Mednarodna konferenca / International conference

Formalno in neformalno izobraževanje Romov: različni modeli in izkušnje /

Formal and informal education for Roma: Different models and experience

ZBIRKA POVZETKOV / COLLECTION OF ABSTRACTS

Ljubljana, 2011

| Ljatif Demir |

Romani Cultural After-School Activities as an Instrument for the Better and Easier Inclusion of Romani Children and Youth in the Formal Educational Process

1. Introduction

The Romani Cultural and Educational Center [RCEC] *Darhia* (Roots) was established in 1998, in Skopje, by a group of writers, artists and experts in the field of the culture, language and literature of the Roma in Republic of Macedonia. As a non-governmental organisation (NGO), *Darhia* included, in their plans and programmes (and later on in the full Work Strategy created in 2001), the promotion, nurture and development of the Romani culture, language, art and literature through appropriate innovative methods. These innovative methods are applied in the work of youth as participants in this organisation. The wide range of activities is found in the field of culture and education, as part of the following five core programmes:

1. Romani language programme;
2. Creative educational programme;
3. Publishing and library;
4. Public promotion of Romani culture programme;
5. Programme for support and assistance in the education of young Roma.

The activities have extended across the borders of the Republic of Macedonia and in a short time they have become a good example of work in the field of Romani culture in the countries of Southeastern Europe. The activities are taking place in the local communities, on both a national and international level. The RCEC *Darhia* provides a base for cooperation with NGOs and Governmental institutions, artists, artist groups and experts from Macedonia and the region. This cooperation enables projects that, aside from the basic activities, enable interdisciplinary research, art work and fine-tuning in the field of culture, language and art. The members of the organisation design, develop and implement interactive and participatory activities.

These activities are based on methods that allow the social integration of Romani children and youth, and thus help improve their integration and better inclusion in society. These processes and methods are of special significance at the present time, in which children and youth grow and mature burdened with numerous risks, and when families and the existing educational institutions do not always succeed in responding to the specific needs of the young population. Therefore, the efforts made by *Darhia* are of enormous significance in the enabling of quality support by making it possible for the vulnerable population of Romani children and youth to participate in cultural activities outside school (in which different theoretical concepts are put to use); and these activities later are reflected in their formal education and their easier integration into society.

In this paper, I will not concentrate on the detailed work curriculum (cultural and educational programmes), or on the contents of specific youth programmes, but will describe the basic knowledge and skills necessary for work with the Romani children and youth that are used by *Darhia*.

2. Development Cycle

At the beginning of its work the RCEC *Darhia* created its own development cycle of youth programmes, as well as the basic elements that constitute the very basis of practice, that may prove effective in the realisation of everyday work with Romani children, their families and institutions, facilitating the process of cultural, social, educational and personal development of the Roma in and outside Macedonia.

This specific plan has individual stages in the cycle of programmes designed to achieve better efficiency and achievements of the planned goals.

The plan highlights the methodology of both individual and group approaches that allow the monitoring of the groups' development and at the same time that of the individual through informal (after-school) programmes. In order to achieve this, experiences are used which come from organisations that have previously worked on the same issues in the region and systematically analysed their practice models.

We chose models that we considered compatible for the Romani community in the Republic of Macedonia, and which in addition contain standards, ethics, segments of culture and methodology that are closely connected to the cultural practices and offer organised work with children and youth. In addition, by using these programmes, we wanted to show the Romani community and the official institutions in Macedonia that work with the Romani children and youth is of great significance for both society and their local communities. Our main goal was to show that our work with the children and youth will contribute to the development, quality and systematised integration and inclusion of Roma in society and their inclusion in national politics for children and youth in Macedonia.

In the preparation of our developmental cycle of programmes for children and young people, we used the following data:

1. The experiences of the youth;
2. The experiences of the parents;[1]

---

1 These data were especially important, and perhaps the most crucial factor in the creation of a successful development cycle.

3. The experiences of volunteers and leaders in the communities;
4. The opinions of the institutions and individuals concerned (teachers, professors, professional services and experts in the field, as well as social workers).

In 2001, opportunities were presented for high quality and practical after-school education based on programmes created by the RCEC *Darhia*. A base was formed consisting of 300 experts involved, volunteers, Romani children and youth and Romani parents, as well as school representatives who had started with the implementation of the programmes. The programme was put into effect in close cooperation with the community; during the work, it was adapted to the context of the local communities in which it was implemented. Its participants actively carried out and developed their work, and at the same time developed themselves.

2.1. The Developmental Cycle Adjusted Using Effective Practice Models[2]

This plan as outlined contains the following individual, mutually dependent stages:
1. Analysis of the community context;
2. Consultation with the community and defining its needs;
3. Identification of the resources available;
4. Agreeing on goals and objectives in consultation with the community;
5. Establishment of programmes;
6. Implementation and monitoring of programmes;
7. Evaluation of programmes;
8. Assessment and modification of programmes in consultation with the community.

3. Elements in the Planning and Preparation of *Darhia's* Programmes for Children and Youth

- Selection of the target group: analysis of the needs of target groups based on their characteristics (age, number, location, values, specific behaviour, whether they have participated and which programmes they have participated in, etc.). The analysis made by *Darhia* was based mostly on the context in which the Romani children and youth have participated in programmes that others have made for them; also, on their rights as implemented, their problems, as well as their needs. A research project was conducted on the state of the language, culture and art among the Romani population in the Republic of Macedonia. The aim of the research was to explore the influence of the socio-economic conditions on the status and development of the Romani culture and language. The themes of the programmes were designed to be suitable and interesting to the target group, and the question was posed: What did we wish to achieve with this programme? Also, what was especially important was the opportunity the children had to openly express their needs. This was achieved

---

with the use of an equal opportunities approach where the whole target group was able to share their opinion and views on their current status in the society and how they saw the possible solutions for their problems and situations.

- Establishment of a team that would lead the programmes, bringing attention to motivation and the need for additional training if certain competencies and division of tasks within the team were required;
- Selection of topics, goals and objectives, programmes and methodologies;
- Time schedule of activities in phases;
- Required resources (budget preparation, work space search, necessary technical equipment, etc.);
- Consent of the parent or of a certain institution;
- Analysis of possible difficulties in the implementation of programmes;
- Programme evaluation plan and reporting.

In the context of the above elements we paid particular attention to the following:
- Before the finalisation of the contract for the programme, we realistically assessed the resources needed (i.e., we used only what was necessary for implementation).
- Each programme had its own clear goals which were compatible with the results expected, as well as a clear goal as to how they could enable the childrens' involvement in formal education or an entry into the institutions of the system. Above all, we took into consideration the use of the programme and the way Romani children and youth could continue applying the experiences that they acquired in *Darhia*.
- We realised the necessity to align the goals of a specific programme for young people with the broader set of goals – those of the local community and of the local, national and regional action plans for children and youth. We succeeded in creating the basis for developing action plans wherever they lacked specific targets. It was very clear to us that by working with the Roma, we would be able to achieve progress in their community and small changes in the wider community.
- Our plans were to be in accord with the plans of the wider community and the way in which these plans could be made sustainable.
- We actively involved the young people in the planning of the programmes by using a different approach regarding their age, level of maturity and independence. A special approach was made among Romani children and youth in order to develop personal and group responsibility in the implementation of each programme and they were included as its creators, which in turn led them to become active and regular participants who make efforts for the programme to be successful.

4. Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programmes

Each programme was composed of several parts and stages. This was done in order for us to have the opportunity to adjust it and incorporate methods, reflections and discussions with the Romani children, youth and parents about the difficulties they faced. They were given the opportunity to consult us about every change in order for their original expectations not to be betrayed. It was made clear to them that their role in the implementation of the programmes was a great one and that they had a significant effect on the programme. They knew that the programmes on which the projects were based were not simply pieces of paper and that they could be waived (in situations where it was necessary to be flexible),

and that the most important thing that could help all of us become included in Macedonian society was our commitment. Quality should be cherished, not quantity. In order to best meet and maintain quality, we should always give our maximum no matter how long a specific programme or project would last.

RCEC *Darhia*'s programme evaluation is made monthly, quarterly, biannually, and annually, as well as the final evaluation that is made at the end of each programme.

Darhia sees the evaluation as an opportunity to have an overview of the goals achieved, as well as to determine the effectiveness of the working methods and to assess our success. It is with the help of the evaluation and monitoring that we realise our mistakes and we have the chance to correct them.

5. The Impact of Culture and Art on the Integration and Inclusion of Romani Children and Youth in their Formal Education

What has been especially important for the work of RCEC *Darhia* in the past is the use of culture and art in the integration and inclusion of Romani children and youth in their formal education. The method by which they initially participate in the activities of programmes which are created for them and by them (as a part of the informal education in the field of culture and art), has proved successful and has resulted in:
- Personal satisfaction;
- Developing skills to recognise different cultures and art forms;
- Developing and expressing ideas and feeling through the use of materials, sounds and movements;
- Engaging in the preparation and realisation of cultural events, performances, exhibitions, etc.;
- Achieving high standards for their own personal development;
- Opportunities to travel internationally, for youth exchange and participation in cultural camps, etc.;
- The use of those activities later on as a part of teaching activities in their schools.

The cultural and artistic activities have also made an impact on the parents of the children, including the following opportunities:
- To continue their education;
- To better understand the local and global questions associated with their condition;
- To find a solution to their low socio-economic position and to bring better care for their children and their position in society.

The after-school activities outside formal education have prompted bigger involvement of children and youth in cultural activities related to the needs of the Romani community. Also, *Darhia* has offered easier inclusion in the formal education of Romani children and youth by bringing about the acquisition of the following social skills, which to us represented a basis for assessment of the progress that we made (Huskins 1996):
- Awareness and self-esteem (a sense of self);
- Communication skills (effective communication with others);
- Interpersonal skills;
- Research and management of emotions (being aware and open for one's emotions);
- Understanding and identification with others (empathy, compassion);

- Development of values (what is right and what is wrong);
- Solving problems;
- Negotiation skills (making decisions with others);
- Action planning (ability to plan in advance);
- Assessment of one's own skills (learning experiences).

The successful work of *Darhia* showed that formerly-held views that the issues of children and young people were an exclusive obligation of the formal state institutions were completely wrong. The changes we have brought about in these children have imposed a need for a different approach that offers an efficient response to the complex questions that are connected to Romani children and youth, as well as to the whole Romani population.

The multi-sector approach provides a solution in which we get a systematic and comprehensive network of care for the children and youth. A part of that network includes the work of the RCEC *Darhia* with children and youth that is implemented in the framework of informal education. The new concept that *Darhia* offered in the past is simply emphasising that the work with Romani children and youth in the Republic of Macedonia plays an important role in the development of society through providing support for their development.

Unfortunately for us there is still no formal recognition of this kind of work with the children and youth in their formal education, and that work is therefore marginalised.

However, in its strategy, *Darhia* has set new ways for formal education and participation of Romani culture, language and art in that formal education. Specific examples (to give just a few) can be seen in the following table:

Programmes of the RCEC *Darhia*	Examples of projects with afterschool activities of the RCEC *Darhia* (informal education)	Influence on formal education (examples)
Romani language programme	- Romani language and culture courses	- Affirmation of Romani language among young Roma, leading to the selection of elective course in Romani language and culture in elementary schools - Increase in the number of Romani language and culture classes and the number of elementary school teachers - Curriculum developed by the Bureau of Educational Development for Romani language and culture as a school subject for grades 3–9 - Accredited Romani Language a university subject at the Faculty of Philology - Accredited Methodology of teaching Romani language a university subject at the Faculty of Pedagogy - School curricula developed for teaching Romani language and culture in Kosovo - Strategy for Romani culture in Kosovo - Lectures on culture and language in official institutions and universities in and outside Macedonia

Programmes of the RCEC *Darhia*	Examples of projects with afterschool activities of the RCEC *Darhia* (informal education)	Influence on formal education (examples)
Creative-educational programme	- Drama, music and puppet theatre workshops - Puppet theatre and Youth theatre - Establishment of *Darhia* orchestra	Development of programmes for arts and culture Increase of number of Romani children in elementary school activities Application of methods for working with children and youth in elementary and secondary schools Increased interest among non-Romani (children and teachers) for Romani culture and art Sensitisation of teachers with respect to the problems and need of Romani children in schools The study of Romani culture as an elective course The introduction of elements of Romani culture as a part of the country's cultural heritage Use of *Darhia* materials as a part of teaching materials Improvement of the relationship between the Romani community and the schools
Programme for the public promotion of the Romani culture	- Concerts in institutions and Romani communities - Exhibitions - Events	- Increased number of Romani parents attending cultural events in the schools - Direct participation of parents in public school events and in the realisation of the teaching contents (Romani culture workshops) - Lectures on Romani culture topics in educational institutions
Publishing and library development	- History of the Roma - Romani-Macedonian-Romani dictionary - Grammar of the Romani language - Auxiliary materials for teaching the Romani language (traditional stories, children's poetry, new fiction, etc.) - The cultural magazine *Horizonto*	- Use of published works in formal education - Use of *Darhia*'s library for educational and scientific purposes in institutions
Programme for support and assistance in the education of young Roma	Applied education for young Roma	- Education for parents who continue their education in official institutions - Involvement of parents in school boards - Acceptance of assistants and mediators in institutions of formal education - Increased cooperation between schools, NGOs and the Romani community - Increased coverage of Romani youth and reduction of drop-outs - Increased interest of young Romani drop-outs to attend courses and professional training and to acquire certificates from official educational institutions

6. A Good Practical Example: the Romani Mentor Project (Macedonia)

The Romani Mentor Project is a regional initiative supported by the OSI Budapest Art and Culture Network Programme. It is being implemented in Macedonia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The project in Macedonia is realised in partnership with 15 schools and involves 300 children (Roma and non-Roma) in afterschool activities

with cultural content and a focus on Romani culture. The activities are carried out by 15 successful and well established Romani professionals who act as role models to the children with their personal example and experience.

6.1 Aims of the Romani Mentor Project

6.1.1 Aim
The long-term aim is to generate change in Romani children's self-awareness and self-esteem by presenting them with a Roma role model whose personal example and experience increases their knowledge about Romani culture and conveys to them a sense of hope and purpose in life.

6.1.2 Objective
To connect successful and established Romani professionals with groups of children in marginalised schools and community centres, and to provide them opportunities to develop personal skills as well as social competence via a series of regular and structured afterschool activities with cultural content and focus.

6.1.3 Expectations from the Arts and Culture Programme (ACP)
1. To fund the project long-term which requires:
   - The empowerment of the Country Coordinators (CC);
   - The promotion of the Romani Mentor Project (henceforward: RMP) as a best practice to a wider public including the authorities: regional expansion and inclusion in the education system.
2. To emphasise the arts and culture content of the activity, which requires:
   - Clarification of what we understand by arts and culture;
   - Competent mentors capable of delivering appropriate activities.
3. To consider the RMP as a methodological research platform for educational and integration purposes, which would involve:
   - Finding appropriate approaches and collaborators;
   - The documentation, analysis, and sharing of achievements.

6.1.4 Series of Activities with Arts and Culture Focus
The following aspects should be considered as essential during the implementation process:
1. Coherence of the Series of Activities as:
   - a comprehensive whole,
   - consisting of 16 units;
   - a series of meetings thematically linked to each other; systematically paving the way to deliberately planned goal
     (There are external and internal conditions that influence on achieving this aspect: The schools are those that enable appropriate place and time available for realization of these after-school activities due to what they are considered as an external conditions for achieving such regularity of holding the meetings with the mentors (same time, same place, for ex. Every second Tuesday at the music cabinet); the internal conditions refer to the mentors qualities and commitment to the work with the groups of children)

2. The hierarchy of the educational goals of the Series of Activities is as follows:
   - the basic goal: spending time together in a constructive atmosphere, witnessing positive examples;
   - the knowledge-related goal: equipping children with knowledge they do not obtain in school;
   - the development-related goal: children experiencing their own culture and capacity by becoming involved in a creative process.
3. The concept of culture in its complexity and broader sense which includes
   - a number of activities related to arts and culture (traditional and also contemporary);
   - a dynamic process of cultivating the way of life of a community.

The Series of Activities should contribute to human development by enhancing capability and capacity. Therefore the means and tools of experience-based pedagogy should be deployed.

Rather than simply explaining what culture is, the aim is for individuals to explore what their own cultures are and how they relate to a wider context. The wider context can be:
- team building in classroom sessions between Roma and non-Roma;
- conceptualisation of a common project (planning, implementing, debriefing);
- inviting and working together with a guest mentor;
- realisation of outdoor activities (thematic excursions, visits to cultural sites, joint efforts with cultural organisations, etc.);
- conducting community events with schoolmates and/or families and the local community.

6.2 Methodological Issues

6.2.1 Composition of the Groups

Target group: elementary school students. Within one group, different classes or years can be mixed, taking into consideration that each programme has to be planned in such a way that each participant is able to follow, enjoy, and benefit from the activities. An effort should be made to create mixed groups enabling Romani and non-Romani children to work together. In the case of segregated schools this may create problems, therefore contact with the majority population should be facilitated through the structure of the activities. The ideal number of children per group is 20.

6.2.2 Content of the Activity Series and its Structure

The goals of the work with the groups can be put into three major categories:

1. The first one covers the basic goals, which are achievable by realising the programme without any special effort. The basic goals are: organisation of high quality after-school activities that are motivating for children; creation of a good atmosphere; learning how to work in a team; practising social skills; seeing positive examples with the mentor's help; and developing a plan for the future.

2. The second contains knowledge-related goals, which are achievable by any dedicated mentor with a little extra preparation. The knowledge-related goals can be achieved primarily through the transfer of actual knowledge, which supposes a receptive group and a mentor capable of transferring knowledge in an enjoyable way. The basic goal of the programme is to acquaint children with Romani culture and history, thus strengthening their Romani identity; and, with respect to the members of the majority population, to make them more open and tolerant toward that identity. Additional targeted knowledge-related goals can be: developing writing and reading skills, learning about healthy lifestyles, environmental protection, crime prevention, career choices, etc.

3. The third and most important entails development-related goals which can be achieved via a methodology with a special cultural and artistic focus. Development-related goals can be achieved in accordance with the artistic profile of the mentor and the choice of the school. Depending on the mentor's background, development-related activities may focus on the so-called traditional arts such as music, singing, dance, theatre, film, fine arts, literature, or alternatively on culture understood in a wider sense such as media, informatics, sport, nature, gastronomy, etc. In addition, goals can also target the development of social skills such as communication, trust, and working in a group.

It is worthwhile developing year-long activities that enable the children to be creative, because the public presentation of their work (whether in an exhibition, or in a performance) ensures a concrete final aim of the year-long activity and provides the most direct and effective feedback to them – i.e., having success in front of their classmates, teachers and parents. Of course, the above-mentioned categories can be mixed and merged, but their clarification may offer help to the mentor-teacher pairs when developing the structure and outcome of their work. The goal of the Arts and Culture Programme should be kept in mind: namely, to contribute to the integration of disadvantaged children using the means of arts and culture. Accordingly, when developing the year-long activity plan, it is important to try to direct attention toward the development-related goals. Without underestimating the basic goals and the knowledge-related goals and while admitting that their realisation is also very demanding, it is important to clarify that in the long run the ACP can only support programmes which use the arts and culture as a means. At the same time, we are completely open to considering variations to this approach, taking into account the mentors' and the teachers' experiences.

It is recommended that the following elements be included in the activity series:
- team-building games;
- familiarisation with Romani culture and history, and its relation to the majority culture;
- holidays (Romani, national and religious);
- periodical involvement of guest mentors;
- activities involving the parents;
- excursions, visiting cultural venues;
- presentation of the results in a public event at the end of the term;
- elements understood in a wider sense, such as media, informatics, sport, nature, gastronomy, etc. In addition, goals can also target the development of social skills such as communication, trust, and working in a group.

7. Conclusion

The Romani Cultural and Educational Center *Darhia*, a nongovernmental organisation (NGO), in its plans and programmes (and later on in the full Strategy of Work created in 2001) promotes, nurtures and develops the Romani culture, language, art and literature through innovative methods that apply in these fields. It uses innovative methods in its work especially with young people as participants. The activities have crossed the borders of Macedonia and in a short period of time have become a good example of work in the field of Romani culture in the countries of Southeast Europe. The activities take place in the local communities, on a national and on an international level.

These activities are based on methods that facilitate the social integration of Romani children and youth and their better inclusion in society. *Darhia* provides quality content to support the vulnerable population of Romani children and youth and allows them participation in after-school cultural activities, in which various theoretical concepts are applied, and those activities later on reflect on their formal education and their easier social integration and inclusion in society.

In the beginning of its work *Darhia* created its own development cycle of youth programmes, as well as some basic elements. The latter represent the basis for a practice that may be shown as effective in the realisation of everyday work with Romani children and youth, with their families and with the institutions that assist the cultural, social and educational process, and the personal development, of Roma in and outside Macedonia.

These after-school activities in formal education have brought about the inclusion of activities related to the needs of the Romani community as a whole.

Also, *Darhia* has offered an easier inclusion into the formal education of Romani children and youth by the acquisition of social skills, which to us represent a basis for the assessment of the progress that we made.

Specific examples and the good practical example of the Romani Mentor Project – (Macedonia), which is described in this paper, show a successful way towards the inclusion of the Romani culture, language and art in formal education, and hence the integration of Romani children and youth in Macedonian society.

References

A Model for Effective Practice, 2004. Curriculum Development Unit, Youth Work, NI, Antrim.

Akcioni planovi za razvoj na RKEC Darhia, 2002. Skopje.

Demir, L., 2009. Model za boljše vključevanje Romov v družbo, Skopje: Darhia.

Gaspar, M., Gruber, A., Kubicsko, S., Lidlle, M., Rozsa, M., Demir, Lj., Demir, F., Nunev, I., 2011. *Roma Mentor Project-Training Manual an Innovative Approach to Culture, Tradition, and Modernity,* Budapest: Arts and Culture Program, Open Society Foundations.

Huskins, J., 1996. *Quality work with young people: Developing Social Skills and Diversion from Risk*.

Young, K., 1999. *The Art of Youth Work*, Dorset: Russell House Publishing.

Strategija za razvoj na RKEC Darhia, 2001. Skopje.