



Children's access to play in school

National Adaption Plans

Field research

Slovakia

Document Details:	
Reference	Children's access to play in school (CAPS)
IO1 / Activity	IO1 – National Adaption Plans / field research
Author(s)	Péter Urbán, Mária Borvák
Character	Country Report (Slovakia)
Date	31.03.2018



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National Adaption Plan – Field Research – key findings

1. Database

Focus group was held 12th March 2018 (4pm-7pm)

The focus group interview was carried out with the following people:

Advisory team members (4 people) - we considered it important to have them there, they are experts whose opinion we consider important

1. Peter Drál: one of the initiators and promoters of the campaign ([We want to know more](#) – a research on what would be an ideal vision for the school system in 40 years time in Slovakia)
2. Martin Kríž: member of the team of Indícia, n.o., who implements the Roadshow and the annual conference „Teaching for Life, Teacher“
3. Barbora Tancerová (higher education, formerly National Pedagogical Institute, parent),
4. Peter Lenčo (non-formal education, Children of Slovakia Foundation - co-author of the book "Government respecting Children's and Young People's Rights" and Children and Young People Friendly Communities: <http://www.codetipotrebuju.sk/prirucka-komunity-priatelске-detom-> and a people-YOUNG /).

Other participants (9 people)

1. Dušan Ondrušek (NGO-sector, senior supervisor),
2. Juraj Šimkovič (teacher at the Private School of Nová Dubnica, a progressive, innovative school) They joined an experiment and created a role for Juraj, called Well-being Manager.
3. Marián Lezo (pedagogue, Private Elementary School Felix)
4. Radka Staffova (educator, she worked at Iuvente, in Felix, she is now on maternity leave)
5. Szilárd Kása (parent)
6. Monika Šajánková (Faculty of Philosophy at Comenius University - Didactics)
7. Eva Balážová (Komenského Elementary School in Bratislava - state school, capital city)
8. Andrea Križanová - school psychologist (Komenského elementary school in Bratislava)
9. Valéria Kováts (teacher at Elementary and Grammar School Dunajská, Bratislava)

There are 2 interviews planned for the near future, where we will include the following people:

1. Kornélia Várady - head teacher, Elementary School of Kóczán Mor in Zlatna na Ostrove
2. Fodor Attila – policy maker at Comenius Institute, part of the Slovakian Hungarian Pedagogical Association

2. Research method

Instead of simple interviews, we have decided to organise a focus group for the added benefit of people inspiring each other, and being able to react to each other's ideas. The total number of participants was 13. Although we have invited more, head teachers were not able to come, but they have shown support by sending their employees instead.

The focus group had the following steps:

1. Introductory round – introductions, "my relationship to learning, teaching and education", completing the sentence "The school should be a place where..."
2. Presentation of the project (OPAL programme, Michael Follett's work, sample video showing playtime at schools, sharing experiences from the UK study trip)
3. Work in small groups: 1st topic: Challenges that the programme might face, 2nd topic: Interventions, 3rd topic: Need for support, that might be given during the duration of the CAPS project – each group had 20 minutes to work on each of the topics using a flipchart and creative tools, when finished, they had to pass the flipchart to the next group, who continued to work on it. This way all the ideas were included, and taken one step further with every round. At the end, all the groups have presented and explained their own topics, thus adding further information and clarifying the topics.

Head teachers' opinion still has to be included, thus we are planning 2 more personal interviews: Personal interviews with school principal and expert.

3. Key findings from field research

All the experts agreed on the fact that introducing free play into schools is a necessary and highly beneficial thing, and at the same time warned us that it might be too difficult in such a short time frame. Play and understanding of the importance of play is still very much not discussed in education or school management or on a national level.

Experts also agreed that one of the most important things is that there are no barriers in the national educational program, so that free play could be introduced, however there are major factors that make it quite difficult. Just the three most important:

- fear and mental barriers in school managements or parents' minds
- free interpretation of the law / it is dependent on school inspectors whether they consider something dangerous, legal, acceptable
- every single loose part would have to be certified as there is a rule about not letting children touch or use any material that hasn't got a certificate

A common trait was also that experts emphasized the need for education and information about free play and play is a whole, later going further with informing the public about the project CAPS, as it is such innovative method, that many people have to familiarize themselves with the concept of free play.

One more very important element was the educational and training part that would enable the teachers or playworkers to perform their task properly. Their common understanding is that it would be easier to introduce free play in religious schools rather than state schools.

3.1. Value of play

How do interviewees perceive core value of play?

- there are still some interviews to be performed to answer this question fully as mainly those people came who consider play and games to be a very important thing in a children's life for its own sake.

3.2. Challenges for play friendly schools

Educational program

The education program is divided into national and school. The national educational program is a wider framework and offers schools the opportunity of profiling through school education programs. Experts agreed that there was enough room for OPAL to be introduced without changing the national educational program.

The problem may be "interpretation of the rules" by individual inspectors who then threaten schools. The solution can be a set of questions and answers for such cases, so the leadership has something in their hands not to be defenseless.

The problem may be the safety rules and the need for certificates ("everything you give to children must have a certificate that they are safe to be used"). If children are to play with used things to make it cheap, it can be a problem.

Curricula-fit and school authorities

The prescribed educational program is only a mental barrier. We are limiting ourselves to referring to the state framework and authorities that do not allow for innovation in education. In fact, there is nothing in the national educational program that would not allow more games in schools.

The only problem can be school inspectors - individuals who have their own interpretation of laws and regulations and can make life more difficult for innovative schools.

The role of the authorities may be interesting in raising funds for playwrights.

There is one possible risk that does not concern school authorities, but insurance companies: what if the insurer refuses to insure the child against the accident because of their free play time. This concern mainly concerns children and parents in the capital city.

Summary:

- Start with small, incremental changes
- The introduction of the rules to start - the beginning is important, mainly the how, on the other hand, in case of big schools, it is necessary to introduce changes gradually - 700 children
- Sequence of group formation, start in small and then expand gradually
- Certificate - Everything with which children are playing has to have a certificate (case of a tree, killing a child)

Authorities

- Financial resources for playworkers are uncertain
- School - liaison with the university
- Inspector, who has "its interpretation of law"

School management

Experts agreed that school management is a key factor in introducing free play to schools. If the director is determined and believes in the benefits of introducing free play, he/she has enough freedom in the competencies and means to take sufficient action.

It is important to be clear on who is legally responsible for children in breaks during free play.

Summary:

- The legal aspect of responsibility (who has responsibility during those breaks)
- Insurance against accidents - the insurance company will not want to insure children
- Space - schools also do not have spaces
- Disapproval of school leadership (more conservative, worrying)
- Guidelines - Safety and more.
- Could religious schools be like more likely to adapt free play than state schools?
- Aspect of "equality" - to make it accessible for all children where it is introduced

Employees

The main question is: who can be a playworker? Do they have to be pedagogues? If so, how do we motivate them to sacrifice their breaks? Or educators? Should it be voluntary or obligatory for them? Who will provide them with education? Or should parents be involved? How do they acquire the ability to do children's supervision? (not only the ability to know how to do it, but also the fact that they can remain with the children themselves - an aspect of responsibility)

It is necessary to deal with the financing of playworkers: when it is extra work, it also has to be honored. Who will pay for it? Firstly, one-time education, as well as regular work in addition.

Is it useful to look at what are currently the problems of the assistant? It can help with the introduction of playworkers.

It will be a great deal to find those who want to do it and who will do it despite the initial resistance of their colleagues.

Summary:

- The question of supervision, responsibility
- Finance: completing a job?
- Who can be a playworker? They do not have to take care of the educators
- Resistance of colleagues
- Find those who want to do it
- Fear of uncontrolled
- See what are the problems of the assistant now? It can help with the introduction of playworkers

Parents

We also need to be prepared for disagreement and serious doubts from the side of parents who are often performance-oriented and stamina-oriented ("children are not the problem, they are mostly not interested in their marks, parents are more keen on marks only"). the fact that parents are performance driven shows in the way how they say: "the school is there to learn", "learning must hurt, when it does not hurt, it is not learning".

In Slovakia there is a grammar school system, so parents have the habit of sending the child to the nearest school. Therefore, the argument of the school's profiling may not work on free play that if they do not like it, they should take the child to another school. It does not work in Slovakia yet.

It may be useful to find a school where the cooperation with parents is already cultivated, well-developed. Experts assumed the lead of religious schools in this regard.

Summary:

- Disapproval from parents - do not want children to be dirty
- Find motivated parents - as a leader, perhaps with activities with children
- Long-term cooperation with parents (where it is already - find those schools first)
- Bullying vs. myth about bullying - parents are afraid of bullying
- Gradient school system - we're working on it, we're not used to choosing schools, we're doing the closest
- Parental performance - "at school to learn", "it must hurt when it does not hurt, it's not learning", "they go after stamps, children do not need, parents need"
- "parents explicitly ask that they do not want an alternative class" - they are afraid they will not be able to control their home at home (but when the child goes home happy)

- Parents' consent is necessary to play football
- A long process

3.3. Fields for intervention

In which different areas do interviewees see some need for change?

Educators

It will be crucial to point out the benefits in the learning process to get the support of pedagogues for this idea. Only by themselves will they not actively support the free play concept.

It is necessary to differentiate between ordinary teachers who do not act actively as playworkers, have a rather passive role and those who are active as playworkers. They need special preparation. But the others need to be thoroughly informed so that they won't protest against it (whether open or hidden).

It is also necessary not to forget about the financial reimbursement of those who are willing to take on more tasks (eg as playworkers).

At the macro-level it is crucial to initiate education on the topic of free play, to organize debates on the role of education in our society, forms of education, access to children, access to play, and so on. The aim is to change the setting and thinking in the direction of making the child the centre of learning (and not the lesson that has to be delivered).

Summary:

- Parallel Assistants - Understand the experience
- Point to benefits in the learning process
- Financial intervention
- Video previews and an experiential workshop
- Playworker - special preparation for them/define what their responsibility is (what is the responsibility of the P.E. teacher?)
- General Teachers - basic info, the use of learning experiences
- Change of thinking, settings

Children

In the case of children, it would be necessary to involve them from the very beginning into the creation of free play rules and ask them for regular feedback.

Explanation of rules and compliance are key factors as well as their openness to free play. If children have a skeptical or reluctant attitude and will not cooperate, they will not understand the free play approach.

The question is: what happens to a student who does not follow the rules?

Summary:

- Explanation of rules on examples

- Creating common rules (from a certain age) - involving children (the question: "What if someone does not follow the rule, what are the consequences?")
- Regular feedback from children that they want or do not want to have during breaks and follow-up ("If they wanted to have a dog there, then introduce it")
- Drive children to communication

Parents

- Explain to them what free play is about to get some form of consent (eg parent)
- consent: informal and formal (upon registration)
- Use cooperation: material, space, supervision - involve them in it
- Workshop for parents as well
- The opportunity to be present
- Informing: show benefits
- Consent of all of them?
- Show alternative to mobiles
- Injury: Injuries can occur, preparing for parents, such as at ski or forest school - even there have to be injuries, yet it is tolerated, how do they do it? Distract them. Talk about the risks, do not silence it.

Environment

- Cabinets, accessories for clothing
- Sheds - toy space
- Material-technology security: project, school, parents (to be enough)
- To make it available to all (ideally not usurped by strong)
- Large enough space and diversity (articulation, variability, and introversion)
- Appropriate space
- Look for a solution as far as possible (even male schools could find the right space)

School management

- Support, avert fears, answers, mental settings, identify yourself with the idea
- Manual for Directors: Questions and Answers to Communicate in Possible Critical Situations
- Experiential workshop
- Present at a parent's meeting or trainings of "Learn to live"
- Possibility to obtain a certificate
- Training by foreign teams
- Mutual exchange of representatives and experience

State / founder

- Do not solve this
- Solve certificate issues, legal issues answered
- Engage in school policy
- Inform about the project
- Lobby: find an ally, ambassador

3.4. Need for support

How could CAPS project support schools best in implementing

- Education for playworkers
- Experiential workshops for parents
- Make short videos
- Questions and Answers: If an official or inspector had his / her own interpretation of the law, manual on how leadership can prevent accusations, how can they argue
- Lobby: find an ally, an ambassador for the idea of playwork
- Inform audience about the project and about the importance of free play in schools

3.5. Any other topics

Not yet.