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**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES THEORETICAL AND  
PRACTICAL APPROACHES FOR PRIMARY AND PRESCHOOL  
CYCLES**

Dana Jucan (a)\*, Denisa Ungurășan (b)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,  
dana.jucan@ubbcluj.ro

(b) Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,  
denisa.ungurasan@ubbcluj.ro

**Abstract**

The topic of education in the current society has acquired different connotations that have been generated especially by the unprecedented changes that have been taking place in all areas of social life. The emphasis has been shifting quickly from the informative to the formative. Thus, formal education overcomes the limits of national values and essentials and tends towards a universal character, towards the common patrimony of human values. A unitary curriculum, even if it is characterized by flexibility, can no longer respond on its own to the diversity and training needs of the generations that are being educated today. Schools must develop an educational offer according to the profile of the graduate and as requested by society and professional life. The fulfillment of this desideratum is also dependent on the offer of extracurricular activities that complete the range of curricular activities carried out with the students. As such, aiming to support teachers in trying to meet the expectations and needs of the main educational agents (preschoolers, pupils, parents, the school community, etc.), through this paper we put forward an analytical approach to extracurricular activities, especially those intended for groups, while simultaneously outlining some directions of action specific to non-formal education that we recommend to practitioners.

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## 1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities represent educational manifestations from the spectrum of non-formal activities and are comprised of academic, physical, and artistic activities that are generally planned, implemented, and assessed at the level of the educational institution individually for each class in addition to the subjects that are included in the framework curriculum and the school-based curriculum. Extracurricular activities can also be designed to take place within the confines of the schools, usually outside of normal class times. Extracurricular activities are forms of organizing the activity of students outside of the classes included in the school schedule, namely ways in which students can spend their free time by going through some instructive-educational content that comes to complete the national curriculum and promote positive development in one or more domains (Oberle et al., 2019).

When we talk about extracurricular activities, we are referring to a type of activity that is complementary to the didactic approach provided by the Framework Curriculum and the National Curriculum. These activities can be scientific, artistic, physical, and vocational, and they are dedicated to groups of students who are interested (Țiru, 2007).

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Characteristics of extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities are activities carried out and planned in educational institutions which possess a broader interdisciplinary nature. These activities are led by qualified people (teachers, usually) with a view to completing the forming and development of the personality of the preschoolers/schoolchildren provided by formal education. Such activities are not included in the official curriculum, but they have aims that are meant to directly support the competencies targeted by the school curricula. They have a complementary character to the learning activities undertaken in group/class, with the intent to broaden and deepen the acquired knowledge and cultivate interest in the different areas of knowledge. Thus, we mention the fact that extracurricular activities are organized in groups of preschoolers/schoolchildren and are characterized by the fact that the teacher guides the extracurricular activity of the subdivisions/micro-communities (called groups) consisting of preschoolers/pupils of the same group/class or preschoolers /pupils from groups/classes of the same level and which pursue certain educational objectives, identical or different from one group to another (Bocoș & Jucan, 2019). Additionally, the relationship between the teacher and preschoolers/ schoolchildren within extracurricular settings is suggested “to provide a bridge between child and adult worlds” (Chapin et al., 2022, p. 177) and to facilitate a valuable connection, with a significant impact on children’s socioemotional and cognitive development.

Extracurricular activities that are undertaken in groups are appreciated by all the educational actors involved (preschoolers, young schoolchildren, teachers, parents, educational partners, etc.) due to the characteristics they include:

- i. They capitalize on and develop the interests and abilities of the preschoolers/pupils;
- ii. They organize free time in a pleasant and relaxing way;

- iii. They contribute to the optimization of the learning process first of all but also the teaching and evaluation processes;
- iv. The organization methods of these activities can be traditional, but they can also be modern, original, ingenious, with a recreational character;
- v. Preschoolers/pupils have a free context that capitalizes on their sense of initiative;
- vi. Preschoolers/pupils have a free context that capitalizes on their sense of initiative;
- vii. They have a positive effect through the group work achieved;
- viii. They are characterized by optimism and humor;
- ix. They create a sense of safety and trust for the participants;
- x. They aim at the broadening and deepening of the influences present in the educational process;
- xi. They contribute to the harmonious development of preschoolers/young schoolchildren.

## **2.2. Educational aims targeted by extracurricular activities**

Group didactic activities in an extracurricular context aim at identifying and cultivating the optimal relationship between abilities, and talents, cultivating a healthy lifestyle, as well as stimulating the creative behavior of the learners. Also, extracurricular involvement promotes new learning skills and self-efficacy and exerts unique effects on children's cognitive functioning, especially fluid cognitive functioning [FCF] (Kirlic et al., 2021). Recent research studies have shown that extracurricular activities influence the development of students' soft skills, strongly related to self-regulating learning, motivation, and learning aspects (Feraco et al., 2022), including students from rural areas (Pino-Juste et al., 2020).

Further aims include:

- i. formation and development of an autonomous and creative personality;
- ii. developing social and emotional skills;
- iii. permanent updating of learning contents;
- iv. increasing the quality of the educational activities and the learning outcomes;
- v. developing the skills to relate to others;
- vi. developing creativity and imagination;
- vii. recognition of the activity carried out in extracurricular contexts as a fundamental dimension of the instructive-educational process;
- viii. capitalizing on non-formal education as an educational space for formal education;
- ix. stimulating the interest of students and teachers in getting involved in extracurricular educational projects and programs at the level of each educational institution;
- x. developing skills to apply previously acquired knowledge in various new contexts;
- xi. increasing the graduation rate of schools;
- xii. establishing extracurricular activities as a space for personal development;
- xiii. ensuring equal opportunities for personal progress;
- xiv. reducing the percentage of antisocial phenomena, school dropouts, and absenteeism;
- xv. developing the European dimension of extracurricular activity by increasing the number of educational programs and projects of international cooperation;

- xvi. strengthening the governmental and non-governmental educational partnership by increasing the responsibility of all the social factors involved in supporting the instructive-educational process.

### **2.3. Extracurricular activities categories**

Group teaching activities in extracurricular contexts are varied, have a predominantly optional/voluntary character, and can be designed and implemented with the following in mind:

- i. the possibilities of making the connection with the instructive-educational process carried out in the classroom, respectively with its objectives;
- ii. the general objective pursued and the specific objectives;
- iii. the most appropriate place/space for it.

Group extracurricular activities can be classified based on the criterion of the place where the extracurricular activities unfold and the institution that manages them:

- i. Group activities in an extracurricular context carried out in educational institutions
- ii. extracurricular activities carried out in educational institutions but outside of the group/class and the activity/lesson;
- iii. extracurricular activities carried out in educational institutions by other institutions with educational functions;
- iv. Group activities in an extracurricular context carried out outside of educational institutions
- v. extracurricular activities carried out outside of educational institutions but under their incidence;
- vi. extracurricular activities carried out outside educational institutions by other institutions with educational functions.

Depending on the target group and its size, extracurricular group activities can be:

- i. activities with the whole group of preschoolers or with the whole class of pupils;
- ii. activities performed in smaller groups of preschoolers/schoolchildren;
- iii. individual activities.

Depending on the purpose pursued, extracurricular group activities can be:

- i. predominantly informative activities;
- ii. predominantly formative activities.

Depending on the dominant educational dimension, extracurricular group activities can be:

- i. intellectual education activities;
- ii. cultural activities;
- iii. sports activities;
- iv. activities with religious content;
- v. moral education activities;
- vi. aesthetic education activities;
- vii. ecological education activities.

### **3. Research Questions**

In accordance with the subject of the theoretical study undertaken, our investigative approach was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the principles underlying the design, organization, development, and evaluation of extracurricular activities?
- ii. How can an efficient correlation of the design, implementation, and evaluation of extracurricular activities be facilitated?
- iii. What directions of action could be taken and followed by practitioners to ensure the effectiveness of valuable extracurricular activities that generate authentic learning experiences adapted to the primary and preschool cycles?
- iv. To what extent can extracurricular activities be carried out given the pandemic context?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of our study was to pursue a multidimensional investigation of extracurricular activities, from the perspective of their specific elements, their aims, and typology, as well as the praxiological directions to follow when intending to design, organize, conduct, and evaluate the activities. From a theoretical point of view, we aimed to achieve the following thematic objectives:

- i. An analytical and comparative approach to extracurricular activities that take place within educational institutions and those that take place outside them.
- ii. Explaining the principles underlying the actions of designing, organizing, developing, and evaluating extracurricular activities.
- iii. Establishing directions of action to be followed to ensure that extracurricular activities at the level of primary and preschool education can be implemented, even in the pandemic context.

### **5. Research Methods**

Our investigative approach was supported by the intentional and unitary application of a set of scientific methods, agreed upon by the theory and practice of pedagogical research. Throughout the investigation, we took a systemic, critical, reflective, and forward-looking approach to the subject of our study. Thus, we drew upon bibliographic sources from specialized literature, and we employed complex processes of recognition, understanding, explanation, interpretation, generalization, and the realization of logical inferences, all of which contributed significantly to the construction of a theoretical framework accessible to teachers of the primary and preschool levels and others. In accordance with each major aspect approached theoretically, we applied methods such as research reading (careful reading and critical analysis, followed by taking notes of relevant information); exegetical reading (thematic approach, by providing explanations and interpretations around key concepts); experiential observation (based on the didactic experience gained, we have contributed to a deeper understanding and clear illustration of the topic).

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Design principles of extracurricular activities**

In designing group activities in extracurricular contexts, the premise is that these activities are intended to deepen the compulsory school curriculum on the one hand and to emotionally charge the preschooler/schoolchildren, to capitalize on their potential and skills, to motivate the students in learning on the other hand; in other words, they aim to develop the personality of preschoolers/young schoolchildren. Furthermore, in the design of these activities, we aim at the overall development of preschoolers/young students (cognitive, affective, volitional, relational aspects) by proposing approaches that best meet their needs and interests while considering the human and material resources available to the educational institution.

During the design of extracurricular group activities, certain principles are taken into account to provide quality and efficiency:

- i. Focus on the participants, on their interests and concerns - the design of extracurricular group activities must start from the objectives to establish their content. However, they should remain centered on the interests of the preschoolers/schoolchildren.
- ii. Rigorous but at the same time flexible planning, organization, implementation, and assessment - the design of extracurricular group activities involves comprehensive planning, down to the most basic details, but must remain characterized by flexibility and adaptability.
- iii. Complete information - in the design of extracurricular group activities all resources and sources of information are exhausted, from documents to people.
- iv. Regarding extracurricular activities as a collateral component of the curriculum - the design of extracurricular group activities is a part of the curriculum development process. It fully respects the requirements of a research and development activity.
- v. Wide-scope, a tangible collaboration between all the factors involved - in the design of extracurricular group activities the collaboration between those involved is mandatory and permanent.

### **6.2. The design, implementation, and assessment of extracurricular activities – an integrative perspective**

Group activities in an extracurricular context are goal-oriented. That is why they involve a correlation between design, implementation, and evaluation activities. There must be an interdependent relationship between the three processes for the activity to be successful, and this implies:

- i. Selecting the goals to be achieved through the process of implementing extracurricular group activities.
- ii. Choosing the extracurricular experiences necessary to achieve the goals, planned and organized in advance, according to the characteristics of the extracurricular situation, the aims pursued, the contents (if any), but especially the age and individual characteristics of the learners.

- iii. Choosing the contents through which the learning experience is offered in an extracurricular context according to less rigorous and scientific selection criteria and more focused on the needs and interests of the learners instead. The school/kindergarten is responsible for establishing relevant connections between learners' interests and the curricular requirements (Hirschenhauser et al., 2019).
- iv. Organizing and integrating experiences and contents within the specific extracurricular activities and anticipating the general ways of achieving these two aspects, as guidelines for the effective action of those who organize the extracurricular activities.
- v. Evaluating the effectiveness of all aspects of the previous phases as a prerequisite for ensuring the efficiency and optimization of extracurricular activities. The modalities to achieve this are: the assessment carried out by the main categories of people who will be involved in the extracurricular activities and the assessment through the practical testing of the extracurricular project in order to certify its effectiveness.

### **6.3. Directions for actions for ensuring the offer of extracurricular activities at the primary and preschool levels**

The extracurricular group activities carried out in the educational institution have as objective an intellectual component and one of relaxation/fun. They are held regularly (weekly, semesterly, annually), sometimes based on topics established by teachers or at the suggestion of the preschoolers/schoolchildren: science, cultural, and literary clubs, cultural and scientific circles, artistic and plastic circles (for example, the painting circle), sports, music (e.g. choir, instrumental), computer science, math, theater (e.g. puppet theater, improvisational theater, shadow theater), school competitions, Olympics, celebrations, watching shows and films with educational content, culinary workshops, construction workshops (e.g. LEGO, based on recyclable materials), greening/gardening/decorating activities, charities, first aid courses, traffic and road safety courses, natural navigation activities, thematic fairs, meetings with outstanding personalities (e.g. writers, scientists, various specialists) in specialized institutions (e.g. libraries, astronomical observatory, research centers), etc.

The extracurricular activities carried out outside of the educational institution have as objective both an intellectual component and a relaxing/fun one. They are organized and planned at the level of a group/class, kindergartens/schools, requiring an organizer and an action plan approved by the management or even by the County School Inspectorate: visits, educational routes, viewing of theater shows or movies in out-of-school institutions, excursions, thematic activities included in inter-institutional projects and requiring travel outside of school/kindergarten (e.g. museums, other schools/kindergartens), camps, hiking, out-of-school recreation (for example, in the park). These activities involve some costs that are borne by the participants or sponsors.

When a teacher plans and organizes a group activity in an extracurricular context that requires, for example, travel outside the kindergarten/school (hiking, school visit, educational trip, school camp, etc.), the teacher will consider such elements as choosing the route, establishing the program/operational plan - organizing the learning situations in detail and anticipating the positive, constructive learning experiences (Bernat, 2003; Bocoş, 2002), obtaining approval from the school management and decision-making

forums, obtaining the consent of parents/guardians of the preschoolers/students, establishing the guidelines in regards to safety and behavior rules that need to be observed during travel and during activities and making these known to the participants, setting up the group, preparing the necessary materials, providing financial resources (if it is the case), ensuring an appropriate number of companions for the group of learners.

According to Dulamă (2002) the choice of route, tourist objectives, and activities is a challenge that depends on the attitude and competence of the organizer. The teacher establishes the route, the degree of difficulty, and its complexity depending on the specific purpose and objectives to be met by the proposed extracurricular activity, the physical training, age, and experience of the participants, the season, the means of transport available, accommodation, prices, existing time and financial resources, etc. For students to achieve the educational goals that the teacher set up, the chosen route will include a harmonious, balanced, and varied combination of tourist attractions and recreational activities which would stimulate them, keep them interested, and would place the children into situations that generate positive emotions.

The schedule of the day in which the extracurricular activity takes place must be established with caution depending on the setting and difficulty of the route, the number, and importance of the objectives, the location where meals will be had, and accommodation (if applicable), the means of transport, the size of the group of preschoolers/pupils, the conditions of access to the objectives, the degree of anticipated fatigue in the participants, the interests of the preschoolers/pupils. It is recommended that the program of activities be respected flexibly, leaving the possibility of adaptations and restructuring based on the concrete situations that occur (Lilia, 2015). When attempting to ensure the creation of positive emotional states among learners, it is preferable to visit unforeseen objectives and thus have the group members involved in unique educational activities, but not to give up certain planned actions, actions designed to significantly contribute to achieving the established goals. If the teacher does not have the competence to establish the route and the daily program, to choose the tourist objectives and activities, then it is advisable to do the necessary research or ask for the opinion of a person with expertise.

Following many practical recommendations and imperatives (Boțan & Costea, 2006) we emphasize the idea that the responsibility assumed for carrying out a group activity in an extracurricular context obliges the teacher to the permanent supervision of the participants and immediate pedagogical interventions to prevent or remedy problematic situations. To ensure the efficient accomplishment of complex learning situations in which students practice attitudes, acquire valuable information, and have beneficial emotional experiences, a responsible preparation of the learning environment is required, aiming at clearly formulated educational objectives, careful monitoring of activities, and adequate feedback. One of the biggest challenges in the development of extracurricular activities is to ensure the active involvement of learners in contexts that allow them to practice new or constructive behavioral repertoires (Cortellazzo et al., 2021).

It is imperative that the design, organization, and development of educational activities, including group activities in extracurricular contexts, must exist in a complementary relationship with evaluation activities and ensure the reverse connection, both in order to assess the efficiency and relevance of the activities as well as with a view to optimize future programs. The evaluation of a trip, for example, can be



done by making a photo album, initiating discussions and proposals for other trips, making collections with the objectives that were targeted, building models/dioramas, creating a short film, etc.

Considering the particularities of the recent pandemic context and the multitude of changes generated in the educational environment, globally, we emphasize that group activities in extracurricular contexts can also be successfully carried out online. Various institutions, such as museums, memorial houses, and art galleries have met the information and training needs of students, as well as the general public, through virtual tours or non-formal educational activities carried out on specialized platforms. We offer some relevant examples and suggestions in this regard, by virtue of the fact that we support the need to continue extracurricular activities regardless of the format (physical, hybrid, online) in which the educational act is framed.

- i. Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural History  
<http://www.imagofactory.ro/muzee/antipa/antipa.html>  
<https://antipa.ro/product/sah-online-la-muzeul-antipa/>  
<https://antipa.ro/product/galileo-tehnic-online/>
- ii. National Museum of Romanian History  
<https://muzeulvirtual.ro/tur-virtual/>
- iii. National Museum of Transylvanian History  
<https://www.mnit.ro/turlimes/>
- iv. Muzeul Național de Artă al României  
<https://www.mnar.arts.ro/exploreaza/36-tururi-virtuale>
- v. Ion Creangă Memorial Museum  
<http://mmich.muzeu-neamt.ro/tur-virtual.html>
- vi. Louvre Museum  
<https://www.youvisit.com/tour/louvre-museum>
- vii. NASA  
<https://www.nasa.gov/stem/forstudents/k-4/index.html>

Nowadays, and even before the COVID-19 pandemic, new visions and practical approaches for extracurricular activities were internationally promoted. The offer of extracurricular activities at the primary and preschool level needs to emphasize inclusion and variety, encouraging all students “to participate in a variety of activities, giving them opportunities to broaden their interests, learn about many topics, and interact with a wide range of peers and adults” (Lang, 2021, p. 16). Including intercultural education in primary school and kindergarten could be achieved through extracurricular activities, according to the results of some recent research data (Adili et al., 2022; Krsteska-Papic, 2019).

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, group teaching activities in extracurricular contexts are likewise aimed at achieving the educational ideal and promoting the values that it comprises. These types of activities tend (Bocoș & Jucan, 2019):

- i. to make the most of the potential of preschoolers;
- ii. to develop their motivation and their receptivity to the new;

- iii. to form an appropriate attitude towards certain situations of knowledge;
- iv. to develop their courage to act;
- v. to select relevant contents – in agreement with the current and forward-looking requirements of the society, but also with the interests and educational needs of the individual – and flexible contents – open and permeable in the new contexts;
- vi. to ensure the coherence of the information obtained in extracurricular contexts, in the diachronic and synchronic plan;
- vii. to ensure the integration of approaches in extracurricular contexts, respectively multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches;
- viii. to ensure the operability and functionality of the acquisitions of preschoolers/young schoolchildren: knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, etc;
- ix. to ensure the optimal balance between the formal curriculum, the non-formal, and the informal one by increasing the weight of the latter as the school-age increases.

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