



Early Childhood Education and Care: Specificities of the Hungarian System

PLA background paper
for the EU Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood
Education and Care



Hungarian Institute for Educational
Research and Development

November 2012

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1. The Holistic Meaning of „Nevelés” in Hungarian Language - ECEC Terminology in Hungarian

Márta Korintus

Nevelés

The term “**nevelés**” has a central role in early childhood work in Hungary. It does not have an exact English equivalent, the closest translation being “upbringing”. It is a holistic concept, including not just care and education (considered as very closely related, if not inseparable), but also health, behaviour, and social skills – everything needed in life. It has, therefore, much in common with the concept of ‘social pedagogy’ (as used, for example in Denmark or Germany) or “education in its broadest sense”. (Source: Kaga, Bennett Moss: Caring and Learning Together, UNESCO, 2010)

“Nevelés” expresses that care and education are inseparable concepts. When you provide care, you also teach children directly or indirectly and vice versa. In other words, it relates to “pedagogy”.

Care

The best Hungarian translation of the word “care” is “gondoskodás” in relation to children. Sometimes it is translated as “gondozás”, which meaning is closer to the English term “nursing”. However, “nursing” means “ápolás”, and is mainly used to express the activity of nursing sick people. “Gondozás” is commonly used in connection with healthy children or adults, and it usually relates to physical care.

Education

The Hungarian translation of “education” is “tanítás” or “oktatás”. Both are closely related to teaching children, especially in school settings.

2. Basic Principles of Free Play As Reflected in the National Core Curriculum of Kindergarten Education

Margit Lakatos

What is Free Play?

In pedagogical terminology, free (or unstructured) play is one that is spontaneously initiated and controlled by the child without any specific goal or structure set by adults, and the role of the teacher is only to provide the setting and conditions for playing.

The National Core Program of Kindergarten Education (1996) gives a high priority to playing as the primary form of kindergarten activities. Play is defined “as a process following free associations which is a fundamental psychic need of the child, to be satisfied on a recurrent daily basis, for long times and, as far as possible, undisturbed.”

The play of the small child is not some kind of incidental free-time activity but a mode of existence satisfying fundamental psychic needs. When children, on arrival to kindergarten or during daytime, pick up a toy from the shelf or join others to build or to swing or to play plasticine etc., they are free to act spontaneously. The main stimuli for playing are curiosity, openness to the world of people and objects, social needs, aspiration for independence and competence, plus personal experience related to the child’s activities.

When interpreting free play in an educational context it is essential to understand and accept the fact that this is a segment of children's life where they are in control: they can choose themselves what and how to play, and they can competently manage events within the framework of play. This is an area where they are "at home", contrary to other areas of life where, due to their age and lack of experience, they are more in need of adult support.

What Happens in Free Play?

As the Program puts it: "Unstructured impressions from the outside world and from the small child's internal world are structured in playing."



This transformation or assimilation is an internal process whereby the child's sensual, motoric and observational impressions are associated with emotions, desires and memories. In this way they are rebuilt with the child's own "psychic cementing medium" and internalized. During this process the child switches to a different mode of operation: he or she becomes a creator or magician, creatively bringing forth something that has not been there before. This process is emotionally controlled and relies on activating

mainly right-brain functions which need time and quiet. Thus kindergarten needs to be a "scene of leisureliness" where children have sufficient time to become immersed in a self-made world, which takes them closer, albeit by a circuitous way, to the adult world and to an understanding of themselves and their surroundings. The basic requirements are formulated concisely in the Program: "The high importance of playing should be reflected in the programme and timetable of kindergartens."

What is the Role of Adults in Free Play?

"[The adult] gives an imitable example for play; remains an involvable partner after free play has developed; and acts as a helper or initiator if playing meets some obstacle."

The special role of play is acknowledged by all educators but the parallel requirements of free play and giving active support to playing are met in different ways in practice.

One extreme is overcontrolling: the teacher puts himself or herself in the centre instead of the child during free play. The other extreme is zero involvement: the teacher "leaves the kids alone" even when some discreet support or fine-tuning would be needed to prevent getting stuck. Both types of behaviour reflect an underestimation of the efficiency of free play and of the internal motivation and divergent experience of children.

Optimally, the role and tasks of the teachers should be positioned between the two extremes, in accordance with the specific situation and the children involved. They should create the conditions for the children to be able to move safely, to make discoveries of their own, and to gather experience. They should rely on their methodological culture and the knowledge of children in deciding when to interfere, when to play together and when to help, always respecting the principles of free play, first and foremost of which is that the ruler of this domain is the child.

Free Play as Mental Support for Development

In the last decades there has been an expansion in "playful programs" aimed at the development of small children with an emphasis on cognitive functions. The methods and means which push free

play into the background and promise a faster and more efficient growth than spontaneous development in this age group neglect the most important characteristics of the way small children gain experience: the skills and abilities which lay the foundation of higher-level cognitive functions are developed step by step in repeated variations of playing.

Children absorbed in play are making motoric and mental efforts to understand things and to solve self-created problems. They are occupied with what is most interesting for them; they develop in areas which are most needed for them; and they are moving forward at their individually optimal speeds. Vygotsky (1978) in his theory of the zone of proximal development states that children at play surpass their age and achieve physical and mental accomplishments which will be paralleled in real life only later; in other words, the child is more developed in the play scene than in the real world. In Mérei's (2006) group synergy theory it has been demonstrated that common personal experience increases performance. Common experience serves as mental support by increasing the efficiency of learning in all areas.

Free play, according to the approach taken in Hungary, in addition to a constraint-free exercise of motoric and cognitive functions, is instrumental in developing social skills. Of all kindergarten activities, free play, by means of mutual communication, offers the most inspiring conditions to learn empathy and emotions, to master the rules of cooperation and social coexistence etc.

The National Core Curriculum of Kindergarten Education serves as a reliable guide to professionals for the interpretation of free play as a priority method supporting the development of children in kindergarten and for finding the best pedagogical methods.

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3. Inclusion, Differentiation and Integration - Differentiated Education in the Practice of Early Childhood Education

Anna Bakonyi

Three concepts appear in the title. These three words are not only synonymous in everyday language but often in professional literature as well. Connections between them are inevitable but it is worth distinguishing between them.

Inclusion is an approach, which expresses that the pedagogue does not regard the group a homogenous unit but concentrates on the personal competences. In this view no „average” development exists but everybody is different.

Differentiation is a method, more precisely a methodology, a combination of methods, by which the approach is implemented. It is by the multitude of variations, the „repertoire” of differentiated treatment that the personalized support to development can come true.

Integration is the situation, where the social life and personal development of children significantly different from the neurotypical children but still possible to integrate in a normal community takes place.

The clarification of these concepts leads to better understanding the connections between them. Individualised, differentiated treatment (education as well as teaching) is realized in a grouplife with an inclusive approach according to the complex developmental level of the young child. In Hungary we generally integrate children with special educational needs, disadvantages, with ethnic minority, migrant background or the gifted ones (or with a mix of these), but in fact, each child needs an inclusive approach and differentiated treatment.

The possibilities and areas of differentiation:

- Firstly, getting to know and understanding the family. **Family centred intervention** means that the pedagogue does not analyse the child’s development, characteristics, habits and skills on their own but in the context of the family background, since the child’s acceptance, the culture of the family and the treatment of the child significantly affect the child’s development.
- The next step is **getting the child accustomed** to the nursery or the kindergarten. The impact of the adult’s presence who accompanies the child to the institution must be well thought over. It is important how we plan the process of settling in: for how many days or weeks, which part of the day, which part of the kindergarten – the yard or a room –does the child first come and which activities s/he first takes part in.
- The issue of **care and independence** is also very important in differentiation. It is important to know how far the child has got in independence, what special habits, needs s/he has, how and how much s/he requires assistance, how much time s/he needs.
- The next aspect is the **level and quality of play**. Play is the basic activity of the child therefore his/her favourite kinds of play, toys need to be known and preferably supplied by the institution. Sufficient time must be provided but the length may be individually different. The child’s personality also determines the direction of the play and the role of the adult.
- The organisation of **learning activities** is also dependent on the child’s knowledge and his/her psychic and cognitive functions. According to the constructivist theory of learning, background knowledge plays a significant role in the process and success of learning as well as the way the child develops best – either by his/her skills in an intuitive way or (in the case of older children) by problem solving. A differentiated organisation of learning activities is greatly enhanced by projects and team work.

The priority areas in early childhood education and care have been listed above. The tasks stemming from them are listed below - what the pedagogue needs to plan and arrange for differentiation:

- **The pedagogue must get to know the child.** In order to be familiar with the characteristics of the child the pedagogue can rely on standard assessment tools and methods for monitoring child development. All the aspects of the child's personality should be learnt about: socialisational, communicational, verbal, kinesthetic, cognitive aspects. Observation and monitoring should be ongoing and not campaign-like and conducted in real life situations.
- **Parallel daily schedules** are indispensable in differentiation. Individual treatment can only be achieved if the aims and activities of the development of a child are adapted to the individual child, if we do not use the same methods, tools, length of time and ways of feedback. If any one of these is disregarded, differentiation cannot be achieved.
- The **relationship between the individual and the community** and moral development is also a basic question at the analysis of differentiated treatment. It is only the self-assured child living in security and love, who can actively participate in the life of a group. Tolerance, empathy and the ability to understand others can only be expected from children who are provided these, though not in the same manner for every child but according to their personal differences. This does not mean bias but adaption.
- **The development and improvement of competences** are common elements of differentiation, competence meaning the aggregate of skills, knowledge and attitude.

In summary it can be stated that the optimum conditions for development must be ensured for every child. This in itself is providing equal opportunities. However, **equal opportunities are ensured by different conditions**. This apparent contradiction must be understood clearly by every pedagogue. Besides these – no need to say - differentiation is supported by intuitive impressions and an instinctive love and affection towards children.

4. The System of Curricula, the Revision of Curricula, the Integration of New Elements into the Curricula (Nursery and Kindergarten)

Ildikó Bárány and Andrea Paszkosz

The curriculum of the nursery

Granting an operating licence to a nursery is dependent on adopting a suitable curriculum, which is regulated by a ministerial decree (15/1998) and the National Core Curriculum of Nurseries.

Nursery curricula usually follow the same structure. They start with an introduction about the institution's aims, quality assurance policy, the basic values and principles. It must be noted that the aims must take into account the local needs and situation and they are not to be general.

The curriculum contains the mission of the institution (why it was established, what its aim is, who the services are for, how and where the services are provided). Then the institution is presented



(geographic location, the social network of the community, demographics, needs of the local population and how the institution responds to them). The professional goals of the institution are also specified (e.g. what kind of basic and extra services it provides) as well as the role and significance of education, in-service training and self-development of the staff. Forms of partnership, intensity and frequency of contacts with the visiting nurse, child welfare office, kindergarten, local authority and guardianship office, etc are described. The curriculum defines how childcare work in the institution is implemented in practice. It presents what services and how they are provided, with what kind of tools and methods, and what the priority tasks are.

It includes care and education tasks (healthy lifestyle, support to emotional development, socialization and the development of cognitive processes, etc.), the most typical situations of care and education, life in the nursery and forms of activity (care, play, movement, story, poem, rhymes and singing, creative activity, observation of the environment), education of children with special needs, their care and early intervention (if any), extra services, if provided (playhouse, temporary childminding, salt room, etc.), and other events and festivals in the institution.

If there are changes in the statutory elements of the curriculum, the maintainer has a reporting obligation according to a government decree (259/2002)

Hungarian regulation related to the content of kindergarten education – the connection between the National Core Curriculum and the local curricula

Pedagogical work in kindergartens in Hungary is regulated by the National Core Curriculum of kindergarten education. The Core Curriculum determines the basic values and principles according to the traditions, values, national characteristics and the educational and psychological research findings of Hungarian kindergarten education, as well as international experiences.

The Core Curriculum is applied to all institutions entitled to provide kindergarten education and care. It determines the child's competences to be reached by compulsory school age embracing a professional, high-quality legal framework of different areas of education, socialization, emotional, moral, aesthetic education, the child's individual rate of progress and differentiated education.

The relevance of the values and framework in the Core Curriculum is supervised every 5 years by the Government authorized by the Act on Public Education and as a result it is modernized, updated or an entirely new code is provided.

The principles of the Core Curriculum are not sufficient on their own, of course. The implementation is ensured by detailed rules, which are incorporated in the local curricula.

The professional staff of kindergartens are entitled by law to the development of the local curriculum. Kindergarten pedagogues are granted a high degree of autonomy and also a great responsibility.



The two level content regulation aims to provide every kindergarten-age child the same basic principles for the acquisition of skills and competences that make them capable of and ready for starting school and at the same time to take into account the local environment, traditions and needs.

5. The Types of Kindergarten Curricula

Judit Villányi

Kindergartens may establish their own local curricula/pedagogical programme in three ways: by adopting or adapting one or creating their own. Adopting and adaptation has been supported by the accreditation of some curricula.

The following curricula have been created by innovative programme design using research findings of decades and experiences of model kindergartens.

Complex Prevention Programme: the focus is on movement and communication. Its speciality is the personal development plan and the observation based development diary. Detailed guidance is provided in the handbook titled Without Failure in School (Kudarcc nélkül az iskolában).

Programme with Play and Tales: its content and daily routine is characterised by play and tales in a seasonal framework. Guidance is provided in the handbook Kindergarten Education with Play and Tales (Óvodai nevelés játékkal, mesével).

Play – Movement – Communication Programme: the focus areas are in the title. Special playrooms and special daily routine provide the place and time for development.

Differentiated Treatment in Kindergarten Programme: applies a strategy of trust and tolerance and strives for harmony between education in the kindergarten and in the family. The methods are based on personal treatment and benefit from curiosity, attention, thinking and calmness.

Activity Based Kindergarten Programme: personal development takes place through experiences gained in the spontaneous and organised activities, in which children's cooperation and communication skills develop.

Kindergarten Programme in an Epochal System: the organisation of activities (including play, skills development, maths, nature, work and behaviour activities) is based on an epochal system.

Mályva Integration-Differentiation Programme: the aim of the curriculum is to expand the time, the role, the space and tools of play and provide a solid basis for school education.

Kindergarten Programme for the Development of Movement: the focus is on planned, regular physical education to establish a basis for a physically active lifestyle.

Several **Kindergarten Programmes Preserving Folk Traditions** exist: personal development is linked to preserving folk traditions and nature. In some the customs of the region in others the customs of festive days are more emphasised.

Kindergarten Programme with Arts: it takes emotions as a basis and children develop through aesthetic activities and their creative skills. Several handbooks support the quality of the curriculum.

Kindergartens can apply to receive the title „**Green Kindergarten**” if they incorporate in their pedagogical programme the principles of sustainability and ecological education.

Three curricula have been developed along the principles of schools of reform pedagogy: the **Montessori**, the **Waldorf** and the **Everyday Miracles** (with Freinet elements) Programmes.

The **Step by Step Programme** is an adaptation of an American curriculum. It provides the possibility for development for socially disadvantaged children with modern tools, especially cosy environment and individual consultation with parents.

Curricula have been designed for **kindergartens maintained by churches**, such as the Kindergarten Programme of the Catholic, the Jewish, the Reformed, the Lutheran and the Ecumenical Church.

Programme parts have also been developed, which concentrate on an issue, such as the Smoking – Health Complementary Programme, The Chamber of Heart Programme, Traffic Education, Health in Body and Soul, Complementary Kindergarten Programme Without Toys and the Reggio Programme.

6. An Element of Intensive Partnership with Parents in the Nursery and in the Kindergarten: the Institutional Practice of Settling in

Erika Kovács and Márta Korintus



A particular feature of the Hungarian ECEC system which takes an important role in implementing the curriculum successfully is the practice of „settling in”. A child’s acclimatization, adaptation in the nursery and in the kindergarten takes place with the same pedagogical approach in Hungary. The basic document of education and care in the nursery says: „Cooperation with the parents is emphasised by the practice of the child’s gradual acclimatization in the presence of the parents. The presence of the mother or the father ensures security for the child and helps him/her adapt to the new environment. The emotional attachment

gradually increasing between the child and the nursery pedagogue helps the child accept his/her new environment, significantly contributes to settling in the community of the nursery, alleviates the gravity and delay of stress reactions during adaptation (e.g.: eating and sleeping difficulties, restlessness, weeping, protesting, increased attachment to parents, changes in behaviour, habits and level of independence, ... etc.).”

Acclimatization in the nursery usually takes 2 weeks but it can be longer. The child spends more and more time in the group with his/her parent – usually the mother – to learn about the customs, the

environment, the other children and the pedagogues. From the second week on the parent withdraws more and more from the activities and the pedagogue gradually takes over. The parent stays in the nursery with the child until the child feels completely safe, that is the child accepts his/her nursery pedagogue, accepts the food s/he offers and can sleep without the parent after lunch. Settling in is considered complete when the child gains familiarity with the nursery and enjoys being there.

The Kindergarten Core Curriculum includes emotional development and socialisation in the general tasks of kindergarten education. This means the establishment of a secure and calm atmosphere taking into account the age and developmental stage of the child, which provides a solid basis for a complex personality development during kindergarten education.

Children often arrive in the kindergarten from the nursery, but sometimes from the family, in which case it is the first time they have been separated from their parents. This is sensitive period for both child and parent therefore the kindergarten pedagogues approach this issue carefully.

Thus settling in cannot be connected to a point or a length of time, it goes on until it is obvious that the child feels safe and enjoys staying in the kindergarten. It is important for the child to understand: being in the kindergarten is a cycle in the daily routine, which starts with the leaving of the parent and ends with the returning of the parent. The objects and toys brought from home (favourite doll, rags, etc.) help the process of the settling in. From the kindergarten pedagogue's perspective this period is also a time for getting to know the child and establishing cooperation with the parents.

A significant point must be mentioned here: in most kindergartens the groups are not homogeneous, that is, they have younger and older children, which helps the process of settling in, since not all the children go through the same process at the same time. It is only a few children who we wish to involve in the everyday routine. Older, more experienced children usually happily join in and help the process of settling in of the new ones.

7. Monitoring Child Development

Ágnes Nyitrai

Assessment and related evaluation are much disputed issues of pedagogy, determining its use is often ambivalent and extreme: in pedagogical thinking the fetishism of assessment and keeping a distance from it are present at the same time. However, education as a process supporting the development of the personality can only be efficient if it is based on the characteristics of child development thus assessment and monitoring of development are inevitable. Monitoring development and assessment are not objectives, are not the end to something but a tool, a beginning of something shaping the pedagogical/developmental/supportive tasks. The fundamental question is what happens after assessment? How far is further support to development based on the results of assessment? In this sense assessment is a basic condition to individualized, well-considered education.

In recent years the examination of institutions' efficiency and the calculation of the pedagogic added value have gained significance, which are impossible to assess without the monitoring of development.



The tools used for the assessment of children and the monitoring of their development have a long history and have been revised several times. Several tools are available in Hungary too, such as the percentile chart or DIFER for 4-8 year-olds or its adapted versions or Ms Katalin P. Balogh's prevention assessment methods or the monitoring-type assessment method of the Competence-based Kindergarten Curriculum, etc.

In the nursery, childcare pedagogues keep a development diary of each child: entries are every month until the child's first birthday, then every 4 months. A huge advantage of the method is that it is based on observations in real life situations but its disadvantage is in its subjectivity and the fact that it is impossible to numerically express it thus the analysis with qualitative methods is hindered. Changes in children's weight and height can be recorded in the percentile chart and can be compared to national averages. (The percentile chart is applied in later ages as well.)

DIFER is the standardized tool for the development of kindergarten children. DIFER: Diagnostic Instruments for the Assessment of Children 4 to 8 years old, the theoretical background of the DIFER-test is the competence-based and criterion-referenced education. It is suitable for the assessment of elements of competences and of basic skills necessary for the successful start of schooling, such as: writing movement coordination, phonemic awareness, vocabulary of relations, counting, deduction, relation comprehension and sociability. The sensitive period for the development of these is between the ages of 4 and 8. 5 stages can be differentiated in their development: preparatory, beginning, elementary, advanced and optimum phases. Supporting their development ends with reaching the optimum stage. The advantages of DIFER are that the kindergarten pedagogue or teacher conducts the assessment and not a stranger, it does not require any tools apart from the test and it can be completed in parts. 2 assessments are recommended per school year at the most. In some cases (e.g. obviously slower development) the law requires an obligatory DIFER assessment. Programme packages, related to DIFER, designed to support the criterion oriented development of basic skills are also available. Based on a ministerial decree, those 1st year pupils who need focused support in developing their basic skills according to the opinion of their kindergarten and school teachers must be assessed by mid-October (the decree makes the use of DIFER compulsory in such cases).

It is important to develop and operate a system taking into account the differences of the two ages, adaptable to the pedagogical programme of the type of institution and more precisely to that of the specific institution and at the same time that the equivalence of assessment results gained in different times and sometimes by different methods can be achieved. Thus the coherent treatment of development of ages 0-6 (7) can be realized and the opportunities for developmental support can be taken.

8. Flexible Start of School

Mária Pákozdi

Children in Hungary reach compulsory school age at their 6th birthday or the following year at the latest. The head of the kindergarten is entitled to issue a certificate about the fact that the child has reached the stage of development necessary to enter school.

If the child is not ready to go to school, a Committee of Experts decides if the child remains in the kindergarten or goes to a school for special educational needs.

The Kindergarten Core Curriculum sets out the developmental features to be reached by the end of kindergarten education.

In case a child reaches school readiness earlier, the parents can turn to the Government Authority assigned to their home area to decide on the start of schooling based on the recommendation of the



Committee of Experts. Children turning 7 may still remain in the kindergarten for one more year based on the recommendation of the Committee of Experts. The Expert Committee advises in cases where an agreement between the parents, the school and the kindergarten cannot be reached on the start of schooling.

The head of the school decides about the start of schooling based on the recommendation of the kindergarten and if necessary, of the Committee of Experts, examining whether the child has reached the age when s/he can or must attend school. Compulsory schooling starts on the first day of the school year.

The aim of the measure is to take into account children's individual differences when starting school. In practice readiness for school is largely dependent on family background. Well-off families tend to postpone schooling, thus their children can have more developed attention span and better movement coordination when entering school and so they can adapt to school more easily with better learning outcomes and more mature behaviour. Flexible schooling can well compensate the often observed developmental difference between boys and girls. Teachers are happy with the more easily reached success and even more importantly, success makes children more motivated to learn.

Compensation for socio-cultural and economical disadvantages is best achieved by regular attendance in kindergarten and/or intensive differentiation, individual treatment in the first years of schooling.

In summary, flexible schooling is great responsibility in school systems which are based on the notion of school readiness for the start of schooling. In order to select the most optimal solution for the individual child common thinking, shared responsibility, consideration and trusting communication are essential between the kindergarten pedagogue, the teacher and the parent.

9. Teacher Training and In-Service Training: Conveying the Basic Values and Learning How to Implement Them

Mária Dávid and Judit Podráczky



In Hungary the childcare profession has fought for twenty years to raise the education of nursery pedagogues to college level.

After one and a half years of preparation and large scale professional cooperation including the Association of Hungarian Nurseries, the relevant ministries and 8 higher education institutions the BA Programme for nursery pedagogues was established and launched in September 2009. The length of the education is 6 terms and is worth 180 ECTS. The aim of the programme is to provide education for the development and care of children from 20 weeks to 3 years of age (5 at maximum). The pedagogues equipped with their complex skills and competences help the development and socialisation of this age group and support education within the family. The graduates are suitable for jobs of nursing, caring, educating, mediating and counselling in the scope of childcare work.

Competences to be acquired: nursery pedagogues are familiar with the characteristics, needs of the age group, the tasks related to their nursing, educating, health care and feeding, the specifics of care work for under 3-year-olds outside the family, the running of the social welfare system, the legal and public administration background of childcare work, the administrative responsibilities and the ethics of the profession.

Application of competences: nursery pedagogues can apply their knowledge of development, caring and education, can choose the most suitable methods can assess children's normal development, can cooperate well with the children and their parents. Preparation for the practical tasks goes on for 3 years (30ECTS). The programme ends with continuous internship for a term in a nursery. Places for practice: nurseries, kindergartens, alternative places of service and relevant places of the social welfare system. Studies can be continued at MA programmes in Pedagogy.

The foundation of the first training centre for kindergarten pedagogues 175 years ago is commemorated in 2012. The education and further education of kindergarten pedagogues has developed continuously in this historically significant period in harmony with the changing needs, demands and tasks of school education. As a result of this development kindergarten pedagogues need a BA certificate, continuous professional development can rely on a rich selection of training possibilities. Besides, it is a real alternative to pursue relevant studies at master and then at doctoral level.

The social demands, the legislation, the National Core Curriculum and the vivid world of kindergarten practice provide the basis for the education of kindergarten pedagogues. The Core Curriculum is a framework curriculum therefore it is manifested in various practices. The study of the „common ground” including values, principles, responsibilities and activities is a priority issue in the education of kindergarten pedagogues, since these must be applied in each and every kindergarten. The acquisition of competences set out in the Programme and Outcome Requirements and necessary for the development of local pedagogical programmes are also considered of great significance. Such competences involve the knowledge of content regulation of kindergarten education, the knowledge and application of methods of assessment, monitoring and quality development, cooperation skills for team work, ability to identify, critically analyse and solve problems. The study of the National Core Curriculum is a transversal topic, which appears in the study of Pedagogy and Psychology, in Methodology and in the practical preparation. Special emphasis is placed on the study of the connections between the Core Curriculum and the local curriculum and the implementation process. This study is carried out in systematically structured practical modules expressing the unity of theory and practice and in programme analyses, all taking place in kindergartens.

10. Current Leave Policies to Support Parents in Hungary

Márta Korintus and Andrea Gyarmati

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Hungary is 3 years, but the last year is paid at a low flat rate; until 2 years, insured parents taking leave are paid at a high earnings-related level with a ceiling. There is an entitlement to ECEC (óvoda/kindergarten) from 3 years of age and it is compulsory to attend from the age of 5 years. Children under three years are also entitled to an ECEC (bölcsőde/nursery) place, but there are not enough places; legislation is in place in both cases but implementation varies. So though by legislation, there is no gap between the end of Parental leave entitlement and the start of an ECEC entitlement, there is in practice due to a shortage of places in services for children under 3 years. Otherwise there is a one year gap between the end of well-paid leave and an entitlement to an ECEC place for three-year-olds.

Maternity leave (szülési szabadság)

Length of leave (before and after birth): twenty-four weeks: up to four weeks before birth.

Payment (terhességi-gyermekágyi segély) and funding: Seventy per cent of average daily earnings, with no ceiling on payments. In cases when there has been previous employment (i.e. the pregnant woman is eligible) but no actual income can be determined on the first day of eligibility (e.g. the pregnant woman is on sick leave for several months, or is self-employed and does not have an actual income), the payment is twice the amount of the official daily minimum wage.

Eligibility: All women are entitled to 24 weeks unpaid maternity leave. Women employees and self-employed women with at least 365 days of previous employment within two years of the birth of a child are entitled to benefit payment for the period of Maternity leave.

Paternity leave 1

Length of leave: Five days, to be taken during the first two months of the child's life.

Payment and funding: Hundred per cent of father's average daily wage, with no ceiling on payments.

Eligibility : All employed fathers.

Parental leave (responsibility of the Ministry of Human Resources)

There are two types of leave and benefit: (1) for non-insured parents, Gyermekgondozási segély, GYES; (2) for insured parents, Gyermekgondozási díj, GYED. Both are family entitlements except for GYED up to the child's first birthday, which is an entitlement only for mothers.

Length of leave:

GYES: Until the child's third birthday for parents not insured. From the end of GYED (child's second birthday) until the child's third birthday, for insured parents.

GYED: from the end of the Maternity leave period until the child's second birthday, for insured parents.

Payment and funding:

GYES: until the child's third birthday, a flat-rate benefit equal to the amount of the minimum old-age pension, HUF28,500 per month in 2012.

GYED: benefit of 70 per cent of average daily earnings, up to a ceiling of 70 per cent of twice the minimum daily wage, HUF 130,200 per month in 2012.

Flexibility in use:

A parent taking GYES cannot work until the child's first birthday, but can then work less than 30 hours a week, or unlimited hours if she/he works at home or has a disabled or permanently sick child while still receiving the full benefit until the child's third birthday.

Eligibility:

GYES: all parents.

GYED: only the mother may take this leave up to the child's first birthday. Otherwise either of the parents living with the child is eligible as long as she/he has been employed at least for 365 days within the two years before the birth of the child; however, only one parent can actually take GYED.

¹ Paternity leave has no separate name in Hungarian; it is just listed as one of the eligible reasons for leave days in the Code of Labour legislation.

GYES: can be taken by grandparents from the first to the third birthday of the child if the child is looked after in her/his own home and if the parents agree to transfer their entitlement. Grandparents taking GYES can work less than 30 hours a week, or without limitation if the work is done in the home, after the child becomes older than three years of age.

Childcare leave or career breaks

Either of the parents in a family with three or more children may take leave during the period between the second and eighth birthday of the youngest child (Gyermeknevelési támogatás, GYET). Benefit payment as for GYES. The person taking up GYET can work less than 30 hours a week, or unlimited hours if the work is done in the home. GYES and GYED are intended to promote childbirth and support reconciliation of work and childrearing; GYET is considered an acknowledgement of parenthood as paid work.

Source: International Review of leave Policies and Related Research 2012

http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Country_notes/2012/Hungary.FINAL24may.pdf

11. Pre-School Programmes for Disadvantaged Children

Anikó Orbán

Background

The current institutional conditions in pre-school education are inadequate for the task of compensating for the disadvantages accumulating over the first few years in the lives of children of poor and uneducated parents. These children, especially children of Roma ethnicity, are far more likely than the general population to delay kindergarten enrolment until the age of five or even later (Havas & Liskó, 2006).

Although as a consequence of the decline in the child population there are overall more kindergarten places in Hungary than there are kindergarten-age children and institutions are constantly closed down or merged, the distribution of places across the country is far from being even. Settlements or areas inhabited by a markedly high proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents are the most likely not to have a kindergarten at all or else not a sufficient number of kindergarten places. The problems caused by the shortage of places are further exacerbated by a growing share of children staying at kindergarten for an extra year.

(Green Book I. The Renewal Of Public Education, Ecostat, Budapest, 2009)

Improvement the school success rate of disadvantaged children and students using inclusive methods in pre-school programmes

It is highly important to provide pre-school education at the earliest possible age to prevent and reduce failures of children at early school years, and to improve the pedagogical tools available to teachers. The target group of these measures is disadvantaged² children, students and families living

² The definition of disadvantage was included in the Act in 2003 and the definition of multiple disadvantages was included in 2005 following large-scale consultation in the profession. The target group of equal opportunity programmes in education is also specified in the Act. It is not defined on an ethnic basis, since the problems characteristic of a significant proportion of the Roma minority are not due to their ethnic background but due to their social and health-related status.

in depressed micro-regions, crisis zones as well as in isolated settlements who have limited access to quality services. Measures are taken to expand kindergarten capacities and implement programmes to improve kindergarten care, Act on Public Education contains the obligatory admission to kindergarten of three year old disadvantaged children; free meals and the new provision of merged kindergarten-crèche intend to enhance equity.

The objective of the programme called „Kindergarten Development Programme” is expanding kindergarten capacities and implementing programmes to improve kindergarten care, to prevent students from disadvantaged backgrounds from dropping out of school, to reduce setbacks in school, to promote academic success and to help reduce socio-cultural disadvantages.

Kindergarten and school maintainers are entitled to a grant if they provide inclusive teaching in line with regulations and the methodology of the Integration Pedagogical Programme published by the minister responsible for education. These measures are based on innovative methodology, amendments of regulations and introducing financial incentives. The relationship of kindergartens and disadvantaged families must be improved with the help of other actors involved (health visitors, child welfare services, etc). The Programme is supported by initial and in-service teacher training programmes. Teachers who take part in Kindergarten Development Programme are eligible for extra bonuses.

Kindergarten support was 660 million HUF from the state budget in school year 2011/2012.

12. Rationale behind Making Kindergarten Attendance Compulsory from the Age of 3

Andrea Paszkosz

Children’s cognitive development and the social-economic background of their families are closely linked. Dealing with high-risk problems arising from whatever reasons (health, behaviour, social, educational, etc.) are not to be postponed. They must be attended to, identified and the disadvantages compensated for without delay.

The new Act on Public Education extends compulsory kindergarten education from 5 to 3 year-old children in order to ensure access to early childhood education and care skills development and complex service as of September 1, 2014. The law provides a possibility for consideration until the child turns 5 in cases where the parent applies for exemption from kindergarten education. The registrar assigned to the area of the child’s home can give the exemption based on the recommendation of the visiting nurse and the kindergarten.