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## Background

The „Media Playing Communities” project aims to examine how children, families, and early years practitioners can extend levels of media literacy within their communities, by exploring how media can form an active part of a play environment.

Funded through the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme, the project involves families, pre-school children, early years practitioners and community organisations from Austria, Germany, Denmark, Romania, Italy, Spain, Hungary and the UK. These groups will develop media playing activities locally and exchange their ideas during and (hopefully) long after the project.

In Hungary, the project activities are run and facilitated by Tregag LTd involving two kindergartens: Kispatak Kindergarten, which is situated in Nagykovácsi about 10 kilometres from the capital and Török Béla Nursery, which is a special institution for children with hearing impairment in the green-belt area of the capital, Budapest.

For further information visit the project website:

[www.mediaplaying.net](http://www.mediaplaying.net)

and have a look at the Danish website:

[www.mediaplaying.eu](http://www.mediaplaying.eu)

## “Can we play together?” A Hungarian story of media playing and children with special needs

The adventures of the two groups of children and their companions started on the long-long way to Graz on the train. Separately they were sitting at the start talking to their parents, or their kindergarten teachers. First the pedagogues from the two institutions started to mingle. Then parents encouraged their children to share their toys with their new fellows. By the end of the 8-hour-long journey hard of hearing and normal-hearing children were playing together.

The adventures went on the following days, too. In Kinderhaus Gösting Hungarian children were a bit shy to communicate with others but they found common ground for playing together through media playing devices. Zsolti and Ferko from Török Béla Hard of Hearing Kindergarten and Toto and Lili from Kispatak Kindergarten discovered the wonderful venue of the kindergarten together. They were drawing with paint programme side by side, played in the moving activity “Catch me if you can” and tried other games jointly. The biggest adventure of the day was the treasure hunt on the way to Castle Gösting. The steep path up to the hill hid a lot of tasks and surprises for the little “hunters”. Hungarian children solved the problems together and helped each other with no sign of any communication boundaries. Up in the castle the great excitement of looking for the box of treasure hidden in a hole in the wall of the ruins joined children of all nationalities. Without any communication problems they all agreed that treasure hunting is good fun and eating chocolate is one of the nicest occupations a child can have regardless of culture, religion, nation, or hearing difficulties. Without realizing it the



*Hard of hearing kids composed an invitation for the healthy pals into their institution and sent it by e-mail.*

integration of children with special needs was already on the move.

The activities of the sightseeing trip of the following day including the fairy tale railway and the playground visit on the Isle of Mur also brought children with different backgrounds closer to each other. Children taught us adults that despite the dominance of verbal communication in adulthood there are many ways of sharing ideas, experiences through moving, visual world and the virtual reality. And kids are experts in discovering and using these new means of communication.

### Integration days

Based on the experiences in the mobility in Graz a new idea was risen from the minds of the participating pedagogues of the two kindergartens: why not binding even closer the relationship between the kids of the two institutions? Let’s organize some exchange programmes where the



*Mobility Copenhagen: Normal hearing and hard of hearing children and accompanying adults in an international scene.*

children and pedagogues can visit the other institution, get a glimpse into its life and play together! Even better if they can do it with their new knowledge on media and media playing!

So an exciting preparation time started. Kids and their helpers jointly decided how to welcome their little guests. They rehearsed some welcome songs, made some tiny, kind presents, and sent an invitation by email to the visitors. Media-playing tools were great help in this process. Kids invented some guess games – took photos of some parts of the object

in the nursery to display it on computers for the newcomers to explore the venue in a playful guessing way. They composed the invitation cards by installing drawings, photos and paint programme decorations, and then tried out how to send it via the virtual posting tool – email.

First, Kispatak Kindergarten in Nagykovácsi played the role of the host. Children and pedagogues prepared their minds and hearts for receiving the group of hard of hearing children of Török Béla Nursery. Another time the Nagykovácsi group had a glimpse into the life of their playing pals

of hearing difficulties. They learnt that although hearing impaired children due to their handicaps do not hear properly, and speak differently, which is more difficult to understand, once you picked up the hints for their unusual ways, communication can get just as fluent as with normal hearing peers. The two groups shared songs and games, had some performances, played with media together. They explored the new surroundings with help of “find the object whose part you see on the screen”, and took photos and short videos.

By the end of the integration days children of different backgrounds could play and communicate without any boundaries.

### Let's play exhibition

During the many months of the project children were given cameras and video recorders and were encouraged to use



*Copenhagen mobility: The Mayor of Nagykovácsi showing Zsolti, a hard of hearing kid, how to use her camera. In the meantime Nikoletta (a normal hearing child) is taking a photo of them.*

*Integration day: Normal hearing and hard of hearing kids playing jointly in the garden of Török Béla Nursery.*



them to catch a glimpse of the world around them in a way they wished. Photos were printed out and children had a look at the “pieces of art” they produced. They interpreted them and had some funny games using them. With assistance of their carers kids “explored” new ways of decorating and arranging photos – using paint programme, photo story and monkey jam are just a few examples. The photos reflected upon the world around them, their life in the kindergarten, their relationships, their interests and fantasy. And they were eager to see these reflections, comment on them and share them with others.

A joint exhibition of photos of the two kindergartens made kids explore the multicolour world of reflections of other little “media players”, and helped parents and other visitors understand the “fantasy land” of the children with or without special needs.



*Integration day: Hearing and hard of hearing children playing “hide and seek” with the help of a computer.*

## Children with special needs – children with hearing impairment

Definition: From the aspect of special pedagogy, those children are regarded as hard of hearing whose hearing loss can be counterbalanced through the use of hearing aid instruments. They can, to some extent, perceive, understand and learn articulate speech, although this ability is less developed compared to their healthy counterparts. They can more or less understand verbal communication as well, and, even if not perfectly, they are able to hear their own speech too. Subsequently, speech development of these children usually does start, although it may be late and the development may be imperfect.

### **The effect of hearing loss on social competences**

“Competences related to conduct of life, social relationships and the environment are distorted from the beginning, because children with impaired hearing lack auditive information: they are not affected by enough external stimuli; and in many

cases they are not aware of the meaning of these stimuli, and cannot assess their importance. Subsequently, they do not understand verbal commands, and certainly do not follow these commands. All these often result in behaviour problems. This can certainly lead to severe tensions, and might finally result in segregation. For this sake, hard of hearing children should be prepared to behave in a community, and to receive and respond to the communication and behaviour problems they face in a successful way. On the other hand, the behaviour of the environment – i.e. that of the parents in the beginning, and of the recipient community later – is a determinant factor in their lives. Much depends on how much they are aware of the consequences of being hard of hearing, how much they are accepted by the surrounding group of adults and children, and whether the acquirement of social competences becomes a mutual process. Do the people in their environment know that non-auditive communication channels

(i.e. visual channels) should be used to interact with hard of hearing children? Can they use different communication channels; are they aware of the opportunities of meta-communication?

During the acquirement of social competences, the supporting and accepting recipient environment can strongly affect the success of social, educational and emotional integration.” (Teachers Handbook – Music for deaf – Leonardo project)

It is the joint duty and responsibility of both the communities of the hearing impaired and their “healthy” counterparts to work on the integration of these children from as early an age as possible. Opening up new visual channels and an introduction into the world of media and virtual reality in a playful but also meaningful way capable of easing the communication and thus the integration of these people. We can say that media playing in today’s society is really a special need for children with special needs.

## The media players in Hungary

### **TREBAG LTD – the facilitator of media playing activities in Hungary**

TREBAG is a multidisciplinary private entity responsible for project preparation and implementation, as well as for results dissemination. It is a key actor in supporting life-long learning education in the region of Budapest and the neighbouring Pilis subregion.

### **Dr Török Béla Nursery, Primary School, Methodology Center, Boarding School for Children being hearing impaired and in need for special education**

The institute has been working for 80 years now with very good results on the basis of medical and hearing-impaired scientific pedagogical background. The institution is situated in the capital, Budapest, but it admits hearing-impaired children from all over the country who receive special education from highly trained staff.

The kindergarten of the institution has 25 children in adequate group ages. Following a special programme tailored to the needs of hard of hearing children, special pedagogues and surdo-pedagogues help to develop the hearing and speaking abilities of small children. The main objective of the kindergarten is to prevent, correct and possibly eliminate complications of communication and learning in order to create the basis and background of the kids' integration into "normal" primary schools.

### **Kispatak Kindergarten, Nagykovácsi**

With its main building and two branch kindergartens, its capacity for 226 children in 8 groups and 40 staff, Kispatak Kindergarten is the biggest kindergarten in Nagykovácsi. It is a public institution run by the local government of the settlement.

The kindergarten is situated in a nice, green area, surrounded by Nature parks nearby. Thus, besides the usual indoor kindergarten activities the educational programme focuses on environmental issues and exploring the world with playing outside and going for excursions. With its home-made food, the highlight on nature and a lot of active playing the kindergarten establishes the background for a healthy lifestyle of the kids. The kindergarten accepts children with special needs and it has an integration part in its programme. Activities for children are competence-based, involving arts and "free" computer and media use.

Most of the media playing activities took place in the two kindergartens, but also outside in nature and on other locations and contexts, because media playing is not only playing with technology indoors, but also telling stories, playing outdoors and exploring lives and viewpoints of others who might be different from us, might have special needs and might require special attention from all of us.

The main activities besides learning and applying the special "media playing language" by new games and new ways of communication and self expression, were the integration visits within Hungary, the joint exhibition and the two mobilities in Graz and Copenhagen.



*Some children had a videorecorder in their hands for the first time in life.*

## The world around us – Conclusions

During our life course most of us are closed in a nutshell. The size and comfort of this existence depends on several factors. You can open up new windows onto the world by making new contacts, exploring new ways of self-expression, getting information, etc. The more open-minded you are and the more assistance you get from others the wider your horizon can expand. By new perspectives you do not only explore more of the world around you but also the world inside yourself. It might make you recognize your strengths and weak points, discover new realities, new competences, etc.

This is even more applicable to children with special needs. Due to their deficiencies in certain areas and their need for special care most of the times these kids are looked after in segregated institutions where they are mostly cut from their healthy pals and lead different life peculiar to their "microcosms". For their future development it is essential to peep out of this world of reality into the world of the majority of children, to try to understand the others and make them understand their perspectives, too.

By media playing this breakthrough might be realized in several levels: by discovering new ways of communication, meeting children (and also adults) with non-special needs, sharing information and ideas through new channels, getting involved in mobilities, where the world could open up and gained international dimensions.

### **Masthead**

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