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# Integration practices

Svraka, Bernadett – Lo Bello, Maya J. – Márkus, Éva

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The pedagogical practice of acceptance paves the way to integrating those disadvantaged children who can only live their daily lives with support and would experience a learning process full of failures without the proper aid. Societal expectations and social integration can only meet successfully when the spirit of educational institutions and the attitude of teachers demonstrate an accepting attitude. The structure of the institution must furthermore undergo a transformation. When good practices are included in institutional regulatory documents and efforts are made to comply with them, i.e., the institution adapts to the individual needs of the child, then inclusion can be said to occur. Ensuring the conditions necessary for inclusion is a major challenge for the teaching community. Many creative initiatives launched for the purpose of implementing integration demonstrate that the harmonious cooperation of teachers, parents, and children is essential in the process. An example of such an initiative can be found in the second phase of our sensitising series.

*Keywords:* disadvantage, special attention, inclusion, good practices, learning support

## Introduction

Integrating disadvantaged communities is one of society's greatest challenges. This paper relays our cooperation with two initiatives related to the empathy challenge launched by UKids, a social entrepreneurship education project. The first project concerned the implementation of a sensitisation programme that we conducted with lecturers and prospective kindergarten educators from the Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education. Our lecturers and pre-service educators were joined by the fourth- and fifth-grade students of the ELTE Gyertyánffy István Practice School in Budapest. The aim of this programme was to increase participants' awareness of social issues while making children more aware of their civil duties. By targeting a range of age groups, it was our goal to encourage a sense of responsibility toward society's daily challenges while simultaneously developing their skills in seeking alternative solutions.

The second project to occur as a part of this effort began by establishing a joint-cooperation with the Ugyer Member Kindergarten of the Széchenyi Road Nursery School in the city of Cegléd. This institution was an essential factor in our further efforts. As a part of our effort to sensitise members of the majority society to the value in developing unity, inclusion, greater familiarity



with other cultures and lifestyles, battling prejudice, and building common networks for communication, we turned our attention toward exploring the daily lives experienced by Hungary's Roma. Found not far from the city of Cegléd, the Roma children who attend the Ugyer Member Kindergarten come from the outlying, infrastructurally undeveloped farming area of Ugyer. As inspiring as this natural 'world of wonders' proved for those who had mainly been familiar with the urban world of Budapest, we chose Ugyer for its deep poverty and residential Roma community. Our aim was to expose project participants to this community's living circumstances while developing a greater level of responsibility and empathy toward their fellow man.

The Roma comprise Europe's largest ethnic minority group. Out of an estimated ten to twelve million Roma living in Europe, approximately six million are citizens or residents of the European Union. Many Roma are still victims of prejudice and social exclusion. For the purpose of this paper, it must be clarified that the term 'Roma' encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.). While many Roma citizens who live in Hungary prefer to identify themselves as cigány, the term traditionally used in Hungary for Roma, we use 'Roma' in recognition of the great diversity of cultures and ethnic groups that this designation implies while distancing ourselves from the pejorative overtones that can sometimes be attached to the word 'cigány' when used in certain contexts. Given that some aspects of Hungarian Roma culture – most notably those related to music and dance – have virtually evolved into their own genre known as cigányzene ['cigány music'] or cigánytánc ['cigány dance'], in instances related to cultural heritage we use the term cigány out of respect for the numerous contributions Hungary's Roma communities have made to Hungarian culture.

According to the EU, all Roma should have the opportunity to realise their full potential and engage in political, social, or cultural life. Beginning in 2023 onwards, member states of the EU must report on the implementation of National Roma Strategic Frameworks<sup>1</sup> every two years, including measures to promote equality, inclusion, and participation.

As was mentioned previously, our project began with visits to the kindergarten in the settlement of Ugyer, located in the middle of a disadvantageous, mostly Roma-inhabited region that largely depends on agriculture. During joint play activities and outdoor games, our group gained familiarity with the kindergarten and gained insight into the everyday life of their attending children. Our aim was to assess the attitude-shaping role of the sensitisation program. We can conclude that this part of the program was implemented in a way that made sensitisation successful for both the school children and pre-school teacher students involved.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu\\_en#eu-roma-strategic-framework-for-equality-inclusion-and-participation](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en#eu-roma-strategic-framework-for-equality-inclusion-and-participation)

A continuation of this series of programmes is the realisation of the seemingly unattainable dream of preschool children from Ugyer: to travel to Budapest, the capital city of Hungary. Together with their companions, a group of preschool children from Ugyer visited the Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, where pre-school teacher students and elementary school students awaited them with a variety of programmes. In this part of the project, the experience and implementation of the practice of inclusion played an essential role. The good practices detailed in this paper were tested and applied in the course of the Ugyer pre-school's visit to Budapest. For more international projects on Roma Inclusion, i.e., to improve the access of Roma children to quality early childhood education and care see the website of the European Commission (European Commission, 2011)

For a compilation of Roma inclusion good practices in Europe see the website of the European Commission (European Commission, 2010). To study a successful project in a little village in Slovakia see the Politheor website (Bajtosova, 2019).

### Literature review

According to the *EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020–2030*, education is the area that has progressed the most in the past years, notably in the areas of reducing early school-leaving and improving participation in early childhood education and compulsory schooling (European Commission, 2020). However, cases regarding the segregation of Roma pupils in education have increased. The Commission has initiated infringement procedures against three countries (CZ, HU and SK) for the school segregation of Roma children. In contrast to the field of education, access to employment has not improved. Mainly due to inadequate and segregated residential areas, access to adequate housing also remains difficult. Antigypsyism, hate crime, and the human trafficking of Roma (in particular women and children) continue to be matters of high concern.

To achieve greater and faster progress, the current EU Parliament has laid out a new Roma Strategic Framework for the purpose of promoting effective equality, socio-economic inclusion, and the meaningful participation of Roma. In terms of education, the strategic framework aims to ensure that by 2030 at least 70% of Roma children participate in preschool education while fewer than one in five Roma children attend schools where most or all students are Roma. The Strategic Framework also aims to increase effective equal access to quality, inclusive, mainstream education. The National Strategic Framework should present a plan or set of measures for preventing and fighting antigypsyism and discrimination, segregation in education and housing, and anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypes, including those found online (European Commission, 2020).

In Hungary, there are settlements and districts where the disadvantaged social strata – mostly comprising citizens of Roma origin – form segregates. This social problem has also infiltrated educational institutions. In many

cases, due to prejudice, parents do not enrol their children in institutions with a high proportion of Roma children. Given that this topic is a sensitive one across several disciplines, a clear position cannot be taken, but a stance can be supported by means of implementing integration practices. Implementation poses a particular challenge for teachers in those educational institutions where social integration should be a top priority. Ensuring fair treatment and individual needs goes beyond any effort to achieve equal opportunities.

In addition to an inclusive approach, institutions must also play a role in compensating for disadvantages. The biggest challenge is the language barrier as a limited language code and low level of speech comprehension hinder the development processes. Thus, this distinct disadvantage can carve a direct path to further learning difficulties or disorders later on. To avoid this circumstance, it is important to maintain contact with the parents of the children in kindergarten and define the parents' role in facilitating developmental processes. A good method for accomplishing this aim is furnished by the organisation of joint programmes where educators and parents can get to know one another in a way that reassures parents regarding the usefulness of the work conducted by educational institutions. Such a programme can further reassure parents that their children are in good hands on a daily basis. Once this relationship has been established, parents are happier to let their children go to kindergarten and school (Pankotai & Hegedűs, 2019). This study therefore presents an example of good practices utilised in the interest of this kind of an integration effort.

### **Good Practices**

Accompanied by their parents and kindergarten teachers, on 21 March, 2019, a group of kindergarten children from Ugyer travelled by bus to the Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, located on the Buda side of Hungary's capital city, Budapest. Their reception required great organisation on the part of young and old alike.

Throughout this visit, our main goal was to develop a common language for the basis of communication. We planned to accomplish this aim by means of a series of interactive activities. When planning these activities, both individual needs and the factor that the majority of these children and their parents had never left their settlement were taken into account. In other words, we were certain that all the information they absorbed from the Faculty's environment would be new to them.

As a first step, we furnished the reception halls. A separate room was provided for the placement of bags and coats (Picture 1) and for the location of the activities.

**Picture 1***The Reception Hall*

Meanwhile, the primary school children who had accompanied us during our kindergarten visit, also arrived. We were fully prepared and excited to receive our little team of guests from Ugyer. We awaited the kindergarten children, their parents and kindergarten teachers at the building's entrance and accompanied them to the scene of our joint activities. (Picture 2)

**Picture 2***A group photo of the participants*

The pre-schoolers and their kindergarten teachers also had several surprises in store for us. First, the kindergarten teachers held a presentation for us. They brought us a basket full of the kind of skirts, aprons, and shawls that Roma women used to wear as a part of their traditional dress. Some of these clothes were borrowed from a grandmother who lives in Ugyer. (Picture 3)

**Picture 3**

*A presentation of a traditional 'cigány' folk costume*



This was followed by the performance of a *cigány* dance held by the children. (Picture 4) During this event, the children were able to demonstrate their own individual dance skills, which they performed freely and accompanied by their own musical instruments. Two little pre-school boys drummed on jugs and provided the musical background.

**Picture 4**

*Performing a traditional 'cigány' dance*



Then the kindergarten teacher students took control of the pre-school group and played the first Raindrop Game with them. (Picture 5) The purpose of this game is to acquaint children with matching oral directions to certain movements and sounds while they remain seated. When the “rain” is falling, the children are to tap the table with their pointer and middle fingers; to express a light drizzle they extend all of their fingers and tap the table as if hitting piano

keys. When hail arrives, they then hit the table harder with their knuckles. Various associated forms of weather – heavy winds, snow, thunder, lightning, etc. – can also be added to this game. It should be mentioned that pre-school education in Hungary is firmly based in the method of teaching via various forms of games and/or free play. In pre-school, the main aim is to develop physical, emotional, mental, social, and communication skills while acquiring knowledge. The children do not study the weather-related facts and vocabulary mentioned above, but rather acquire this information via a game such as the aforementioned Raindrop Game. It is our contention that the flexibility and creativity demanded by utilising this methodology provides a suitable foundation for supporting inclusion in pre-school institutions: as the case of Hungary's Roma community demonstrates, the main issue is for educators and institutions alike to be better prepared to address the developmental challenges brought about by generations of poverty, antigypsyism, and unequal access to education.

In the end, both the pre-school and school children enjoyed playing this game very much, even though it could not be implemented according to the game's original rules due to difficulties in task comprehension. Adapting the game to the needs of our visitors still allowed everyone to have a good time while our pre-service educators also gained experience in altering a task to suit the needs of a group whose development does not fit a 'textbook' scenario.

### Picture 5

*Raindrop Game*



These warm-up events and games were followed by team games. We took care to divide the teams so there would be a mix of pre-schoolers and schoolchildren on each team. This measure was taken so older children would be present to help the little ones with every task. At the first station, each child received a teddy bear-shaped passbook that they had to take with themselves everywhere, as they were given a sticker on their teddy bear passbook at the end of each

of the five stations (Picture 6). Of course, each child took this passbook home with them at the end of the day as a keepsake.

**Picture 6**

*Teddy bear passbook with stickers*



At the second station, a game created for the purpose of developing eye-hand coordination (Picture 7) awaited the children. Loop sticks were inserted into a styrofoam circle, including four colours (red, blue, yellow, green) and two sizes (long and short). Pieces of drinking straws cut evenly into 2.5 cm pieces and in four different colours were placed in small bowls. The teachers discussed with the children the colour and length of the sticks. Then the children mostly figured out very skilfully how to place the pieces of straw onto the sticks. Some children could do this quickly and easily, but a few could only manage it more slowly due to difficulties in eye-hand coordination. Meanwhile, the schoolchildren tied line patterns on the sticks and then helped rearrange the game.

**Picture 7**

*Sorting, tying, grouping*





At the third station, the children put together pieces of images. (Picture 8) Four types of images were provided, including that of a duck, a grape, a ladybug, and a snail. When the picture had been completed, the station manager asked the participants if they remembered a song or rhyme that was about the image they could see in the picture. If they did, the children either sang the song or recited the chant or poem; if nothing came to mind, they got a little help.

### Picture 8

#### *Image puzzle*



At the fourth station, children could play a game to develop their sense of rhythm. Quite aptly, the name of this game is Rhythm Phone. (Picture 9) After forming a line, the children must gently 'forward' the rhythm that the child behind them has already tapped on their shoulder. The pre-schoolers from Ugyer genuinely enjoyed the game while skilfully passing on the rhythm and even inventing very creative rhythms.

### Picture 9

#### *Rhythm Phone*



At the fifth station, children had to place different images in a chronological order. (Picture 10) The children solved this task very skilfully as even the trickier pictures were quickly sorted. In one image, the seasons had to be placed in chronological order, a task that proved difficult for several children, but one that could still be learned with the help of the pictures. The school children were very helpful in that they supported the pre-schoolers throughout the entire process but did not solve the task for them. Instead, the older children tried to guide the younger children to the correct solution.

**Picture 10**

*Image puzzle (chronological order)*



At the sixth station, children played a game of trust. (Picture 11) Each pre-schooler was blindfolded while the schoolchildren led them along a track. The children had to reach the teddy bear called Jar and take him to the starting point. The schoolchildren were very helpful in supporting the pre-schoolers.

**Picture 11**

*Game of trust*



After the children got through all the stations, they ended by playing a relaxation game. The children sat in a circle and the pre-school teacher students placed a piece of paper in the middle, upon which they drew a man. Slow, relaxing music was played and the children closed their eyes, Jar, the teddy bear, walked around and touched each child on one part of his/her body. Then the children had to place a dot on the same body part that the teddy bear had touched on the picture of the man. The pre-school children sat with incredible patience and in silence until the teddy bear reached everyone. All people present were touched.

After the games ended, the children filed to the pre-set tables to have lunch. Following lunch, they received their well-deserved reward: each of them received a gym bag from the school, with a chocolate and a hand-sewn bunny in it. Before the children arrived at the university, the students had collected and bagged all the abundant donations that they and their university teachers had brought for the children. We were able to gift them a lot of good quality clothes, shoes, and toys. After the children got on the bus, they waved to us enthusiastically from the window, and we said goodbye to one another until the time comes when we meet again.

### Summary

With a population of over 10 million, the Roma community comprises Europe's largest transnational minority. Often victims of racial and social discrimination, members of this minority group struggle to receive equal access to education, employment, and healthcare services. In recent years, the integration of Roma has become an important issue on the agenda of the European Union (European Commission, 2021, 2011, 2020)

In Hungary, numerous views and opinions exist regarding integration and inclusive pre-school practice. According to our Public Education Law, we refer to the co-education of children with special educational needs, Roma and multiple disadvantaged children. Whichever area is used as a basis, sensitisation should begin at a very early age. We joined the challenge of empathy of the UKids social entrepreneurship education project with two related sensitisation practices. The aims of the programmes are to implement social sensitisation in multiple areas and across age groups.

During the second phase of our project, we carried out charitable activities related to sensitisation. We hosted Roma pre-school children from Ugyer, who in turn introduced us to a taste of their own culture. Then we invited them to participate in a joint game that combined the developmental effect of perception with playful activities.

Throughout these activities, our pre-service teachers could observe that the preschool children displayed differences in several areas of development that could have been the result of intercultural variations. The children's communication was characterised by a limited language code, which we tried to replace with other means of expression, including rhythm exercises, touch, and games of trust. It was good to experience that children and adults turned to each other with great love, thereby setting aside all of our differences.

From this perspective, it can be concluded that the goal of empathy projects (sensitisation) has been fully implemented.

Throughout all phases of this project, both the children and the adults enjoyed themselves thoroughly and were able to learn a lot from one another. Sharing our time and discovering our similarities were only some of the short-term benefits to developing out mutually satisfying relationship. In the long-term, it is our hope that the experiences our pre-service teachers gained while in Ugyer and the good practices they were able to test among both the children from our practice school and the Roma pre-school students will enable the kind of pedagogical experience that fosters genuine inclusion. While much more admittedly remains to be accomplished in this area, we remain committed to any effort that halts the continued segregation of Hungary's school system.

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## Resources

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