of the learning activities, it can have three fundamental forms: formal, non-formal and informal education.

Formal education is defined as the: "...the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded educational system, running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training." (Coombs et al. 1973, apud Costea, Cerkez, & Sarivan, 2009, p.10). It is a structured environment whose explicit purpose is teaching students which takes place in a school environment with classrooms of multiple students learning together with a trained, certified teacher of the subject.

Most school systems follow a set of values that govern all educational choices in that system, including curriculum, organizational models, learning spaces, student-teacher interactions, methods of assessment, class size and educational activities and which typically leads to certification.

The educational policies of the recent years are explicitly described in the Eurostat *Classification of Learning Activities* which defines formal education as "institutionalized learning activities, chronological succession of level and grades, admission requirements and formal registration" (Eurostat, 2006, p. 23).

The Romanian Law of National Education no.1/2011 defines "learning in formal context" as being the institutionalized, organized learning, based on didactic explicit planning, associated with resources,

objectives and duration and finalized with certification and competences. (www.edu.ro)

Associated with the concept of lifelong learning, the term non-formal education came into prominence in the early 1970s; although it was intended to make people look at education in a different way, the practice of non-formal education is as old as society itself. The key elements are a clear definition of purposes, relevance to the needs of a certain group, flexibility in organization and methods.

Cedefop (2008) considers non-formal education made up of intentional planned activities with no learning objectives, while Coombs, Ahmed and Prosser affirm that non-formal education is organized, sustained and develops within and outside education institutions with learning objectives although it does not lead to qualifications: ‘...any organized educational activity outside the established formal system-whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity-that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientèle and learning objectives.’ (Coombs, et al 1973, apud Costea, Cerkez, & Sarivan, 2009, p.10) while The Romanian Law of Education no1/2011 defines it as an intentional, planned activity, with learning objectives and different duration which does not follow a curriculum or lead to a certification. (www.edu.ro).

Informal education is ‘...the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment-from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library and the mass media...’(Coombs et al 1973 apud Costea, Cerkez, & Sarivan, 2009, p.10).

Informal learning is the oldest form of learning and the first one, received in the infancy and lasting throughout a person’s lifetime, being described as a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognized even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

In the glossary on the Quality in education and training, provided by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the concept is defined as “learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure, (...) not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support, (...) in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective (...).with validated outcomes”. Informal learning is also referred to as “experiential or incidental/random learning” (www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_e.pdf).

Informal learning occurs in a variety of places, such as at home, work, and through daily interactions and shared relationships among members of society. For many learners this includes language acquisition, cultural norms and manners. Informal learning for young people is an ongoing process that also occurs in a variety of places, such as out of school time, in youth programs at community centres and media labs. Informal learning usually takes place outside educational establishments, under specialized educators but it does not follow a specified curriculum.

Communication in foreign languages broadly shares the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in different social and cultural contexts. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding and to key competences such as competence in foreign languages, social and civic competences and cultural awareness and expression. Competence in foreign languages requires knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language. Knowledge of societal conventions and the cultural aspect of languages are also important.

Foreign language teaching by its very nature is an interactive process. It is very important for learners who study a foreign language to experience real communicative situations in order to develop their language proficiency.

Students spend a majority of their time outside of the classroom; the way this free time is organized or spent can improve their academic performance. Non-formal educational activities create the opportunities for the international students to engage and interact in ways that allow developing language and intercultural skills.

2. Non-formal and Informal Education Activities Used in Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language

Along with formal education, non-formal and informal education activities have an important role in acquiring Romanian language. They help students adapt to the new cultural environment and develop intercultural communication abilities as they basically involve “authentic material”, that is in contexts when language is used in non-pedagogic, natural communication” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 177).

Although they develop under the educational unit guiding, extra mural activities have the advantage of being attractive, pleasant and useful at

the same time. They encourage free speech and interaction by providing numerous communication opportunities; they enhance knowledge and personal development.

The activities organized with the international students In the Preparatory year develop in the following directions: Christmas and Easter events, 8th of March Day, cultural meetings with Romanian students, The International Student's Day, The Scientific Conference for International Students and extra mural activities: visits to museums, trips, outings and other outdoor activities.

It is very important for international students to become acquainted with our Christmas and Easter customs; they improve their Romanian and it helps them to understand our culture in relation and comparison with their culture. In mid-December, we study texts about our Christmas customs, carols, traditional food, fasting, giving and other things related to this holiday. Usually, we organize a meeting where we serve traditional food (cakes, rolls, apples, nuts) we listen to carols and we decorate the Christmas tree. They are invited to write a wish in Romanian on small cartons and hang it in the tree. Before Easter, students take a short trip to the Folk Tradition Museum at Golesti and learn to paint eggs. Many of them are curious and attend the religious service at night together with Romanian students.

These activities offer them the opportunity to overcome the ethnocentric barriers and develop intercultural competences. These competences promote the understanding of different people and cultures, the acceptance and respect of normality and diversity in all areas of life, of the fact that we have naturally developed in different ways. Intercultural education "aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups". (UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education, 7).

Another activity called Cross-Cultural Identities includes meetings between international and Romanian students at the University Library. It is an activity organized on small ethnic groups where they have the opportunity to socialize, to exchange opinions and to present their countries in a few slides. They can make friends and improve their language oral skills. "Language issues are also central to concepts of education. Linguistic competencies are fundamental for the empowerment of the individual in democratic and plural societies, as they condition school achievement, promote access to other cultures and encourage openness to cultural exchange". (UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education, 11).

Last year, students from Egypt, Vietnam, Cameroun, Guinea and Jordan presented their countries and discussed freely about their place of

origin. Students from Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education and from Psychology program of studies attended the meetings.

The most important event of the year is The International Student Day, a show usually staged at the “Alexandru Davila” Theatre, where the most talented international students recite, dance and sing in front of a numerous audience. The artistic pieces either belong to a specific cultural background or to the Romanian one. It is carefully rehearsed and it is a reason for national and cultural pride. In May 1916, the fourth edition was moderated by students from Jordan and France and included poems by Adrian Păunescu, short humorous theatre pieces by Romanian writers, Romanian folk dances along with classical and national musical pieces belonging to different cultural backgrounds.

Each culture has its values and values common to other cultures. Samovar and Porter (2004) consider that the most important cultural values which influence intercultural communication are those related to: individualism, family, religion, materialism, human nature, science and technology, progress and change, work and entertainment, equality, gender, nature and environment, time, speech, silence, obedience, interpersonal autonomy. Late in May, when their linguistic competences improved, the students participate at the Scientific Conference where the most hard-working students present in front of their peers essays on cultural symbols, important events in history, places of interest in their countries, aspects of Romanian culture. Among the papers presented we may cite: Petra, The Coltan War, Who Built the Egyptian Pyramids, Yesterday and Present-day Syria, Women Status in Cameroun, Famous Romanians -Henri Coandă, New Year Customs in Vietnam.

According to their needs and demands, we organize different activities for a better understanding of Romanian cultural environment, Romanian civilization and improvement of language skills. During the last years, we organized visits to museums in accordance to their interests: the future art students wanted to see the Art Museum, most students visited the History Museum and the Folk Tradition Museum and the Monastery Curtea de Arges. Once a year, we organize a trip to Brasov and Poiana Brasov. On the way, we stop and visit different places of historical or touristic interest. Sometimes, students disappointed that Dracula never stayed at Bran, the alleged Dracula's castle that they all want to see, wanted to go to his real headquarters at Poienari and climb the steps to the fortress on the top. The explanations are given in Romanian and students are encouraged to talk to the natives and to ask questions which help their understanding and speaking skills.

Also, we organized outings in the Trivale forest, at the Zoological Garden. During these activities, since most groups are heterogeneous, they interact between them and with people met which ensures a personal good contact with the real world when they will learn how to express their own views and opinions.

3. Conclusions

Education can be largely understood as a human interrelation based on a mutual and conscious effort between the educator and the educated. Teachers are expected to build the relationship between culture and language and to explore effective ways to bring a cross – cultural element in teaching.

Non-formal and informal education activities are necessary and useful as a way to enhance learning. We may affirm that these types of activities play an important role in the learning of Romanian language by the students in the Preparatory year. Despite certain disadvantages (high costs, time-consuming aspect, linguistic and extra-linguistic disturbing factors), they help to develop social relationship and intellectual intelligence, to improve cross-cultural and language skills and contribute to their personal fulfillment and future social inclusion in the Romanian society.

References

- Costea, O., Cerkez, M., & Sarivan, L. (2009). *Educația non-formală și informală: realități și perspective în școala românească*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
- Cucoș, C. (2006). *Pedagogie*. Iași: Polirom.
- Eurostat, (2006). *Classification of Learning Activities. Manual*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Samovar, L., Porter, R. (coord), (1994). *Intercultural Communication. A Reader*. UK: Wadsworth Publications.
- Mialaret, G. (1976). *Les sciences de l'éducation*. France: PUF.
- UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education. Retrieved from: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf.
- www.edu.ro
- www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf