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

How to prepare children for work with instruments

Background of children

Children from segregated Roma ghettos usually began schooling without any prior preschool education. The environment in which children in ghettos are brought up does not provide appropriate balanced stimuli for development of cognitive skills, command of Slovak language and nonverbal analytical thinking. In home environment, they usually communicate in Romani language (even their usage of Romani language is poor) and are being raised in different behavioural pattern which is in conflict with optimal social learning and prosocial interactive engagement with peers and adults.

ETP's profound experience has shown that due to insufficient family involvement in a child's upbringing, as well as inadequate living conditions, children from Roma ghettos require altered teaching approach. However, elementary schools in Slovakia in their current form are not well prepared to respond to the needs of children who's personal, social, neurological and cognitive skills are substantially delayed compared to their peers from mainstream society.

In academic year 2015/2016 ETP Slovakia in cooperation with the Pedagogical Faculty of the Charles University in Prague has prepared the randomised controlled trial to assess the effectivity of the FIE method in comparison with traditional educational method (Criss-Cross) in three elementary schools. One of the outputs of the research says that average mental age of children from segregated Roma ghettos at the start of first grade is 3.9 years comparing to children from mainstream society, whose mental age is 6 years[1].

Teachers and lecturers describe children as follows:

- Their communication skills are very poor
- Don't understand and follow the rules of the class
- Speak whenever they want, don't listen when spoken to
- Use physical power and don't know how to calm down
- Are not able to concentrate, lack inner motivation to work
- Don't cooperate, don't share toys or teaching aids
- Don't respect diversity of the class and don't want to make friends
- They are inpatient, distrustful toward the teacher, unable to articulate their needs

Before developing cognitive skills, teachers have to focus on socialisation and emotional development. It is necessary to create safe, inspiring and welcoming environment.

[1] Páchová et al. Kluby FIE a KK…, 2016, p. 31 - 47

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

Pre-preparing exercises for the *Organization of Dots* instrument

Many years of experience with FIE instruments have shown us the necessity to prepare and guide children to work with these peculiar exercises to help children to understand the task easier and to enjoy the work from the beginning. Before our lecturers started to work with the first set of instruments (handouts) named *Organization of Dots*, they did the following activities with children to consolidate their understanding of the concepts, which are needed to work with the instrument.

Activity: Network

Divide the clean paper into 12 parts - equal squares. At the beginning, we sit down with the children together and explain the borderlines: "Look, here are 1, 2, 3 ... 12 squares." Then we explain what we are going to do in those squares. We draw two dots below each other into each square. The dots are placed on a vertical line drawing. In the first square, the child connects them to a vertical line. We ask children to connect the dots with a standing line; such a line is also called by a more professional name - a vertical line. We let the child to link the dots in the other squares. We explain and make sure that the child interconnects the dots from top to bottom, but if the child is not yet mature enough, we will let him to connect in the other way as well. We make sure to proceed in tasks from left to right because this exercise develops reading literacy, too.

We observe what degree of support (mediation) the child needs - some children need more, others less. If we see the child not prospering at the activity, we do not let him grope, we will help him. If it does not work at all, we will help, holding his hand while linking the dots and we can say: "Look, what a nice vertical line we have drawn! Do you like it? "If the child does not know where the second dot for merging is placed, we will help him:" Look, I can point my finger to this dot to take care of it and to make you easier to see where it is laying, when you will match it with the second dot." We do not overact but, keep in mind that we are starting from the slightest support to the greatest, according to the child's abilities.

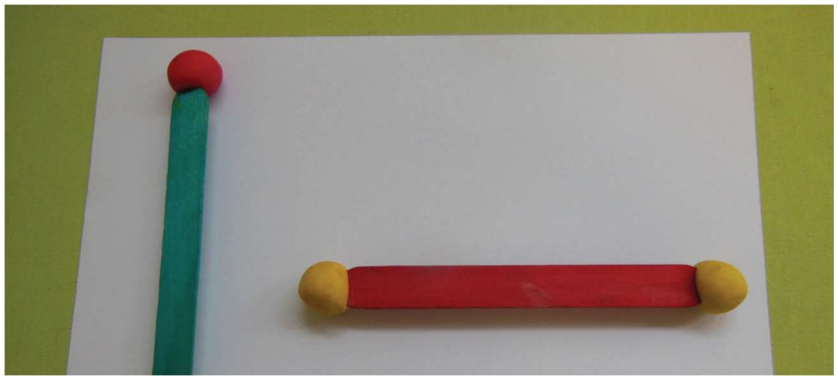
If the child works precisely, we appreciate him/her. The lecturer should only have the status of an observer or a guide. He remains neutral, does not evaluate what is right or wrong. He does not evaluate the child by adding any attributes to him: "You are good, you are clever, you are the best ...“. We appreciate his/her progress at work, thoughts and insights. It is expected that the child will build self-motivation and learn to evaluate himself/herself. It is important that the child is satisfied with his work and himself/herself in all.

If the child fails to accomplish the tasks, we can ask: "I think one of the lines turned out well, do you know which one was it? Can you show it to me? Which one do you like the most? I like this line of yours, too. Do you know why it turned out well? Because you didn't rush, you worked precisely, you made an effort. Can you also show me the one that you liked the least? What do you mean, why is the line so unsuccessful? Were you in a hurry when you drew it, didn't you pay attention? What could we do with it? If you don't like it, would you like to fix it? How could you do that? How could you fix it? Could we erase it? Come on, we'll do it together, I'll erase it and you will fix it then."

If the child did not do anything well, we rub at least one of the lines out and correct it together with the child, to make him feel successful and, that he has done something well. In this way, step by step, we add a long and short vertical line, later a horizontal line, a diagonal line from left to right and from right to left. We still take names to the lines, for example: "Here in this square we have drawn a long horizontal line and a short horizontal line." We show to the child on the paper: "Tell me, what line did you draw here, what is this line called, what is its name?"

Activity: A Dot

To understand the term dot we can use play dough and wooden sticks. Children are given play dough and wooden sticks and their task will be to model two balls from the play dough. When the balls have been shaped, the children join them with a wooden stick. At the same time, when manipulating with a stick, the concept of the horizontal line, the vertical line, the diagonal line and the orientation in the space - the right side, left side - are also practiced. We can give instructions to the children: "Take a ball in your right hand, lay it on the bench. Take a ball in your left hand and lay it on the bench. Join the balls with a wooden stick. What line did we get after joining the balls with the stick? Put the ball down. Pick the ball up. Join them with a stick. What line did we get?" In this way, we can create different variations for joining balls and sticks. For better preparation for working with Organization of Dots, children can work with balls and wooden sticks using office paper as a work pad. At the same time, they can use balls with a wooden stick as a pattern for drawing their dots and lines on office paper (pic. 1).



Picture 1: Dots made of play-dough

The dot conception can also be explained on PET bottle caps and marshmallow candies, which we can combine with a wooden stick (for example, a medical stick used for throat examination). The dot is also

a full stop after the sentence. The colours of the dots in the instruments are black, for example, as the ladybird´s spots on her back, and red as a clown´s nose. Where can we still find dots (stars in the sky, poppies in the poppy-head or the prefiguration of marking lines or letters in an exercise book)?

Activity: Horizontal line

Picture 2: Straight line

Place a bowl or some shallow water container on the table. Take e.g. a wooden skewer and ask the children if we can say that the skewer looks like a line. We will put it on the water and ask what the skewer is doing. It lies on the water (pic. 2). "Look how the skewer lies, could you draw it as it lies?" We can draw on the board, in sand, or on plain paper. "The line that looks like it is lying on the water is called a straight line, and it also has another more professional name, the horizontal line. Do you remember what we called the line that stands? Now we know the lines that stand and lines that lie. Moreover, we will learn the lines that look as if they were tired and would like to fall. Such lines are called oblique lines."

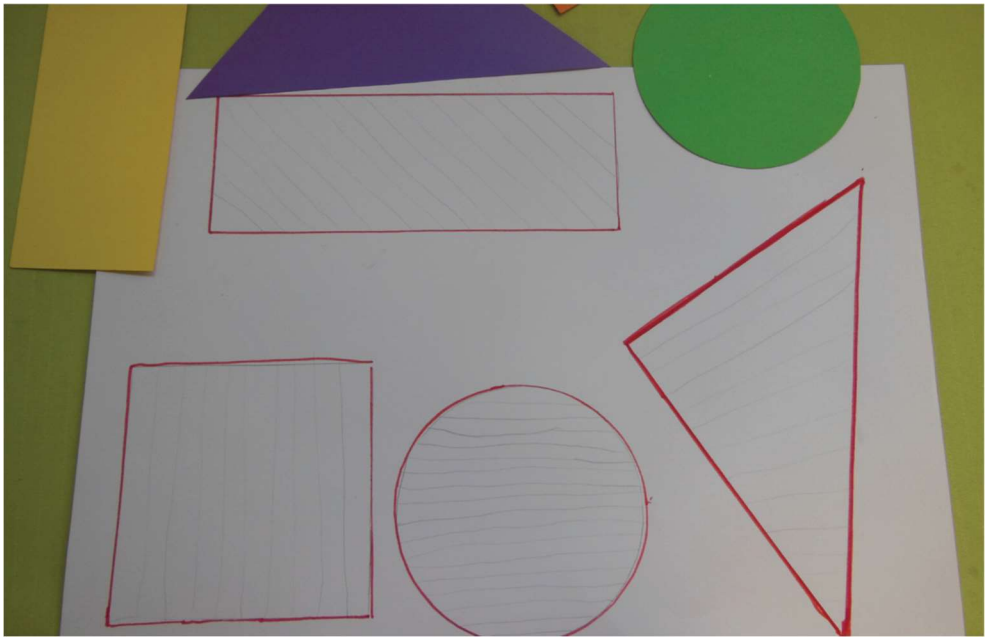
Be careful when switching between two- and three-dimensional spaces. Draw lines on supplementary papers and display them in a conspicuous place to make them available to be used while repeating with children as needed.

We can also use practical activities to enrich the work with children. It is possible to use crepe paper, cut into strips to stick different lines according to the instructions. At the same time, children also consolidate the concept of colours.

Activity: Geometric Shapes

Children are given maquettes of various geometric shapes. These geometric shapes are retraced by the children on paper. According to the teacher's instructions, children draw the vertical, the horizontal and the oblique lines into the drawn geometrical shape (pic. 3).

Picture 3: Drawing lines into geometrical shapes



Activity: Searching for lines

Variant A: If the children already know the letters, we can also work with letters from the printed alphabet. We choose those letters in which children can search for the lines and can name them. For example, we ask, "Children, from which lines is the capital letter M made of?" The children answer, "Two vertical and two oblique lines."

It is very effective if the children participate in the tasks actively. We can ask the child to draw a line on the board. The whole process is accompanied by a verbal description of the work: "Tell me what you drew?" We encourage the children to express themselves, for example: "Here I have drawn a short vertical line." Little by little, we can include lines (wooden sticks) in various colours, lengths, thicknesses, and the kids will verbalize and comment them using multiple information. They will note, for example, the lines of the same colour but in different length or size.

Variant B: When go out for a walk with the children we can look for parallel lines on the fence, point them out to the kids and we can start counting them one after another. When we go to a zebra crossing, we can talk about the lines there and we can look for signs on the road to find parallel lines.

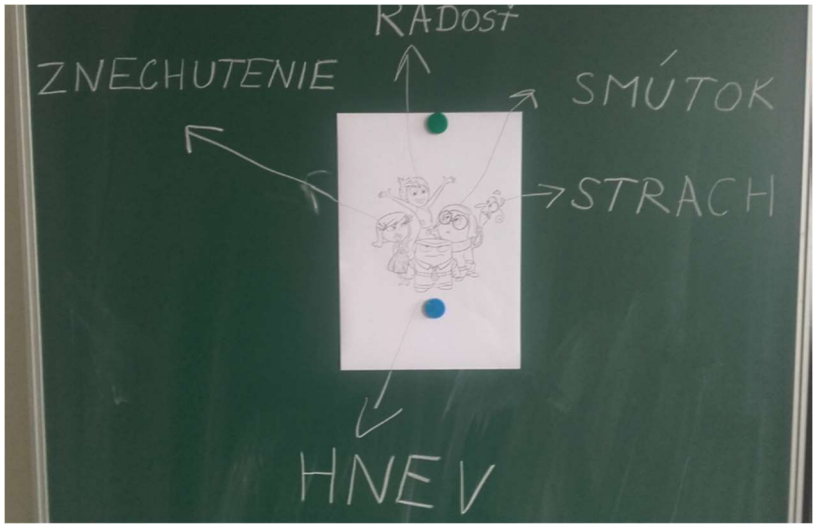
Variant C: We remove the long parts from the building blocks set. We place one piece in front of the children and ask them to place another piece next to it, to create a parallel with the first one. Another child places another parallel piece, not necessarily following the same distance between each of the parts. We can explain to children that even if there is a narrow gap between the first and the second part and a wide gap between the second and the third part, there are still parallel lines because they run in a synchronous way. We can ask them to measure the distance between two parts to make sure it is the same.

Variant D: We know that parallel lines are the lines that "run" in the same direction, but never meet. "Where do we see such lines? When we go by train, when we climb a ladder. What are the lines, can you describe them to me?" As backup, we will have pictures of rails and ladders prepared. This example can also be used to explain long and short lines. Our legs lines and we can show juxtaposed legs in a standing position - as straight and parallel lines, then the standing astride - oblique lines.

We do the exercises with lines until it is all clear to the children, until they can do it precisely. When they already know it, then we can move on to the Organization of Dots.

Pre-preparing exercises for the instrument *Define the Emotion*

Activity: How do you feel?



On arrival at the club, it is advisable to ask children how they feel, what they have experienced during the day and how they feel about it. Thus, they learn to describe their feelings and emotions in words. When we later start working with the instrument, it will be easier for them (pic. 4).

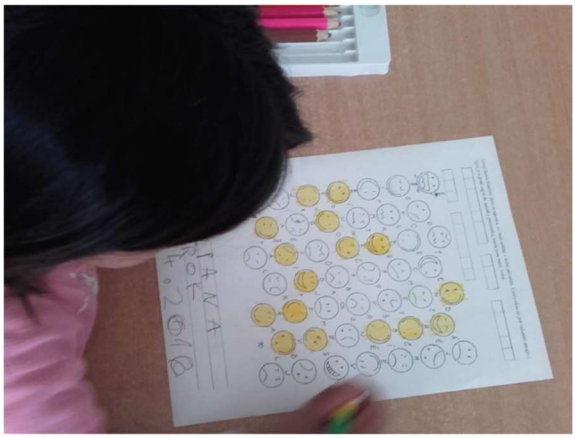
Picture 4: Joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust

Activity: Smiley

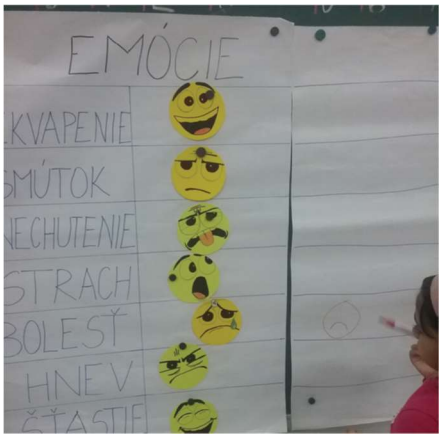
We ask the children to draw a smiley that shows how they feel. They can show it to the others and the children can try to tell how their friend feels, according to the smiley drawn.

We will give a job sheet to the children to let them colour the different kinds of smileys. Children will learn to assign a smiley expression to a specific emotion (pics. 5 and 6).

Picture 5: Different kinds of smileys



Picture 6: Emotions – surprise, sadness, disgust, fear, pain, anger, happiness



After that, the lecturer will lead the situation, for example: "Draw a smiley showing how you feel when your mother kisses you, strokes and hugs you, how you feel when she beats you or screams at you, when she is angry with you, how you feel when she buys you something nice and so on." The children can compare their smileys with one another. Someone will be sad when mum screams at him, but someone may be angry. We can talk with children about our different feelings in the same situation.

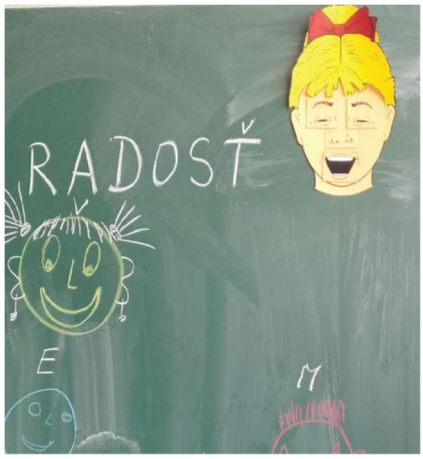
Activity: Pantomime

Children will mime. The lecturer can whisper or give them paper with an emotion they have to play e.g. you are sad, you are surprised, you are afraid and so on. We are not telling them that these are the emotions; children will find it out later in the instrument. The game will help them to understand the feelings they have already experienced and the feelings they know.

Activity: Emotions in different situations

We can ask children how did they feel when, for example, they have won a contest, when they have been on a trip, when they have been at disco, when they have been out for a walk and found something nice, when they have fallen and broken their knee, when they have cut themselves, when they have broken their arm, when they have been in the hospital, when their tooth had hurt. It will help them later when they will work with the instrument. They will find out that they have already experienced some of the situations pictured in the instrument. They will begin to realize this and will be able to describe and compare their emotions better. If children do not wish to talk about their feelings, they can draw them (pic. 7) or make a paper collage (pic. 8).

Picture 7: Drawing joy



Picture 8: Paper collages

Activity: How does it feel?

We will show an item to the children. Their task is to describe how it feels when they touch it, e.g. rumpled paper in a rubbish bin, an empty glass, and a vase with flowers, a bowl with a pudding, a broken flower, a wet coat, a ragged photo. Children will write their feelings down on paper about each of the items displayed. Pupils are then to invent a story about an item. The aim is to develop empathy by describing the feelings from the specific artefacts. If a child is not yet able to write, we will give him space for preparation and then he/she talks about his/her feelings (pic. 9).

Picture 9: How does tangled fibre feel?

Variation: Write down a list of things on the board: a toothbrush, a telephone, a computer, a television, a shoe, a coat, a refrigerator, a dog, a school desk (or use pictures of the things). The task for the children is to choose one of these things and write down what the object says about the child, how does he/she treat it, how does he/she take care of it (pic. 10). The children read what they have written in front of the group. The aim is to express feelings towards himself/herself through projection. Children who feel unappreciated often reflect a deeper self-esteem on subjects.

Picture 10: What does my mobile phone say about me?

Pictures were taken by ETP Slovakia lecturers in Veľká Ida, Stará Ľubovňa – Podsadek, Rankovce during afterschool FIE clubs in 2015-2016