



Are Roma children educable?

"When a child asks, he wants to learn," says teacher Natália Pilipčuková from Veľká Ida. She has been working for fifteen years with children from excluded Roma communities, and she never thought they were incapable of being educated, as people sometimes say. However, she says, it is necessary to bring them to a school in which they feel good, stimulate their interest, encourage them to ask and to praise them. Only in this way can we expect success.

Before Natália attended the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment (FIE) special training for lecturers, she felt sorry for her pupils from segregated Roma ghettos. They were far behind the children from the majority population. She did not look for the reasons and did not realize these were actually so serious and restrictive. "Now I know that this is because of the environment in which the children grow and develop. That's why they need special attention. When they enter the first class, they are at the level of three-year-olds of the rest of the population. The teacher speaks Slovak, they do not understand and this is a huge obstacle for them. From their first school days, they are lagging behind, their problems get worse, they are stressed, they do not like school and they do not like learning", Natalia says. She is convinced that ETP's training helped her to better understand her children. "The FIE method is excellent for these children and has done a lot for them," she says.

In 2013/2014 Natalia started to lead the afternoon FIE club for twelve children, who had been randomly chosen from her class (zero graders at that time). She quickly saw the difference between „club children“ and those who did not get into the afternoon club. Later on, the difference became even more pronounced.

From the original group of twelve FIE pupils, six pupils moved to the current fifth grade without having to repeat. Four other fifth graders are from the class whose class teacher was Natalia, but they did not attend the FIE club. To summarize, **out of 17 pupils who were touched by the FIE (either through morning school education or the intensive FIE afterschool club activities), there are currently ten pupils in the fifth grade. Out of the remaining 12 pupils without FIE, there is not a single one in the fifth grade.** The children, who attended the FIE club have also had excellent school attendance.

What are the other differences?

The children involved in the FIE program have better working habits in terms of attention - concentration, distribution and ability to work. Contrarily, the children in the control group have low-level working habits, or even none at all. They have lower concentration and a slow psychomotor rate.

Children from the club had built up the basics of strategic thinking, they were engaged and more dynamic. They were better able to control their impulses. Children outside the club had a poorly

developed verbal area and without the ability to develop an idea. Impulsivity prevailed in their behavior. They were largely passive.

After some support and verbal encouragement children from the club were able to perform better and finish the task (even if with mistakes, but they were not resigned). They were looking forward to success, which motivated them to continue. However, non-FIE children were unable to use the strategy offered, even after repeated mediation. They kept the hint in their memory only for a short time. After praise or a compliment, they would sit silently without any emotional expression, and without a smile or any sign of pleasure.

These findings were presented by psychologists who in April and May 2018 carried out the psychodiagnostic examinations of children from the club and children who did not attend the club.

It is also noteworthy that children had enjoyed attending the afterschool club since the beginning of their schooling. It took place after morning classes, regularly from Monday to Thursday and lasted for three hours. Now they are in the fifth grade (lower secondary school). During the morning curriculum they have several teachers (comparing to zero to fourth grade when they were taught only by their class teacher Natália), but they continue daily - from Monday to Friday - with Natália, who they meet for two hours daily at the FIE club. "Now it is more challenging for them. It is very important to get support from parents", Natalia says. Four mentors have started to help these children since last September. Each mentor meets their group of three pupils twice a week. Together they practice the school curriculum, do homework, play board games, engage in creative workshops, the boys play football, and they all sometimes go to the cinema, to the zoo, or for pizza. Or they just talk together, usually topics other than that are usual at their homes.

Marko is the best pupil in Veľká Ida. Recently he had just three Bs and the rest were As on his half-term certificate. His classmate Venuška had similar results. Since the zero grade, the overall school results of the FIE club children are one grade better than the non-club children.

"When I saw how the afternoon FIE club runs, I felt sorry that my Mária did not get it. I asked if she could join. Since then she has changed completely. She enjoys school, makes progress and has better grades. "I really want her to achieve more than I have and do not want her to suffer as much as I suffered", says Angela Horváthová, a mother of Mária from Veľká Ida.

Ms. Ema Csiszárová usually goes to the club with her granddaughter Venuška and is very proud of her. The girl achieves great results also because her grandmother helps her with homework. Other moms or grandmoms are welcome in the club, too. They see how their children are smart and skillful. It is proof for them that education is meaningful and helps their children to plan their futures.

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