University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola
Faculty of Education – Bitola

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.30.06

CONCEPTS AND MODELS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION WITHIN SOCIAL PEDAGOGY

Blagojche Anastasov
Primary School with Resource Center "Kocho Racin" – Bitola
blagojche.anastasov@uklo.edu.mk

Vesna Stojanovska
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola, Faculty of Education – Bitola
vesna.stojanovska@uklo.edu.mk

Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and society, yet traditional systems often fail to address the diverse needs of students. Alternative educational models have emerged as a response, offering flexible, individualized, and holistic approaches that promote active learning, creativity, and social inclusion. This paper explains prominent models of alternative education—Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, Freinet, and the Jena Plan—and their relationship to social pedagogy, with a focus on the comprehensive development of the child beyond academic achievement. Montessori encourages independent work and sensory development; Waldorf integrates art, music, and movement to engage multiple intelligences; Reggio Emilia treats the environment as a "third teacher" and fosters exploration; Freinet emphasizes self-directed learning, cooperative work, and practical experiences; and the Jena Plan promotes mixed-age collaboration and democratic participation. These models are particularly beneficial for children with special educational needs (SEN), including those with autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, dyslexia, and other developmental challenges, by providing individualized learning, adapted curricula, and safe, supportive environments. Key principles across these models include fostering emotional intelligence, promoting social interaction, cultivating self-confidence, encouraging creativity, and adopting inclusive practices. The paper highlights the potential of alternative education to enhance the inclusivity, quality, and sustainability of learning environments, demonstrating that integrating alternative approaches into traditional education can contribute to equitable, adaptive, and future-oriented educational systems.

Keywords: *pedagogy, inclusion, education, flexibility, development.*

1. Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in the development of each individual and in shaping society as a whole. Although traditional educational systems remain the dominant model worldwide, they often fail to address the specific needs and learning styles of all students. As a result, there has been an increasing emphasis on exploring alternative approaches that promote flexibility, individuality, and holistic development.

Alternative educational models have emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional, rigid systems. They are grounded in progressive pedagogical theories that highlight the importance of active learning, learner autonomy, and the integration of education with real-life experiences. In essence, alternative education encompasses a variety of pedagogical frameworks that emphasize creativity, personal growth, and social inclusion.

Within this framework, **social pedagogy** plays a crucial role. It seeks to foster the comprehensive development of the individual while promoting inclusive educational practices that accommodate diverse life circumstances. The connection between alternative education and social pedagogy lies in their shared objective—to create learning environments that respect individual differences, enhance social development, and minimize barriers to learning.

This paper aims to examine the concept and significance of alternative education, its pedagogical principles and models, and its relationship with the theoretical foundations of social pedagogy. By analyzing various alternative educational models, this paper aims to illustrate the interconnection

between these two fields and their potential to contribute to more equitable, accessible, and high-quality education for all learners.

2. Concept and characteristics of alternative education

The introduction of alternative forms of education represents the first step toward the pluralization of education, a process that reflects the broader goal to which many European countries aspire. However, it is essential to note that school pluralism primarily refers to the coexistence of private and alternative schools, while the terms "private" and "alternative" education are not synonymous. The term "private education" often denotes educational institutions that operate outside the framework of public education—that is, education implemented and financially supported by entities other than the state (Damjanić, 2015). Alternative education initially emerged as a response to growing dissatisfaction with public schools, which often failed to adapt to societal and global changes. It developed as a reaction against the rigidity and stereotypes of the traditional school system, the lack of supportive teacher–student relationships, and the imbalance between didactic and educational goals (Admin, 2022). That is why, at the beginning of the 20th century, several models of school reform emerged, and together with those developed in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them have endured to this day. These diverse approaches are collectively referred to as alternative educational models. Alternative schools are established and structured for various purposes. According to Mary Anne Raywid, there are three main types of alternative schools:

1. **Corrective schools**, which are primarily designed for students at risk.
2. **Innovative schools**, which focus on introducing new curricula, applying non-traditional teaching methods, fostering educational partnerships, and creating a positive psychosocial classroom climate.
3. **Transformative schools**, whose goal is to promote systematic changes in education by ensuring diversity and flexibility through a range of learning opportunities (Milutinović & Zuković, 2012).

Developed countries continue to seek new solutions and mechanisms for implementing bottom-up educational reforms. Acknowledging the internal dynamics of schools has greatly shaped approaches to educational development and contributed to the emergence of new concepts in alternative education. The alternative education model has been evolving globally for over a century, supported by extensive literature and numerous international studies (Admin, 2022).

This type of education incorporates a wide range of approaches and models that redefine teaching methods, curriculum organization, and the function of the teacher compared to traditional schooling. Its main characteristics include:

- An individualized approach to learning.
- Holistic development of the student's personality.
- Reduced formality and rigidity in teaching methods.
- Increased student autonomy in selecting learning content.
- Active involvement of parents and the community in the educational process.

3. Alternative education through the prism of social pedagogy

The core principle of alternative education is to provide a dynamic learning environment where students advance at their own pace and follow their individual interests, without the constraints of conventional school rules. Following Mary Anne Raywid's framework of the three types of alternative schools, the connection between alternative education and social pedagogy becomes clear, as both concepts work together to promote a higher-quality and more accessible educational process. The

modern concept of social pedagogy emphasizes the holistic development of the individual within a social context, considering both personal needs and broader societal factors that shape people's lives. This discipline extends beyond traditional educational frameworks, promoting social inclusion, support, and integration. Its focus encompasses not only learning but also the emotional, social, and ethical development of the individual. Social pedagogy aims to promote social justice by reducing inequality and marginalization through educational and social interventions, while fostering active citizenship and community participation. It applies a preventive approach that offers early support, focusing on vulnerable groups such as children, youth, migrants, and individuals with special needs. Inclusion and integration are key principles that promote diversity, acceptance, and equal opportunities for all individuals to reach their full potential. Social pedagogy emphasizes personal relationships and social interaction as the basis for learning and social development, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and empathy. It draws on knowledge from psychology, sociology, education, law, and cultural studies, and collaborates with professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and teachers. Rooted in ethical principles and values such as justice, respect, empathy, and dignity, social pedagogy aims to enhance society by promoting the development of individuals and communities (Kraus & Hoferková, 2016).

Alternative education encompasses a range of pedagogical approaches that differ from traditional systems in terms of teaching methods, goals, and practices. All share a common aim: to create a flexible, individualized learning environment where students can progress without the constraints of standard assessments and rigid rules. For students facing academic challenges, learning disabilities, behavioral issues, or irregular attendance, alternative programs provide opportunities to employ innovative methods in supportive settings, enabling them to achieve success. Despite the diversity of alternative schools and programs, they are often distinguished by flexible schedules and adapted curricula (Aron, 2006). Alternative education and social pedagogy are interconnected through several key principles:

• Individualized approach – both emphasize students' diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles.

• Inclusivity and social justice – providing opportunities for marginalized students or those who do not thrive in traditional settings.

• Critical thinking and autonomy – flexible curricula encourage independent thought and decision-making.

• Emotional and social support – education addresses not only academic knowledge but also the emotional and social development of learners.

4. Types of alternative educational models

The drive for school transformation, which began in the early 20th century, continues to this day, with its principles most clearly reflected in various models of alternative schools. This paper will examine some of the most prominent alternative education models.

4.1 Montessori pedagogical concept

Montessori pedagogy is a widely implemented alternative educational approach. Even more than a century after its inception, it remains relevant, grounded in universal human values such as dignity, peace, and freedom (Здружение, 2017). Montessori's model is rooted in the principles of reform pedagogy, emphasizing active learning, hands-on activities, greater freedom, and the rejection of practices that position the child as a passive observer (Matijević, 2001). Its greatest contribution lies in promoting the child as an active participant in the educational process. Montessori pedagogy goes beyond classroom materials or teacher-led instruction; it reflects an approach that respects children's unique nature and creates conditions for them to grow freely and realize their full potential.

Maria Montessori viewed each child as "his or her own builder," perceiving the world through individual senses and experiences. Sensory engagement enables children to interact with their

environment and form relationships with others. Developing the senses, beginning with motor skills, is central to her pedagogy. The correct execution of fine and gross motor movements, integrating sensory and movement education, serves as "a criterion for the healthy mental, spiritual, physical, and social development of the child" (Seitz, 1997).

The core principle of Montessori pedagogy is the child's freedom to choose activities, topics, tasks, schedules, and materials. A child can fully engage in learning only when they experience freedom in their actions and have ready access to materials. This freedom, however, is not unlimited; meaningful boundaries must be established: "just as a house without walls is not a house, freedom without boundaries is not freedom" (Schafer, 2015). Montessori emphasized that for a child to reach their full potential, it is essential to establish clear standards for the learning environment and define adult behavior toward children. Only a well-prepared environment can provide "everything the child needs for physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional adaptation" (Philipps, 1999).

4.2 Concept of Waldorf (Steiner) Pedagogy

Schools and preschools worldwide follow various models of holistic education, with Waldorf pedagogy becoming particularly prominent in recent decades. This approach has grown increasingly attractive to both parents and educators in our region. According to Waldorf pedagogy, the aim of education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of abilities and engagement in activities that foster a meaningful and well-rounded life. This approach is also applied to children with special educational needs. Since its inception, Waldorf pedagogy has emphasized an open curriculum, interdisciplinary connections, age-based instruction, and an individualized approach to all students. Educational methods and content are adapted to the child's age, as well as their physical and spiritual needs and abilities (Damovska, 2005).

Waldorf pedagogy emphasizes the nurturing of each child's individuality. This is achieved through small-group work, where parents and educators collaborate to observe the child, monitor development, and adapt teaching methods to both individual and group needs. A structured rhythm provides security, while the curriculum remains flexible to meet the child's needs. Children are offered a variety of artistic and practical activities—such as drawing, painting, sculpting, woodworking, gardening, crafts, music, and household tasks—allowing them to explore interests and develop diverse skills. Activities are designed to engage the child physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, addressing multiple forms of intelligence (Domić, 2021).

In Waldorf pedagogy, instruction follows natural cycles, with special emphasis on the changing seasons. Children spend time outdoors daily, regardless of the weather, and engage directly with nature. Kindergartens are typically located near forests, parks, or feature spacious yards. Toys and art materials are crafted from natural resources such as wood, wool, and wax, while interiors are thoughtfully arranged to create a safe, homelike environment. Interiors are carefully designed to create a safe, homelike environment. Family values are emphasized, with parents actively participating in activities, while collaboration among children, families, and educators forms the cornerstone of the kindergarten (Domić, 2021). Waldorf pedagogy provides an innovative approach that fosters the child's development in harmony with their natural abilities and interests. It promotes creativity, self-confidence, and a love of learning, while developing critical thinking, social skills, emotional stability, and overall harmonious growth—encouraging learning without the stress of tests and grades.

4.3 Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach

The Reggio Emilia approach emerged after World War II, when the community of Reggio Emilia in Italy developed a new educational model distinct from traditional methods. It promotes innovative, democratic, and inclusive education, viewing children as active, creative, and intelligent participants capable of exploring, discovering, and constructing meaning in multiple ways (Hargraves, 2020). A key figure in the Reggio Emilia approach is Loris Malaguzzi, a young teacher and psychologist who became its main theorist. He developed a pedagogy based on the belief that each child is unique and can express

interests in diverse ways. Children learn best through interaction, exploration, and expression via multiple media, such as drawing, sculpture, and storytelling. Rather than following a traditional classroom hierarchy, this approach fosters a collaborative environment, establishing partnerships among children, teachers, and families, with active participation shaping the children's learning experiences (Flavin, 2020).

The Reggio Emilia program emphasizes practical, hands-on learning, allowing children to explore and learn through direct interaction with objects and their environment. The goal is to create a "home-like" setting where natural learning occurs using all available resources, including the natural environment, peers, materials, and educators. This approach supports children's independent discovery and exploration, fostering self-respect, respect for caregivers, animals, living things, and the Earth through activities such as recycling, composting, growing, and preserving (Гренџер-Елис, 2019).

The Reggio Emilia approach is recognized as one of the most innovative models for early childhood education and continues to shape contemporary practices. It evolves constantly, inspiring educational institutions worldwide. In 2006, the Loris Malaguzzi International Center was established in Reggio Emilia to study and promote his methodology. Today, many schools globally adopt or integrate this philosophy into their curricula.

4.4 The pedagogical concept of Celestine Freinet

Celestin Freinet, a prominent proponent of reform pedagogy, is recognized for his original educational approach, which remains influential among educators and policymakers. (Matijević, 2001). He advocated for increased autonomy for teachers and students, allowing them to jointly decide on learning content, its breadth and depth, and the methods and forms of work that encourage resource and experience exchange. In Freinet's schools, teachers design operational programs only after meeting the children they will teach. Weekly activity plans are central, allowing students to plan their work in subjects such as language, mathematics, art, or the school printing house. The individual student plan, described as a "didactic agreement jointly agreed upon by the teacher, the student, and the parent", aims to help children express themselves, organize, develop, and learn independently. Effective coordination of weekly plans between teachers and students relies on cooperation and mutual trust (Jagrović, 2007).

A key feature of Freinet's pedagogy is the view of school as a place of work, where "the memorization of numerous facts is not valued, but rather the training for independent learning and the use of various media" (Matijević, 2001). Through organized work activities, students explore the world independently, while teachers foster discipline and responsibility. Class self-management, cooperative learning, independence, and discovery-based education in a stimulating environment are central elements of Freinet's approach, promoting children's holistic development and affirming school as a place that nurtures educated and skilled individuals.

The spatial arrangement and material conditions in Freinet classrooms are designed to meet children's diverse needs for work, play, and learning. Classrooms provide areas for individual, paired, group, and project-based activities. Traditional layouts with desks arranged for frontal teaching are avoided, with the organization of space guided by the needs of students and teachers to support a variety of activities (Jagrović, 2007).

4.5 The pedagogical concept of Peter Petersen (Jena Plan)

The Jena Plan, developed by pedagogy professor Peter Petersen, presents an alternative approach to upbringing, education, and school organization. Petersen modeled school activities on family life, believing that this alignment allows schools to meet all aspects of a child's development. The child is placed at the center of attention, with the learning process viewed from the child's perspective, guiding the organization of teaching and learning (Damjanić, 2015). Key principles of the Jena Plan include:

- Vertical grouping of students in age-heterogeneous classes instead of traditional grades;

• Individual learning combined with collaborative group activities;

• Thematic, project-based learning integrating multiple areas of knowledge;

• Dialogue and democratic learning, where students participate in decision-making and function as a small democratic community;

• Practical experience and self-assessment, with teachers serving as mentors rather than authority figures.

Petersen promotes intergenerational learning, with students taught in mixed-age groups that include children with special needs. The Jena Plan emphasizes support, care, and teamwork for students facing learning challenges, while fostering emotional bonds, socialization, active parent involvement, and collaboration among children of different ages (Bobić, 2016). To support social learning, Petersen organizes classes by combining three grade levels: the first consists of students from the first, second, and third grade, the second group of children from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, and finally a group consisting of students from the seventh and eighth or eighth, ninth, and tenth grade (Matijević, 2001). Mixing students from different ages provides diverse learning opportunities and enables them to plan, understand, and independently manage their learning process. The main goal is to foster cooperation rather than competition, directly promoting self-regulated learning. In this system, older students work alongside younger ones respectfully, revisiting and consolidating material they have previously mastered. In these schools, students both demonstrate and live by a culture of mutual support. (Damjanić, 2015).

5. The role of alternative education models in the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN)

Modern education aims for inclusivity and equal access for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Inclusive education strives to engage all children, irrespective of their abilities or social and cultural differences, with a focus on equality and the universal right to education. Through activities and projects, it promotes values such as equality, justice, and solidarity, fostering an environment of inclusion and togetherness (Naraian, 2013). Educators in inclusive settings must engage in continuous professional development—through workshops, seminars, and training—to address inclusive practices, the needs of children with SEN, and the latest teaching methods, ensuring their knowledge and skills remain up to date.

A key goal of inclusive education is to ensure that children with SEN have the same opportunities as their peers, through adapted curricula, diverse pedagogical approaches, and additional resources and support (Popadić, 2016). Alternative pedagogical models—such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Jena Plan, Waldorf, and Freinet—support inclusive education by providing flexibility, individualized learning, and environments that respect children's diverse abilities and learning styles.

Alternative education models support individualized learning, adapting to each child's needs and pace—particularly important for children with autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia, ADHD, and other developmental challenges. Individualized approaches allow children with SEN to progress according to their unique abilities, through adapted methods, materials, and activities that promote optimal development and success (Cvjetićanin, 2017).

The Montessori approach allows children to work independently with developmentally appropriate materials, while the Jena Plan offers mixed-age activities that enable children with SEN to learn from peers without the stress of comparison or competition. Alternative education models provide environments adapted to children's diverse needs. The Reggio Emilia approach treats space as a "third teacher," creating an interactive, visually stimulating environment that encourages exploration and supports children with cognitive and sensory difficulties (O'Brien, 2023). Waldorf schools incorporate art, music, and movement into the learning process, supporting children who face challenges with traditional methods. These models emphasize emotional intelligence, social interaction, and teamwork, fostering cooperation over competition and creating inclusive settings where children with SEN feel

valued. The Jena Plan promotes democratic relationships, giving children with SEN an active role in the school community and boosting self-confidence. Avoiding traditional tests and assessments further reduces anxiety and allows children with SEN to thrive. Each alternative educational model uniquely promotes inclusion, and incorporating them into conventional education can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of learning settings.

Conclusion

Within social pedagogy, alternative educational models play a central role, prioritizing the comprehensive development of children over mere academic performance. They promote learning based on individual abilities, social interaction, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for fostering inclusive and equitable societies. Approaches such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Freinet, Jena Plan, and Waldorf create environments that respect diversity and encourage inquiry, collaboration, and independent thinking. These models provide flexible teaching, adapt to individual needs, and foster creativity, supporting the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs. By integrating traditional methods with modern approaches, technology, and enhanced support for teachers and students, alternative education can improve the education system and contribute to innovative, inclusive, and sustainable learning. The future of education relies on flexibility, equity, and accessibility, and alternative approaches provide a solid foundation for achieving these objectives.

References

Admin, D. D. (2022). Šta je alternativno obrazovanje? Повратено од Pij-pij: https://bs.drink-drink.ru/chto-takoe-al-ternativnoe-obrazovanie/

Aron, L. (2006). An Overview of Alternative Education. Washington: National Center on Education and the Economy.

Bobić, K. I. (2016). Peter Petersen i Jena-plan. Повратено од Radio Televizija Srbije: https://www.rts.rs/lat/magazin/nauka/2516681/peter-petersen-i-jena-plan.html

Cvjetićanin, S. A. (2017). Teacher's opinion about the implementation of inclusive education in teaching integrated natural sciences. Časopis za Društvene Nauke, 41(4).

Damjanić, I. (2015). Alternativne škole. Rijeka: Sveučilište u Rijeci/Filozofski fakultet.

Damovska, L. (2005). The Waldorf Pedagogy and Children with Special Education Needs. Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation.

Domić, S. (2021). Valdorf pedagogija „izvlači“ najbolje iz deteta. Повратено од Moj Pedijatar: https://www.mojpedijatar.co.rs/valdorf-pedagogija-izvlaci-najbolje-iz-deteta/

enciklopedija, H. (2013). Jena-plan. (L. z. Krleža, Ур.) Повратено од Hrvatska enciklopedija mrežno izdanje: https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/jena-plan

Flavin, B. (2020). What Is Reggio Emilia? Your Guide to This Child-Driven Approach. Повратено од Rasmussen University: https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/education/blog/what-is-reggio-emilia/

Hargraves, V. (2020). The Reggio Emilia approach. Повратено од The Education Hub: https://theeducationhub.org.nz/the-reggio-emilia-approach/

Hinz, A. (2011). Što znači prepustiti se pedagogiji Marije Montessori u školi. Bo I. K. Hicela, Pedagogija Marije Montessori – poticaj za razvoj pedagoškog pluralizma. Split: Dječji vrtić Montessori dječja kuća.

Jagrović, N. (2007). Sličnosti i razlike pedagoških modela Marije Montessori, Rudolfa Steinera i Celestina Freineta. Školski vjesnik – Časopis za pedagoška i školska pitanja, 56(1), 65-77.

Kraus, B. (2014). Základy sociální pedagogiky. Praha: Portál.

Kraus, B., & Hoferková, S. (2016). The Relationship of Social Pedagogy and Social Work. Sociální pedagogika | Social Education, 57-71.

Matijević, M. (2001). Alternativne škole: Didaktičke i pedagoške koncepcije. Zagreb: Tipex.

Matijević, M. (2009). Školski i pedagoški pluralizam u zemljama u tranziciji. Buduća škola: Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa I, 193-206.

Milutinović, J., & Zuković, S. (2012). Odgojne i obrazovne tendencije: Privatne i alternativne škole. Hrvatski časopis za odgoj i obrazovanje, 15(2), 241-266.

Naraian, S. (2013). Disability, agency, and context: A differential consciousness for doing inclusive education. Curriculum Inquiry, 43(3), 360-387.

Noack, W. (2001). Sozialpädagogik. Einlehrbuch: Freiburgim Breisgau: Lambertus.

O'Brien, S. (2023). A guide to the environment as the 'third teacher' . Повратено од The Spoke: https://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/a-guide-to-the-environment-as-the-third-teacher/

Ondrejkovič, P. (2004). Poznámky ku konštituovaniu sociálnej pedagogiky jako vedy. Konstituování sociální pedagogiky jako vědeckého oboru, 78–87.

Philipps, S. (1999). Montessori priprema za život: odgoj neovisnosti i odgovornosti. Jastrebarsko: Naklada Slap.

Popadić, A. M. (2016). Inkluzivno obrazovanje: Ideja i praksa, književnost i kulturu. Sinteze-časopis za pedagoške nauke, 10, 35-46.

Schafer, C. (2015). Poticane djece prema odgojnoj metodi Marije Montessori: priručnik za odgojitelje i roditelje . Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga.

Seitz, M. i. (1997). Montessori ili Waldorf?: knjiga za roditelje, odgajatelje i pedagoge. Zagreb: Educa.

Vujčić, V. (2013). Opća pedagogija: novi pristup znanosti o odgoju. Zagreb: Hrvatski pedagoško-književni zbor.

Гренцер-Елис, Р. (2019). Прирачник за основите за социјална кохезија и културен дијалог.

Здружение, М. М. (2017). Монтесори педагогија. Повратено од Montessori Macedonia: http://www.montessori-macedonia.org/105210861085109010771089108610881080-108710771076107210751086107510801112107 2.html