

## GEOGRAPHY LESSONS TAUGHT THROUGH NON-FORMAL ACTIVITIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Teaching geography in the class, in a formal way, is a normal thing to do. We all do this. Teaching geography in a non-formal context, from time to time, is different, seems a bit strange and needs courage to even think about it. In fact, it is not so difficult, it requires a good plan ahead and desire to make students understand how important it is to actually see and do things outside in the open. This paper presents my experience in taking the 9th grade students outside the classroom and presenting aspects from three different topics : the Universe (at the National Observatory), glacial and river erosion (on a trip on the Transfăgărașan road) and atmosphere (at the National Meteorological Administration). All in all, the students were enthusiastic about this mixing of theory and practice and I am sure they will better remember Cumulus clouds and forms of erosion as part of their personal experience.*

**Key words:** *geographical observation; field work; non-formal activities; group work;*

Studying geography through extra-curricular activities, such as study visits and trips represent alternative situations that give students the possibility to observe and take direct contact with geographical aspects that they learn in the class in a theoretical way.

### 1. Theoretical background

A universally accepted definition of non-formal education refers to "any action organized outside of the school system, which forms a bridge between the knowledge taught by teachers and their implementation in practice." In non-formal education, the whole activity is represented by educational activities organized by institutions other than school and is based on the recognition that "a large number of people's learning experiences took place outside the formal education system."

Between non-formal and formal education, there are multiple links and a certain opposition. However, classical

educators draw attention to the need for the two types of education to take place in a correlated way, so that formal education becomes less "formal", i.e. more flexible, more adapted to the specific needs and motivations of the students, while non-formal education is better organized, thus ensuring a certain quality and efficiency of the learning process and using some methods already proven and recognized by specialists.

The importance of non-formal education is evidenced by focusing on a student, the existence of a curriculum of choice, a focus on practical activities, rapid updating of information in different fields by training new technologies, thus meeting the needs of permanent education.

There are also a number of limitations, referring to the focus on short-term goals and a greater methodological "freedom" of teachers, as well as a certain superficiality on the part of the pupils, which would disturb the normal development of formal learning.

## 2. Examples of non-formal activities that help acquire geographical knowledge

The first geography lesson taught in a non-formal way - a revision lesson about the Universe - took place at the National Observatory in Bucharest, an old, beautiful, impressive building that breathes science. I wanted to mention this visual aspect as only 4 out of the 25 students have been there before and the first impression counts, isn't it?

of the specialists made in a pleasant environment close to their level of understanding.

Another practical activity meant to link the geographical knowledge with practice took place at the National Meteorological Administration.

At that time the students were studying the topic about the Atmosphere in class. The visit had two important objectives : to actually see how the National Centre of Prognosis works and the visit to Baneasa Meteorological platform (fig.1).



Fig. 1. Visit to Baneasa Meteorological platform

This proved to be a inter-disciplinary experience (geography-history through the blended elements in the local architecture). Inside the building, the students were able to identify and study scientific and synthetic panels that show the characteristics of the Universe and its associated connections with the real life on Earth as well as live current NASA activity. The students could also check their geographical knowledge in an interactive game.

On the Observatory Terrace they watched the telescope, and in Planetarium they recalled the main constellations they knew and their beautiful stories.

They were captivated by the explanations

At the Prognosis Center, the service meteorologist explained patiently to students what their specialists are doing, what is the difference between real-time information provided by satellites and radar, how synoptic maps and many other very interesting issues are being drafted; the adolescents were captivated - 2 of them even think of pursuing a career in the field.

Subsequently, on the meteorological platform the pupils saw how the automatic weather station works, but they also received interesting information about the instruments used in the past by the meteorologists, which are kept on the platform and what role they each have (fig.2)



Fig. 2. On the meteorological platform

The synoptic gift map was the subject of study in the following class, at the same time with the practical activity of building graphics related to the meteo topics.

Prior to leaving, the students received a workbook that complemented the location of the goal, the relief unit, the objectives to be

keywords, etc.

There should be mentioned in the context the multiple roles for the teacher as expressed in the table below - such as planner, organizer, communicator, the teacher being also the one who motivates the students, coordinates and evaluates them.

Roles	Formal education	Particular aspects - nonformal education
Planner	The teacher plans the activities of instructive and educational nature, presents the tasks and objectives on various levels, structures his lessons.	Extra work, correlation with practical activity of the projects; underlying SMART objectives.
Organizer	The activities of the instructive-educational program are organized by the teacher, but also the pedagogical/ learning climate is taken into account.	All students are involved with a focus on emotional climate and work group.
Coordinator and leader	The teacher directs the learning process through educational norms and coordinates all class activities.	The leadership component is superior to that corresponding to management. It mainly targets the degree of involvement of the participants, the level of motivation and the progress of the activities
Evaluation	The teacher assesses the extent to which goals and objectives at one stage have been attained through summative assessment tools	Process and final evaluations have the effect of sustaining the activities, which must generate other projects, for the concrete use of the skills and competences formed.

visited, and important data on the World Meteorological Day, as the visit took place at a short distance in time March 23 when it is celebrated. Following the visit, the students were given a questionnaire in which, besides a number of scientific questions, they were given the freedom to express their impressions of the visit in what way they wished - chromatic expression and graphics, brainstorming, in the form of drawing, "Cinquain" poems or associations,

As for both learning methods - informal and non-formal, we should also mention a third activity with the students in the month of April - Earth Month - as a study trip in the Arges County and on the Transfagarasan. The trip had an interdisciplinary character, as it implied visits to the Golesti and Bratianu domains which required refreshing history and literature knowledge, as well as ethnography; it proved to be a pleasant and instructive mix up which, they found

interesting and made them look for new information in the field with the promise of returning to those places.

The main theme of this excursion was the route presentations that students had to do individually or in pair, either by coach or on the route (at the Vidraru dam, the Capra cottage or the Poenari Fortress). Field observations related to river and ice erosion have brought back the theoretical knowledge learned some time ago (fig.3).

and attitudes);

- are active, creative and interactive;
- have participatory and experiential character;
- have innovative character (not part of the category "Classic methods");
- have a high degree of applicability.

Fortunately, the day of the trip coincided with "Earth Day" - and the teacher was surprised to find out that the students knew lots of things about this worldwide event.

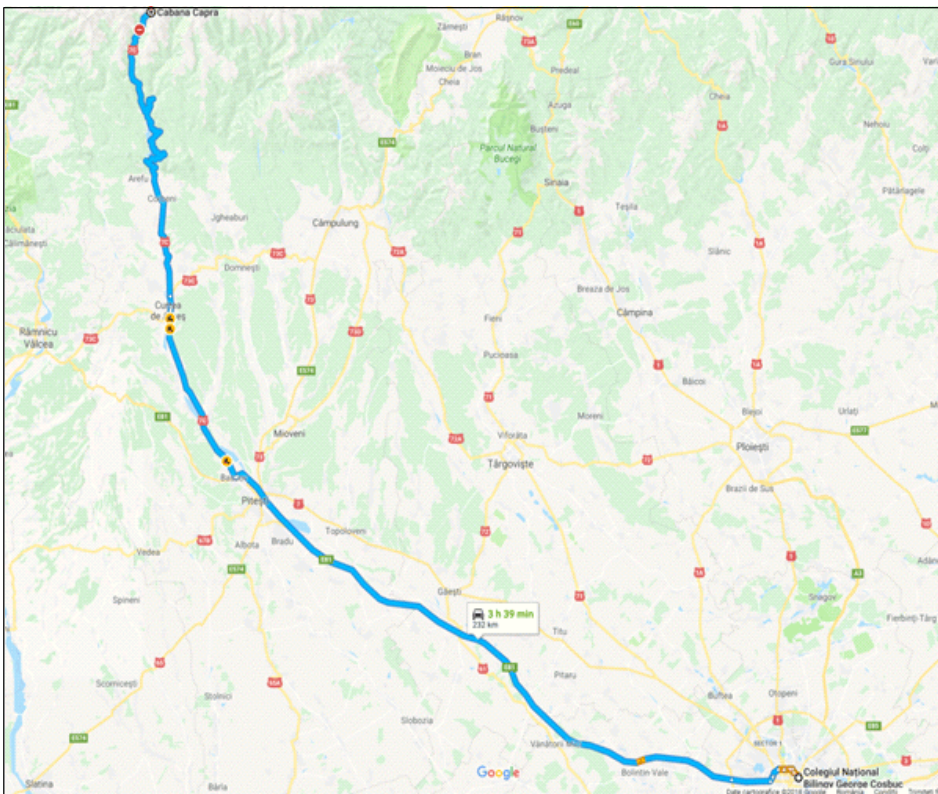


Fig. 3. The study trip route

Among the non-formal methods that could be applied in these activities, we can mention brainstorming, debate, chromatic expression and graphics, team building activities, role plays, etc. Characteristics of non-formal education methods:

- have clear learning objectives;
- develop all kinds of competencies (knowledge but especially abilities

In Conclusion, geography, as a science, can be taught in both theoretical and practical ways, but combining the two types of activities with different learning styles increases the attractiveness of classes. This also awakens the pupils' curiosity and desire to discover new things including through practical, non-formal methods, thus creating close links with other sciences.

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