

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA. A BRIEF EXAMPLE FROM BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

Laura Maria Andrada Blaj

PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: The "Nonformalul prinde Universitarul" campaign started from the need of an alternative way in the learning process in the university and some methods to complete the formal system. This project represents the first of this type that was ever done inside the Babeș-Bolyai University and benefited of a great support from both the civil society part and the academic area part. In the following pages, there can be found the definitions of concepts such as non-formal education, informal education, features of academic area, participative methods from non-formal education and how can these be applied in the academic process of learning.

Keywords: non-formal education features and methods, non-formal education in academic area, non-formal education in NGO sector

Introduction

As we all know, education is one of the most important elements in the life of an individual, on which depends its evolution as human species and the evolution of the society in general. In its development, education suffered different changes, both classical and revolutionary. If we refer to the academic educational system, studies show that nowadays, students appreciate the participative methods found in the non-formal education and prefer to be found in their academic life. Romanian academic area is crossing in recent years a process of change, of improving the current programs and different vision on the students-professors relation. Our country has passed through an economic crisis that also affected the educational system by decreasing the number of students; in this context, our university tried to attract the persons who wanted to study in academic area through different original ways. Thereby, from academic branding strategy (Ilieș, Fărcaș, 2013, 150) to non-formal education projects and programs, the university went through several rebranding and repositioning in the potential and actual students' minds. Evidence of attempts to change the mentality in the Babeș-Bolyai University, the subject of the current study, are represented by the researches done to identify those specific elements that could appeal the students to choose the study programs offered here (Ilieș, Fărcaș, 2013, 2014). In support of the above ideas it comes the presentation of the

campaign "Nonformalul prinde Universitarul"¹, developed inside Babeş-Bolyai University and which represents the strength of this study.

Defining non-formal education

The term "non-formal education" and the idea itself were introduced in the late 1960's. According to Fordham (Fordham, 1993), at an international conference in Williamsburg, USA, in 1967, the concerns in that moment were relative to a "world education crisis". The needs that the educational systems had to answer were drawn by the fast paced economic growth: "The conclusion was that formal educational systems had adapted too slowly to the socio-economic changes around them" (Smith, 2001). Therefore a need emerged for creating out-of-school responses to new and differing demands for education. "Although there has always been some importance placed on out-of-school education and acknowledging the importance of community resources for teaching and learning the new term, "non-formal", helped to legitimate this attention." (La Belle, Thomas, 1982).

As a result, new concepts emerged for the new theoretical construct. In other words, "non-formal education means education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programs contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of school children, as well as programs on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development" (www.nonformalii.ro).

To better understand the differences between formal and non-formal education, here is a definition of the formal education: "Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies and – in their totality – constitutes the formal education system of a country. Formal education programs are thus recognized as such by the relevant national education authorities or equivalent authorities, e.g. any other institution in cooperation with the national or sub-national education authorities. Formal education consists mostly of initial education. Vocational education, special needs education and some parts of adult education are often recognized as being part of the formal education system" (www.nonformalii.ro).

Also important to add here is the concept **informal learning** which represents forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalized. "It is consequently less organized and structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis" (Yasunaga, 2014). We should also present some alternatives of these concepts, for the purpose of underlining the complexity of the

¹ Nonformalul prinde Universitarul, translated as the "Nonformal gets the University" and refers to the name of the campaign that will be related in this topic. Also, in the future lines, we will use the original name due to the fact that represents a concept designed in Romanian.

non-formal education policies in the present. Especially in the Nordic countries we can talk about “community education and learning” or “social pedagogy”. According to Smith (Smith, 2014), “this variation of non-formal education has a strong emphasis on association and community participation, a community-based education.”

In general, the interest in this somehow new field of education started not from the educators’ part but from those who designed the youth policies. Why? “The formal education crisis became more acute and came into everyone’s attention. In our times, the focus must be on problems related to population, food, health, environment, civil society, rural unemployment and poverty and the policymakers and not only know that education must reach these problems” (Coombs, 1976). Despite the common knowledge about what this educational system means, non-formal education doesn’t stand on its own and it never should. “On the contrary, non-formal education is simply a convenient label covering a bewildering assortment of organized educational activities outside the formal system that are intended to serve identifiable learning needs of particular groups in any given population: be they children, youths, or adults; males or females; farmers, merchants or craftsmen, affluent or poor families” (Coombs, 1976).

Non-formal education is represented by different things and needs of the above mentioned groups which are highly diverse. The idea behind non-formal education is that learning happens half-way. Students and those who want to learn are part of the learning process need to meet their facilitator/trainers/youth workers half-way and to dedicate to their mission. The ones, who deliver the content need to provoke to discussion, debate and think those who assume the role of the learners.

In the end we should also take into consideration the definition that United Nations Organization gives to the non-formal education concept: “is a worldwide phenomenon systemic out-of-school activities designed to meet specific needs which are to be found in both developed and developing countries. In most cases, non-formal education programs are designed to serve people who are currently not participating in school education or those who could not receive sufficient education in the past, consisting of both adults and children” (Akpama, Ibor & co, 2012). This definition appeared in a report on Nigerian implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the UN and describes the non-formal education as a tool for achieving the second Millennium Goal, universal primary education, and a worldwide phenomenon strong enough to close the gaps of formal education.

The importance of such a definition is to show that the concept has evolved in the later years. Its amplitude, purpose and receivers have grown from the state of a tool providing economic equilibrium on the workforce market to that of a phenomenon able to tackle worldwide social, economic and environmental issues for both children and adults. Defining such a concept, although a possible subject by itself of an entire thesis, it does not only provide the basic terms and institutions necessary for any study, but also shows the dynamics of the field, still active after more than fifty years since it’s appearance.

Non-formal education in NGO sector

The first important mention of the NGO’s was in United Nations Carta, in 1945. By that time these types of organizations have already faced several social issues of the time. In 2001, the number of NGO’s acting on an international level was evaluated as being over 47.000. In Romania we could speak of a reenactment of the position of the ONG’s in the social life after 1990 and an more important increase in the 2000’s, when companies and NGO’s also started to implement social responsibility programs (Ilieş, 2011, 2015). In the Associations and

Foundations Registry held by the Ministry of Justice, on a 07 June 2016 update, 78.203 associations were registered (<http://www.just.ro/registrul-national-ong/>). It's important to know that most of the NGOs in Romania are exclusively based on the voluntary work. Taking this into consideration, we can picture an environment in which motivation is highly regarded and, therefore, in constant search for ways for increasing the loyalty toward the cause. We can identify a series of motivational factors in practicing voluntary work. First of all are the altruist motives, which include notions of solidarity for the least lucky, compassion for the ones in need, identification with the persons that suffer and hope and dignity for the ones disadvantaged. The instrumental reasons are the ones that motivate the voluntary through the idea of winning experience and new abilities, having to do new activities in its free time, new knowledge of friends and personal satisfaction. The third category, the obligation, it refers to moral and religious obligation, the contribution to the local community, restitution of obligation towards the community (Anheier, 2005).

For an NGO it is necessary to maintain the interest of the voluntary, through diverse activities and benefits which these can have within the structure the work for that is gathering experiences, abilities and competencies. That is why most of the NGO use non-formal education methods to improve and motivate their own members. The information and the abilities needed to conduct the projects and programs an NGO is running usually are transmitted by engaging the members in activities like the methods presented in the above chapter. The reason for this is found, in our opinion, again in the mostly voluntary character of the persons working in NGO's. Their work has to be new, engaging from the discovery perspective and has to brake routine so it gives a novelty sense of the activities. In these conditions, most of the NGO's use themselves as a testing ground for the non-formal education methods. The results are the members able to sustain and deliver with success the same methods towards the goals of the organization or the project/program.

Outside the NGOs, most of their ideas or goals focus on change; a challenge of the status quo or an improvement of a social reality, a public procedure or a policy on a restricted area. In this context non-formal education has proven to have the ability to draw attention and to educate both the persons involved in the situation tackled by the project, decision makers, and the general public. Although there are several other ways to publicly draw a problem which perhaps work better on a larger scale, like marketing and publicity, both used by the NGO sector, non-formal education methods have the huge benefit of finding also solutions for the problems directly from the target audience, therefore a durable solution, often with ways of applying it in the real world.

Academic area - features

As Gray Peter showed in its article, "A brief history of Education", the need for a school system aroused together with the need of trained workforce: "If we want to understand why standard schools are what they are, we have to abandon the idea that they are products of logical necessity or scientific insight. They are, instead, products of history" (Gray, 2008). This idea is also supported from the sociology point of view, "Childhood" and "Adolescence" being two social constructs typical for modern society (James, Prout, 2015). In the light of this perspective we cannot talk about systemic education until the late 15th century when, in the German Duchy Pfalz-Zweibrücken territory, schooling for boys and girls became compulsory, starting the era of modern mass education (Sehling, 2006). As it is well known, the academic legacy goes back as far as antiquity, at least for the European culture. The oldest running university in Europe is the

University of Bologna, founded in 1088, but considering the entire world, we would have the University of Karueein, Morocco, founded in 859 AD, still operating as well. Their purpose, as is recognized throughout the education research, was to preserve the knowledge gathered in the antiquity and scattered after the fall of the Roman Empire. In Romania, it is considered that the first school with Romanian instruction was founded in 1583, in Brasov, in the church of Saint Nicolae (Oltean, 1989). The first Romanian university is considered to be “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, from Iași, founded in 1860. As a conclusion of the features of Academic area worldwide and in Romania, we would like to underline two characters that we believe that still influences the decisions in this field, the mass education and culture preservation.

Example of a non-formal education campaign developed in Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca, Romania - „Nonformalul prinde Universitarul”

General description

„Nonformalul prinde Universitarul” campaign was considered by the NGO sector representatives a need in the high-top levels of education – the academic field.

Why do we need non-formal education in the formal educational systems in Romania? Non-formal education has a series of specific characteristics: it reflects intentionality; it offers activities which require participation, consistency and quality of education, offering a response to the target audience's need for a different style of education, due to the inefficient and old fashioned methods of teaching which don't have a substantial impact on today's pupils. We need to take into consideration the possibility of introducing these characteristics in our traditional educational systems. Non-formal education achieves results in non-profit sector - educational field due to its relevance in relation to the specific target audience and has well defined objectives. This type of education has a certain flexibility regarding the manner of activities which take place and uses participative methods. Non-formal education also aims at correlating the education of the young students with the labour market due to the differences between the formal education system and the socio-economic changes that are taking place. It's important to know that this kind of learning supports the direct involvement of the target group (those who are learning) in the planning and organizing curricula content process and that it's dedicated to everyone, no matter the age. This is exactly why students should beneficiate of this kind of education elements. They are mature enough to represent multipliers of the non-formal education methods and concepts, being also academically raised in the long life learning manner (www.nonformalii.ro). It is easy to understand why the project wants to concentrate on students. They are more receptive, curious and more willing to achieve knowledge in different kind of fields.

The traditional methods of education in Romania, the ones we know, started to fade away and no longer have such a great impact. The reason we state this is simply due to the test scores for the national exams and final exams, attendance rates and overall pupil attitude towards the educational system, which in recent years is simply uninterested. This is the first time an organization is involved in this kind of situation in Cluj-Napoca area; Go Free Association takes the lead and implements in premiere the first non-formal education campaign in Babeş-Bolyai University. The reason why this campaign was made is because it creates, together with traditional education, a large complex of knowledge and competences the children and teachers have easy access to and help with the betterment of each individual.

The campaign aims to create a context during 7 days in which both students and professors to get in touch with different kind of activities and methods derived from the alternative educational system. Non-formal doesn't exist to replace the classical system, but to complete it. It represents a way whereby students can develop practical abilities and creativity. This campaign will raise awareness over the non-formal education concept and to be shown what kind of impact this can have on the academic area.

Research

The question behind this campaign was: **how can University offer the youth the best learning frame?** The responses were given by students of the 21 faculties of the Babeş-Bolyai University. Of these, should be remembered the following: I learn best when: “the space where I find myself inspires me”, “when I'm feeling safe in a friendly environment”, “when the professors applies interactive exercises during classes”, “through practical simulation and interactive games”, “experimenting”, “when I'm stimulated to think”, “if I find any practicality of the class”, “when the professor uses visual techniques”, “when I'm not scared”, “when I'm working in teams”, “next to a good coffee or tea”, “when the professors actively involve us”, “when I'm moving, in visits, excursions or expeditions”.

“Nonformalul prinde Universitarul” campaign comes to meet their expectations and to offer a usable alternative to both students and teachers. Go Free¹, the hosting organization meets no competition in achieving and running this campaign. On the contrary, the entire civil society and especially the NGOs in the educational field come to complement the initiative and offer their entire human, financial, time and creative resources. Of the partner organizations, we recall the following: “Dreams for Life” Association, “New Horizons” Foundation, PATRIR – Peace Action Training and Research Institute Romania, Volunteer Center of Cluj-Napoca and OSUBB – Students Organization from Babeş-Bolyai University. The potential of the campaign is a really important and big one and could bring relevant impact and content inside the University. It's really important to mention that this campaign wouldn't have taken place if the Babeş-Bolyai University would have declined the participation into the project. The support of the university, both by offering to the hosting organization the spaces and the necessary resources and helping to promote the event and sharing their media contacts, is really important and vital for the development of the campaign.

The target

¹ More information about Go Free Association can be accessed here: www.gofree.ro

The **target audience** of this campaign was formed of students and formers/professors, trainers, media staff, children and pupils, members of the academic area, members of the NGO sector. The specific target audience for this situation was students and professors in Babeş-Bolyai University. The fourth point reached in the construction and development of the campaign was setting the goals and objectives. In a PR or awareness campaign development, setting the goals represents one of the most important steps. In order the campaign to be a success, the objectives were stated on the following rule: attention, interest, intention and action.

General objectives:

- Informing the target public about the non-formal education methods;
- Offering both the students and professors the opportunity to experiment the non-formal education methods and activities.
- Gathering together a number of 10 friend organizations of Go Free Association and create a strong non-formal education network in Cluj-Napoca that will collaborate with Babeş-Bolyai University.

Specific Objectives:

-Immediate action-

- Promoting the concept of the non-formal education concept integrated in classes among 2000 students and professors from Babeş-Bolyai University;
- Informing 50 professors and PhD students regarding non-formal education methods and actively involving them in specific workshops in order to be able to apply it during classes at the end of the campaign.

-Long term action-

- The campaign will have an outcome or a guide that can be successfully used by those who want to adopt and implement non-formal education methods.
- Implementing non-formal education methods in the next 10 years by all the faculties" members in their teaching activities.

Short Description of the Activities

Through this campaign we intended to raise awareness on non-formal education methods and activities and how this can be successfully used during university classes. In all 24 days of campaign, 7 full events took place inside academic spaces. Of these, two were especially designed for professors and the others were constructed for both teachers and students attendance. These represented concrete sessions of informing and getting in touch with the subject, followed by sessions of trying and experimenting.

The main word to describe this campaign was experimenting. This applied for both students and professors and represented the main focus of this project. Other strategies this campaign development was based on were represented by learning, informing, and (doing).

Also, another focus was on how this movement can turn into a community and could bring benefits for all its members.

Like we previously mentioned, we based our campaign on two strategies designed for our both target public: students and professors. The students got informed in the first activity of the campaign and got the chance to experiment some of the non-formal education methods. In the

following sessions designed for them, they continued to experience the efficiency of these unconventional methods and they had the chance to actually apply it in some activities. In the end, the students had the chance to get together with their teachers and experiment and apply what they learned.

The professors benefited of two actions that were designed exclusively for them. In the first one, they got informed about what non-formal education is, its characteristics, its importance and it can be used in their classes and teaching processes. In the second one, they focused on some specific methods and discovered how to apply it in order to get amazing results with their students during classes.

In the next lines we will describe all the activities that took place between November 5th and November 29th. The first event of the campaign was "The Fair of Non-formal Education Methods" that took place inside the Babeş-Bolyai's cafeteria. The students had the chance to experiment some of the creative non-formal methods. The next event took place in the building of the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and it was designed for both students and professors; the target public was reached. The third event was the Photostory workshop where students were invited to find spaces from university that could be redecorated in a friendly manner and could be adapted to the students' needs. The following event was the workshop designed for the professors, named "Non-formal Education Methods in the University" and it was approached all those methods that could increase the interaction between students-professors in class. The last event of the campaign, designed exclusively for the professors was "Pro Action Cafe", being approached the topic: Educational Projects for the Community.

Communicating and promoting the campaign

In communicating about the campaign, there were used the following of instruments: posters, flyers, stickers and Social Media posts. A number of 100 posters, 500 flyers and 500 stickers were listed and distributed all around Babeş- Bolyai University: campus, cafeterias, and all the 22 faculties. Also, the flyers were shared in all the spaces that students could be found. The Social Media posts started as teaser posts only to be transformed in a serious promotional campaign on Facebook. People engaged and reached the posts in a high number and represented an important aspect in the visibility of the campaign. Also, Go Free Association resorted to every resource they had and used their own online platform, the website www.gofree.ro to promote and write descriptions and impressions of every each event.

Results & Evaluation of the Campaign

The feedback of the campaign was positive; the project managed to get the expected impressions. All the participants have been content with the methods and instruments they experimented during the campaign and they declared their interest to apply the learned methods in the educational process. The participation rate was measured with a list of signatures with all the people that got into contact with the non-formal education and got informed about this aspect. Over 2500 students and over 60 professors and PhD students were actually involved in the campaign.

It's also important to mention that this campaign was done with zero budget; every promotion and activities materials were realized with the partners' support.

Conclusions, perspectives and limits

“Nonformalul prinde Universitarul” campaign represented an important pylon in getting the non-formal education inside the university and academic area. Even if it was a pilot version, the campaign reunited students and professors altogether and informed them about the benefits of using the non-formal education in the learning process. Considering the lack of funding and the quantitative results of the campaign it is our opinion that the project was a success. Also, regarding the general feedback received from both the targeted audience and the community, we can conclude that the main idea of the project, non-formal education in the academic environment, was well received. The project itself, strictly analyzed from the technical perspective, has reached its specific objectives, over 2500 students and over 60 teachers and Ph.D. students were involved in the activities. The objectives regarding both targets were achieved.

The campaign "Nonformalul prinde Universitarul" was a pilot, but other editions will follow. For a better unfolding of those editions, it is beneficial to apply a strategic sense to some perspectives. It is desirable for the future to increase the number of organizations from the civil society, which should be actively involved and include their own resources in order to fulfill the objectives. Also, a perspective worth following would be increasing the number of students and teachers that would benefit and experiment with the methods and instruments of non-formal education. Another perspective would be applying this campaign to a financing program. In this way the organizations involved would benefit from more material and financial resources in order to achieve greater results with their public. Another perspective is one of the long terms objectives; creating or designing a guide that could help the learning and educational process inside the university. This will represent an sustainable outcome. Also, the attention should be focused on strengthen that non-formal network which can bring amazing results for both sectors. If we approach the limitations of this campaign we should certainly speak of the lack of funding which most likely limited the potential of the project. We hope that in future editions solutions could be found on this issue. Another limitation was what we consider an incomplete evaluation of the results and activities. For the project to have durable results and for it to be easily replicated, further analysis of the outcome should have been made.

In the end it is our opinion that the project "Nonformalul prinde Universitarul" can be considered a best practice on its objectives and we express our wish that it will be replicated with even better results.

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