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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Longinou, D. (2020). The benefits from cultural activities at a school environment. *Journal of Contemporary Education Theory & Research*, 4(1), 8-13. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3769252>

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The benefits from cultural activities at a school environment

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the present study is to analyze the concept of cultural activity in the elementary school and to examine the importance of applying innovative models - such as CPFM. Another purpose is to reveal the educational benefits from organizing a theatrical performance.

Methods: The empirical part of the study attempts to link the theoretical views, presented in the literature review part, to the school's reality through the organization of a theatrical play. The survey stages are presented in a sequence through the analysis of the play's design and are linked to the elementary schools curriculum at the interdisciplinary level.

Results: The educational benefits resulting from this process are identified, and the importance and role of innovative models in the school's environment are highlighted. Using ICT innovations in the planning of the theatrical event brought students in touch with new technologies and greatly enhanced their digital skills. Moreover, their psychology and self-confidence were enhanced.

Implications: Students realized the value of strategy in organizing a cultural event. The steps that the children followed both during the planning and during the implementation process of the event, helped them to determine the sequence of actions they had to take to accomplish their tasks.

Keywords: cultural activity, CPFM, organizing, management

JEL Classification: I2, Z11

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1 INTRODUCTION

It has been historically proven that urbanization was the main reason that led people to engage in cultural activities. Scholars say that the cultural development of man includes his material and spiritual works, his spiritual cultivation and education, his morals and values, his habits and traditions, his aesthetics, as well as the refinement of his behaviour (Kokkinos, Alexaki, 2002).

Researchers point out that cultural activities are a system of goals, instruments, and bodies that are combined in a program to achieve the enhancement and dissemination of a cultural good through specific cultural processes (Gadzias, 2019). Other scholars observe that cultural activities make sense when (Philips, 1994):

1. they take into account the needs of the public.
2. they provide opportunities for creativity and expression.
3. they supply equality and justice for everyone.
4. they are formed according to participatory freedom and democracy.

The existence of many different perspectives within a society can determine the content and interpretation of a particular cultural activity (Gilroy, 2000).

Moreover, cultural activities are integrated systems that are developed on the basis of specific strategies and steps. Within this context, the manager is required to be careful, insightful, and able to design flexible strategies to explore the ever-changing 21st-century environment (Console, 1990).

An effective cultural activity (Gilroy, 2000):

1. has a proper management.
2. relies on the simplicity and the common logic.
3. is based on a specific method.
4. is the result of a scientific design.
5. contains rational thinking and is composed after scientific research.
6. takes under consideration every opinion on a subject.

The benefits of having a strategy in organizing a cultural activity are particularly important. The strategy encourages a systematic way of thinking, predicts the future, and

contributes to the successful operation of the event (Console,2006).

Furthermore, it is widespread that the context in which a cultural activity develops is influenced by both the real and the digital landscape, shaping the cultural perception of societies. At the same time, the dynamic potential of new technologies is shaping a new learning environment that could lead to the optimization of education. Coordinators keep at their disposal exploratory learning tools such as educational simulation, educational games, and interactive multimedia, which can be used by all students (Lewis,2008). At the same hand, It is accepted that the transmission of information through audio and images could bring changes in society. Visual and audial media emotionally stimulate the human brain and can alter a person's behavior and in the long-term the structure of a society (Morley 1992).

Based on modern scientific research, students prefer to devote their free time to new technologies. They show particular interest in the domain of Space. Many scholars point out that it is not enough for the design of cultural property to be in harmony with students' views in order to make the program successful. The active participation of the individuals, that is the students, who take part in this particular cultural activity is also required (Carey,1989).

Cultural activities are not just a way of entertainment, as most people think. It is a way of creative and experiential learning, which helps children to embed the curriculum, discover themselves and build a mentally healthy personality (Storey,2010).

Considering all of the above, it is concluded that the concept of cultural activity is highly complex and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Therefore the combination of strategies and models is desirable in order to have a complete result (Morley 1992).

It is concluded that organizing a cultural activity is a process of coordinating human resources, a combination of effort between people, and with the aim of achieving a common goal and purpose (Clarke, 1992).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development and shaping of a cultural activity encompass the areas of planning, implementation, and evaluation. In particular, the scope of the design includes the following stages (Koutouzis, M. 1999):

- **Choosing a cultural activity:** At this stage, teachers and students choose the type of cultural activity - for example, a theatrical or musical dance, artistic or photographic exhibition - that they will organize. With the help of the internet, they search for the subject and classify the content of the event in a way appropriate for the age of the pupils, compatible with the curricula and to respond to the pupils' interests.
- **Specifying space and time:** Here teachers and pupils are called upon to find the appropriate venue for cultural activity (for example a school event hall, a theatre or an outdoor community hall, etc.). E-mail, electronic forms, and digital chat help members reach out to cultural leaders in order to virtually see any relevant sites and determine the time for cultural activity.

- **Artistic Selection:** At this stage, teachers and students are sharing tasks. Depending on the interests of the students, responsibilities are shared in order to highlight the students' talents in painting, theatre, music, organization and other areas of school life. Here, through social networks, stakeholders can communicate with each other to discuss and share tasks quickly, saving valuable time.

- **Budgeting:** Teachers and students calculate the costs of cultural activity and seek financial resources. online spreadsheet software helps coordinators calculate costs.

- **Schedule:** At this stage, the students determine the time of completion of the tasks (for example the stage sets) and determine the rehearsals. Electronic diaries are a powerful organizing tool for this stage.

- **Promoting:** At this stage, students are designing the advertising campaign for the cultural activity. Online advertising, presentations, posters, and newsletters demonstrate the usefulness of new technologies in organizing and developing of a cultural activity.

- **Project Implementation:** Includes execution of all the previous stages. Here new technologies leveraging digital audio and video systems, which deliver a sleek result, delighting the public and contributing to the success of the event.

- **Evaluation:** Includes the evaluation stage of the cultural activity. The organizers examine whether the cultural event has achieved its purpose and record their observations - positive or negative - in a portfolio. Managers are called upon to identify mistakes and to resolve them so that they will not be repeated in the future.

At the same time, the CPFM (Active Perception Cultural Activities) model bases the planning on the core of the operation and management. The first two dimensions of the core of operation relate to the research part of the design, while the third involves the choice of the type of cultural activity, the organization of the event, and the execution. In particularly (Hill, O'Sullivan, & O'Sullivan, 2003):

- the identity dimension helps in developing perceptions based on the content of an idea, reflecting the particularities of the audience. For example, from the concept of freedom emerge the particular characteristics of students in a classroom, since it will be approached in a different way on a group of immigrants or refugees, differently on a group of Gypsies, and also differently on a group of children who reside at civil or non-civil areas.

- The dimension of impact enhancement detects positive or negative reactions by helping to resolve potential issues. For example, it is supposed that the approach of the concept of freedom -based on the mentality of the Gypsies- creates negative reactions to other groups. This creates a fertile ground for dialogue, through which similarities and differences are sought to change the students' attitudes and make them accept the diversity of people.

- the dimension of innovation leverages the landscape of cultural activity that students are going to organize (music, theatre, art, etc.) and assesses whether the opportunities presented in the two previous dimensions have been explored or not. For example, students choose the kind of cultural activity they want to implement

through voting. Then, via a draw the perspective through which the children will approach the concept of freedom is chosen - such as that of the Gypsies. The students' willingness to participate in the activity may indicate either or not their attitude has finally changed.

The core of management is developed simultaneously with the core of operation. The first three dimensions concern the research part of the design, while the latter two focus on the type of cultural activity, its organization as well as its execution. In particular (Kotler, Andreasen, 1996) :

- The ability to perceive is developed at the same time with the dimension of the identity and provides students with cognitive information. Also, it helps them to convey an idea briefly. Here, bibliographic research based on the material of the websites can assist children to collect data.
- The ability to understand is developed in parallel with the dimension of the impact. Students record advantages and disadvantages, similarities and differences, as well as problems that arise against design and discussion in electronic or printed notebooks.
- The principles of public law incorporate the dimension of the impact and enable children to understand the concepts which emerge in planning, relying on the socio-economic environment and the anthropocentric model. Here, conceptual maps, whether printed or electronic, can be a great tool for classification, grouping, drawing conclusions and dialogue.
- The possibility of adoption is developed alongside the dimension of innovation. Students choose the type of the cultural activity they want to implement, and they create innovative practices. Electronic applications, virtual reality, digital or traditional games, music and theatrical improvisations in an electronic or a physical environment, all of the above are modern dynamic tools for this part.
- The feasibility of implementation is part of the dimension of innovation and concerns the presentation of the cultural activity chosen by the learners themselves.

3 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Based on the above theoretical framework, this research examines whether fourth-grade students can operate in accordance with the stages and principles presented earlier to design and organize a cultural activity. The sample of the study consists of twenty fourth - grade students and the data collection method combines participatory observation along with formal and informal interviewing (Fopp,1997).

At the first stage of selection, students discussed with each other and after voting they decided to organize a theatrical performance. In order to organize their tasks, they searched for relevant material on the internet, but they were disappointed when they didn't find appropriate material for their class according to the curriculum. In addition, they raised concerns about copyrights. Thus, they took the decision to follow the instructions of the 9th module of the language lesson in order to create a theatrical performance (Bandimaroudis, 2011).

As far as space is concerned, it was agreed for the performance to be presented at the school's event hall, since

it is highly secure, equipped adequately, large, easily accessible for rehearsals as well as financially efficient. However, while students were debating, they realized that they had to obtain permission from the headmaster of the school in order to gain access to the event hall. They felt upset with the thought that they might receive a negative response. The teacher suggested creating a delegation of students who would mediate to the headmaster to take permission. The students proposed their classmates who they considered to be able and reliable to ultimate that task. Moreover, they were skeptical regarding how they could manage the headmaster's possibly negative feedback, but they were relieved when they realized that the delegation had accomplished its purpose (Bandimaroudis, 2011).

Regarding the selection of actors, the children created artistic groups according to their inclinations and interests. There were some tensions over who would become a member and in which group, but it was overcome through dialogue, arguments and advice (Fopp,1997).

For budgeting, students used Excel to record the cost of the materials (sets, posters, invitations, program) and found that they needed about twenty euros to buy the materials. They felt stressed for the second time, and they wondered where they could find the money. Some children suggested that they could offer the amount from their pocket money, others to ask for money from the headmaster, and some from their parents. After a conversation, the children decided to rely on their own strengths and put the amount from their pocket money (Hawkins, Menear,1988).

At the timetable's stage, the children used Microsoft Outlook to set a task completion schedule. There were disagreements regarding the division of roles and the definition of the number of rehearsals. Also, delays were observed in completion of the work, which were overcome by mutual subsidence by the members of each team (Arnold, 2005).

At the promoting stage, the children designed the posters, the invitations and the schedule of the show, using PowerPoint and Publisher. Then, they posted the material to their school and their neighbourhood and distributed invitations to other students and their parents (Hawkins, Menear,1988).

In designing, the students depending on the group they belonged to, searched the web for information about Mother's and Father's Day. With those searches in mind they could collect data in order to write the acts, compose the music, create digital stories in video format, as well as to search for clothing choices. The students were particularly pleased because of the good design of the previous stages. The wasn't much tension and for that reason the tasks were completed on time (Lewis,2008).

At the evaluation stage, the students they agreed that everything was under control and they felt particularly happy for the fact that they were able to implement the design steps. They were delighted that they worked in teams according to their talents. They pointed out that at first, the whole process seemed difficult, but with the distribution of activities, the arrangements were easier. When they were asked to define improvements for the whole process, students stated that they would need more time to complete the tasks and they highlighted that next time they would redefine the limits of the schedule (Fitts,1962).

About the dimensions of CPFM model the following were observed:

- During the dimension of identity, the students recorded on their digital notebook the topics in which they were interested in looking for more information about organizing the theatrical performance. Then, they voted. The topic that dominated concerned the family life and particularly the Mother's and Father's Day (Storey, (2010).
- During the dimension of impact enhancement, the students faced the following difficult situation: Some of their classmates came from single-parent families and they felt uncomfortable under the thought of approaching the specific subject. The coordinator suggested to the children to search the web to find who the Mother's and Father's Days are dedicated to. After the research process and the following discussion, the students realized that these celebrations are not exclusively about mothers and fathers. Any person who protects and loves a child as a mother or a father could celebrate those days. It was observed that the students' negative attitude, after this approach was altered (Arnold, 2005).
- In the course of the dimension of innovation, a student who was an immigrant proposed to acquire the theatrical act's cross-cultural content. Most students decided to give to the theatrical play a multicultural character. The idea of approaching other cultures on the occasion of the performance was welcomed with enthusiasm by all students (Fopp,1997).

Concerning the abilities of the CPFM model, the following were observed:

- At the stage of the perception's ability, the children worked harmoniously with each other and organized the bibliographic research using the web. However, there were difficulties when they had to choose the material that was important to them. There, the coordinator had an advisory role and helped them complete the process (Liakos, 2007).
- During the comprehension phase, the students recorded in their digital notebook the similarities and differences between the ancient and modern cultures, and they realized that in earlier historical times, different peoples identified the sky as the father and earth as the mother. They loved the civilization of Incas and they decided to start the event under the traditional music of Incas (Liakos, 2007) .
- Based on the principles of public law, children created conceptual maps. Using Mind Mapping software, they grouped and sorted the information, and they decided the order of the presentation (Philips, 1994).
- In the course of the possibility of adoption, the children through discussion decided to present a part of the theatrical tribute visually. They agreed to make a digital storytelling video about Gaia and the Sky and a presentation dedicated to a family's daily life (Fitts,1962).
- At the stage of the implementation, the theatrical tribute was presented by the students. Overall, the whole process went smoothly, but there were minor issues mainly with the digital media (the video was stop unexpectedly) and the tuning (some students forgot their

words), which were overcome by the students' ability to keep their temper (Philips, 1994).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1. A snapshot from the beginning of the theatrical performance.



Based on the observation, the formal and informal interviewing as well as the result, the organizational process was considered satisfactory. It was especially important that students could manage their research spirit, that they were able to work in groups, as well as to understand the concept of teamwork. What made the whole process difficult was the limited time, and for this reason the next time the tasks will be divided even more (Figure 1).

In addition, teamwork mitigated students' anxiety, improved their performance in the individual areas, and brought forward alternative ideas and practices in completing goals. Furthermore, through teamwork, students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities were encouraged to take part in the process as equal members, avoiding their targeting.

The students, having in mind the information that they processed, they attempted to create a rule-based framework for the theatrical performance. Of course, the result was not 100% their own work, as the trainees took into account other information to make their work more comprehensive to the rest of the group. This process allowed them to express personal views sufficiently.

The content of the event reflected the personal desires of the students, which contributed significantly to the success of the event. Students were eager to work on an idea they had chosen.

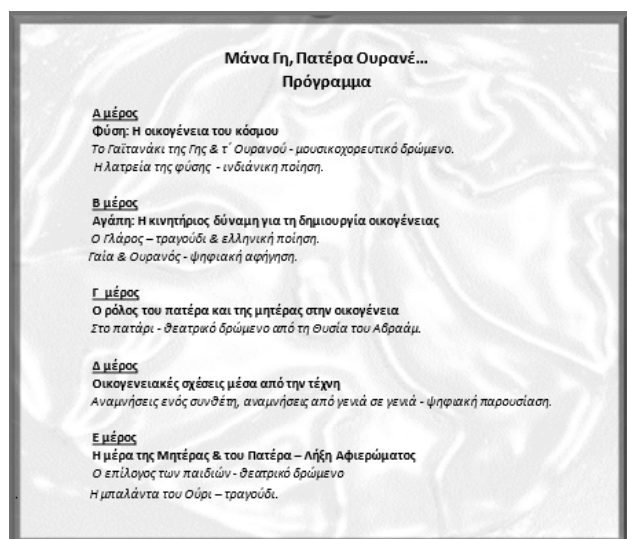
Another important aspect of the results was the opportunity for the students to work in a democratic context. Through voting, draw, and discussion they determined the frame of the topic on the basis of free choice. Thus, the children realized that through dialogue and a positive approach to an issue, the

contradictions were mitigated and the problems minimized (Figure 2).

Figure 2. A part from the theatrical scenario.

- Αφηγητής 1 :** Η Σάρα και ο Αβραάμ... δύο κέρνα ομοιώματα από κάποιο παιδικό παιχνίδι, ξεχασμένα σε τούτο το πατάρι...
- Αφηγητής 2:** Η Σάρα και ο Αβραάμ... χρόνια ικέτευαν τον Ουράνιο Πατέρα για ένα παιδί...
- Αφηγητής 1 :** ...και τελικά μετά από πολλές προσευχές και παρακάλια...
- Αφηγητής 2 :** ...κρατούν στα χέρια τους τον Ισαάκ.
- Αφηγητής 1 :** Όμως, ο Πατέρας θέλει να τους δοκιμάσει, να δει τον αγαπούν από πίστη ή από συμφέρον;
- Αφηγητής 2:** Προστάζει ο Θεός τον Αβραάμ να θυσιάσει το παιδί του κι εκείνος την εντολή υπακούει...
- Αφηγητής 1 :** κι η Σάρα ... τον γιο της για θυσία ετοιμάζει.
- Αφηγητής 2:** Ο ένας γονιός μοιρολογεί...(τρυφερά προς τη Σάρα)
- Αφηγητής 1 :** Κι ο άλλος τον στηρίζει...(τρυφερά προς τον Αβραάμ)
- Αφηγητής 2 :** Γιατί πίσω από το περιτύλιγμα που λέγεται σώμα, κρύβεται η πνοή που δίνει ζωή στα πάντα, η άυλη ουσία, που οι άνθρωποι συνηθίζουν να ονομάζουν ψυχή...

Figure 3. The programm of the theatrical event



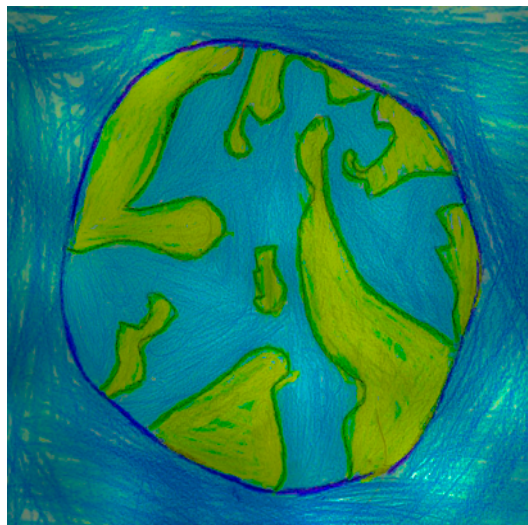
In addition, students understood the importance of timing to the success of a project. They realized that the event could not be completed if all the teams did not finish their work in a timely manner (Figure 3).

In general, the teams felt that the time to complete the work was insufficient, so it was agreed to devote more time to complete the project next time.

Furthermore, the students realized the value of strategy in organizing a cultural event. The steps that the children followed both during the planning and during the implementation process of the event, helped them to determine the sequence of actions they had to take to accomplish their tasks.

At the same time, using innovations in the planning of the theatrical event brought students in touch with new technologies and greatly enhanced their digital skills. Moreover, their psychology and self-confidence were enhanced (Figure 4).

Figure 4. A snapshot from the digital story telling.



In addition, it was found that the power of digital media lies in conveying values, ideas or attitudes through images and audio.

Figure 5. The invitation



Also, the advertising campaign stage allowed children to express themselves artistically and release their imagination to create posters and invitations. At the same time, it strengthened the organizational skills and relationships of the group (Figure 5).

Finally, the fact that the students evaluated the event and focused on the tasks that they would like to redesign next time, gave them the opportunity to develop their critical thinking ability. Feedback has enabled students to realize the importance of validity, to maintain a positive attitude towards error as well as to understand the importance of flexibility in organizing process.

All in all, Children were pleased with the alternative approach of the ceremony and they expressed the wish to repeat the whole process for other events such as the Greek War of Independence or World War Two.

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SUBMITTED: JUNE 2019

REVISION SUBMITTED: NOVEMBER 2019

ACCEPTED: DECEMBER 2019

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

PUBLISHED ONLINE: 15 MAY 2020