**Toward an extracurricular curriculum: Afternoon studies for narrowing the educational gap**

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1. Rationale

*But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation.*

*This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation.*

Ignacio Martin-Baro, Writings for a Liberation Psychology

1. The problem

Children from ethnic minorities, especially the RAE community, lag in their schoolwork behind the majority of pupils for several reasons:

1. Extreme poverty
2. Low education of parents.
3. Lack of proper equipment at home.
4. Ethnic discrimination
5. The attitude that an education will not make a difference in their lives.

It is therefore important to emphasize as many aspects of these factors as possible when implementing an educational program for underprivileged ethnic minorities.

The result is a vicious circle where school failure leads to poverty which in turn deprives the child of the tools to succeed in school. The situation is exacerbated by prejudgments of the target community, where officials find it hard to believe for that the cycle of poverty can be broken, and therefore are not motivated to put pressure towards change.

The cycle can be broken by a concerted effort in programs such as the one proposed herein. Although the number of children participating in the program is not large, it is hoped that the program will develop inertia that will accumulate and create significant change within a reasonable amount of time.

1. Principles of implementation

The program will take into account the following principles in its implementation:

1. It will include as many types of literacy as possible, at different levels.
2. All levels of literacy will have a critical consciousness component.
3. It will be culturally sensitive and encourage cultural pride.
4. It will be developmentally relevant
5. It will take into account the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of the children.
6. It will contain a community empowerment component.
7. General description and strategy

The program will be in modules of three hours and can be implemented in as many modules per week as needed. It assumes that the children have had 3-4 hours each day of formal schooling and comes as a supplement to school work, not as a replacement for it. Therefore, if a child does not go to school, a truancy component should be implemented in addition to the curriculum. Of course, school attendance should not be a condition for participating in the program, but it will be more effective if the children go to school as well.

It is understood that the program will take place in groups of about 25 children, from approximately grade two to grade five. We recommend inviting children in kindergarten as well; the earlier the start, the better.

The program will be implemented by one professional teacher per class of 25 children. Since the diversity is very high in this group, we expect the teacher to build a team of classroom assistants from the older students and/or parents, by turn. These assistants should be paid, at least a symbolic price.

If it turns out that the children need an afternoon nap, the curriculum module should be four hours and not three.

Each module will include:

1. Story reading (15 minutes)
2. Story telling (~ 25 minutes)
3. Current events and/or critical consciousness activity (45 minutes)
4. Verbal literacy (half hour)
5. Mathematical literacy (half hour)
6. Problem solving (half hour)
7. Snack (20 minutes)

There will be a concerted effort to expose all the children to all of the components of each module every day. This may not be the case because of absentee children or the older ones teaching the younger while not being taught themselves. This may be the time to test the contention that those who teach others learn much more than those who learn.

Although it is true that the children must keep up with the curriculum, they must be taught how to deal with the academic material that is fundamentally foreign to their daily lives. This schism, between the written word and daily living, can be dangerous because a person who does not know how to relate to written material may accept it as a given and not challenge the ideas he or she sees.

II Spreading Literacy

*I want to read and write so I can stop being the shadow of other people*.

Man from Recife, Brazil, as spoken to Paolo Freire

Literacy has many facets. We usually think of literacy as learning the basic building blocks of academic life: Reading, writing and arithmetic. Since the middle of the 20th century, Freire added another term, critical consciousness. In addition to these, we would add one more component, connecting with the world through literature, which, to some extent, is a step past reading and writing.

The program, therefore, will contain components of all the above. The children will be divided into age groups, that is, groups of 3-5. The groups will be led by one of the older children. It is assumed that there will be 5-8 groups. If there are more of the older children than this number, the leadership of the group will rotate.

The room will be partitioned into areas for reading skills, problem solving skills, mathematics skills, current events, word games, and a book corner. The groups will rotate though these corners throughout the time and take part in the activities as designated by the curriculum.

Children will be grouped by age and not by ability. This will create semi-heterogeneous groups and will encourage mutual aid within the groups.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere(from Balkan Sunflowers LCN Manual)

At one American high school, rated as one of the 10 best out of many thousands of schools, the director stands at the door almost every morning, greeting the students by name, asking questions, and most importantly, making sure they know they are wanted and welcome. They have come to learn, and the school is also home for them. Creating a welcoming Center includes:

* Greeting each child by his/her name
* Smiling naturally at each child as you greet them
* Making sure the Center is clean and cheerful
* Having activities available immediately when the child comes to the Center
* Caring about the children as people

III The teacher

The teacher has the following tasks;

1. Pedagogue
2. Team Leader
3. Guardian and child protection
4. Advocacy

As a pedagogue, the work demanded of the teachers is equivalent to the training they have received when they became teachers. The lesson plans for this program are modular and are given to the teachers in developmental order. The formt chosen is the USA "common core" format which is fast becoming accepted in other parts of the world.

It is important that the teacher use professional judgment when using the materials, adding to them or changing them as seen fit. The teacher knows the individual children, and therefore can best adapt the program to fit their needs.

The teacher is responsible for choosing, training, and operating the older children who will be the group leaders of the program. Group leaders need to be trained in understanding younger children and fulfilling their needs, understanding the curriculum, assessment procedures and meeting objective criteria, and group processes.

The teacher should attempt to get parents involved in the program by:

1. Making home visits once every two months. The purpose of the visits is to discuss the progress of their child, and discuss any concerns the parents may have about their child. The home visit should also facilitate making positive contact; therefore, the teacher should take into considerations any cultural concerns about hosting the teacher in the home. Home visits should be coordinated with the child's school teacher in school, who can be invited to accompany the teacher. A good connection with the teacher should also encourage the child staying in school and making progress.
2. Encourage the parents to visit the program and to participate when they have time.
3. Organize parent participation in preparing meals for the program (for pay).
4. Distribute material for work at home.

If the teacher sees any issues concerning the welfare of the child, he or she should first try to work with the parents concerning these issues, taking their feelings into account as much as possible, without compromising the welfare of the child. If the concern continues, the teacher should report the issue to the center for social work and cooperate with the social workers in dealing with the situation.

The teacher should make an effort to encourage the voice of the families coming to the program and teach them how to organize and lobby for their rights. Periodic meetings should be held with representatives of the families to make plans to advocate with the government and civil society to improve the position of those participating in the program.

From Balkan sunflower LCN Manual:

# 1. Philosophy and Goals

* 1. **Goals**
* To ensure that our children and young people, under the age of 18, participate on an equal footing with their Serbian and Albanian peers in the school system, through a preprimary school program and support for primary and secondary school students.
* To create a place where the children feel comfortable and can enjoy the process of learning.
* To create a welcome atmosphere where every child can excel in the Center and in life
* To ensure that the children attending the Center gain self confidence in order to succeed in the regular school system

**1.2 Why a Learning Centers Network (LCN)?**

In the Learning Centers Network we believe that whatever challenges a child faces, there is always the chance for that child to succeed, do well in school and in life.

What do we mean by ‘to succeed’? It does not mean that a child must be ‘the best physician, engineer, lawyer, teacher, architect, or actor’. This is not the goal. Instead, the LCN goal is to develop each child’s ability. This means more than just ‘getting by’, doing the homework, even getting good marks. This means much more. Here are some examples:

* It means a child returns to a Center the next day and says to the tutor, “explain and show me again how to …”
* It means a child says, “I know how to add 1 + 1. Now I want to know how to add bigger numbers and it doesn’t matter that we haven’t learned that yet in school”.
* It means a child asks a facilitator for a book to take home to read.
* It means a mother really believes that her daughter can do well in primary school in order to continue to secondary school so that she may study at the university, get a good job and make her family proud and economically more stable.

This is what *excellence* is about. These are examples of the signs that tell us that we are doing the right thing. And, ultimately, this is what the LCN is all about....

* 1. **What is child-centered education?**

In child-centered education it is believed that children should be respected and loved, that they know a lot, that they can learn through exploration, while developing their own self-confidence and independence. Some characteristics of child-centered education are:

* Education is for the child and not the child for education
* Activities, interaction with children, etc. are inclusive
* Emotional, social, physical and intellectual development are as important as academic achievement
* Learning is based more on activities than on lectures
* Children are encouraged to make choices, make decisions, and learn independence
* Families and community are included
* Staff are more Coaches than Teachers
* Children are respected as developing, thinking individuals
* The process of learning is as important or more important than the result
* Children are understood as having the same range of emotions as adults but express them differently
* Staff talk less to children and *listen* more
* The child is more important than the subject
* Interactive cooperative learning gives children energy and enthusiasm
* Exploration is encouraged in learning

**1.4 A Learning Center is a place where …**

* An opportunity is given for everyone to achieve excellence
* A child can expect a warm welcome every time
* A child is treated as a developing, thinking individual who can achieve success
* A child learns how to learn - the process of exploration - rather than just the facts
* A child is given choices
* A child is taught and encouraged to make decisions and gain independence.

**1.5 Creating a welcoming atmosphere**

At one American high school, rated as one of the 10 best out of many thousands of schools, the director stands at the door almost every morning, greeting the students by name, asking questions, and most importantly, making sure they know they are wanted and welcome. They have come to learn, and the school is also home for them. Creating a welcoming Center includes:

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* Having activities available immediately when the child comes to the Center
* Caring about the children as people

**1.6 Non Discrimination Policy**

The Learning Centers Network was created because of the particular education challenges facing the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. Therefore, there is emphasis on these children, outreach to these parents and hiring preference for members of these communities when qualified applicants are available. However, any child who comes to the Center, from whatever community or background, shall be as accepted and welcomed in the same way as any other child. We will stay in contact with their parents, as with other children’s parents, and also make every effort to help those children be happy and comfortable in the Center, and progress in their school work.

Similarly, any coordinator, facilitator or tutor shall be treated equally and with respect by the program staff and co-workers regardless of age, gender or ethnicity.

**1.7 Facilitators and tutors thoughts for consideration**

Think about some of these points. What do *you* think?

* Your job is to help kids succeed in school.
* Smile a lot.
* Tell kids when they do it right.
* When they do it wrong, be honest but not negative. Help them learn.
* Understand that mistakes are no problem but rather an opportunity to learn
* It is better for the child to be at the white board, then for you to be there.
* The brain learns through practice. Neural connections form. That is learning and memory.
* Kids learn to read by practicing reading. Out loud is important.
* Kids learn math by practicing math.
* Kids learn to speak in a language by practicing speaking in the language.
* When one is happy or excited or positively relaxed, the body releases chemicals that help the brain work better.
* When one is nervous or afraid, the body releases chemicals that make the brain slow down.
* The most important goal for tutoring: help the kids to be “engaged” with the work – that is, interested, challenged and wanting to learn. So, it should be fun and interesting. They need to feel good about themselves and you.
* The most important goal for tutoring: that the kids know you care about them. (So, okay these are both most important goals!)
* You are not the teacher.
* Promote independence. Help and encourage the student to do the homework themselves. When they become more independent and have more trust in themselves, you really succeed.
* Help kids figure out the answer instead of giving it to them. If there is a mistake, don’t say they are wrong; ask them to demonstrate how they got the answer. They will either find the error themselves, or you will see where they went wrong.
* Kids should never copy the homework from the book or other kids. They have to learn it.
* Personalize. See what the child needs and help them meet their own need.
* Remember why this is important for kids; help them remember.
* Build on what kids know.
* Listen to kids. For example, ask kids to explain to you how they solved a problem. The problem can be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, either way listen to their answers with good attention.
* Give kids time to answer. Don’t expect an immediate answer to a question.
* Relax yourself. Admit your own mistakes or if you do not know something.
* Mark correct answers – not incorrect ones. The child can correct those not marked. Mark them correct when the problem is solved.
* Don’t say, “Do you understand?” Ask the pupil to demonstrate that they understand

**1.8 Leadership and Teambuilding**

The coordinator has overall responsibility for the center facility, the program and the center team. Hopefully, everyone feels responsible and does the best they can. The more everyone is concerned, the better the possibilities are for success.

Here are BSF guidelines for team leadership and building:

* Guiding co-workers and volunteers should be with concern, gentleness, honesty, fairness, humor and vision.
* You have a lot of responsibility, but that does not give anyone permission to yell, threaten or play power games.
* You can accomplish our goals as a leader, not as a “boss” or “dictator”, etc.
* The team members need to feel an important part of a team
* It is not your job to control everything and how everything happens, or to give permission before things can happen. Clear vision, understandable goals, guidance and freedom are all important. When freedom has undesired results, give guidance and more control, but lead back to freedom.
* Do not yell at your team members as we do not yell at children.
* Do not correct team members in front of others, unless it can be done in a way that the staff person is comfortable with and helps everyone. Be careful of feelings.
* If you make a mistake, such as yelling at someone, losing your temper, embarrassing someone, apologize and try to reach an understanding with the person about what happened from your side and their side, so that you both can work more maturely together.
* If you cannot explain a rule or give a good reason for the way “you” want something, maybe there is not a good reason, or it is not a good rule. You have the power is not enough reason.
* Creating a strong team includes valuing and appreciating what each person brings, including them as much as possible, encouraging creativity and success, supporting fun activities for the staff, giving way to the ideas of others even when you like your own better, maintaining positive vision, maintaining positive attitude, etc.
* Creating a weak team includes using threats and fear, arbitrary decisions, embarrassing people in front of others, making everything only your way, being critical, anger.

We do want results: active creative programs, happy children, high attendance, improved school grades, stronger smarter kids, reliable on-time staff attendance, etc. This is your job. It needs to be accomplished.

There are rules. Rules do need to be followed. We start with being a good example, guidance, and care. Sometimes we have to be strict. Sometimes we must give a written warning. Sometimes we have to tell someone they cannot work with us anymore. But we start by working to create a positive, energetic, supportive team.

IV The Group Leader

The group leader is a child in the 7th or 8th grade, chosen by the teacher for his or her leadership and learning potential. The training of the group leader consists of familiarization with the material and creating rapport with the children. The group leaders will learn skills in problem solving and human relations, and will be monitored by the teacher.

The group leaders will lead their groups on a rotating basis. Those not leading the groups will participate in the program at their age level.

V The Snack

The snack is an integral part of the program and is meant to contribute to improving the child's learning capacities. It will be prepared according to two principles: 1) Nutrition and energy value, and 2) The culture of the children in the program. Parents of the children will prepare the food and be paid for their effort. If needed, the parents will be guided by the teacher towards maximizing the nutritional value of the snack, in hopes of improving the content of the food served at home.

VI Daily agenda

The program will be three hours long. It will begin every day with a snack, to encourage the children to arrive on time. During the snack time, expected to last about 20 minutes, the children will listen to a story. The story will be picked to appeal to as wide an age level as possible. It can be a long story and read in installments, 10-15 minutes. The emphasis will be on world children's literature and the purpose is to expose the children to this literature, so as to widen their horizon.

Next, the children will be divided into groups to play word games. The groups are fixed and are determined by the age of the child, not his or her educational level. I tis therefore foreseen that each group will contain more than one level of performance. The games will usually be in the language of the children, but beginning from the fourth grade, some of the games will be in English. This activity will be approximately 30 minutes.

The next activity will be a lesson in reading and understanding a story. The story will be at each child's level and will the child will answer questions on work sheets. This activity is expected to take about 5 minutes. Each lesson begins with the child reading the story aloud.

The next unit, also performed in groups, will be on current events. The material will be taken from the local newspaper. In the younger groups, the leader will read the article, whereas in the older groups (grade 5 and above one of the children will read. The articles will be picked by their language level and by the relevance to the children involved. For the older groups, the articles can contain more international import. The children will be asked about the information, will be encouraged to give their own opinion, and will be stimulated to see things from more than one point of view. They will then criticize the event according to their own value system. An attempt may be made to modify the value system of the children, but this must be done gradually. The children will be encouraged to discuss the event at home and report to the group the next day. This work is expected t take about 45 minutes.

The next lesson, for about half an hour, will be in mathematical literacy and will consist of work sheets at the level of the child. The children can take home the completed work sheets.

The next half hour will be spent on problem solving exercises. Sometimes the problem will come from the physical world and sometimes from the world of human relations. When the problem is a human relations problem, role playing may be used.

The program will end with a story, followed by a short discussion. The group leader reads the story, stopping at times to ask question, such as "what do you think will come next"?and, "What do you think about this?"

The teacher and the leaders will stay after the program for about half an hour preparing for the work of the next day. As the program progresses, these meetings may become weekly.

We understand that there are many constraints with this plan. The constraints are both financial and logistic. The proposed program will cost more money than the previous one, and this issue must be negotiated. Logistically, many schools in Kosova run in shifts, which means that all 25 pupils cannot be present at the same time. The implication may be that pupils will spend less than 3 hours in this program. Were we must take into consideration that it in order to make a meaningful difference in the academic function of these children, they need a significant amount of time and proper incentives. At any rate, these issues will also have to be negotiated.

A sample sequence of the day for one month is found in Annex A.

VII The Curriculum

The curriculum of the program in general is based on the American common core curricula. This was done in order to ensure a widely recognized standard of literacy in central areas of learning and in development of learning strategies. Of course, there are some important issues in this decision, the most important of which is using the Albanian equivalents to English language development and unavoidable bias of American culture. We have used some of the curricula with almost no change, but some will have to be adapted to Albanian language and culture.

The stories for storytelling in reading have been chosen from existing literature both native Albanian and world of literature in Albanian translation. The stories are were collected by Griselda Zaimi, who holds a master's degree in education from the University of Tirana. The stories have been divided by age level and can be read by the staff for children in kindergarten and first grade and in later grades can be read by the children themselves. The list of stories chosen, by age level, is found in Annex B

First Grade

The curriculum in first grade will begin with a review of preschool material, under the assumption that some of it has been forgotten during the summer break and that it will need reinforcing.

We have developed a primer ("abitare") to teach and reinforce reading skills from the very beginning at the first grade level. The abitare was translated from a popular Israeli prime specifically designed to teach children with special needs. It was translated by a group of Kosovar graduate students in psychology under the supervision of a PhD psychologist fluent in Hebrew and experienced in teaching reading. The abitare is currently undergoing language proofreading and is available in first draft in Albanian.

Theabitare consists of four books each emphasizing a different vowel. The progression in the abitare is self-evident; that is, page after page

In addition to the abitare the pupils will hear stories told by staff, both during the snack at a specified time, which can be seen in the daily agenda in Annex A.

At the first grade level, children will also learn arts and crafts, fitted it to their developmental level.

A math literacy program, which is at the level of the common core criteria in the United States ,will be also included. The math program uses work sheets the old available from the Internet, and used according to the sequence found in annex D. The worksheets have instructions to the teacher, found in the folder of each subject. The work sheets are found in AnnexE.

The children will also participate in critical thinking exercises, which, at this level, we have called "problem solving". The exercises conform to common core standards and are developmentally appropriate for children at this age. The sequence of the tasks is found in annex D and the material is found in annex E. If

Every second day the children will participate in current events discussions. These discussions will be taken from the daily newspaper, but must be adapted to the level of children in the program. At this age, it is expected that current events consist of information about the relatively close environment.

Second and Third Grade

If from those age and above, the children will be placed in group by two age levels together. The first reason for this is to have groups large enough for significant interaction between the children, and small enough so that the staff member can control the teaching situation. The curriculum in general begins developmentally at the second grade level and continues through the end of the third grade level. This will give the opportunity for review and reinforcing skills before continuing to a higher level.

The day will begin with arts and crafts, planned developmentally for this level. There will be storytelling periods each day, followed by independent rating. Storytelling will be performed also during the snack. As mentioned above, a list of stories is provided if in annex B. It is important to hold discussions on each of the stories, emphasizing active listening and critical thinking. Sample questions on one of the stories are provided in annex F. Part of the time of the story telling a story reading will be allowed for homework in this area; that is Albanian language and literature.

The math time will be utilized by worksheets designed to correspond with common core standards. The work sheets are found in annex E, along with instructions for teachers in each folder. The sequence of the worksheets is found in annex D. The work on math will be alternated, one day four homework and the next day for the work sheets.

Every second day the children will participate in a current events discussion. The staff will pick an article from one of the daily newspapers and discuss the meaning of the article with the children, inviting critical response. The purpose of this activity is to develop and the children what Paolo Freire called "critical consciousness". Children will be encouraged to take a stand on the issues that influence their lives, and it is possible that they made be interested in taking action. We will discuss this issue in the section on the higher grades where it is more likely to occur.

On the other day of the alternate days, children will work on critical thinking and problem solving. Most of the sessions will be from work sheets found in annex E. The sequencing is found in annex D. This material also conforms with common core standards.

Fourth and fifth grades

The activities at this level will follow the same agenda as the activities of a second and third grade; that is, arts and crafts, storytelling, reading, math literacy, current events and critical thinking. The activities are sequenced in the same annexes as the second and third grades, and the material is also found in the same annexes, which are arranged according to grade level. The annex for sequencing is a Microsoft excel table which shows the sequencing by grade level and by subject.

Sixth, seventh and eighth grades

Among the eighth grade students we hope to find those who are potential leadership material. The teacher will make an effort to identify those students and train them to be his or her assistants in carrying out the program. At the end of the seventh grade identification process will begin and some days in the summer will be utilized to give training sessions in the various subjects of the program. Students will be trained to operate the Portage project, the abitare, reading and discussing stories, reinforcing reading skills and listening skills, and enhancing mathematical literacy.

VIII The Parents

There is no doubt that the cooperation and help of the parents is important, if not essential, for the success of the program. A significant problem is that parents are so burdened with survival that they often have little time or interest in the academic success of their children. Teachers often do not have the professional knowledge and skills to involve parents in educational programs. Indeed, teachers often see the parents as interfering with their children's education. We try to take these factors into consideration when planning this program.

We therefore believe that the best way to involve parents is through community programs that already exist. The staff of the program, or representatives of the parent NGO, will establish contact with these organizations and attempt to coordinate efforts to get the parents involved in this educational program. It is foreseen that parents' involvement will be accomplished by their paid participation in preparing the snacks. In addition, we expect the staff to participate in advocacy for the empowerment of the community that is the target of our program. Besides meeting the parents, activities initiated by the older children as a result of the current events and critical thinking components may bring the program closer to the parents by demonstrating mutual interest.