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**Casistry of school – Elementary school Svitavy, T.G.Masaryk 27**

**1 Basic information about school**

Our school is typical elementary school in a town of average proportions, which has approximately 18000 inhabitants. There are 5 elementary schools plus one with only first school that is regarded as being alternative. A good fortune for us and all the other schools as well is the huge support we receive from the town administration, which takes great interest in education.

The management of our schools has changed in 2012, which brought along many changes needed to introduce to the town administration to sustain the support it provided us. At the time there 248 students and 18 pedagogical employees.

One of the key changes was the implementation of Feuerstein's Instrumental enrichment into regular curriculum as a mandatory part of the school education programme. In the beginning we introduced large quantity of sample lessons, to which we invited the higher-ups of town administration, pedagogical public and parents of our students. Thanks to those activities we gained the needed support and information about FIE did reach general public. Based on our experience the method appeared in the following years at every school in our town. We worked on, so to speak, the dissemination of the method throughout the town.

**2 Current structure of our school**

- 306 students
  - ✓ There are 188 students of first school and 118 students of lower secondary school
  - ✓ 68 students with special needs
  - ✓ 178 students have weekly FIE lessons as part of school curriculum
  - ✓ 35 students take FIE as part of pedagogical intervention or supplementary education
- 41 pedagogical employees
  - ✓ 24 teachers
  - ✓ 3 teachers of after school care
  - ✓ 13 teacher's assistants
  - ✓ 1 remedial teacher
- 14 FIE teachers
  - ✓ 14 teachers – FIE I
  - ✓ 11 teachers – FIE Basic
  - ✓ 2 teachers – FIE II
  - ✓ 12 teachers who practise FIE as part of curriculum, pedagogical intervention or private courses

**3 Our road to FIE**

In 2013 we visited along with members of broader management elementary school at Lycka square in Prague, Karlín where we for the first time saw children working with instruments as well as use of mediated learning during normal classes. Because we took interest in the method two of our teachers went to one day sample course in February 2013 and then the same year in summer they attended first course of FIE I.

In September 2014 we started a pilot year of using the FIE method. For this we utilized the club for students of 9<sup>th</sup> grade where the students usually prepare for entry exams in Czech and mathematics. Opening of this club was preceded by a sample lesson for children's parents. The number of students interested in this type of club activity was approximately the same as how many would come to the preparations for exams. Additionally there more students who considered vocational training.

After 4 months multiple teachers began to notice change in the class' atmosphere. They commented on the level of mutual communication, listening to opinions of other classmates and their mutual respect. It was for this reasons we started thinking about implementing FIE as a mandatory subject into school educational programme and also we discussed how many and which students we want to affect.

We came to conclusion we should include 1 FIE lesson a week in 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The age of children in 4<sup>th</sup> grade seemed suitable to begin work with instrument of FIE Standard (we always start with Organization of Dots). In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade we offer FIE only as a club activity, which also works as an indicator of how many students want to be further involved with the method.

It was clear we would be needing more teachers. That is why four more of our teachers attended in summer 2015 the FIE course. In September 2015 we started FIE lessons in all selected grades, beginning with Organization of Dots. Much encouraging proved the regular meetings of FIE teachers where they shared everything that happened to them in their classes, what went well and what did not. The joint FIE cells were not only to reflect upon classes taught but also to prepare for classes to come. Integral part of our work became mutual sittings in on class we used to support one another up to this date.

In the years to come additional members of staff attended the FIE courses but each was given the choice whether he or she wanted to work with FIE after they finished the course. We wanted to give everyone the freedom of choice and looking back we view it a great benefit that only those willing teach the FIE.

As of now FIE functions on all possible levels at our school and we work with various instruments. Each class is given a choice out of several instruments, selection of which is adjusted from class to class. Respecting the succession of instruments where there is one of course. Apart from the aforementioned grades the FIE method has also spread to the first school where it is included in some classes as a supplementary curriculum. School also offers open courses for pre-school children, children at first school and students of 9<sup>th</sup> grades. We met with great interest of public so we offer FIE courses for adults. We also have special groups for our employees who wish to try out FIE from the client perspective (some of our FIE teachers attend as well). Next area where FIE is strongly utilized is work with children with special needs. Some of them take FIE lessons as a part of their pedagogical intervention, others have individual classes with one of FIE teachers. We also created a system of how to approach students who transfer from other schools and have zero experience with FIE. We deem it necessary to take care of those students so they can grow accustomed to working with the method as it then turns beneficial to them.

In the past few years we also took part in several projects, which support the development of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment.

In the Czech Republic emerges a network of schools, which work with the method, and alongside it so called Centre of Collegial Support in FIE method was founded. One of which is our school. Our task is further dissemination of the method (sample lessons, FIE open days, inspirational visits for general and pedagogical public, attendance at conferences) and taking care of FIE teachers in our vicinity we meet on circa monthly basis.

One of our other projects is cooperation abroad. In the frame of Erasmus+ we could establish contacts, exchange experience with various institutions in Netherlands, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia, and create supportive materials for those occupy themselves with mediated learning.

The most intensive cooperation we established with non-profit organization Charlie Karlin and ATC of methods of prof. Feuerstein. PaedDr. Eva Vanova visits us regularly and is at the same time our supervisor. Close interaction with many specialists has been of great help to us and our efforts with FIE because the sense of support and possibility to turn to others is always important.

#### **4 How does FIE affect us**

From the school management's viewpoint changes occur in all of the school's areas. The essential change is that in the atmosphere at school. Both in classes and amongst colleagues we register more empathy, more frequent and concrete sensing of emotions, one's own as well as others' and last but not least improvement of the ability to react adequately at given situations. Even though our team grew in numbers, it has got twice as much teachers, we notice sense of belonging, cooperation and mutual respect.

Communication has gotten better at all levels. Students are able to express themselves verbally with more accuracy and defend their opinions not only towards teachers but towards one another as well. They are better at formulating their thoughts, they listen to each other and are able to put gathered information to use.

FIE teachers go through more rapid and intense personal growth and in they use the criteria of mediated learning in their normal classes. Their lessons are studded with questions and lead students to finding information on their own, their consolidation and putting them to use in daily life. Those methods of work with one self also bring awareness of context and responsibility for one's behaviour.

It is a must to say we are very happy that FIE method did cross our path because it influences everything and everyone around us.

#### **5 Reflection**

Because we wanted to know how all the school members feel about the presence of FIE we decided to ask if they could give us feedback and their opinion. Below you will find the selection of what was mentioned most often in the reflections as well as quotations of some opinions.

##### **5.1 Changes at students**

###### **5.1.1 Views of teaching staff**

- being able to voice their opinion
- share their experience
- thinks about the importance of an answer

- accept responsibility for their actions
- find and use clues
- overcome barriers that could prevent them from entering discussion
- even introvert students find expression
- they thoughtfully work with emotions
- they overcome fear of making a mistake
- they handle mistakes better and look for ways to remedy it
- they can navigate various problems
- they stay on top of their mental and work procedures – work with strategy
- they think about problem solving – *‘It was the last year when I uttered speculation that KlokaneK (mathematical competition) in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades gave better results than in past years. I can confirm that this year. I am sure it is thanks to more accurate reading, better handling of instructions, and change of the way of thinking’*
- they do not react in a negative way to slower pace of other – more patience
- better ability of self-reflection, often quite objective
- empathy – *‘At some students humanity manifests even when in face of teacher.’*
- they formulated their thoughts with more precision
- *‘I would not call it revolutionary but some progression is apparent when it comes to overcoming obstacles to enter discussion, ability to express thought, not being stressed by mistakes and being on top of their own mental and work procedures.’*

### 5.1.2 Views of children

- they give themselves time to think
- their communication gets better
- better at expressing themselves (even in front of people)
- listening on and respecting opinions of others
- cooperation
- perception of emotions, one’s own and others’, and ability to react at given situation
- realization there are other points of view
- *‘Everyone has right for his or her opinion, even when we disagree.’*
- they embrace the basic principles of work within FIE (essential at Organization of Dots) and putting them to use in daily life
- influence on classmates – *‘In our class there were some basic problems like shouting over one another, inability to express clearly and not being able to give oneself time to think. When FIE came all problems began to slowly but steadily melt away.’*
- being aware of belonging together in time and space brings better feeling and experience
- attention to detail and sharper concentration

## 5.2 Teaching staff

### 5.2.1 Views of school management

- sense of team and cooperation
- bigger responsibility
- change of attitude towards children and their work

### 5.2.2 Views of teachers

- more calm and rational solving of work problems

- pleasant atmosphere among staff
- mutual respect
- management as part of school (lesser hierarchy)
- planning strategies
- being able to give time to both students and us
- asking questions as part of learning process
- devolve more responsibility to students
- change of approach in examination (individual work, exams, pop quiz)
- part of teaching staff senses the staff is somewhat split
- inspiration to colleagues in regularity of meetings (of methodical commission) and work enthusiasm

### 5.2.3 Views of children

- FIE teachers are a bit more 'annoying,' they keep asking questions
- frequent use of questions
- influence of FIE on other subjects
- teachers are more patient
- more communication with us means more interest in us
- effort to let us find out how things are on our own

### 5.3 Effect of FIE on school

- pleasant and friendly atmosphere
- sense of prestige
- more possibilities of self-development – for everyone
- *'The atmosphere of the whole staff is very pleasant to me and is formed by my colleagues and the school management. After finishing FIE course I realized that one cause of the pleasant atmosphere is FIE itself.'*

### 5.4 Remarks of students about FIE lessons

- rest from curriculum, but we keep thinking
- lessons of humanity
- it is not important to finish first but to solve the task
- different view on world, looking for various paths

### 5.5 Influence of FIE on teachers

- need of sharing and cooperating more closely with colleagues
- different perception of time, not only when teaching
- more roundabout approach to children
- *'I think more about the students and look for reasons why something is happening this way and something does not go the way I thought it would.'*
- *'I try to be human.'*
- *'When talking with colleagues I notice who underwent FIE and who did not. The FIE ones are more responsive, open to views of others and I feel they treat human relationships with more respect.'*
- *'I want to be more patient when it comes to 'more difficult' students.'*
- *'I am more eager to help all those who need help or ask for it.'*

- *'I try to be less scared.'*
- *'I doubt everything more.'*
- *'I try to be more helpful.'*
- *'FIE helped me to deepen the gift of empathy.'*
- *'I no longer teach FIE, I live it.'*



#### **6 Attachment – school logo**

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Just like society is steadily developing, same could be said about our school. Its new logo symbolizes the tradition of education (ink blot) openness towards parent and children alike (speech balloon) and positive attitude towards solving educational issues (smile).

Let it be known to everyone we are open for innovation (the numerical mark from former logo is no longer used). The colour drops are art play just like the blot – a mistake, which gives the opportunity to learn. The smile is both the joy of 1<sup>st</sup> graders and nostalgia of 9<sup>th</sup> graders leaving. We think positively and perceive our history in many ways – author of our new logo is former student of our school Bc. Tomas Krasa.