APPLICATION OF A FRENCH MODEL OF SOCIOCULTURAL ANIMATION AT ADOLESCENTS' LEISURE TIME

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ABSTRACT

Sociocultural animation is an intriguing topic, one which is still insufficiently covered and studied by Pedagogical science; it is an area which is mostly being developed in practice. This paper aims to draw attention to the potential in using sociocultural animation as a means in the designing and implementation of pedagogical projects targeted at adolescents and their leisure time. The paper will outline the pedagogical project implementation model used by the author, namely, intercultural youth exchange, which has a very topical educational objective: overcoming of stereotypic thinking and formation of interest in diversity, multiculturalism and intercultural sensitivity.

The model presented is being used in sociocultural animators' training and practical work in France. It has been used as a basis and has been adapted by the author of this paper to correspond to the specifics of the target group of Bulgarian adolescents and to the needs of the educational projects intended for their leisure time. This model which has the characteristics of sociocultural animation was used by the author for the preparation and implementation of 9 international youth exchanges which took place in the period from 2008 to 2015. These exchange projects involved 57 teenagers aged 13 to 19 – students from the High School in the town of Buhovo, Bulgaria.

Key words: sociocultural animation, leisure time, adolescents.

This paper focuses on the potential of sociocultural animation as an approach to the organization of projects intended for adolescent's leisure time. The interest in this topic is provoked by the growing crisis in education and in the society as a whole observed in the area of education of children and adolescents. It is not a secret that for some time now this education has not been a priority for the educational institutions. Furthermore, the family has also withdrawn from its responsibility in this area and often expects education to be entirely delivered by pedagogues alone. It is as if this constant transfer of responsibility with regard to the care for and education of children and adolescents takes the focus of them, and the need of a consistent educational impact is sometimes entirely neglected. This break between family and school is inevitably reflected in students' attitude, which often takes the form of mistrust, apathy and even wariness, which is often the case when it comes to adolescents.

The issue outlined above, as well as today's growing expectations with regard to the formation of knowledgeable, skillful and active individuals makes it necessary to identify an alternative which would offset the negative impact caused by the crisis in education. Sociocultural animation intended for the leisure time could be seen as an effective approach to the implementation of pedagogical projects in support of successful education.

Sociocultural animation is a notion which has not been sufficiently studied yet; however, it is being increasingly used in Pedagogical Science. In Bulgaria animation (sociocultural, didactic, entertaining) is covered in scientific research by the following authors: N. Boyadjieva, R.

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Vassileva, N. Petrova-Dimitrova, N. Vitanova, N. Popova, P. Miteva (1-7). In practice it is a quite popular means used in support of educational and social pedagogical activities. Sociocultural animation draws on the significant importance of interaction which includes the individual along with his/her surrounding cultural and social environment. The focus is on the importance of the group and the community which provide opportunities for creativity, self-expression and a sense of belonging. Sociocultural animation requires a careful selection of activities and non-standard pedagogical approaches which should inspire, activate and urge young people to participate. The conditions required for its implementation include voluntariness, freedom of choice and equal participation in the initiatives. Sociocultural animation may also be used for the achievement of important social objectives, as it mobilizes groups and communities in the pursuit of a change, drawing on their potential and resources (5, 8).

Leisure time is an especially valuable resource when it comes to education, since it is the only time when the individual can exercise his/her free choice on how to use this time according to his/her preferences. Leisure time provides an opportunity for catering to one's personal and spiritual needs which depend on each individual's values. Leisure time involves a variety of activities which define its nature: leisure, entertainment, 'spiritual' activities and favorite activities in the field of science, education, sport and tourism, various forms of cultural and civic engagement, etc. (9, 10).

Along with all positive aspects mentioned so far we should also draw attention to the risk related to the excess of leisure time and to the lack of skills and routines required for employing this time in useful and developmental activities. This necessitates our attention on the potential for consistent educational activities within this leisure time, and the risky and 'difficult' adolescence is of main interest, taking into account the considerable amount of leisure time available here.

This age group is all the more interesting due to the fact that adolescence is one of the most difficult and controversial periods in the integral human development, with changes taking place in a young person's physiology, psychology and socialization. Adolescents strive continuously to understand themselves as persons, their internal life and the way in which they are perceived by others, and this makes social contacts especially important. This age group stands out also with its rebellious spirit and the inclination to question anything proposed or imposed by adults (11). This is what makes this group an especially problematic and risky one, a group which is difficult to be involved in planned and organized forms of activities, especially in adolescents' leisure time. Adolescents are critical, mistrusting and demanding when it comes to attempts at organizing their leisure time. It is important that the correct approach and means be identified so that the leisure time activities would be useful and interesting, corresponding to the needs and specifics of this target group. Special organization is needed to make sure the activities correspond to young people's requirements and interests, and to make those activities attractive, wanted, inspiring and contributing to participants' development.

In this paper we will present the "S.A.A.D.R.A.F.R.A" model which could offer a solution to the difficult task of adding purpose to adolescents' leisure time. This model is widely used in the training, as well as in the practice of sociocultural animators in France. It consists of nine consecutive stages facilitating the preparation and implementation of leisure-time activities (12, 13). The strict implementation of these stages, as well as their adaptation to a certain age group and to the achievement of given education goals within a certain pedagogical project makes it much easier to animate and to make the leisure-time activities attractive and desired. The model has been used by the author of this paper in the design of the experimental part of a PhD study, and namely, the preparation, implementation and evaluation of nine pedagogical projects – international youth exchanges, conducted in the period 2008-2015. These exchange projects involved 57 teenagers aged 13 to 19 – students from 117 St. Cyril and Methodius High School in the town of Buhovo, Bulgaria. The educational objective of these projects is the cultivation of tolerance towards representatives of different nations and cultures, as well as the development of cultural sensitivity in the participants in the exchange.

The name of the model, S.A.A.D.R.A.F.R.A., is an abbreviation which stands for the names of each of its nine stages in French. The objective of the first stage: *warming up (sensibilisation)* is to arouse interest, to motivate and to urge young people to participate. This is the stage, in which

the target group gets informed, and the animation and the activity envisaged gain popularity. This could happen in a number of ways – by using posters, video or oral presentations, or personal invitations. The second stage is called '*welcoming'(accueil)* and aims to make people feel comfortable about participating in the activities. Imagination and creativity development have a central role here. The third stage is about the *arrangement (amenagement de l'espace)* of the space where the activities are to take place. The arrangement should enhance imagination and should make it possible for the participants to feel as if they were in a different place, unlike what they are used to. It is also important to make sure this arrangement is in line with certain requirements guaranteeing participants' safety. The fourth stage is the *implementation of the activity (deroulement).* When organizing this stage we are looking for an answer to the question "How are we going to proceed/work?" The tasks should be distributed not only among the animators who organize the implementation of the activities and of the project, but also among the adolescents, the delegation of responsibilities to the latter being very important when it comes to sociocultural animation targeted at adolescents. The fifth stage of this model is about *rhythm (rythme),* meaning that a time management plan should be drafted. This plan should include all activities envisaged and should be used for monitoring the compliance of their implementation with the time limits and the timetable in place. The plan should also be synchronized with the participants' rhythm. The sixth stage, which is also the content stage, is the *animation (animation).* This is the stage in which the educational objectives of the animation are defined. Here we identify the values which we expect it to cultivate in the participants and we define our expectations about the final result or deliverable. Another key moment in this stage is to make sure that a well-planned, original and high quality animation is in place, one which inspires and makes adolescents want to engage in active participation. The seventh stage, *winding up (fin),* is about completing the animation and making plans about future activities. The next, eighth stage is dedicated to the *organization and the arrangement (rangement),* where it is important to distribute the tasks, to decide on whether the target group's participants should be included in the distribution as well and to calculate the time needed for the process. The last stage, *analysis (analyse),* is about keeping track of any disparities between the initial expectations and the reality during and after the animation's implementation. The attention here is on the issues which have not played out as expected and on the analysis of the reasons which have led to this situation. This has to be done by the whole team, but also with the target group (12).

When designing the concept of the pedagogical project and its implementation, incl. the concept and implementation of each separate activity planned, it is necessary to take into account all the stages outlined above. It is very important to make sure that the target group's age is taken into account so that the activities included in each stage correspond to this age group's characteristics and requirements.

The use of the "S.A.A.D.R.A.F.R.A." model of sociocultural animation in project implementation considerably enriches and widens the opportunities for pedagogical and educational impact. One of the main advantages of this model is the detailed stage description which facilitates the design and organization of the activities in a way which is attractive and inspiring for the adolescents who are the target group. The model provides a guiding framework for the animator, but yet allows for freedom and offers a variety of options for creativity. The implementation of the requirements of each stage ensures that the sociocultural animation is consistent and complete and that each of its elements (posters, arrangement, warming up, clothing, variety of activities, etc.) contribute to the achievement of the pedagogical objectives envisaged. In this manner the essence of sociocultural animation is reached, and namely, adding purpose to leisure time in a manner which is pleasant and beneficial for the individual, allowing for a fulfilling interaction of this individual with his/her social and cultural environment.

Along with the advantages of the model presented above, we should note that it also has some weaknesses. One of the requirements of sociocultural animation is that it should be both original and of high quality, which in turn requires preparation. The latter is related to a considerable amount of time which is not always available, and necessitates creativity and continuous generation of ideas. The large number of stages in this model is also a source of concern, since there is a possibility that the animators might invest most of their efforts in the first stages and neglect the remaining ones.

This undermines the implementation of the social pedagogical objectives envisaged, as well as the animation activity itself. The usage of this model in sociocultural animation poses a serious challenge: the pedagogues-animators have to find the balance and combine entertainment with the achievement of other important pedagogical objectives: socialization of the individuals, development of their creativity, informal learning, etc.

The domination of any one of these dimensions might result in the organized activity losing its initial purpose.

This method was successfully implemented by the author of this paper in the organization and conduction of 9 international youth exchanges in the period 2008-2015. The exchanges included 57 adolescents aged 13-19. Following the implementation of these projects, the results from the surveys and the study of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews established that the activities organized by means of sociocultural animation were seen as completely satisfying by the adolescents and met their expectations for a pleasant and purposefully used leisure time, offering fun and contacts with peers.

Although that entertainment is one of the key elements of sociocultural animation, it is not the only and most important objective. As mentioned above, sociocultural animation is about achieving educational goals. By means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted with the adolescents and by thorough processing of the resulting data, a study was conducted to establish the extent in which the projects' educational goal was achieved, namely, cultivation of tolerance towards the representatives of other nations and cultures and development of cultural sensitivity in the participants in the exchanges.

Results show that participation in intercultural exchanges implemented according to the "S.A.A.D.R.A.F.R.A." model for sociocultural animation has contributed to the development of cultural sensitivity and ethnorelative attitudes among the participating adolescents. They accept foreign cultures as part of the limitless intercultural diversity. The experience gained during the youth exchanges is helping adolescents adapt their behavior and engage in fulfilling communication with the representatives of other cultures. A large number of the adolescents were able to overcome stereotypic thinking and showed interest in cultural diversity, which they see as valuable and enriching.

Along with this, young people are of the opinion that, thanks to their participation in international youth exchanges, they have acquired new skills and knowledge. They have considerably enriched their emotional experience and values, they have broadened their social contacts and have gained confidence in communication.

Obviously, the "S.A.A.D.R.A.F.R.A." described above and the projects implemented by means of sociocultural animation have a positive impact on the life of adolescents in a number of areas and can be adopted as an approach to the achieving of a variety of educational goals. Their usage provides a number of opportunities and is an interesting topic for further studies and research in the area of social pedagogical science; it also opens new horizons for the professionals engaged with adding purpose to the leisure time of children and adolescents.

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