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Original Article

Forest School. A Modern Method in Educational Process

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Abstract

The ”Forest school” is a modern educational method which is based on learning outdoors in a specially designed space in the middle of a forest called *Pedagogical Forest*, offering countless opportunities for learning. The ecological crisis combined with the failure and dropout and lack of motivation for learning have led us to propose the introduction in the educational process of this modern method called *Forest school*, which has a beneficial effect in various areas: sustainable development, environmental protection, personal and professional development. To see the double impact that *Forest school* has on society and the environment, we used an investigation questionnaire, which tries to capture the current state of knowledge about the world and its role in the evolution of society and the desire of students to know the beautiful sylvan. Both students and teachers are open to this challenge called *Forest school* as they want a diversification of the educational process, to arouse their interest in knowledge and self-awareness.

Keywords: educational process, Forest school, forest function.

1. Introduction

Forest teaching is an opening to a new method of learning ”Forest school” that increases knowledge of the forest ecosystem to another level, that of sustainability, in which man, being educated, will have an overwhelming role that would change his attitude towards nature, towards the others and towards himself [9].

The concept was originally developed in Sweden and has expanded into the UK in 1950 and since then it has been spreading worldwide. The number of these forests schools, called abroad ”Forest school, forêts pédagogique, bosquescuela, ecoécole” reached several thousand and continues to grow.

More and more people start to become aware that the game approach and education in the woods has a significant effect on student development [6]. In nature students concentrate better and are less stressed, learn to respect each other more and also the environment [1].

The aim of opening the educational center named Pedagogical Forest and implementing of this modern method of learning, called ”Forest school” is to know and perceive the forest with the help of concepts related to the spiritual sphere, trying to model man’s ethical behavior towards nature from tender ages.

Sustainable forest management is the most widely discussed topic in the world in this century, but the population does not know what this means, does not know how this ideal can be reached, not does it know why sustainable forest management is so important [2].

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It must be educated in this regard, from tender ages, putting them into the real available settings of learning, which should help them understand the realities of the contemporary world, through a modeling ethical behavior, giving surprising satisfactions both personally and professionally [10].

Pedagogical forests involve carrying out educational activities in the forests conducted by a multidisciplinary team made up of teachers, students and foresters [15]. Given a theoretical basis the student wants to experience practically, wants to have contact "here and now" with the world around him, to understand the complexity of nature and the need to protect it, but moreover he can learn how to protect forests [14].

The program called "A different school/an alternative school": To know more, to be better!" is the first to involve all preschool children / pupils and teachers in activities that meet the interests and concerns of various preschool children/students to highlight talents and capacities in different areas, even if it is not necessarily present in the national curriculum, and to encourage their participation in various actions in non-formal contexts. "Forest school" is a modern method of non-formal learning, which has beneficial effects in a double sense, namely protects both environment and society [13]. It is based on learning outdoors. Direct contact with nature provides the a powerful source of learning for the student, facilitating the learning process even for students who have various difficulties, encouraging students and giving many physical as well as mental and emotional benefits [7, 12].

Forest school should be considered a significant part in the Romanian education system because it offers countless opportunities for learning [3].

2. Materials and Methods

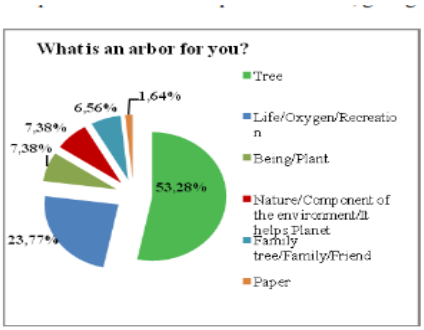
Based on data found in the literature, this research attempts to highlight the youth society's desire to know the world around them. We used a favorite method of questionnaire survey in order to obtain results as objective as possible.

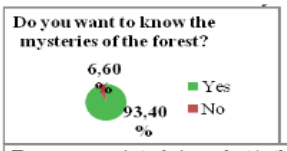
A questionnaire was applied to 106 students from grades 5 - 8 and to 15 teachers from Secondary School Ion Creangă, who tries to capture the current state of knowledge about the world and its role in the evolution of society and the desire and curiosity of students to know beautiful sylvan as well. Semi-structured questionnaire is applied, comprising a set of questions, some of which are closed questions and some open questions.

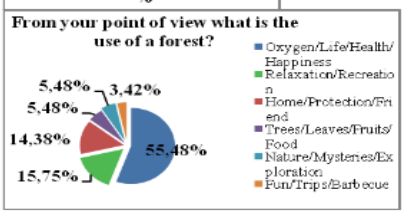
The reason we opted for semi-structured a questionnaire was to highlight the novelty, we let the students express themselves freely, not to feel compelled by some answers, not to have the impression that it is a usual test, but feel otherwise.

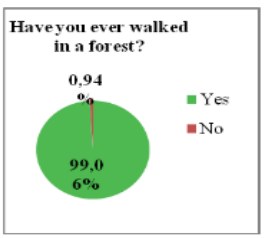
3. Results and Discussion

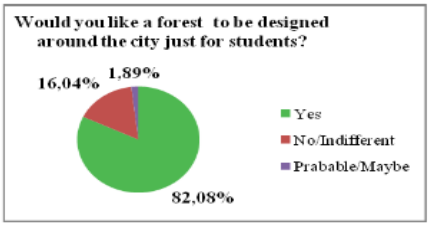
After applying semi-structured questionnaire, we obtained the following results, which will complete the information presented so far, giving us a much clearer vision on this study.

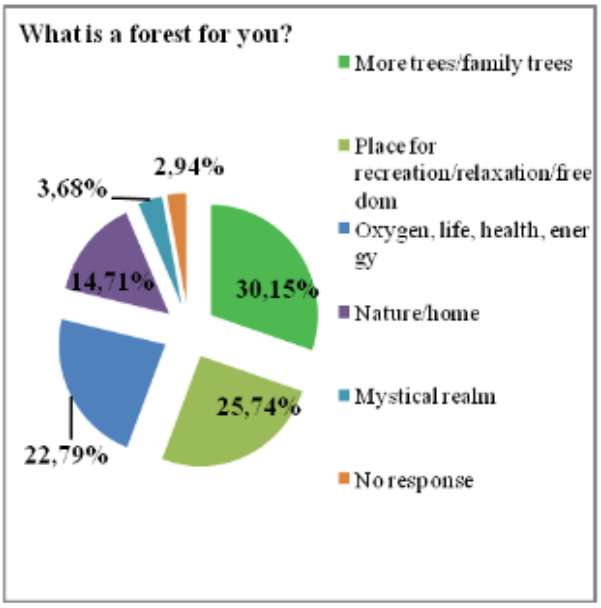


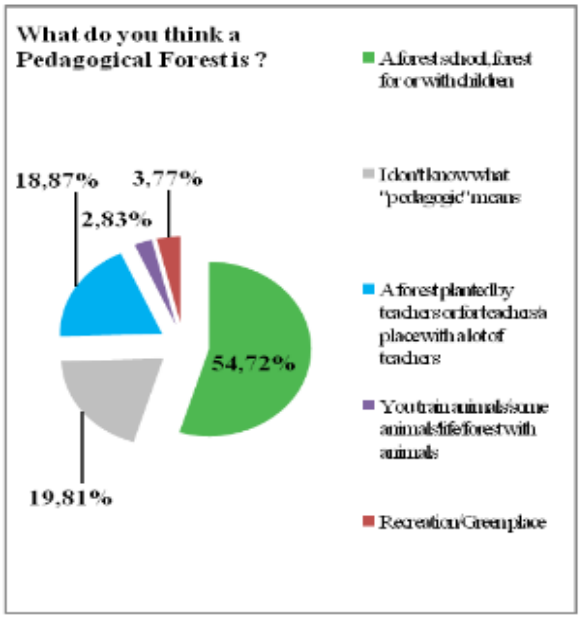












I will start to interpret the results with the first reaction which the students had, when they saw the questionnaire: "Well, you all keep coming and giving us questionnaires to fill in, but in the end, nothing is done for us". Another reaction was when they read the questionnaire question number 5 "**From your point of view, what is the use of a forest?"** The vast majority of students answered orally "for fuel". In writing, however, they did not give this answer.

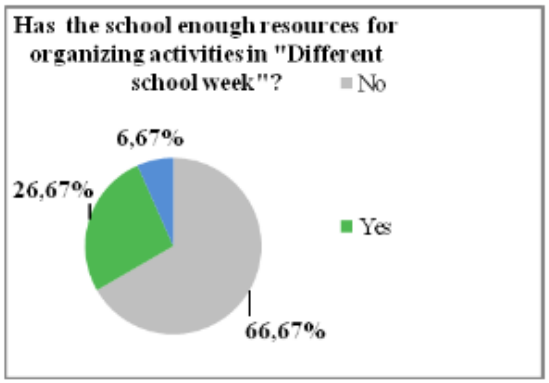
There were no students who did not wish to fill in the questionnaire, but there were some questions that they did not answer, they either abstained or did not know the terms in question, as such term pedagogic. At the first question most of the students associated the arbor with a tree, easy to explain, because although the DEX terms of arbor and tree have the same definition, however, the tree is a more empirical term, while the arbor is a scientific one, but we should not forget that the students attend secondary school. For others, however, an arbor is a Family tree, family or friend. Question two, however, seeks a much broader ecosystem, and the students associated forest, most of them with a family, home and health. Of the 106 students, only one had never had any contact with the woods, in the sense that he had never walked through it. However there are some who consider the forest a place for having barbecues, others a place to embraces trees to be healthy.

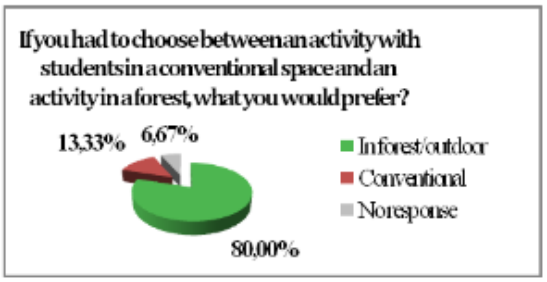
For question 5 I would have expected all students to answer that the forest gives us oxygen, but among the students there were some who used the terms relaxation, shelter, harmony. Almost all students prefer that the activities in "Different School Week " should take place in a forest, or at least outdoors, anywhere else but not inside school, which encouraged me to start this research. Students want a forest to be designed around the city just for them, some of them even started to offer suggestions about how to arrange this space, or tried to imagine aloud about what they would do in this space.

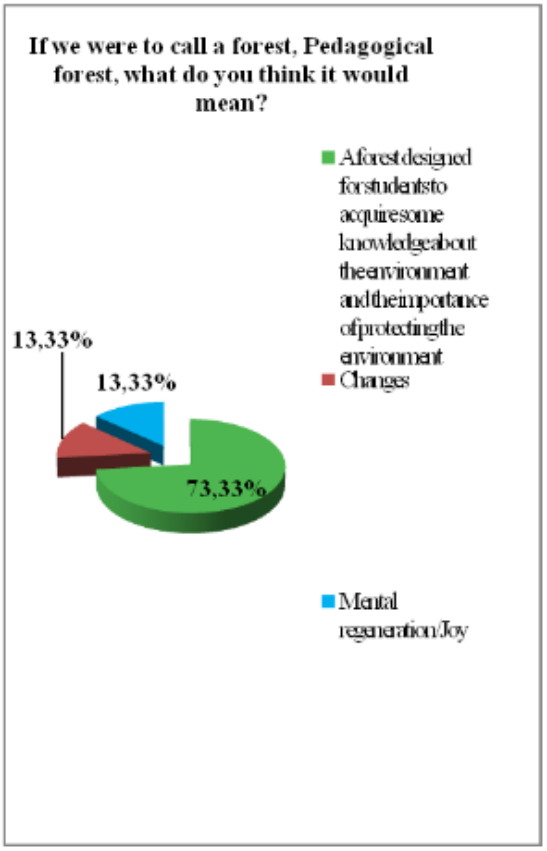
Their curiosities are numerous and very deep, some were thinking of mysteries other stories, others of plants and animals, and others how it would be to live there day by day. It would have been interesting to see the behavior of the students from all four classes before the questionnaire and their behavior after they filled in the questionnaire, but we would exceed the maximum number of pages allowed for this article, however we can say that teachers came and asked me what I had done to them, because they were more relaxed during the class that followed after we applied the questionnaire. And now we are asking ourselves /wondering "How would these students be after an hour spent effectively in a forest, if a positive effect was seen only after reading the 10 questions?"

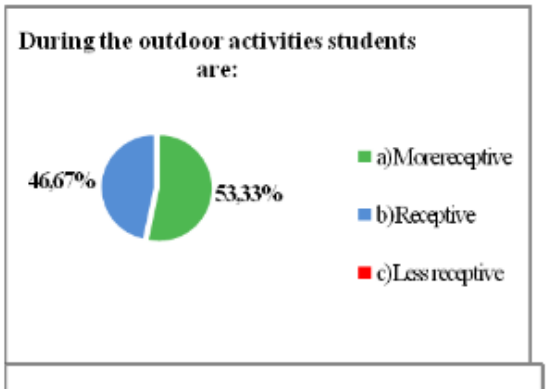
Teachers, however, were not open to this questionnaire, some refused to answer the entire questionnaire and others left some questions unanswered, especially those referring to Different School Week, while others on the

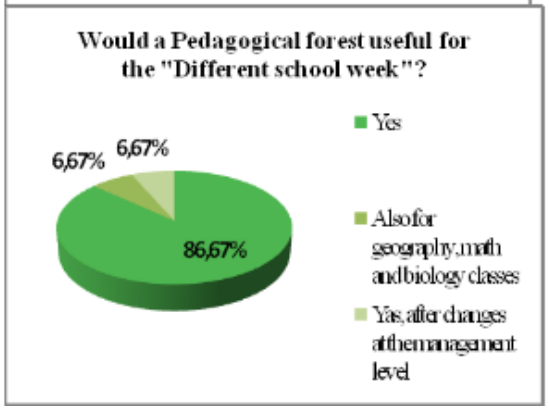
contrary were extremely honest saying that the Different School Week School is an unsuccessful experiment, or it is something beautiful which turned out into a mess. They all agree that the institution does not provide them with sufficient resources to carry out these activities and that they have difficulty in planning and organizing them. They prefer outdoor activities because students are more communicative, selfless, more receptive or responsive, relaxed. In school pupils are too excited, nervous, anxious or, on the contrary, lonesome.











As far the place where the lessons are taught is concerned, they prefer a forest to a conventional space. They are convinced that the educational process could be more easily carried out and that the results would be much better. They consider that a pedagogical forest around the city would be useful, but that should not concern only the activities organized during the Different School Week, but everyday subjects such as biology, mathematics, science, Romanian language etc. Of course the results would have been more objective if we had used a structured questionnaire, but we avoided this

in order to better see what students know about a forest. To understand nature we must be subjective, and these children, behind masks adapted to the society they live in, hide a burning desire to experience the world around them, whom they would like to confide to, transforming it into a true friend to guide them on their way in life.

4. Conclusions

It is imperative for our evolution to introduce *Forest school* in the educational process and create as many teaching forests to help of young people's personal and professional development and therefore to help us live in peace and harmony with all the living and play a vital role in securing our living conditions. We do have Forest therapy [8] which offers us free healing, we also have Forest ethics [4, 5] which teaches etiquette, why wouldn't we have *Forest school* that gives us many learning situations, much more interesting and enjoyable for all ages. All these three terms are included in the Pedagogical forest and it should not be too daring on our part if we considered this to be part of the forest special protection functions, because it gives us a lot of benefits (Fig.1).

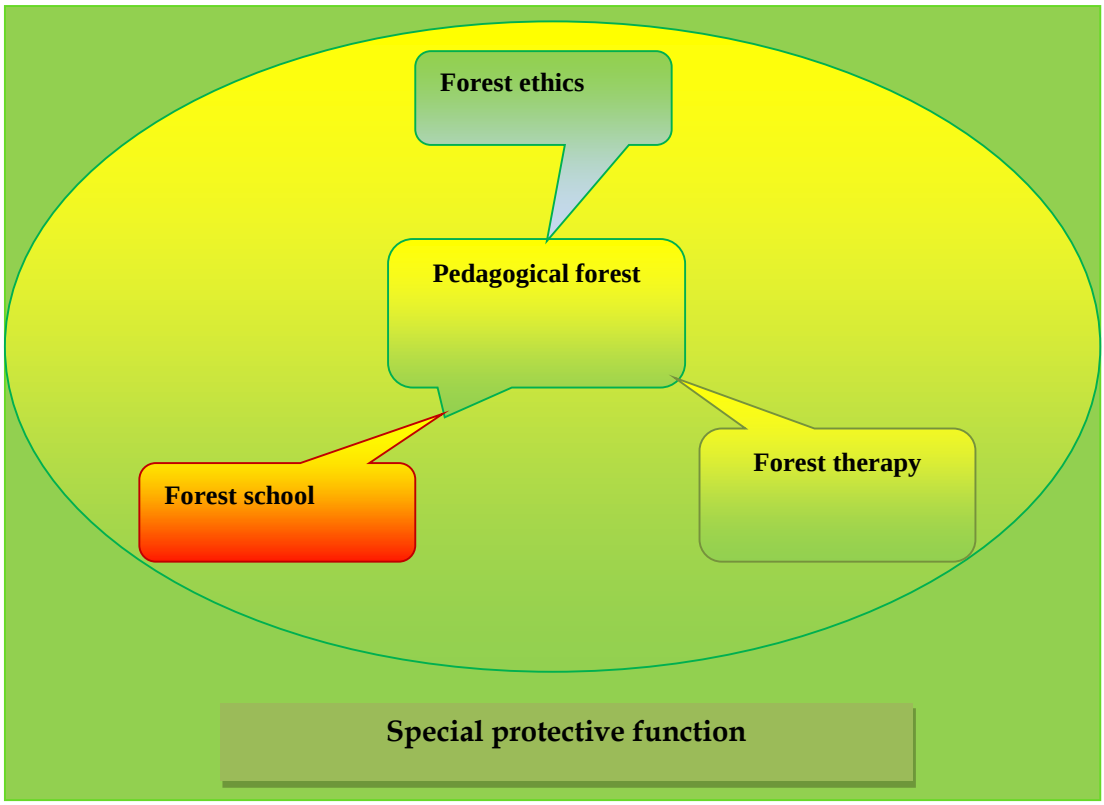


Figure 1. Special protective function

Lately, when humanity is facing a series of major problems, which condition its existence (global warming, population growth, lack of resources, etc.), the forest takes on new meanings [11]. Not only the resource of timber is emphasized, but also the other functions that the forest performs. In this context, **Forest therapy, Forest ethics** and, why not, **Forest school** must find its place in the Romanian education system. With children, we can more easily educate adults, so as to develop in the population that forestry consciousness, which we need so much.

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