

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS MEDII SIGURE

Nicoleta Marilena MILITARU,
english teacher, Arts High School “Ionel Perlea”, Slobozia, Ialomita

CZU: 37.014

Summary: The paper presents examples of activities that can be used with primary school children in order to explore different children’s rights.

Rezumat: Lucrarea prezintă exemple de activități care pot fi folosite cu elevii din clasele primare pentru a explora diverse drepturi ale copiilor.

Key words: rights, projects, eTwinning, UNICEF

Cuvinte-cheie: drepturi, proiecte, eTwinning, UNICEF

I started working with young children since I was in high school training to become a primary school teacher, which was my dream. I dedicated my passion to this profession and I enjoyed every single step I had to make in the process no matter how difficult it was. I have high appreciation for teachers in the primary school as they are the ones who fight the first serious battles in educating the young generation. For me, the journey continued at university when I decided to pursue the career of an English teaching but never giving up the possibility to work in primary school. At present this is what I am doing and I love every moment I spent with my younger learners. What I also learnt is that our job is not about delivering content and making our students write and learn, sometimes by heart. Our calling is much more than this and we have to make sure that we create different contexts for our learners to bloom. Every time I see a new post about a new competition or about a new event, project, camp, I think of how that one can benefit them on the short and long term.

The topics of the children’s rights is something we dealt with every year in different contexts in our school and we feel inspired by our little ones every time we plan an activity. So far, our activities and projects have mainly focused on some of the rights included in the U.N. Convention such as their right to be informed and to be listened to, the right to set up or join a group, the right to share their thoughts freely, and mostly, their right to be educated and be given access to different opportunities. we want our activities to make them explore different parts of their personalities and their human relationships, making them aware that they are part of a smaller community in school and a bigger community in their town. We want them to be self-aware but also aware of others around them and we want to educate a generation that is informed and knows how to express themselves in order to make their ideas known and respected. We started from an early age as we believe this is the best moment to begin with and we make sure we change the activities in accordance with their level and needs.

One of the most appreciated extracurricular activities is taking part in the Pop-up festival which is organized by UNICEF and offers the opportunity to create stations for children to work on different topics. The team of teachers must carefully plan the activities taking into consideration the level of the students and what they want to address. So, we plan the activities or the “stations” and we prepare all the necessary materials. An example of activity is called “The Circle of Compassion” and the goal is to make them aware of their compassion towards themselves and the others as well as towards the environment. Compassion is what makes us understand what other people are going through and the desire to find solutions to improve their lives. We live in communities which are meant to support every single member and which need to find ways to provide support.

Children start working on their own personal feeling by thinking about the way they feel and why they feel like that and they are encouraged to express themselves in front of the others. After, they are asked to think of a person that is dear to them- a family member, a friend, a teacher, a neighbor, a classmate and to imagine that they are in front of them, playing or laughing or just looking at them. They are asked to say how it feels for them to be with that person and what they most appreciated about them. They are invited to write these thoughts on pieces of papers which will later be made into circles and connect together to form a paper chain. The same thing is done with wishes: children are asked to think of something they want for themselves and write it on a piece of paper and then to think of something they would like for the person they mentioned in the first part of the activity and again, put it on paper while presenting it in front of the others.

The activity above continues with the second station, called “The Emotions Garden” which starts from the premises that we do not always show our appreciation for the people around us and we take them for granted. The goal is to make our children to be able to identify other people’s feeling and show gratitude. They are asked to cut out six circles of colored paper and in the center of one of the circles to write the name of someone they appreciate while on the remaining five circles they have to write what they appreciate about that person. Then, they fold these five circles in half and cut a small slit in the center taping a wire, making the stem of a flower. Children are then invited to bring their flowers to the station and place them in a garden showing appreciation for the people around them. And this activity is continued with the “Color your heart” activity in which children identify emotions that they are feeling and color a heart in accordance with them. They receive a worksheet with different feelings such as excited, afraid, angry, sad, happy, fearful, anxious, peaceful, worried, confident, silly, hopeful, lovable, proud, energetic, easy going, irritated, joyful, comfortable, lonely, optimistic and others and they have to highlight the emotions they are experiencing. After doing so, they get a heart on paper and they have to fill in the contour by coloring the heart with the colors of the feelings they previously highlighted. They can show their hearts to others and then place them in the emotions garden.

„Two hands are better than one” is another very successful activity which can be easily integrated in primary school activities as it focuses on rights and responsibilities which go “hand-in-hand”- one cannot have rights without having responsibilities. For instance, children do have the right to privacy but they also have to respect other people’s privacy. Children are asked to trace both their hand on a bigger piece of paper and cut the contour. Then, they choose one right from the convention and write it and make associated drawings on the left hand and then write the responsibility they think comes along with it on the right hand. The children participating in this station share their thoughts with the others in the group and at the end, place their cut-out-hands in the station for the others to see and read. Thus, they discover different points of view and they can explore other ideas as well. “A Special Gift” is a final station of the activity in which teachers choose different rights from the Convention, preferably ones that are easier for primary school children to illustrate, they write each right on separate pieces of paper and they hide the papers around the room. The children are explained that they need to be looking for something special around the room and once they have it, they have to go back to their desks and sit down waiting for the others to finish. Then, they present the right they have on their pieces of paper and explain it to their colleagues in their own words. They will tell others by making gifts for other children which can be given to friends, neighbors, siblings on World Child’s Day to raise awareness about the United Nation *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. These gifts can take different forms such as

paintings, drawings, collages of photos that illustrate the right. Also, they will write a simple sentence on their gift, mentioning the right it illustrates.

Other important projects that we have in our school are on the eTwinning platform, which offers teachers and children the opportunity to create projects based in communication and collaboration, peer-learning and project-based learning. eTwinning is co-funded by the Erasmus+, the European programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport and it focuses on bringing teachers and children together in projects dealing with different topics of interest, The beautiful part of this is that teams can choose the themes they want to approach, they can choose the tools to work with and the kind of activities they want to unfold with the children. The plan of the project can be changed in accordance with different factors and depending on the school timetable of each partner and on the social conditions of each country. These projects give us the possibility to explore the world and to learn more and more with each one we plan. The eTwinning projects are about being aware of the others and their needs, respecting other people's culture and traditions, their religion and their education system. The tasks are meant to make children aware of their influence and to make them more responsible in the community. Every project includes different activities which are related to children's rights such as the right of being informed or the right to join a group or the right to education. They work on tasks in national and international groups and they learn about cooperation and respecting other's opinions, listening to different points of view and learning from one another in a safe environment. One of the most appreciated tasks is "Be Kind!" in which they have to identify examples of kind acts which can be easily done by any child of any age. They make suggestions of acts of kindness and they include them in a two-weeks calendar. The challenge is for them to do an act of kindness every day for those two weeks and take photos of their experience so that they can create materials which help promote the topic. They upload their materials in eTwinning and also see what their partners did so as to have a bigger picture and a better understanding of it.

The main purpose of our activities and projects is to get children involved from a very young age in the community represented by their class, then by their school and later by the people living in their town. We also want them to have skills which will allow them to evolve and broaden their horizons in order to have a better understanding of the world around them.

Bibliography:

1. UNICEF- Convention of the children's rights, accessed on 5th November, 2021
<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>
2. World Future Council, Solutions for our Common Future, accessed on 9th November 2021
<https://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/rights-of-children/>