

The School Educational Projects – A Way to Increase the Efficiency of the Training Educational Process

Andreia-Simona MELNIC
George Bacovia University, Bacau, ROMANIA
[***andrea.melnic@ugb.ro***](mailto:andrea.melnic@ugb.ro)

Abstract: *As a result of the use of new information and communication technologies and due to the necessity of focusing on developing educational activities XXI century skills - communication, civic, cooperation, learning to learn, thinking & critical thinking, digital competences, and so on, the current system of education the teaching process emphasis an increasingly greater importance on project - based learning and collaborative learning. Moreover, formal education opens towards non-formal learning experiences, tending to their capitalization in the procurement, in the context of creating a familiar and motivating active and participative in the use of alternative attractive and less formalized the relationship between the teaching and learning group.*

In terms of learning through projects, educational or socio-educational projects are an attractive and efficient way in which students and teachers work together, identify and solve problems, learn applying or using the school premises or off school ones in order to achieve practical applications.

Keywords: *project, education, partnership, community*

Introduction

In the context of reorganization and transformation of educational services in Romania, development and project management in schools is one of the priorities in the development of educational practices.

Project management is well represented in the literature specific issues of economic projects initiated by organizations developing a comprehensive research to solve problems on product quality, market, competition, profit maximization, etc. The importance of project management in the development of the organizations, regardless of the sphere in which they operate, led to the crystallization and development of the concept of project management as a discipline in its own. As in all fields of activity, in education the importance of project management in the sense of modern concept was realized only after 1990, and qualification in the field of those involved in specific activities has become an unquestionable necessity.

School educational projects are the natural result of the changes that have occurred in the life of school organizations as a result of implementation of the process of democratization and reform of the national schools. In recent years, the focus of education has evolved under the influence of social, economic and political rights of the mere acquisition of knowledge and practical skills training to developing social and professional attitudes and skills that enable the individual to develop as a creative person, and therefore adaptive the chances of social integration. Pre-university education institutions were gradually transformed rigid organization flexible organizations; regarding the final product - the young trained in all aspects of social integration - have to solve a key objective: quality assurance in education.

The task is complex at school level, being conditioned by subjective factors generated specifically by conservative attitudes (both in the internal and external organization) and insufficient information, but also by the material basis of objective factors, of financial resources and human resources expressed in quality terms, particularly in the level of training of teachers and school managers.

1. Educational Projects and their Role in School Education

The concept of the project is defined almost identical in the literature; the different approaches are usually given by their typology. From the book “Project Management”, of the author R.V. Pascu one

can retain some definitions in which there can be found the essence of school educational projects, such as:

- the image of a situation that we are going to achieve;
- a specific approach that allows methodical structuring of future realities;
- first form of a plan to be discussed and approved to receive an official character and being implemented;
- a planned set of actions with a start date and an end date, with a team and a budget for this purpose, headed by a manager;
- a set of interconnected activities performed in an organized manner, with start and end points clearly defined, to achieve specific outcomes that meet the needs derived from the strategic plan of an organization;
- a complex non typically effort having a well-defined purpose, without a routine character, limited in time, budget, resources, costs, performance requirements designed to meet consumer needs [1, 4-7].

The same author, accepting the many points of view on project definition, summarizing the concept as follows:

- it is a method that allows the transition from idea to action structuring the various phases of the process;
- it is put in place changing the environment in which it acts;
- it takes shape in a social context, spatially and temporally specific;
- has an educational dimension and allows individuals to learn by experiencing;
- it is the product of a collective work;
- it necessarily involves an assessment that allows a link between idea and action [1, 7].

For the education field, the literature suggests several definitions that essentially do not differ fundamentally from those formulated for the economy. The educational project is:

- a set of general intentions of individual or institutional development orientation;
- intention to take ameliorative action of which crucial issue is an anticipatory one;
- a sure way of responsible involvement of students in society issues [2, 20].

A project that a school implements represents a set of activities:

- provides a meaningful solution to an identified problem;
- takes place in a certain time;
- uses the material, financial and human resources;
- produces measurable results [3, 16].

Educational projects are based on the premise that quality education requires application of the diversity model through a differentiated approach, initiating projects that involve students, teachers of different specialties, educational partners, including parents, civil society, media and the community. Therefore, they seek the active involvement of all those mentioned before, in specific activities of common themes creating thus a partnership. It is important that this issue be one motivating and relevant to all institutions involved in the project. The activities are interdisciplinary projects. In the case of student-centered projects, it is important that they be involved in all stages of the project, from planning stage up to evaluation and dissemination of results. Continued involvement should provide different perspectives to existing partnerships, a strong anchor in reality projects participating communities, determine how many relevant actors involved in education, effective exploitation of results.

Educational projects aim to support the exchange of best practices among the institutions involved in the partnership, to expand the participation of schools, and school authorities and other actors in the informal and non-formal education, the importance of which is continuously increasing. Through activities that involve school educational projects also contribute to the training of staff involved in school education, precisely because it is addressed to teachers in secondary and aim to improve the quality of school education. Thus the participants are encouraged to improve their knowledge and teaching skills and to better know the way in which the school education is performed.

Fundamental issues to be pursued in designing education project are:

- Why is the project initiated ?
- Who are the beneficiaries?
- What are the results produced by the project?
- The project is part of the development strategic plan of school organization?
- There are human resources for the project?
- Are partnership relations needed?
- Can be developed alternative strategies for intervention?
- What are the costs of the project relative to resources?
- What monitoring and evaluation procedures can be provided?
- What is the context of the project - opportunities, constraints, risks?
- What is the duration of the project?

2. The Characteristics of the Educational Projects

Develop an educational project involves:

- establishing and strengthening the project team;
- ensure partnership with the community to which the school belongs to;
- preparation of project team members in designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluating projects.

School project team will focus essentially on the development and implementation of projects which should ensure the application in a standard format of a unique content given by the particular problem/ need of the school they represent. The team must select one or more problems of those already identified; develop a proposal / project proposals, by applying the pedagogic experience of the members in such concrete proposals. They also need to complete application forms for financing, conclude protocols of collaboration with community partners to implement approved projects and promote the project results at the level of the local community.

Project team members must put into value their entire experience acquired in the field of projects and to focus on their ongoing development in this area. They should have in common:

- beliefs about the need to develop schools and communities;
- correct perception of school and community issues;
- skills in solving problems and finding solutions;
- ability to build and implement projects adapted to local conditions;
- knowledge and skills for the implementation of projects in a standardized format;
- initiative and participation;
- motivation for the development of local capacity and school improvement;
- communication skills, cooperation, teamwork and sharing of experiences;
- ability to collect, interpret and present information;
- openness to innovation, change and development;
- willingness for self-improvement.

Following these general requirements requires knowledge, skills, abilities and permanent exercise in inter- personal communication. The success of any project depends largely on how communication occurs at each stage and activity. Requirements related to this issue are even more important as a project implementation strategy involves constant communication within project teams and between teams and local school communities in all stages involved in the project.

Like any financing project, school educational projects provide an opportunity to the schools which aim to assume innovation, change and development. They must comply with the requirements of the provisions of the school development plan and with the specific regional and local context in which the project will take place and fit in a standard model imposed by those offering the funds, a model containing a compulsory set of key elements [3].

To build a genuine and realistic project, it is necessary that the project team know:

- principles and general rules of the drafting of project applications;
- methods of analysis of school and community context;

- parts of the school organization development plan;
- the requirements of the application form (application form).

Educational projects allow the development of large areas of activities such as: project meetings, teacher exchanges, study visits of project partners, research, studies, exchanges of experience and best practices, learning activities and joint training sessions, conferences, seminars, workshops, summer schools, campaigns, publications, exchange with other institutions, assessment activities, dissemination and valorisation. They complement school work with extracurricular education and family education. As a deliberate and targeted activity, extracurricular school education/ non-formal allows the development of students skills, the interest and development of their talents in certain areas. It allows the efficient and enjoyable use students free time, the development of associations, and the capacity to work in groups and cooperate in solving complex tasks, the development of willingness and of positive character traits. Extracurricular education offer the opportunity to enrol students in optional activities to a greater extent than it is possible when based on curricular activities, integrating them into specific forms of verification and assessment of the results.

Some advantages of implementing educational projects are: the assimilation of new knowledge, skills, abilities and skills in action, focusing on the student as a subject of formative action, participation and involvement in self-motivated learning, which involves the capacity of building cooperation, mutual aid the achievement of tasks and responsibilities, with major effects in socialization within the group.

3. The Partnership within the Framework of Designing the Project and the Management of Educational Projects

The school is one of the central institutions of the community, it has specific roles, but can not work and can not be developed without taking into account the specificity of the community in which it operates. Schools have partnerships with various local community stakeholders: students' families, authorities, police, health units, social units, church, businesses, nongovernmental organizations. Partnership and collaboration are differentiated. The close relationship is conducted with those who are most interested in the welfare of children, of their families. Collaboration with government institutions, local organizations of any kind are related to the legal duties manifestations, of their traditional roles perceived by the community. The partnership manifestation is dependent on human resources involved, of the willingness and availability to be involved, to find resources that can meet the needs of the community.

Motivations underlying the initiation of the partnership are: the solving of some institutional, and administrative problems, of specific problems of the beneficiaries (students, parents, teachers), promoting the educational role of school, the satisfaction of those involved, "the common good", etc.

The partnership school - local community is mostly conducted on the components aimed at children: education, health, safety, education, leisure, school space administration, etc. Schools are those which, in most cases, take the initiative of the partnership.

The more the people are involved are more educated, have more information, have access to more resources, the more the partnership and its manifestations, are more diverse. It is important that each of those involved realize interests (personal or institutional) see the benefits of partnership. Where education comes with various offers for children, families, community and make these offers to be known, the community, its representatives can be more involved and more aware of the benefits of partnership.

Developing and implementing projects under successful circumstances can only occur only if each school attracts more partners in the community where it is located.

By attracting community partners in the project developed, the project team must demonstrate that: [4]

- has relevant information about community issues;
- is targeted to projects that lead to the strengthening of the school, making it able to contribute to solving the problems of the local community.

When discussing with community partners, held before the development of projects, the project team must focus on the fact that:

- in order to adapt to a changing world, institutions of local communities must cooperate and initiate participatory planning processes;
- the roles of such communitarian institutions are interdependent;
- in the process of education of the community, the school functions as a liaison and support to other institutions in the community;
- the school has the role of " social organizer" of the community;
- the role of the school is extended to support the development of local culture;
- the school is able to provide support for solving problems faced.

4. The Characteristic Elements of the Educational Project Application Form

In drawing up the application form (financial application form) on which there will be obtained the funding, the project team must answer questions arising from the standard form:

- What are the characteristics of the school and its partners?
- What options make school project?
- What are the objectives to be achieved?
- What activities will be undertaken to achieve the objectives?
- What target groups will be selected?
- Who will be the partners of the school?
- What results will be achieved?
- Who will be the beneficiaries of the project?
- What will be the evaluation procedures?
- What impact will have the project?
- How sustainability will be secured?
- How the project will be promoted?
- What budget will be required and how it will be made?

In the first part, the application form includes information about the school applying for funding and project information (project title, its type - competition, festival, social program, exhibition and so on, the area where the project falls (cultural and artistic: visual arts, culture and civilization, literature, theatre, folklore, traditions, customs, music, dance, ecology and environmental protection, civic education, volunteering, charity projects, sport and tourism, technical, scientific), number of participants, the project budget. It will also provide information about the project partners (other schools, businesses / companies organizations or institutions). Project partners are institutions that have competence or resources that can help achieve objectives. For each school attracting partners to act in specific ways, according to its characteristics and the community to which it belongs. Projects schools are more likely to succeed if it is based on collaboration between school and community partners in the external environment. These partners can participate with teachers and students to: drafting, preparation and implementation of activities, monitoring, development or dissemination of materials.

Project summary will contain information on the number of students and number of teachers involved, the direct and indirect proposed activities in order to be held; partner organization (other than the participating schools).

The most significant is the application form for the description of the project. The project has as its starting point the analysis of needs, starting from a particular strategic target school development plan, which will present the overall objective of the project. Thus, for example, the overall objective of the project "School newspaper - a window to know each other" is "training students in the skills of interpersonal communication and intra- specific activities by publishing a school newspaper".

It then states the *specific objectives* of the project. They express clearly what is to be achieved through the project promoted key elements depending on which to build other items in the application form. For example:

- Developing skills newspaper editing and publishing for a number of 40 students by the end of 2013;
- The potential for expression of community members through newspaper articles.

The target group addressed by the project is stated in the form of well-defined categories of persons or communities on which the project should focus their attention. For example, “The school newspaper - a window to know each other“, the target group consists of:

- 40 students (grades 3rd – 8th) that makes the stories published, of which 5 students will be editorial team and will participate in IT training;
- 9 teachers participating in the project;
- 5 local community members (two parents, one representative of the City Hall, two businesses persons) that will publish articles in the school newspaper (at least one article per issue).

The project period is the duration of the carrying on of the project activities. For example: 9 months.

The project activities are those activities that will be undertaken to achieve the objectives. A quality project must contain a detailed description of each of the activities it includes and which have been selected on the basis of clear criteria. In choosing activities should be taken into account the objectives of the project, the characteristics of the target groups, the requirements of the partners involved. For each task, specify the job title, type, date / time of deployment, venue, and number of participants for each category (students, teachers, parents, community representatives, etc.) the responsible for the beneficiaries, the methods / means of implementation, evaluation methods:

For example, to achieve the objectives of the “School newspaper - a window to know each other”, activities can be:

1. Preparation to launch the project;
2. Promotion and project launching;
3. A debate about the paper;
4. Editorial office preparation;
5. Courses Page Maker;
6. Newspaper publishing skills training needed;
7. A visit to a news-office;
8. A literary competition;
9. Creating and collecting materials published;
10. Edit and launch of the first number;
11. Program monitoring and evaluation;
12. A dissemination activity.

Expected results due to project implementation should clearly express the concrete changes that the project will generate and which can be measured.

Example: As a result of activities undertaken within the Project “The school newspaper - a window to know each other” there will be obtained the following *results*:

Quantitative results:

- newspaper articles school with the students, teachers and members of the community;
- 2 permanent community members working with the school;
- an editorial headquarters equipped to design and newspaper publishing;
- an editorial team consisting of five students (select target group of students regularly to coordinate one issue of the newspaper) and 2 teachers (one of the two being a Romanian language teacher) that will collect, select and edit materials for publication;
- folders with all targeted skills training project held at the editorial board for all those interested in;
- articles, drawings or other materials prepared by students (the target group, and the other students in the school) that would activate and express their creative potential;
- articles published in the newspaper community members in order to exploit the potential of expressing them.

Qualitative results:

- effective communication skills at school and in the community in the direct target group (students, teachers, community members);
- typing and editing skills newspaper in the target group of students;

- informatics skills and the selection of information, expression and correct verbal plan writing, the use of expressive language in the target group of students;
- accurate and eloquent speech skills in verbal and writing plan, for all students in the school through articles published in the newspaper;
- experience of joint actions of school and community;
- the prestige of the school community through disseminating the results of the project.

Project monitoring and evaluation refers to the methods that will be applied during the implementation and its end tracking and measuring results. There must be an evaluation strategy that takes into account all project components. Monitoring and evaluation are ongoing activities throughout the project. Every component must specify what to monitor and WHO evaluates and HOW the evaluation does is carried on (methods and assessment tools).

Direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project are individuals, groups, institutions that will have a tangible benefit from the implementation of the project.

Conducting activities in the “School newspaper - a window to know each other” has as beneficiaries:

- target group included in the project;
- 250 school students from 1st grade up to 8th grade;
- teachers participating in the project;
- school partners involved in the project;
- school teachers and students;
- the school as an organization and school managers;
- community where the school is located;
- schools that will benefit from the dissemination activities.

Estimated impact of the implementation of the project on the target group (students, teachers, local authorities, local communities, etc.) can be reflected in the school and the partners expressing some positive consequences.

Estimated costs

The project budget must be rigorous, clear and detailed, to assemble the model of the application, be consistent with the proposed activities underway, reflecting the number of beneficiaries provided, to strictly observe the principle of cost / benefit analysis to include only eligible costs. The budget chapters should provide eligible expenditures (which can be covered by the project). For each of these chapters, the budget must specify:

- the amount of their contribution;
- funding requested;
- clear description of rigorous and comprehensive spending;
- the total amount needed.

Conclusions

We are in a period where secondary education is marked by changes in the content in approach content in addressing learning and teaching strategies and assessment methods. All items aim exceeding the target of the model of graduate holder of knowledge, but social integration issues and in particular their integration on the labour market. We need a graduate holding the training and practical skills to be capable to adapt to the rules and demands of society.

The change depends on teachers, on their ability to cope with the rigors of professional transition, to assume new roles and responsibilities in their relationships with the students and the community. A plan showing the change, with broad prospects in interactive pedagogy and reflective practice, education is well represented by the school educational project.

Many teachers and school managers show a clear interest for initiating educational projects, but enthusiasm diminishes and even disappears in many cases, because of the lack of training in project management. Therefore, preparation of the area of those involved in such specific projects is an absolute necessity.

The method of projects, in general and the education in particular, is one of those strategies that focus on authenticity and the use of methods much more closely to the education environment. It corresponds to the new trend towards learning in a customized and participatory process, based on encouraging partnerships with community in order to get a higher social integration capacity.

References

- [1] Pascu, R.V., http://ccimn.ulbsibiu.ro/documente/carti/introductere_in_managementul_proiectelor.pdf, accessed on 20 June 2013
- [2] Strategii didactice, Rovimed, Publishers Publishing House, no. 1/June 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/137799347/strategii-didactice>, accessed on 15 September 2013
- [3] Programul de Granturi pentru Dezvoltarea Școlară – Ghidul aplicantului, http://ismb.edu.ro/sitevechi2013/Subpagini/Proiecte/Program_granturi/Ghidul_Aplicantului_pentru_PGDS_2007.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2013
- [4] <http://www.scribd.com/doc/29589528/Elaborarea-Proiectului-Educational>, accessed on 20 October 2013

Supplementary recommended readings

- Gherguț, A., Ceobanu, C., (2009), *Elaborarea și managementul proiectelor în serviciile educaționale. Ghid practic*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi
- Sava, G. M., (2008), *Managementul proiectelor educaționale*, Casa Corpului Didactic Publishing House, Bacau
- Stăiculescu, C., (2012), *Școala și comunitatea locală, parteneriat pentru educație*, ASE Publishing House, Bucharest.