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Focusing on the educational environment for harmonic child development

Zapewnienie harmonijnego rozwoju dziecka dzięki koncentracji na środowisku edukacyjnym

Abstract

The study aims to enlighten the need for focusing towards some psychological aspects of a child's functioning in a pluralistic, pulsating, and flexible educational environment. It reveals resources for its harmonious development through a model of its construction. It is based on the synergistic effect between sustainable transversal skills and variables, according to socio-economic conditions and key competences. The synergy integrates in the model the personality, communicative, sociocultural, methodological, emotional, practical, and physical components. This is achieved through the psychological aspects of the two levels of education of suggestopedic communicative framework – the level of conscious activity and the level of the unconscious psychological reactivity of the learner. Its utilization provides transforming pedagogy into an art and the teacher into a creator.

Keywords: harmonious development, model of constructing educational environment, suggestopedic approach

Streszczenie

Opracowanie ma na celu zwrócenie uwagi na potrzebę skupienia się na niektórych psychologicznych aspektach funkcjonowania dziecka w pluralistycznym, zmieniającym się i elastycznym środowisku edukacyjnym. W artykule przedstawiono zasoby niezbędne dla harmonijnego rozwoju dziecka oraz jak owe harmonijne środowisko edukacyjne budować. Model ten jest efektem synergii między zrównoważonymi umiejętnościami przekrojowymi nauczycieli i zmiennymi zgodnymi z warunkami społeczno-ekonomicznymi i kluczowymi kompetencjami. Synergia integruje w modelu komponenty osobowościowe, komunikacyjne, społeczno-kulturowe, metodologiczne, emocjonalne, praktyczne i fizyczne. Osiągnięcie synergii jest możliwe dzięki wyrównaniu dwóch poziomów psychologiczno-komunikacyjnych ucznia: poziomu świadomej aktywności i poziomu nieświadomej reaktywności. Wykorzystanie modelu zapewnienia harmonijnego środowiska edukacyjnego umożliwia przekształcenie pedagogiki w sztukę, a nauczyciela w twórcę.

Słowa kluczowe: harmonijny rozwój, model konstruowania środowiska edukacyjnego, podejście suggestopedyczne

Introduction

The rapidly evolving world, connections between contemporary societies, and shifts in social expectations towards modern schools demand alternative social and pedagogical approaches to individuals. Today, in the dynamic evolution of education, new paths are sought for maximal development of their potential in order to support the efforts of a child and an immature individual in discovering and nurturing their own abilities and talents.

The dominant educational paradigm adopts individually oriented education as its goal. However, it is evident that this type of educational system does not necessarily yield high achievements. One of the reasons lies in the methodological approach focused on the development of the individual. As individuals are different and with varying needs, teachers struggle to encompass this diversity. This leads to long-term confusion and a decrease in motivation to accomplish the teacher's mission. Alongside innate predispositions, the environment is a crucial element of educational philosophy¹. Focusing on its organization, harmonizing with needs, and orchestrating its components could transform it into a significant invitation for learners to courageously stay in the world of learning. Teachers' preparation in constructing pedagogical environments could enhance learning as a memorable experience. Catalysing the unconscious reactivity during the conscious assimilation of knowledge and skills, the components of the educational environment could be a powerful ally in unlocking vast reserves within one's personality.

The present study aims to enlighten the resources and psychological mechanisms inherent in this dual approach in education, specific to suggestopedia – the Bulgarian methodology recognized by UNESCO in 1978 as uniquely humane². The suggestopedic communicative framework combines rationality in developing educational content with the resources of unconscious incentive within the environment. Hence emerges the necessity to shift the focus of teachers towards certain psychological aspects of harmonious development and a child's functioning in a flexibly constructed educational environment. In the logic of the constructivist approach, the focus on the teacher and on the environment³ would reveal new reserves for optimizing the educational process.

¹ Z. Kostova, *Novi izmereniya na ucheneto*, Macros Plovdiv 2017, p. 9 (in Bulgarian): "The personality develops in a certain historically created social environment and in turn is dependent on it. This circumstance constantly gives rise to and maintains the contradiction between the theories of individual and social goals in education. During certain periods one direction prevails, then the other".

² G. Lozanov, *Suggestopediya – desuggestivno obuchenie*, Sofia 2005, p. 9 (in Bulgarian).

³ S. Anagyun, *Teachers' ideas about the interrelationships between 21st-century habits and management of a constructivist learning environment*, "International Journal of Instruction", 11(4), 2018, pp. 825–840, <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11452a>.

Problem statement

The questions posed from a research perspective here are related to clarification: what constitutes an educational environment? What are its components? In what sustainable model of its construction can they be included? What are the expected outcomes of applying the model? Equally important is the question of which methodological approach integrates and orchestrates these components for the reliable utilization of the model?

Research goals

The research questions guide the purpose of the present study: to achieve terminological clarity regarding the concept of the “learning environment” in order to delineate the indispensable components of a construction model, both in face-to-face and online formats. From a prognostic perspective, it is crucial to outline the environment’s resources as a coordinate system and a specific tool for effectiveness – acting as the “third teacher”⁴ to significantly enhance opportunities for the (self)development of learners. Prognostically, there are expectations for dynamically combining and orchestrating behaviourist, constructivist, humanist, connectivism practices based on the suggestopedia approach, focusing the teacher on the dual nature of dialogue with the students in the post-nonclassical paradigm⁵.

Research methods

Following the highlighted issues and the research questions, we conducted an in-depth search and analysis focusing on publications related to the construction and impact of the educational environment. By examining over 30 publications, key components influencing the learning process were abstracted. Modelling these components into a conceptual framework justified their synthesis, aiming for the future application for optimizing sustainable, harmonious development.

⁴ G. Georgieva, *Interaktsiyata dete-sreda-vyzzrastni v uchilishchata Redzho Emiliya. Sbornik dokladi*, Collection of reports, Ruse 2014, pp. 135–140; Non-standard kindergartens. Italy Published 5.01.2016 | by The Child Plays | in Communication and Education (in Bulgarian).

⁵ D. Kamenova, S. Arkhipova, V. Dimitrova, *Personal-professional characteristics of future specialists in the process of professional training in the post-classical paradigm* [in:] *Educational space: Post-non-classical perspectives*, eds. D. Kamenova, S. Arkhipova, VUM, 2023, pp. 71–92, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368511289>.

Theoretical framework of the research

Without a framework, we don't know what we're doing
(Anton Karo)

Harmonious child development. Development is a growth process experienced by all children, encompassing physical, intellectual/cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic growth⁶. The concept of harmonious development in today's imbalanced conditions appears evidently contradictory and confusing amidst an ocean of knowledge. How can one effectively and swiftly solve problems? Digital transformation, horizontal and vertical integration pose challenges for educators to prepare the modern individual from an early age: to quickly turn data into value; to transform information into intelligence; to convert relationships into resources; to rapidly turn decisions into innovations. These characteristics can be classified as among the most pertinent “key” competencies today, but they are changing over time based on socio-economic conditions⁷. On the other hand, “the world of digital technologies leads to fundamental changes in the consciousness of modern students, focusing on the fragmentation and imagery of information, its frequency, and variability. Modern students are original ‘carriers’ of visual thinking”⁸ In pursuit of sustainability, a decisive turn seems necessary towards conceptualizing and linking the psychological reserves of learning with educational environment, harmonizing them with the application of appropriate pedagogical technologies.

Contemporary research on the so-called “21st-century skills”, which enable students to navigate realities, delineates the following core abilities: critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, innovation, teamwork, decision-making, leadership, knowledge application, self-management, and learning⁹.

It seems that the quest for the right approach to harmonious development directs towards finding a resilient “ground” that meets the demands of the time and society. “Key competencies function as a pragmatic manifestation and specification

⁶ <https://study.com/learn/lesson/developmental-domains-child-development.html>, updated: 11.21.2023.

⁷ Y. Rasheva-Merdzhanova, *Sinergeticheska filosofiya na obrazovanieto. Sinergeticheska uchilishtna pedagogika. Sinergichno obrazovanie*, Sofia 2017, p. 86 (in Bulgarian).

⁸ Zh. Bitimbaeva, E. Nogaibaeva, *Modern digital educational space and ego opportunities in the teaching of Russian language*, Collection of materials of the international round table on the topic: “Training of professional in the context of digitalization of education – problems and prospects” 2022, pp.73–75.

⁹ S. Anagyun, *Teachers' Perceptions about the Relationship between 21st Century Skills and Managing Constructivist Learning Environments*, “International Journal of Instruction”, 11(4), 2018, pp. 825–840, <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11452a>, received: 9.04.2018, revision: 22.07.2018, accepted: 28.07.2018.

of the transversal basic competencies of an individual – their natural, long-term ‘lifelong’ potential. While transversal competencies are constant attributes inherent to individuals, they are transferable and valid throughout one’s life as a reasonable social being”.

These competencies are linked to students’ cognitive competencies – cognition and metacognition, social competencies – their ethics in interpersonal and intergroup relationships, methodical competencies – their organization and purposefulness for prospective activities, and self-management competencies – directing their self-awareness¹⁰. Furthermore, the author convincingly states that “education is called upon to focus on the transversal basic competencies of an individual and on developing their skills to reorganize and combine them in different ways”. Thus, contemporary education can support “the individual’s efforts to build themselves holistically, mastering the core of their transversal life potential”¹¹.

The proposed solution for the harmonious development of human potential as a teacher’s task outlines dynamism in synergy (relationships) between relatively stable transversal and relatively variable key skills – the first component of constructing the educational environment. Therefore, the educational environment should reflect and “remind” of the connection between the foundational stable development (of transversal skills) and the variable (key competencies), as well as the synergy of the other components of the environment. What are they?

Components of the educational environment model. Exploring literary sources on the educational environment reveals significant but confusing terminological richness in designating the concept of the time-space in which the educational process takes place – a meeting of educators with learners. This confusion creates even greater headaches when it is necessary to differentiate the specifics of pedagogical environments between face-to-face and online formats. Recently, there’s been talk about an “educational territory” and “educational trajectory” in an effort to denote the “exit” of the learning process beyond the classroom and even outside the school.

The complex of natural and social factors, termed the “environment of the individual”, influences a person’s life and activities. “A person is simultaneously a product and creator of their environment, which provides the physical basis for life and enables intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual development”¹². V. Yasvin perceives “educational environment” as “the system of influences and conditions for shaping personality according to a given pattern, as well as the opportunities for its development contained in the social and spatial subject environment”¹³.

¹⁰ Y. Rasheva-Merdzhanova, *Sinergeticheska filozofiya...*, p. 86.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

¹² V. Yasvin, *Educational environment from modeling to design*, ed. Meaning, Moscow, 2001 (in Russian), cited by 2001 (cit. by Kozhuharova) (in Bulgarian).

¹³ *Ibidem*.

Constructing the educational environment as a “system”, for which teachers lack specific preparation, involves keywords like “influence”, “conditions”, “opportunities”. Apparently, the “influences” relate to the material world of the environment – the **physical** component of the environment, but also to the teacher. Their chosen approach, methods, and tools are undeniably instruments of influence, forming part of the “conditions for shaping personality”. Hence, a **methodical** component of the educational environment can be identified. It encompasses approaches, methods, and innovative teaching strategies based on advanced technologies. Through the choice of teaching approach, activities should be planned and carried out that will facilitate the transition from acquired knowledge about the world to creating a self-image. Such an approach provides an environment where, together with the teacher or independently, an individual educational trajectory for self-discovery, self-revelation, and activation of creative abilities can be formed.

The communicative component of the environment is presented through the psychological dimensions of influence between the two subjects in education. Due to space limitations, we will briefly stop here, focusing specifically on the suggestopedic approach, serving as a communicative framework for fostering humanistic relationships. It is based on the inner freedom of the individual, aiming for communicative liberation through trust to unveil the hidden reserves within. For Anton Karo “suggestopedia is not just a methodology. It represents a humane communication framework that we could apply in everyday communication with all people around the world, giving us the key to unlock our untapped physiological capacity”¹⁴. The release and utilization of “reserves are not owed to the visible influence of the teacher but to the collaborative work between the individual or group members and the teacher, based on genuine respect”¹⁵. According to Georgi Lozanov, in “harmonious communication” “suggesting means offering a choice”, a contrary meaning to the guided or dictated state of mind¹⁶. This constitutes the conceptual framework of suggestology, upon which suggestopedia is built: the science of spontaneous, not forced release from factors of suppression, limitation, or distortion¹⁷.

Starting from “that life-affirming communicative suggestion, in English called to offer, to propose, meaning ‘I offer you to choose’”, it is not just what but also how I “offer” that matters – so that for the student, it becomes the most acceptable, most natural choice. And the environment constructed can facilitate this choice most successfully. “Some suitable orchestration is required to engage the subconscious with peripheral perceptions and emotional stimuli”¹⁸. Thus,

¹⁴ A. Caro, *Suggestopedia for Every Parent and Teacher*, part II, Sofia 2018, p. 7 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁵ G. Lozanov, *Suggestopedia – desuggestivno obuchenie*, Sofia 2005, p. 10 (in Bulgarian).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 50–51.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

G. Lozanov understands effective learning as revealing personal reserves since “communication is holistic”. The author and A. Caro share that “by reserves, we understand the unexpressed, genetically predisposed, and mainly operating in the unconsciousness, many times larger than the everyday possibilities of the personality, which to a certain extent also submit to different psychophysiological regularities than the ordinary”¹⁹.

As an illustration of some revealed reserves, heightened memory and recalling unconscious knowledge from the periphery through environmental elements, at a certain moment recovered from memory at a conscious level, high creativity due to the release from tension, enhanced creative productivity through the activation of intuition, accelerated creative development without fatigue, are mentioned. However, for these to occur, instead of the dominating command position of the teacher, an “emotional synchrony in normal human and educational communication”²⁰ is necessary.

An innovative emphasis in this approach is primarily centered on “the personality of the teacher with their goals, expectations, and spiritual development”. In this regard, the issue of “orchestration” is clarified, how it introduces “music, songs, art, games”²¹, and the crucial question about the unconscious influence of the teacher’s prestige. According to G. Lozanov, the teacher’s prestige and authority are powerful instruments for influencing students and children – their voice and the very word. His overall spiritual presence. Yana Rasheva speaks about the spiritual competence of the teacher²², which makes him a model and an inseparable companion for the student throughout life. The Teacher with a capital T. Obviously, as a component of the educational environment, the spiritual-personal component of the teacher is imposed, synergistically linked to the development of his students’ personalities.

Regarding the question of the internal force of influence (within the approach) and the prestige of the teacher, the author responds: “One of the ‘forms of suggestive impact of art is empathy, soul resonance – an aesthetic reaction upon contact with art. Suggestion can be accepted in this case as a communicative process in which the content of one psyche is transferred to another directly through this empathy. It often occurs through emotions, peripheral perceptions, anticipation of a respected and reliable teacher during education”²³. “Human need is for more and more such influences. They are already interactions. A large part of them is unconscious.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 36 and see more A. Caro, *Fiziologicheska harakteristika na nyakoi aspekti na uchebnia protses*, ed. Foundation Bukvite, 2023.

²⁰ G. Lozanov, *Suggestopedia...*, p. 42.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 34.

²² Y. Rasheva-Merdzhanova, *Predizvikatelstvoto „transformatsiya“ pred profesiyata „uchitel“ – v konteksta na sotsialnoto vzaimodeystvie* [in:] Contemporary challenges for the teaching profession. II Autumn Scientific and Educational Forum Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2012, p. 22 (in Bulgarian).

²³ G. Lozanov, *Suggestopedia...*, pp. 46–47.

Mostly, there is a pleasant feeling and emotional growth... Suggestopedia is an educational form of art²⁴.

What is para-consciousness? For Vipal Gupta it is “the Potential Beyond What We Know”²⁵. According to Suggestopedia, “paraconsciousness” refers to more or less unconscious mental activity. It includes peripheral perceptions, emotional stimuli, unconscious acquired dispositions in their various variants... automated processes, unconscious components of motivation, attitude, expectations, and needs...; all non-verbalized automatic activities; the numerous unconscious forms of association, encoding, and symbolization; the unconscious aspects of creativity, such as intuition and inspiration²⁶.

G. Kozhuharova she expresses doubts about the electronic technologies’ potential to create “a creative educational process”. “Despite the variety of means, the issue of creating a favourable, friendly, collaborative, and effective microclimate in the classroom is undoubtedly important”²⁷. As seen, in the understanding of the educational environment, besides the physical component, the positive mental climate, i.e., the emotional component, stands out. “Few schools today create such an environment. In Suggestopedia, the walls of the room are filled with boards that are visible in peripheral vision and are easily remembered. On one side are boards with studied material, and the other wall is filled with currently studied material. Thus, the child will never be afraid of forgetting and will always have something to remember from”²⁸. The fear of failure is absent, and the desire to participate doubles.

G. Kozhuharova marks yet another component of the educational environment – the active component, and not just purely intellectual, but creatively active: the creative classroom “encourages critical thinking, intuition, imagination, originality in proposed solutions, enhancing the desire for active self-realization, self-improvement, conscious self-construction”²⁹.

Creative teachers usually allocate different areas in the classroom for children and students to carry out various activities, often chosen by them, to experiment with what they learn. What could be more wonderful in the learning environment than the products created by the students themselves, the walls of success, exhibitions, concerts, etc.?

The socio-cultural component of the educational environment is marked by St. Dinchevska, according to whom “the contemporary understanding of the subject-spatial environment is that it’s not merely a basic physical category, but

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ V. Gupta, *What is Para-Consciousness: The Potential Beyond What We Know*, Paperback 2021.

²⁶ G. Lozanov, *Suggestopedia...*, pp. 46–47.

²⁷ G. Kozhuharova, *Menidzhmant na obrazovatelna sreda za razvitie na kreativnostta i tvorchestvoto*, E-Journal “Pedagogical Forum”, 2015, DOI: 10.15547/PF.2015.025 (in Bulgarian).

²⁸ A. Caro, *Suggestopedia za vseki roditel i uchitel*, part II, Sofia 2018, p. 107 (in Bulgarian).

²⁹ G. Kozhuharova, *Menidzhmant...*, p. 6.

a cultural-pedagogical complex”³⁰. The educational environment should imply multicultural education, providing an environment for building their own “self”, while simultaneously the learners getting to know other cultures. It is crucial for the educational environment to foster the development of social competence for living with others. This is a marker of culture today!

Conclusions and perspective for future research

The educational environment is increasingly recognized as vital for high-quality education. As a summary, the contribution of the study lies in bringing clarity to the concept of the educational environment. In the process were abstracted the components of the environment, which help structure a model for its construction by the teacher. Research on applying the model will likely adjust or enrich the understanding of its components. It will also help assess the sustainability of the proposed concepts of sustainable harmonious development through transversal skills upon which variable key competencies can be built.

It was found that the construction of educational environments is a pulsating, pluralistic, and flexible element of educational philosophy, providing opportunities for synergy among personal, communicative, methodological, practical, socio-cultural, emotional, and physical components, enabling continuous learning through experiencing them. This reveals the rich reserves within the child, student, learner, and others. By creating a positive and engaging environment, teachers can provide their students with the physical, psychological, and emotional support they need to thrive and succeed – within and beyond the school.

In the foreseeable future, various theoretical frameworks on the subject, the abundance of research results, and the growing innovations involving artificial intelligence in children’s and young people’s education will likely construct a specialized academic discipline for training and preparing teachers for the creative construction of the educational environment.

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³⁰ T. Delcheva, St. Dinczyska et al., *Tehnologiya na pedagogicheskoto vzaimodeystvie v situatsii*, “Kota”, St. Zagora 2000, p. 31 (in Bulgarian).

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