

# STUDY REGARDING THE SOCIAL- AFFECTIVE MATURITY DEGREE THROUGH OUTDOOR EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** *The present article promotes the outdoor education activities as an educational alternative by stimulating certain real situations and implies the resolution of certain tasks in the physical, psychological and emotional aspects. As a result, the participants assimilate a series of abilities and capacities that contribute to the improvement of personal performance, the encouragement of certain social acceptance attitudes, such as tolerance, cooperation, mutual help, taking responsibility, inner trust and team work. The main objective of this research is determined by the interpersonal social-empathetic relationships, by following and learning to overcome difficulties and by personally improving and developing social relationships. The dynamic character of the outdoor activities also determines different attitudes towards the effectuated activity and different relationships between the members of a group, while the present research studies these interpersonal relationships as well as the place of each subject within the group. The hypothesis has been verified from the experimental point of view, one proving the possibility of creating interpersonal relationships through the processes of manipulated social learning given by the outdoor education activities. The research confirmed the factors of interpersonal progress*

**Key words:** *social-affective maturity, outdoor education activities.*

## 1. Introduction

One of man's constant concerns of all time is modeling one's personality and facilitating the adaptation of its members into society, especially its young ones.

In this sense, the contemporaneous society imposes an education based on forming the modern man according to his real aptitudes, thus outlining the coordinates of his personality that presumes the multilateral development from the physical, intellectual,

ethical, esthetical, etc. points of view in relation to society's requests, such a fact that requires the restructuration, the optimization and improvement of the entire educational system. Within the non-formal educational system, the outdoor education activities can be included into a larger frame, introducing other parameters, indicators and referential framework in appreciating the formative act and represent the non-institutionalized method of accomplishing education.

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The outdoor education activities refer to organized learning that takes place outdoor and are based on the experimental philosophies, theories and practices and on the ecological education. Outdoor, the educational programs sometimes imply residential experiences or traveling ones in which youngsters participate to a broader range of activities.

The outdoor education activities allow the plenary existence of motile experiences in nature, offer a broader range of moral practice, incite to action, determine a state of biological balance, engage and animate the personality. In the same time youngsters learn to understand themselves better, to know the world better (Moldovan E., 2007).

Outdoor education activities stimulate real situations and imply certain task resolutions. "An experimental learning method that implies using all of one's senses. It takes place generally, but not exclusively, through the exposure to the natural environment with implications in the physical, psychological and emotional aspects. As a consequence, the participants assimilate a series of abilities and capacities that contribute to the improvement of personal performances, while the awareness of obstacles contributes to the improvement of team performances, both within the exercises and real life" (Humberstone B.J., 1997: 5).

By effectuating outdoor education activities youngsters exemplarily mobilize their body and mind resources to a much higher level than normally. People are much more sensitive when they are outside, in nature. Here, free from all social relationships and obligations, unsupported by the multitude of artificial prostheses that back up the city life, they remember they are part of a greater natural system, gradually discovering their inner being and becoming more receptive and less conformant the discriminative

stereotypes based on race, social position, religion, etc. Outdoor life shows man how weak he is in the midst of nature and forces him to collaborate and rely on others. The programmed experiences trigger some sort of a fear factor and force him to question himself and the life he's leading and, in the same time, answer these questions that he otherwise would have never popped to mind (Festeu D., 1999).

The outdoor activities are effectuated with the help of the programmed experiences that take place in a secure spot (cord garden) or during a certain trip. The youngsters are engaged in different "happenings" (actually, more or less adventurous events prepared by educators) that, generally, require the participant's creativity and teamwork in solving certain problems. For such educative experiences one uses: tent hiking, boat trips, theme park activities, group games. As a formative activity, the "outdoor education" activities are conditioned by the level of subjects involved, by the degree of developing one's knowledge, by the applied pedagogical methods, by their appreciation and action as components that inter condition themselves.

The outdoor education activities, in comparison to the traditional methods, "*the experimental education*", produce much stronger and much durable educative effects concerning the attitude of being calm and responsive to certain complex, innovative and communicational situations, and for other aspects of the modern life.

The didactical identity of this type of education is ensured by the fact the physical and cultural natural environment offer the learning framework.

## **2. Material and methods**

The present study capitalizes and promotes the outdoor education activities

with the purpose of improving the interpersonal relations following new perspectives of educating youngsters through the implementation of certain interactive activities that had in mind the following *objectives*: determining the interpersonal affective-empathetic relationships, developing and improving social relationships and developing a much tighter relationships with the environment.

The purpose of this research is to outline the fact that outdoor education activities represent an exceptional alternative of optimizing the social climate.

The hypothesis of the research: one starts from the premise that the elaboration and appliance of certain outdoor education activities within the students' practical experiences will influence the social climate of the group, the interpersonal relationships and implicitly, will improve the group cohesion, expressed by a high cohesion indicator.

The research has been effectuated on a one year period (6 stages in 3 days) in a location specialized on outdoor education activities at Paraul Rece, on a sample of 13 students.

The activities included:

- Cord garden activities; gigantic ladder; climb board;
- Exercises regarding acceptance, taking responsibility and supporting the team members;
- Activities regarding the resolution of certain complex practical exercises followed by a debate and by an analysis of the own experienced situations;
- Hiking: "the nature school", contemplating nature, observing the environment and following the journey and the phenomena that take place in nature.

Researching certain aspects of the work group structure and dynamics form our activity domain (student groups) receives through the sociometric method possibilities

of discovering different relationships from these groups in question. Starting from this fact, that within the groups that present positive relationships (sympathy, friendship, collaboration, mutual help) the activity is more efficient, the sociometric method tries to study these preferential relationships in establishing the group's level of cohesion and its psycho-social elements that determine the latter (Holban, 1971).

The sociometric method is based on the inquiry technique (the so-called sociometric test). The particularities of this method, different from all the others, refer to the content of the questions, the way of dealing with the questions and way the answers are taken into account. Based on the analysis of each subject's response, one forms the sociometric matrix to determine the group position that each subject has taken and the relationships with the others. One has calculated the sociometric status indicator and the preferential status indicator for each student.

In the sociometric analyses the main purpose represents the structure of the social and human relationships within the group. For highlighting this structure, based on the sociometric matrix, one can build the group's sociogram, which actually refers to a graphic representation of all the types of socio-affective relationships from the studied collectivity.

The sociometric status indicator gives the image on the position that each subject takes in relation to the group he/she belongs to. The sociometric indicator takes the value 1 when a member of the group gathers choices from all of the others.

The preferential status indicator shows the interpersonal relationships between the subjects of the group and identifies the most popular subjects, the least popular one, the neutral one and the isolated one. The sociometric matrix shows the position that each subject takes within the researched group.

### 3. The results of the research

After stocking the data for both groups (the experiment and the witness one) to the initial and final testing, one has calculated the sociometric and preferential status indicators to both groups in a downward value order to the initial and final testings.

Based on the values given by the sociometric matrix we have built the comparative graphic (fig. 1) of the sociometric status indicator values to outline the existent social climate before and after implementing the outdoor education activities program.

Table 1

*The sociometric status indicator*

Initial testing		
Place	$I_{55}$	Code
1	0,66	D
2	0,50	L
3	0,33	C, G, M
4	0,25	B
5	0,16	F, I, J, K
6	0,08	A, H
7	0	E

Table 2

*The sociometric status indicator*

Final testing		
Place	$I_{55}$	Code
1	0,41	L
2	0,33	M
3	0,25	A,B,C,D,G,H,I,J,K,
4	0,16	F
5	0,16	E

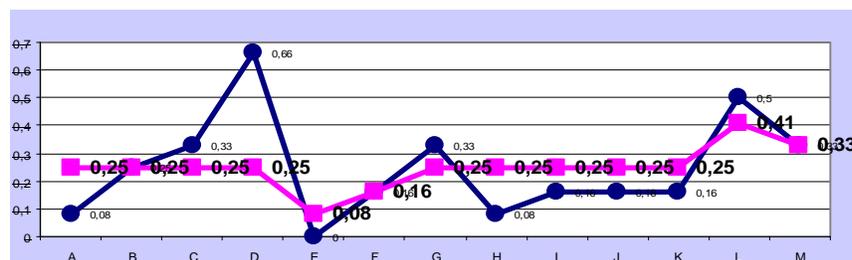


Fig. 1. *The dynamics of the sociometric indicator values to the student groups*

The sociometric status indicator gives us the position that each individual takes in the group he/she belongs to.

As one notices, to the initial testing, the subject D is the closest to value 1 ( $I_{55}=0,33$ ) followed by the subject L ( $I_{55}=0,50$ ). Three of the group members have a status of  $I_{55}=0,3$

Three subjects have a status close to 0  $I_{55}=0,08$  or even subject E with  $I_{55}=0$ . this member gathers the highest positive score and is considered to be, in the sociometric

analyses, the informal leader of the group. In our case, the subject D, having a  $I_{55}=0,66$  is the informal leader of our group. If we analyse the sociometric indicator values obtained by the students in the final testing, one has noticed that the group has become much more unified, the values being registered between 0,41 (1 subject) and 0,08 (1 subject), the difference being of 0,33. To the initial testing one has noticed a difference of 0,66 between the first value (0,66) and the last

one (0). The most accepted subjects are L and M and the most rejected one is E. There is a compact group of 9 subjects: A, B, C, D, G, H, I, J and K that have had  $I_{55}=0,25$ .

At the first appliance of the sociometric test subject D has marked

himself out, being the informal leader of the group, while at the second appliance, the final one, the subject went on the second position giving his place as a leader to subject L.

The next calculated indicator was the preferential status one:

*The preferential status indicator*

Table 3

Code	D	L	B	M	H	G	J	C	A	F	K	E	I
$I_{sp}$	0,50	0,41	0,16	0,16	0,08	0	0	-0,08	-0,16	-0,16	-0,16	-0,33	-0,41

*The preferential status indicator*

Table 4

Code	L	H	B	M	D	A	J	G	K	C	F	E	I
$I_{sp}$	0,33	0,25	0,16	0,16	0,08	0	0	-0,08	-0,08	-0,16	-0,16	-0,25	-0,25

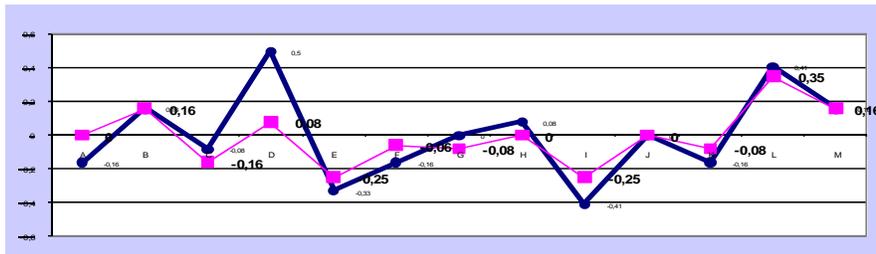


Fig. 2. *The dynamics of the preferential indicator values to the student groups*

To the initial testing we have identified 5 subjects, 2 neutral and 6 isolated, the difference between the most popular one ( $I_{sp}=0,50$ ) and the most isolated one ( $I_{sp}=0,41$ ) being of 0,91. To the final testing we have identified 5 subjects, 2 neutral and 6 isolated, the difference between the most popular, L, ( $I_{sp}=0,33$ ) and the most isolated one, I, ( $I_{sp}=0,25$ ) being less than 0,58. From all these gathered data one can say that the collectivity has become much more unified, the scattering value of  $I_{sp}$  being much lower that at the initial testing. We have ranked the  $I_{sp}$  values in a downward manner to obtain the subject hierarchy depending on the preferential status

indicator. To the final testing, analyzing the graphic, one has noticed that subject L is the most popular one with  $I_{sp}=0,33$ . The subjects accepted by the group are: H, B, M and D. Subjects A and J are perceived as being indifferent, having a  $I_{sp}=0$ . The most isolated ones are the subjects E and I, with  $I_{sp}=-0,25$ . The isolated subjects are G, K, C and F having the preferential status indicator under 0. If we are to compare the two indicators, we can notice that the informal leader of the group, subject D, come always first even if we take into account the number of rejections.

The inquiry asks for the identification of the admired qualities to the subjects that have been preferred and, also, the

enumeration of the flaws that have determined the rejections in the first place. Though these questions one has verified the student's system of values as well as triggering the awareness of the positive aspects in contrast to the negative ones from the behavioral situations that they have encountered.

#### 4. Conclusions

To what the social climate and the interpersonal relationships are concerned within the experimental program, one has noticed that the outdoor education activities have determined the overcome of egotism, tolerance, self-control, group cooperation, all highlighted by high values to the final testing of sociometric and preferential status indicators. In the process on interpersonal interaction, the group members have motivated themselves as a rough guide to what the personal and collective values are concerned. The outdoor education activities have contributed not only to the improvement of the interpersonal relationships but have had a positive aspect on the sanogenic aspect by maintaining the student's optimal health state. The socialization program through the outdoor education activities is the result of wanting to form attitudes, conceptions, beliefs, personality traits, by assimilating norms, collective cohabitation regulations and social values.

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