

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Slovak Republic case study report 2 Art Therapy: Painting and personal development

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MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA



The AMOR (Art Therapy: Painting and personal development) project was realised by the Slovak branch of the Organisation *People in Need* between March and December 2006. The financial costs (134,681.90 SKK) were provided from the COWPARADE 2005 grant scheme of the Foundation for the Slovak Children.

The project organisation and its partners

The main project partners were:

- Local Authority Doľany, the administrative centre of the Roškovce village,
- Local Authority Spišský Nehov, the village where the children attend school,
- Spišský Nehov Primary School,
- Levoča Special School,
- Doľany Kindergarten.

These five partners were the key to the successful realisation of the project and efficient running of the Community Centre (CC) from the very beginning. The leisure time activities offered by the Community Centre should naturally enhance the school curriculum as well as show children the importance of school attendance and education in general. The Community Centre attempted to cooperate with the schools involved in the project to illustrate the friendly face of school both for the children and their parents. Reciprocally, the school teachers were invited to join in the Community Centre events and to visit the centre so that they could meet pupils and their parents outside the classroom walls and to learn more about them.

One of the important aspects of the community life is the existence of the local municipal authority, community self-government, conflict-free and open communication. The community events and meetings allowed both sides – the community members and the self-government representatives, especially the mayor - to acquire another, safer grounds for their further communication. Children's parents and other community members also took part in the community events organisation. After several months, a stable group of four volunteers (one adult and three adolescent boys) was formed and it started regular cooperation on the project activities, including work with children. The AMOR project included several types of activities. The survey of the main ones follows. They are divided into stages of preparation and realisation. The survey includes both the regular and irregular activities.

1/ Preparatory Stage (Stage 1)

The Roškovce Community Centre was opened on February 27th, 2006. As a part of the preparatory stage, it was necessary to establish contacts between Dolany Kindergarten (attended by the Roškovce pre-school children), Spišský Nehov Primary School and Levoča Special School. The head authorities of these institutions were introduced into the community centre activities and agreed on cooperation, especially in the area of communication with the parents and children's school performance. As a result, the Community Centre was donated desks, chairs and blackboards. The community workers could meet the children in the Art Club and during countryside walks.

1a) Art Club

The activities in the first month after opening focused on meetings and contacts of the centre workers and children with their parents. In the very popular Art Club children painted pictures of themselves, their families and best friends, and the houses where they live. The Club held two art therapy projects carried out by the community centre workers and under the supervision of an art therapist (one for children aged 12 to 15 and another one for children aged 8 to 11) with the topic headings 'My family' and 'My Family Under A Spell'. The drawings from these two projects were used for lessons on the art therapy basics for the centre workers.

1b) Countryside Walks

On weekly walks in the Roškovce countryside children went sleighing and playing winter games. They also learnt to use snow as a material for their creative activities – for building not only a snowman, but for building animals, houses and people, too. The children reacted to this activity very lively and with much enjoyment, therefore it was included into the realisation stage and went right through to the end of the project. The walks during summer holidays were more frequent, almost daily ones. These summer activities for groups of six included picking forest fruit, animal footprint plaster casting, an informative course in herbs, swimming lessons and camping. All these activities appeared as art topics in consequent children's works.

2/ The Realisation Stage (Stage 2)

The Art Club organised some activities regularly: topic-based drawing, free drawing, collages, modelling, cultural trips – both bringing culture to the children and travelling with the children to meet culture, music-inspired drawing, learning how to relax, non-verbal activities, art and drama techniques as well as self-reflection activities.

The realisation stage also included other events, outside the regular programme:

- **The Roškov Cow** - with active participation of the Art Club children, who painted the wooden Roškov cow that had been carved and donated by a local folk artist. The cow became an object of an auction and was sold for 5,555 SKK to the mayor of the involved villages and, after a discussion and by joint decision, exhibited in Spišský Nehov together with other wooden carvings. All the children from the community centre voted to spend the money from the sale on buying new see-saws and lights for the centre.
- **Music and Dance Events:** for example 1) *Looking for New Talents* – the regional song contest for the Roma children, with participation of ten Roškovce children, 2) Visit by a French Musician, Siri Charbonneau, and his performance with the children, 3) *Let's Dance with Eliška I* – a three-day dance workshop for the Roškovce girls led by a Czech dance teacher and followed by a dance performance in the centre and by a disco party (17 girls took part in the performance).
- **Theatre Performances:** *Theatre Workshop, Of the Little Hen and the Little Rooster, About Tibor and a Laundry Girl* etc.
- **Community Events:** 1) *Roškov Idol* – a singer show for the talented Roškovce children held in the Centre garden, attended by approximately one hundred spectators – parents, with ten contestants in each of the four categories. 2) *Children's Day* – the celebration of the international Children's Day not only for the Centre children. This celebration was organised by the community volunteers, teachers, terrain workers and friends of the Slovak branch of the *People in Need*. One hundred and nine contestants took part in eight disciplines. 3) *Summer Holiday Goodbye Party* – this event concluded various holiday activities (Art Therapy Club Exhibition, Herbal Tea Shop, theatre performance '*Of the Little Hen and the Little Rooster*'). All these activities were accompanied by quizzes and contests for children. 4) *St. Nicolas Theatre Evening* – an evening of recitation and songs and a performance by the Theatre Club called *About Tibor and a Laundry Girl*.

Project Success Rate: More General Comments

The project evaluation is based on frequency and the Centre activity growth analysis, as well as on continuous monitoring of the increasing number of project participants. Teachers also compared the children's school performance evaluation certificates at the end of the first term and the second term, and the results were studied along the feedback obtained from the teachers during their interviews.

The main success rate quantitative indicator appears to be the actual frequency of the weekly Centre activities, which was higher than the originally planned one. During Stage 1, the regular events for two different children groups were held five times a week and took two hours, ie four hours a day altogether; whereas in Stage 2 the events were organised five times a week during seven hours a day.

The number of daily visitors varied during the school year (thirty-two children visitors on average), especially in winter months, and during the summer holidays (fifty-six children visitors on average). The children took an active part in the project realisation and in the Centre activities.

There was also kept track of the number of the volunteers participating in the project. There were thirty-one volunteers, ten out of them were direct community members – most of them were parents of the Centre children. This fact provides evidence of the community interest in the project and understanding its importance. According to the organisers the main project outcomes were *The Roškov Cow*, *Summer Holiday Goodbye Party* and *Roškovce in Picture*, a photo project.

The project contributed to several positive outcomes, in particularly:

- the children developed and improved their social competencies, their self-confidence and increased their integration potential. They could appear in the roles previously unknown to the majority society and helped it to understand that the Roma children can do better than the usual generalised expectations state. In particular, *The Roškov Cow*, participating at the *Jekhetane pal e bacht* festival and majority society volunteers palpably increased the children's self-confidence and self-respect.
- Improved school performance, less apathetic and more active approach to school curriculum subjects (for example in Art classes) in the second term – after the project had been launched - as it was shown from the class teacher feedbacks. This fact might be clearly seen in comparison to the school performance evaluation certificates from the end of the first term and the second term in the 2005/2006 school year.
- observed from a one-year perspective by the Centre workers, teachers, parents and self-government representatives (from February 2006 until now) – there proves to be an evident shift in approach to life etc; the shift is represented by more active approach to life and to development of communication abilities.

The project might also be considered successful on the grounds of the following reasons:

- 1) children's stable and high interest in the project's activities, which led to the increase in their frequency,
- 2) improved school results (confirmed by comparing the performance evaluation certificates at the end of the first term and the second term and based on the interviews with the children conducted by their teachers),
- 3) continuously growing interest in the project activities from the side of the parents, teachers and self-government members,
- 4) mass media interest in the Centre activities,
- 5) majority's awareness of the fact that an active participation in the community means a contribution for its neighbours as well (feedback obtained from the teachers and common citizens speaks about positive changes in both children's and adults' behaviour).

The importance of the project for the community lies especially in the fact that there had been no activities of this kind in Roškovce before the project was launched. The community felt about the Community Centre very positively since its very first day as there were everyday visits by adults offering assistance either with the children or the Centre building repairs. The project activities and events allowed the community to be seen by its neighbours in a positive way.

There were no clearly defined short-term goals in the project description; it was focused on the long-term ones. The project succeeded in the goal 'Introducing the socially disadvantaged children

into leisure time activities' – the children joined in whole-heartedly. The project also succeeded partially in the goal 'Increasing the children's integration potential and consequent improving conditions for their further integration in their future life'; however, it is not possible to assess achievement of this goal at the moment. As the Community Centre has only been operating for about a year, there still was not enough time to estimate the integration potential of the target group. Nevertheless, based on the project result quality indicators, it might be claimed that the project did help to increase the children's integration potential and certainly facilitated their start forward the future life. The main goal of the project 'Contributing towards skills, social adaptability and self-awareness development in children with social and combined handicaps through art clubs and art therapy' seems to be attained.

Conclusion in the Context of Main Project Outcomes, Identified Needs and Problems

Thanks to this project, the Community Centre and *People in Need* organisation could realise the first activities of this kind at the village of Rošovce. The project yielded several undoubtedly beneficial results for Rošovce: 1) children had an appropriate place to spend their free time in a way that made sense, 2) children not only played in their free time, but they also gained new knowledge and new skills, 3) children lost their fear of strange environment thanks to various trips to the Rošovce surroundings, 4) by being in contact with volunteers, the whole community including children met the members of the majority society which helped to minimise prejudices on both sides, 5) opening up of the communication between children and parents, parents and school and the communication with the community self-government and majority citizens, 6) members of the surrounding majority society understood the positive contribution of the Roma children for the society.

Based on previous estimates, it was confirmed that the Community Centre filled a gap in the community life. Children used to spend their free time in the streets, not being able to participate in any activities outside school and, apart from school attendance, living isolated on the community territory and parents found communication with the majority society (self-government, teachers, officials, and so on) difficult. The project managed to compensate this need. It was fully realised that it was necessary to continue operating the Community Centre since the cancellation of its activities could mean return to the starting point about a year ago, or an even worse impact on weakening the trust to the majority ('*they came, they did something here for a year or so, and they went away again*').

References:

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