PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE ENVIRONMENT – TEACHING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. This paper considers the possibilities for developing a partnership between a school and its surroundings by means of integrated teaching outside the classroom. High quality collaboration between a school and its surroundings requires that both partners participate actively in the process of establishing and developing a partnership that would meet the needs and interests of both stakeholders. From the viewpoint of the current changes in schools, a partnership with the community is a necessity, because schools are expected to open up towards their surroundings and decontextualise school knowledge, which implies a bigger deal of learning outside the classroom for the purposes of the implementation of school curriculum contents.

Important possibilities for building partnership between a school and its surroundings lie in carrying out school activities in authentic environments in the surroundings, especially by integrated outdoor teaching. By increasing the contribution of integrated teaching and learning outside the classroom in the process of school education, students, schools and the environment all benefit, a good base for decreasing the gap between formal and informal education is built and a unique educational space for the acquisition of knowledge and experience is created.

Key words: school, environment, integrated outdoor teaching, partnership.

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the school reform process, the need arises to introduce changes regarding the segments of acquiring quality knowledge and opening educational institutions more towards their immediate environment. In that context there exists an intensive search for the innovation of school work, as well as for new forms of cooperation between schools and their surroundings, which would exceed the frameworks of a traditional cooperation and enable the school to be built on the vision of a future society, the society of knowledge. Since teaching is the central school activity, a change in the quality of school...
knowledge and cooperation between schools and their environments unavoidably includes teaching activities, especially in the part of the contextualization of the process of learning and teaching. Accordingly, it is a justified tendency to realize teaching activities in different environs from the immediate surroundings, through informal contexts which offer fantastic possibilities for firsthand learning, i.e. learning by means of immediate contact with the objects of knowledge. Such a model of teaching activities, known as integrated environmental education, has multiple advantages in comparison with the traditional model of school work: as to learning, it creates a space for applying experiential learning and using various teaching strategies which contribute to the raising of the level of knowledge quality; with regard to the contextualization of the content acquired in school, the acquired knowledge becomes lasting and more functional; in the part of intensifying the cooperation with the environment, i.e. in the part of the active partnership of students and teachers, as well as the school as an integral part of the community. The necessary condition of the quality realization of integrated environmental education is the development of a partnership between the school and the environment within which it is crucial to have active participation of both partners and the satisfaction of mutual needs and interests. From that perspective, integrated environmental education is a link between a school and the community, which is of the utmost importance not only for the school but also for the community. From the pedagogical aspect there is undoubtedly a need for increasing the ratio of integrated environmental education in the process of school education, not only due to the requests for the school system reform, but also due to the needs of the schools for better positioning in the system of social conditions. Bearing in mind the importance and need for the implementation of this teaching model into a school practice, it is necessary to consider the issues connected with the changes in schools and the development of partnership between schools and their environment, as well as a more thorough consideration for essential determinants of environmental education.

1.1. School changes and building partnership between a school and its surroundings

Historically, schools as social educational institutions have always been connected to the local and wider social community. Through different historical periods, schools have always been a faithful companion to social change – changes in the society affected changes in schools, too. Today, we can safely assert that the role that schools have been playing is unsustainable and inadequate in the modern society characterized by new educational needs of each and every individual. Accordingly, new requests for educational changes are posed, which indicate a development of different relations between a school and the society, especially the local community in which schools are immersed. Schools can no longer be a passive receiver of social changes, a shadow that reflects different social influences. Therefore, there emerges a need for changes caused by this new position the school has and its relation with the environment, a need to establish and develop partner relations.

The convenience for developing partner relations between a school and its surroundings are changes in modern society, contemporary reform processes in the educational system, democratization of schools, and their intense need to open to local community and establish quality collaboration with the latter. The need for change that comes from within the school is just one of the reasons that cause changes in the school context, and impose the need for a different positioning of a school in its environment. In fact, modern schools are increasingly outgrowing the frames of institutions specialized in transmitting knowledge,
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and are transforming from formative to constructive and transformative educational institutions which can readily accept changes, new educational approaches and new relations within and beyond their own borders. According to the requirements of a modern society, the society of learning and knowledge, schools with their staff and other resources can be initiators and instigators of change in their immediate environment (Andelković & Stanislavljević Petrović 2013c). However, viewed from the critical aspect, especially in the context of our social conditions, such an attitude can be accepted only as a distant vision of a future school, because it is a well-known fact that schools belong to merely one of the subsystems which are conditioned by the development of society in general. On the other hand, it is utterly justified to talk about the needs for better positioning of schools in a society, as well as for the necessary changes.

In order to achieve such a vision of the school, many changes in the school context are needed, both within the school and in the surroundings in which it is located. Seen from such a viewpoint, changes in the school context are a necessity, because in order to build a partnership with the environment, schools need to change continuously in the future, to transform and improve, either as a whole or in specific segments. In addition to that, it is pointed out that changes in school represent the condition of its survival, and at the same time, the best answer to the changes in society and its requirements towards the school (Kostović 2005). Having in mind that school is a complex living system, consisting of a number of subsystems, it is clear that the introduction of organizational changes is a complex task that requires a longer period of time (Kostović & Oljača 2012).

Current changes, continuous and rapid, significantly affect the changing relations between a school and its surroundings through redefining the role the school has, from being a passive receiver of social changes to becoming an active partner and a creator of change, both internally and externally. Taking this active position requires structural and organizational changes, especially in the direction of improving the quality of schoolwork and school organization. Improving quality of the school is closely connected to the development of partner relations with the surroundings. Together, they can be regarded as a continuous process which includes the active involvement of all the participants (teachers, support staff, principal, parents, pupils), but also of all the interest groups from the local community. The implementation of changes in schools needs joint action of all compatible roles of the stakeholders in the process, among which stakeholders from the local community and the school board have the important role, and if they take part in planning and implementing change, by cooperating, monitoring and evaluation, they can contribute to increasing motivation, creating conditions, respecting efforts, and giving public recognition to school and individuals, rather than causing conflict, numbness, and problems in the process of accepting change (Fullan 2001).

The inevitable part of school change is the development of cooperative relations between the school, individuals and institutions in the local and wider social environment. Therefore, it is necessary to “ensure the information flow in all directions and a consultative process to assure the alignment of goals in schoolwork and the respect for the needs and possibilities in the creation and implementation of the curriculum” (Hebib 2009, 40). However, it is very important that the cooperative relations not be reduced to declarative cooperation, but to develop a dynamic relationship between the school and its environment with a continuous interaction and a partnership that establishes, evolves and changes according to the specific conditions and needs. Developing partnership between a school and its surroundings strongly influences a change in the positions and roles of all the
stakeholders, in the process of education, as well as in the school institutional functioning. On the other hand, the partnership requires the active participation of the local community in the educational schoolwork, because “the local community is a source of financial, technical and professional support in the curriculum implementation and schoolwork” (Hebib 2009, 40). In this respect, parents have an important role representing a link between school and the local community. A functional cooperation with parents has a wider social significance and a priceless value, both for the institution itself, its development and functioning, and for the parents themselves and their children (Stanisavljević Petrović 2010). Parents are naturally concerned for the welfare of their children, for their education, and on the other hand, parents who are professionals in different disciplines can take part in the schoolwork and involve other stakeholders from the immediate surroundings. From this point of view, it is especially valuable to introduce consultants from various fields of interest in the educational schoolwork, starting with tasks related to the planning and realization of diverse activities, equipping school facilities and organizing different actions of common interest for school and local surroundings. Having all the stakeholders from the immediate surroundings participating in schoolwork creates a good foundation for building and enhancing relations with the immediate surroundings, which provides benefits for both sides. Building partnership with the local community supports the school in opening up to parents’, community’s and pupils’ needs. The more intensive participation of the parents and the local community in schoolwork helps expand and enrich the repertoire of school activities and develop the process of promoting different school activities in the environment.

For the implementation of partner relations between a school and its surroundings, it is very important to organize different school activities in the authentic areas in the environment. In this regard, integrated teaching outside the classroom represents a specific implementation model for the partnership between a school and its surroundings. Fundamentally, it is assumed that teaching in the authentic environment in the local surroundings significantly improves the partner relationship between a school and the local community. In fact, it is believed that the realization of integrated outdoor teaching provides multiple options for building a partnership because it allows achieving the following goals through mutual cooperation and a functional connection:

- connecting goals on the personal, family, local, state and society level;
- integrating formal, informal and non-formal education;
- thinking of school and its surroundings as of a coherent dynamic system and a learning space;
- enriching the scope of school activities;
- achieving unity in affective, cognitive and psychomotor area of learning;
- achieving the unity of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors in an individual that is continuously altering;
- connecting curricular and extracurricular experiences and knowledge;
- having an interdisciplinary approach to learning and teaching;
- achieving unity of curricular, extracurricular and social activities in the community;
- directing the holistic development of pupils in three areas – cognitive, psychomotor and affective.

A wider application of integrated teaching outside the classroom encourages schools to cooperate with the local community, to open towards the immediate surroundings and to build partnerships with the stakeholders from the local community. Therefore, we
believe that the implementation of integrated teaching outside the classroom gives a valuable contribution to achieving the vision of the modern school aiming to create a coherent educational space (classrooms and authentic environments in the surroundings), which requires functional cooperation and developing a partnership between school and its surroundings.

1.2. School activities in the authentic environments of school surroundings – integrated outdoor teaching

The development of a partnership between a school and its surroundings is to a large extent conditioned, on one hand, by the school’s opening towards the immediate local community, and on the other by the community’s opening towards the school and accepting the school as an equal actor in the process of social change. The existing cooperation between a school and its surroundings has mostly been declarative and should grow into a partnership which seeks to meet the needs and interests of both sides: the needs of a school which aims to reform, innovate and enrich its educational work, and the needs of local community which aims to integrate and actively participate in school life and work.

From the perspective of the school, the local community gives opportunity and space to organize diverse school activities, both curricular and extracurricular. Therefore, the possibilities for building a partnership between a school and various institutions, non-governmental organizations are extremely wide in this area. In this context, the partnership between a school and its surroundings can be analyzed on at least two levels:

- the level of using space in the local community for carrying out different school activities;
- the level of participation of various experts from the community in school activities, organized both within and outside the school.

It is well known that a larger number of ways of establishing a partnership between the school and the environment exist in practice; however, we believe that there are still many possibilities to implement curricular activities in diverse places in the surroundings. Since outdoor teaching includes all the essential elements of the levels mentioned above (the change of learning space and engagement of experts in different fields), it can significantly affect the development of partnership between the school and its immediate local surroundings.

Although it has appeared only recently in pedagogical literature, the phrase outdoor teaching has deep roots in pedagogical practice. A large number of pedagogic classics, like Comenius, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and many others, pointed out the importance of outdoor teaching in terms of realization of the educational work in authentic, most commonly natural environments (Anđelković & Stanisavljević Petrović 2013b).

Recently, outdoor teaching has gained significant theoretical support form adherents of the approach of learning in context, which points out that the authenticity of the environment serves as a source of information, a context for learning and teaching and as a place for practicing the acquired knowledge and skills (Bognar & Matijević 2005; De Zan 2005; Szczepanski 2009). In this regard, a large number of authors emphasize the significance of the connection between the elements of the context and the process of learning, while emphasizing the importance of the elements in the physical context (Falk and Dierking 2000; Wilson 1995; Rickinson 2004; Tunnicliffe et al. 1997; Barker et al. 2002). However, this attitude may be subject to criticism, for although the importance of
the physical context in the process of teaching is indisputable, one should not neglect the influence of social elements, especially when one bears in mind that the process of teaching is always realized in a social context, wherein the roles of teachers and peers are undeniably significant.

Although the idea of realizing educational work in different environments is not new, it has been expanding over the last few decades, and finding its practical application in most of the developed countries. The implementation of curricular activities outside the classroom is not that present in our educational practice, which is indicated by a small number of studies related to this issue (Đokić Ostojić & Stanisavljević 2011; Janković 2009).

Modern reform processes in school also speak in favor of outdoor teaching in school education (Anđelković & Stanisavljević Petrović 2013a). In fact, there have been a number of requirements for innovating the process of teaching in order to prepare young people for an active life and work in the immediate surroundings in a better and more successful way. According to this tendency, there is an intense aspiration to help teaching become an integral part of the life context for pupils and to take place in the surroundings students live in (Anđelković & Stanisavljević Petrović 2011). In this regard, the partnership between a school and its surroundings allows the process of teaching to be richer, more intentional and more adjusted to the pupils, as well as to give concrete and functional knowledge. The realization of the educational process in different outdoor environments has multiple benefits, both for the school and its teachers, and above all for the pupils, as well as for the local community itself.

Teaching outside the classroom, in authentic spaces in the environment is particularly important for building the partnership between a school and its surroundings. The notion of space emerges as an important element and a determinant of the teaching process organized in this way – as the place where learning is situated, with all of its features. Bearing in mind the importance of characteristics of the authentic space, most authors emphasize as the essential determinant of the place where learning is situated, while putting aside the topic, the content of learning, the goal and the outcomes of learning and teaching (Donaldson and Donaldson 1958). The international documents on modern tendencies in education point out the importance of outdoor teaching and learning as well, with the emphasis on “the place” – the environment for the educational activities (National Center for Environmental and Outdoor Education, 2004, in Szczepanski 2009).

In the realization of curricular activities outside the classroom, the characteristics of the environment itself have an important role, so the process of learning implies different strategies in comparison to classroom learning. It is considered that “didactic identity is determined by the fact that the physical natural and cultural environment furnishes the content of learning, i.e. the identity of the phenomenon outdoor education is characterized by actual physical presence also by its holistic nature” (Dahlgren & Szcepanski, according to Szcepanski 2009, 84). The environment and everyday life is being placed in the center of the educational process, so pupils do not learn in a passive way, but by discovering and examining the world around them.

Most authors agree that learning and teaching outside the classroom has its particularities, because the authentic environment itself and its characteristics represent a source of information, a context for learning and teaching and a place for practicing the acquired knowledge and skills (Bognar & Matijević 2005; De Zan 2005; Szczepanski 2009). Bearing in mind the characteristics and potentials of different environments, it is considered that while organizing education/teaching in an authentic environment, it is necessary to use the
The significance of the implementation of environmental education in a school context is indicated by the increasing interest of theorists and practitioners for this issue. The researchers’ efforts are mostly directed towards examining the positive effects of the teaching process in environmental contexts, first and foremost from the perspective of the development of the personality of students. In addition, it has been emphasized that environmental education significantly contributes to the cognitive development of students, that it positively influences the academic achievements and the development of critical thinking, encourages creative research, develops problem-solving skills and contributes to the personal development of students (Alexander 1995; Eden 1998; Reid 2002; Rahm 2002; Simone 2002). The environment itself, the place where one studies, the authentic space in which it is possible to apply the experiential learning, as well as the combination of different learning strategies, poses as a significant determinant of the environmental education which influences the cognitive potentials of students (Openshaw & Whittle 1993). Unlike learning in a classroom, where due to a limited space one mostly uses traditional learning methods, in authentic environments there are no limitations, which enables free movement and flexible duration of activities. The researches of Carson and Colton confirm that such conditions encourage students to do their own research, to think, creatively solve problems in a relaxed atmosphere suitable for communication and interaction, not only among students, but also among students and teachers (Carson & Colton 1962).

Previous research has confirmed the attitude that learning in an authentic environment influences the quality of students’ knowledge and contributes to the durability and functionality of knowledge (Moore & Wong 2007; Rahm 2002; Mabie & Baker 1996; Nundy 2001). Some authors assert that there is a direct connection between learning in authentic environments and academic achievements in the fields covered by certain courses, such as history, geography, and mathematics where the success of students is significantly increased when integrated environmental education is applied (Diment 2004). Within the same research by means of the analysis of good practice it has been established that students also thrived and developed their knowledge and skills in the fields of arts, ecology, physical and health education.

The results of a numerous studies imply that teaching outside the classroom gives a multiple contribution to improving educational work, affects knowledge acquisition of a higher quality and contributes to a holistic development among pupils, developing a positive relation towards nature, local community, towards the others and themselves (Dierking and Falk 1997; Nundy 2001; Uzzell 1999; Dillon et al. 2005). In this regard, it is pointed out that integrated environmental teaching contributes to developing leadership, communicational skills, team-working skills, respect for the others and their differences, to educating for sustainable development and other aspects that are becoming postulates for well-organized teaching outside the classroom. An important quality of this type of teaching is mitigation and reduction of discontinuity between the knowledge acquired in school and the knowledge acquired in everyday life situations. There are many authors who point to the need for establishing meaningful relations between things being learned in school and everyday life problems, suggesting that learning in different environments allows pupils
to act adequately in diverse life situations (Yager 1991; Orion & Hofstein 1994; Uzzell et al. 1995).

Since characteristics of the environment, opposite to restrictive classroom space, allow the application of different learning strategies, there are conditions for wider pupil interaction (both the interaction with the objects of cognition and the social interaction), self-directed exploration, experimenting and observation.

In the process of outdoor teaching, the space itself, with its characteristics, conditions changes in other aspects of teaching work (Andelković & Stanisavljević Petrović 2013a). However, differences between learning in and outside the classroom exist in other determinants of outdoor teaching as well, and can be examined through different criteria. Table 1. gives an overview of some basic determinants according to the criteria of place, time, planning and organization, teaching strategies, atmosphere and climate, participants’ position in education and knowledge sources.

**Table 1** School and outdoor environments for learning compared to different criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>School space (classrooms, laboratories)</th>
<th>Spaces in the surroundings (natural and social environment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>classroom, laboratory, cabinet</td>
<td>museum, gallery, library, crossroad, meadow, zoo park, botanical garden, nature, theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>most often a single school class, a double class</td>
<td>flexible framework (single class, double class, a half-day, daily, several days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organization of teaching</td>
<td>classical content planning by school subjects, traditional organization</td>
<td>interdisciplinary thematic approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies of teaching</td>
<td>most often traditional lecturing classes</td>
<td>possibilities for using different teaching strategies (instruction directed to action, integrated approach, problem-based instruction, environmental workshops, instruction through exploration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere and climate</td>
<td>clearly defined hierarchical relations and rules</td>
<td>democratic climate, tolerance, accepting differences and individualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants in the educational process</td>
<td>teacher and pupil</td>
<td>besides teacher and pupils, partners from the local community, trainers, volunteers, parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils’ roles</td>
<td>most often receptive role (acquisition of book knowledge)</td>
<td>active constructor of knowledge through a direct contact with the objects of cognition in the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of knowledge</td>
<td>most often teacher, textbook, media – direct contact with the sources of knowledge</td>
<td>natural and social environment – direct contact with sources and objects of cognition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Andelković & Stanisavljević Petrović, 2013, 145)
In the table we can see important differences regarding different criteria between outdoor teaching and teaching organized on school premises – most often classrooms and laboratories – which can help develop a partnership between a school and its surroundings. The most prominent difference refers to the criterion of place where instruction is organized; unlike stereotypical school premises, spaces in its surroundings offer a rich variety of different institutions and natural environment for the purposeful realization of educational work. The variety and the number of spaces in the surroundings depends on the characteristics of the local community itself, its geographical placement, demographic structure, industrial and economic development, as well as other factors that affect social life. In this respect, we can claim that spaces in the environment give numerous possibilities to implement integrated outdoor teaching and to improve the partnership between a school and its surroundings.

The important task for a school, and the teacher itself in the area of planning and implementing curricular activities in the surroundings, is choosing the environment, which depends on a number of factors (security, accessibility, vicinity to school, the achieved level of cooperation with school), with the school curriculum as the most prominent one. Regarding the criterion of time organization and planning, teaching outside the classroom is rather demanding, because it can hardly meet the time planned for a single or a double school class, and requires a longer period for its realization. It obstructs the realization of curricular activities in the surroundings with the existing class schedule, and requires more flexible time organization, which does not depend on the teacher only, but on the school management and other employees too. It has already been mentioned that, in the aspect of planning, teaching outside the classroom is characterized by an integrated approach, which requires changes in organization and implementation in the direction of an interdisciplinary approach and thematic planning. In this regard, one of the possible solutions is creating an integrated curriculum, as a step towards the improvement of schoolwork and the creation of a partnership between a school and its surroundings.

CONCLUSION

Within the current reform processes in schools, a considerable amount of attention is devoted to the opening of schools, both on the internal and the external level, in terms of achieving cooperative relations with the immediate surroundings. In this context, changes in schools are focused on establishing and developing partnerships with all relevant individuals, institutions, associations and organizations in the local community. A significant contribution to the establishing and developing of relations between school and the environment is provided by an integrated teaching outside the classroom, which opens the door to a greater use of natural and social resources for the purpose of educational work. Although in this region it has not yet been accepted adequately, the positive experiences of developed countries indicate significant advantages of the realization of the educational contents in the environment, which are reflected in the establishment of cooperative relations with the local community, decontextualizing school knowledge, acquiring functional knowledge that can be used in everyday situations, widening possibilities of application of active learning methods and the development of new teaching strategies. An essential component of integrated teaching outside the classroom is the space for learning, an authentic environment with its physical characteristics, which allows students to have direct contact with the objects of knowledge and to learn through experience. In the integrated teaching outside the classroom
an important role is given to the various professionals in the community who are involved in schoolwork, and whose knowledge and experience can further motivate students and animate them to explore particular topics in school, as well as the problems of everyday life. Such an approach provides the functionality of school knowledge, helps us to get to know the environment, informs about the problems in local community and their solutions, and allows the active participation of the pupils and the school in the social life of the local community.

However, for the active implementation of integrated teaching outside the classroom into everyday school life, it is necessary to have a good cooperation with the immediate local environment, as well as to make changes in the school itself. This requires a planned and systematic approach to the process of establishing a partnership between the school and the environment, as integrated teaching outside the classroom is, according to its determinants, a significantly more demanding in the area of planning, implementation and evaluation, compared to the traditional teaching process. Given the differences that arise in relation to the place and time of implementation, organizational and technical preparation, engagement of experts from the region, as well as the process of implementation itself, it is understandable that ambient learning requires a more flexible approach, especially in the organization of time.

Bearing in mind the advantages of teaching outside the classroom, especially in terms of connecting schools with their environments and establishing a partnership between teachers, parents, individuals and institutions in the local community, there is no doubt that it can contribute to a better understanding of the problems of the community, and a greater participation of schools and pupils in the life of the environment, which provides the opportunity for students to become active members of the community they live in.

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REFERENCES

PARTNERSTVO ŠKOLE I OKRUŽENJA – NASTAVA IZVAN UČIONICE

U radu se razmatraju mogućnosti za razvijanje partnerskog odnosa škole i okruženja putem integrirane ambijentalne nastave. Kvalitetnija saradnja škole i okruženja zahteva aktivno uključivanje oba partnera u proces uspostavljanja i razvoja partnerskog odnosa u kome su zadovoljene potrebe i interesi dveju strana. Sa aspekta aktuelnih promena u školi, partnerstvo sa okruženjem predstavlja neophodnost, jer se od škole očekuje veća otvorenost prema okruženju i dekonstektualizacija školskih znanja, što implicira veći udeo vanučioničkog učenja u procesu realizacije sadržaja školskog kurikuluma.

Značajne mogućnosti za uspostavljanje partnerstva škole i okruženja nalaze se u realizaciji školskih aktivnosti u autentičnim ambijentima okruženja, posebno integrirane ambijentalne nastave. Povećanjem udela integrirane ambijentalne nastave u procesu školskog obrazovanja ostvaruju se brojne dobiti za učenike, školu i okruženje, gradi dobra osnova za smanjivanje jaza između formalnog i neformalnog obrazovanja i stvaranje jedinstvenog obrazovnog prostora za sticanje znanja i iskustava.

Ključne reči: škola, okruženje, integrirana ambijentalna nastava, partnerstvo.