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**THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING
SCHOOL TRIPS IN TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN**

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Abstract

The learning process involves mediation components such as: language, body language, use of socio-cultural means, symbols, observation. All these components are layered by common values and socio-cultural characteristics. The learning process in school, also the one used in school trips/museums/spectacles, is influenced by theories that argue that learning is not a linear process, but whose success rate is due to a personalized and adapted curriculum. The relationship between museums and schools is a long-standing traditional friendship. Visits to the museum form links between learning content, such as: the introduction of students and motivating them when they are presented with a new learning task, visits offer students the opportunity to use previously accumulated knowledge to develop further discussions. Thanks to this partnership between museums and schools, museums have adapted their exhibitions for taking into account the educational approach. The teaching methods used frequently in the context of carrying out teaching activities in mathematics and explore the environment at the level of primary school age are enquiry, observation and demonstration method (demonstration with substitutes). Curators are trained to assist visitors – students to perceive a different kind of learning. The current study tries to show the development of knowledge of a group of children from the first grade in the field of mathematics and sciences after a series of visits in various museums, exhibitions and spectacles.

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1. Introduction

Museums or exhibitions can sometimes be in an ignorant position because they lack adequate education personnel to receive student visitors. The Ministry has promoted a methodology between 2003-2005 which shows that schools are a very important public category for museums and also supported the



collaboration between schools and museums through skill training needed to develop specific work methodologies for teachers and for museum specialists, the latter being trained in order to become museum teachers.

The principles underlying the collaboration between schools and museums, means respecting identities and needs of the two partners and reorganization methodology, also the methodology for visiting the museum exhibitions (Wojton, 2009). These visits are aimed at a non-formal space in which they can shape a virtual classroom. Visiting museum exhibitions shouldn't be just a one year visit in the context of which the visiting 'rooms with old things and without clear information." Collaboration between schools and museum should be organized so as to contribute significantly to learning, understanding and acquiring of information assimilated into the educational process (Xanthoudaki, 2003). This partnership calls for the following set of principles:

- using all the tools and resources based on traditional and current topics of common interest;
- promoting educational projects in order to achieve the transmission of knowledge and activities performed by teachers in museums.

The relationship between students and museum (as an educational space) can be developed step by step from one visit to another, both through current themes, attractive presentations or workshops as an actual micro-laboratory experiments (Bhatia, 2009). Students may be difficult visitors, but keen collectors, therefore, reach a target group in the context of promoting the public image of museums and exhibitions.

Non-formal education that takes place in Romanian society is limited in time and space just for a week, namely the national educational program called "To know more, to be better!". Due to this fact, independent cultural institutions and social partners create education opportunities and educational programs for the benefit of the entire community.

Museum pedagogy museum gallery is a new term in pedagogy, but not unimportant for achieving education, primarily for students of school age (Cucuş, 2013). The space of the museum and exhibitions led to the formation of the museum specialists' spectrum who are considered museum educators. Following their training in the protocols of collaboration between teaching specialists and the museum, museum educators learned to adapt their specialized discourse in accordance to the age of the visitor, offering different perspectives for the visit. Also due to this segment of professionals and their colleagues, curators, organize exhibitions so as to attract as many categories of visitors, especially young students.

The purpose of museum pedagogy is implicitly guaranteed by the character and potential exposure mode offered by objects in museum and exhibitions thus creating an invisible relation between the exhibit and the visitor. Museum educators assisted by cultural institution that he represents, can reduce the harm of banning interactions with the exhibits through practical activities where visitors can make copies as souvenirs of the artifacts displayed (Ciascai, 2005). These teaching situations are managed in accordance with current teaching methodologies and so enable participants to remain in the teaching scenario designed exhibits in the museum space, even if the presentation is not in accordance with the logic of teaching, but follow the logic of chronological thread of history.

The role of the museum educator is to translate a language unknown and bizarre in one familiar and accessible to visitors, especially young visitors, while noting the transmission objectives and aims of museums and art galleries.

The relationship between school and museum in Romania is still new compared to other countries where it has full rights in the education system of the country and where the teacher is no longer just an attendant, but also participates actively in training within museums and exhibitions. For this relationship to be certified, professional speaking, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth of Romania alongside Teachers Training Bucharest next to the Museum of Art of Romania initiated in 2008 a training program for professionals in education and museum which was entitled "Non-formal education in museums". After the promotion by the Ministry of this type of interdisciplinary communication, led to the development of different educational programs for museums in the country.

Continuous training for specialist in any field in the process of learning throughout life (life-long-learning) lead to the development of inter-institutions or projects for the implementation of concept ideas such as the relationship school-museum all of which are necessary to achieve an educational process to the current standards in a contemporary relationship with other educational companies at home and abroad.

The current study focused on the influence of the learning activities carried out in museums and exhibitions on improving academic performance for teaching children in the first grade as an interdisciplinary approach. The purpose of the present study was to establish the influence of non-formal learning experiences in the museum and exhibitions, as well as theatre and spectacles, for the improvement of school results. The objective of the current study was to record the degree of development of specific skills for the studied classes in first grade children.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A total of 17 first graders ($N_{\text{feminin}} = 7$; $N_{\text{masculin}} = 10$) enrolled at a school in Cluj-Napoca, Romania took part in the current research (Fig.1). The average age of children is $M = 7.72$ years. Children were from families with medium social and intellectual condition. All the children benefit from moral, cultural and financial support in their activities, in school and also outside of school.

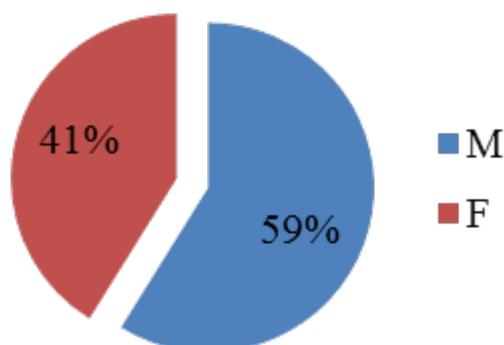


Fig. 1. Distribution of children according to gender

2.2 Materials

The teaching activities consisted in the current study were done in a non-formal environment. To determine the level of knowledge assessment tests were applied in the classroom. The assessment tests were in a number of six on the course of the whole eight weeks in which the research lasted. Development of the evaluation tests was carried out by the teacher who pursued that the tests had elements and presentation to be attractive to students. All evaluation tests consisted of items aimed at assessing knowledge and an item aimed for feedback.

Each test had two sections: one section consisted of exercises in regards to science/math/s/languages and also one section for the student's feedback where he was able to express his opinion about the learning experience he took part. The assessment scale used for the tests was consisted of qualifiers used to grade students in the primary school: I (insufficient), S (sufficient), B (good), FB (very good).

2.3 Procedure

The research was conducted between October 3rd, 2015 and November 23rd, 2015, for a period of eight weeks. It contained a total of six testing papers in order to determine the development and the improvement of learning skills in primary school children through non-formal learning in museums, trips and theatre. All tests were developed following the current national curriculum and were consistent with its requirements and based on the students' previous knowledge.

At this stage children's learning activities were carried out during the eight-week structured period according to the following schedule: in the first three weeks research was conducted under the umbrella-theme "Sound Mind in Sound Body" and in the next five weeks teaching/learning experience was conducted for unit Green World. Thus, students participated in learning activities in the following situations presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Time table for the activities from the study

Date of activity	Theme of the activity
3.10.2015	"Journey to the Centre of the Earth" – Turda salt mine
6.10.2015	"Peter Pan in my city" - theatre
10.10.2015	Trascău Mountains – school trip
23.10.2015	Plant world – the Botanical Garden in Jibou - school trip
14.11.2015	"Magic Trunk" - workshop
23.11.2015	"Candle Workshop" - workshop

Educational activities were conducted according to the methodology specified in the current national curriculum using teaching methods of applied knowledge, strengthening knowledge and assessment methods. The latter were quantified and analysed in the research presented. Teaching was being done using previously assimilated knowledge from the classroom or from non-formal contexts. Knowledge building was conducted exclusively in non-formal context and knowledge assessment was

performed in non-formal and through evaluation tests. Students had an interest in the learning activity proposed in the non-formal environment, showing a pro-learning behaviour.

The information obtained, during the activities was quantified as recorded data according with the dependent variable of the study. To compare results obtained by students in tests paired t-test within SPSS was used, with one study group. We analysed the correlation between six tests during the implementation of learning in non-formal context (museums, school trips)

2.4 Results

The data collected were entered and were processed using the SPSS statistical software. To determine differences between the initial testing and the final testing, the paired-samples test was applied for determining the difference between the means. A statistically significant difference was found between the mean of the group for the two tests respectively after the introduction of learning activities in a non-formal setting.

For the dependent variables there were found statistically significant differences between the means of the first test and the last test considered for $p < 0.05$. Data are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Means of the first and last assessment test

Variables	Mean	N	Correlation	Sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mark/activity1	3,2353	17	,695	,002	-3,24	16	,005*
Mark/activity5	3,7647	17					

* $p < 0.05$, mean statistical significance

Table 3. Means of the first and last assessment test divided by gender

Gender	Variables	Mean	N	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	Mark/activity1	3,40	10	,366	-1,81	9	,104
	Mark/activity5	3,80	10				
Female	Mark/activity1	3,00	7	,008	-2,97	6	,025*
	Mark/activity5	3,71	7				

* $p < 0.05$, mean statistical significance

The data shows a significant difference for the $t(16) = 3.24$, $p < 0.05$, the mean for the first testing is lower than the mean obtained after the final testing. Taking gender separate, a statistically significant difference can be observed for the female gender for $t(6) = 2.97$, $p < 0.05$, there is a significant increase in means recorded by the young female students. The results show an improvement of the knowledge acquired and developed, this development showed in after the museum visits and school trips made for the purpose of learning and consolidation of knowledge, showed as an image in the figure below comparing the average values, the evolution within means obtained by the children in the research (Fig. 2). The comparative analysis of the data led to some conclusions that confirmed the research hypothesis.

The analysis of the feedback section of the tests resulted in data that showed that the young students enjoyed specific things about the museums and the school trips. For the school trip in Turda salt mine the children showed a great interest in the means of transportation to the facility, that was made by train and some travelled for the first time by train, being so young. Others liked the activities that from the salt mine: games and the facts about the salt being explained to them by the teacher. For the activity at the Botanical garden the children really enjoyed the plants and all the new things they learned about them.

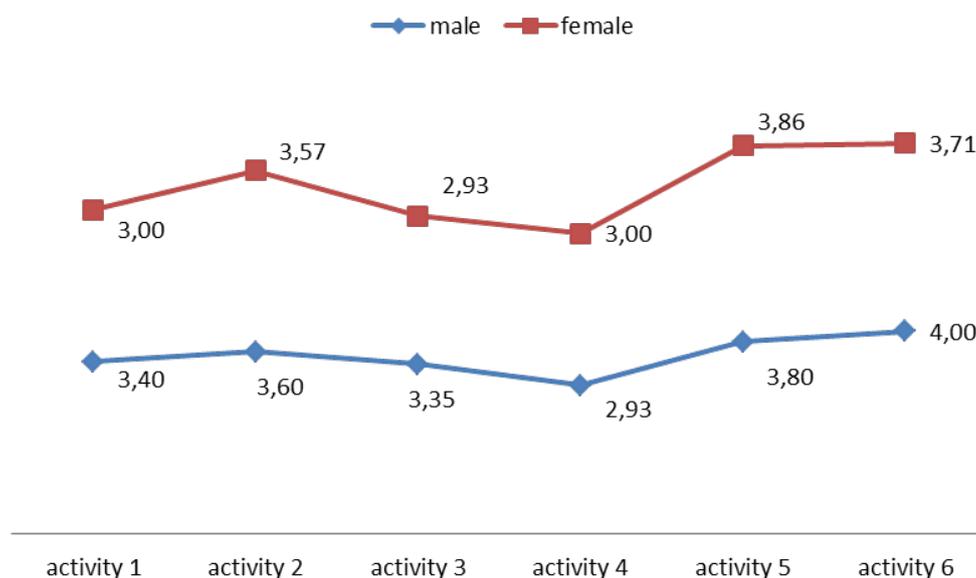


Fig. 2. Means of students' assessment tests by gender

3. Conclusions

The current research has been designed to determine the influence of non-formal teaching and learning in the context of museums, school trips and theatre. The results showed and confirmed the importance of learning in a non-formal environment. The learning process was enriched by new and exciting factors added to everyday learning experience.

One of the limits of the research sample was the small number of subjects. The activities carried out in the non-formal (museum, trips) were limited in number in order to fit in the curriculum and schedule range at which children were fit for learning activities. Museums or exhibitions fail to adapt the content or exhibits to the level of school age understanding and therefore remain few opportunities that can be used in the educational process, also in accordance with the curriculum in Romania.

Influence of proposed activities in the educational context and developed in non-formal (museum trips) cannot be ignored in terms of training and development of children's behaviour in relation to the teacher and colleagues and pro-learning, given the stances in which it was observed the cooperative behaviour of children for the concerned activities.

Schools, museums and educational partners offer real prospects for social development lessons outside the traditional classroom. The classroom can be a real space in the museum, where students receive two types of teachers: the traditional teacher and the museum educator. Teaching at the museum develops both qualifications and specific skills for the disciplines concerned, the visit to the museum (depending on the type of museum) and language skills (oral and written), strengthening the realization of mental schemes and classifications, and space skill development.

Visits to the museum and learning activities in this context invites students to enquire and practice information stored in their long-term memory and also to consolidate new information. In the process, students go from passive visitors to active visitors, becoming the main actors of the visit to the museum / exhibition, the educational process is directed by the teacher and mainly supported by the museum educator. Students are given a wealth in knowledge due to active learning and pleasant stimuli and diversity of content. They are exposed to unlimited space both in a material and temporary, according to the regular school hours. Items consisted in the visit to the museums/exhibitions such as chronological organizing and steps of learning (from primary to complex and current) of exhibits or exposed material, and also the opportunities to achieve other related activities alongside visits of school nature, helps in easy and efficient learning or reinforce the knowledge assimilated.

Collaboration between teachers and representatives of museums has expanded from organizing simple "tours" through museums or art galleries, which had a deficit in active involvement, to collaboration between schools and museums through projects that eliminate the boundaries between standard studied subjects, globalizing and materialized in many activities of multidisciplinary nature.

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