



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

MEDIATED LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Part 1: The future is inclusion

The environment in which children in segregated poor Roma settlements live, and the stimuli they are exposed to, are very different from the living conditions and stimuli of children growing up in a standard middle-class family. Their mother tongue is Romani, they rarely attend kindergarten or a pre-school facility, and they therefore face enormous challenges before they attend primary school.

Despite the endeavors, effort and amount of time that teachers, pedagogues and other professionals working in community centers spend in preparing and conducting educational activities, the school performance and accomplishments of children from generation poverty lag behind those of their peers, i.e. children born in middle-class families even living close to segregated settlements. Pupils from the most disadvantaged and marginalized communities, including Roma from segregated settlements in Slovakia, often have to repeat a grade or even a few grades at their primary school and only rarely continue their studies in a secondary school.

The development of a child is influenced not only by its biological preconditions and its upbringing and education. Child development is also affected by the environment and social experiences in which the child is growing up. Further, the immediate surroundings in which the child is raised (hygienic conditions, presence of diseases, environmental pollution, the availability and quality of drinking water, sufficient and good quality food, the characteristics of the settlement, relationships and stress in the family and the community, etc.) all play a substantial role.

Also crucial is the role of the important adults in a child's life (parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, teachers, medical doctor, and staff in the kindergarten, primary school or community center). Equally



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

important is the wider environment in which the child grows up – the traditions, the culture, the local economy, the jobs available and the infrastructure, as well as relations among family members and the inhabitants of the settlement.

Research confirms that the experiences that a child gains in its earliest years, and the closest environment that surrounds and influences the child, are the basis for future shaping the architecture of the developing brain, as well as the child's individual health. They are then related to the child's school achievements, their later career, lifelong ability and interest in learning, their behavior towards the community and their society, and their future parenting.

The time that parents and significant adults spend with their child in its earliest years is very important to the emotional, social and cognitive development of the child, as well as to developing his or her ability to command their mother tongue.

Slovak is the language of instruction in the majority of primary schools in Slovakia. Apart from some elementary schools where Hungarian or Ruthenian languages are used. Children who grow up in segregated Roma settlements communicate within their families mostly in Romani. At the age of six, when they enter the primary school, their knowledge of Slovak is minimal and is a foreign language for them. They therefore have to study in a language of which they know very little if at all. However hard they try during their lessons, their knowledge of Slovak is not sufficient for them to be able to master the curriculum.

Several researches have confirmed that poor parents talk much less to their children, compared to middle-class parents, and children from generational poverty usually have a weaker vocabulary compared with their middle-class peers.

In the school year 2015/2016 ETP Slovakia – Center for Sustainable Development initiated research to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of after-school clubs on children's cognitive development. The Department of Psychology of the Pedagogical Faculty of the Charles University in Prague was contracted to undertake this research. 52 first grade pupils from three different Roma settlements in



eastern Slovakia were tested by psychologists with a battery of tests in three areas: cognitive, linguistic and mathematical.¹ Performances (of the children involved in the research) in subtests “lag behind the norms for the majority population.”² Psychological testing of Roma zero grade pupils from two primary schools in eastern Slovakia in 2013 showed that the performance of six-year-olds was significantly below the norm and such children were lagging behind their peers by two up to three years on average³.

Primary school teachers lack the skills and competences to meaningfully and fairly involve all children, regardless of their gifts, talents, language, ethnicity or age, into the process of learning. Some teachers, according to qualitative research from 2016⁴, spent more one-to-one time with children who were lagging behind, while other teachers paid more individual attention to the motivated, smarter pupils. The teachers who were involved in the above research lacked the ability and patience to involve all the children equally and fairly during the teaching process.

The failure that children from Roma excluded settlements experience in school from the day one is manifested in their feelings of inferiority and resignation on school, not experiencing a joy during learning, nor any interest to gain any new knowledge. Without help from an outside environment, they are, largely, lost.

The evidence from our many years of experiences in working in disadvantaged Roma settlements shows that the poorest children are unsuccessful at school, not because they have little talent, motivation or will. Such failure is more related to unpreparedness, lack of skills and experiences, and but, not rarely with unwillingness and open or hidden discrimination from the responsible people (mayor, school headmaster, teachers and other staff at school). The local government, municipality or

¹ Páčová, A., Bittnerová, D., Franke, H., Rendl, M., Smetáčková I.: Kluby FIE a KK: Vliv na kognitivní, jazykové a matematické výkony. Výskumná zpráva. (2016). PedF UK v Prahe, Katedra psychologie, p. 62

² Páčová, A., Bittnerová, D., Franke, H., Rendl, M., Smetáčková I.: Školní a mimoškolní vzdělávání žáku z vyloučených lokalit. (2018). Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, Katedra psychologie, Praha. p. 245

³ Mačáková, S., Réveszová, Z., Orságová, L., Pustulková, D., Fortunová, V., Pavlovská, S., Pilipčuková, N., Borzová, V.: Učíme sa učiť sa. (2016). ETP Slovensko, p. 65

⁴ Páčová, A., Bittnerová, D., Franke, H., Rendl, M., Smetáčková I.: Kluby FIE a KK: Vliv na kognitivní, jazykové a matematické výkony. Výskumná zpráva. (2016). PedF UK v Prahe, Katedra psychologie, p. 124



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

city, in locations with segregated settlements, need to invest more energy, human and material resources to improve the overall situation of these children and their families. In villages/towns where the responsible people systematically, and for years, have been against the segregation of local Roma, the Roma children are much more successful at school than in neighboring villages/towns.

What can we do to unlock all the untapped potential of Roma children?

The method of mediated learning, created by Professor Reuven Feuerstein and his team of collaborators, has proved to be an effective way of teaching children from segregated settlements. We have been persuaded by the results of primary school pupils from Velká Ida, Stará Ľubovňa and Rankovce involved in the multi-year experimental verification of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment method. The pupils' academic achievements show that the Feuerstein's method helps to improve pupils' school readiness to the gradually more demanding requirements at primary schools. This method has also positively influenced the acquisition of internal motivation and the desire of children to learn. Pupils are less likely to repeat a grade and their chances of continuing their studies at high school and college after school have significantly increased.

The aim of this report is to convey to teachers who teach children from segregated Roma settlements our experience with the teaching practices based on mediated learning, which helps children to accomplish higher school achievements, success in lifelong learning and at work.