

IS PRIMARY SCHOOL IN SLOVENIA JUST AND FAIR: THE CASE OF MIGRANT CHILDREN FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Mojca Peček*

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ABSTRACT

Is primary school in Slovenia just and fair: the case of migrant children from former Yugoslavia

This paper looks at the principle of justice as it is applied in the Slovenian school system on the case of migrant children from former Yugoslavia. It first analyses the school system at the formal level and then presents teachers' views on migrant children as gathered in a survey carried out on a representative sample of teachers. Teachers' answers seem to indicate their belief that school must be just and fair towards migrant children, namely, that these children should not be taught in separate schools and classes. However, teachers showed less sensitivity when asked whether and what should be done for migrant children to help them become as successful as their peers. Their replies cannot be understood out of the context of the Slovenian school system. The school legislation itself is ambivalent, on the general level it subscribes to the principle of equal opportunity and the right of the individual to be different, yet in practice these principles are negated.

KEY WORDS: justice, immigrants from former Yugoslavia, elementary school, teacher's opinions

IZVLEČEK

Je osnovna šola v Sloveniji pravična in poštena: primer izseljenskih otrok iz bivše Jugoslavije

Prispevek skozi obravnavo priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije postavlja v ospredje vprašanje, kako se načelo pravičnosti kaže znotraj slovenskega šolskega sistema. Šolski sistem najprej analizira na formalnem nivoju, kaže pa tudi, kakšen odnos imajo do otrok priseljencev učitelji. Pri tem izhaja iz analize vprašalnika, delanega na reprezentativnem vzorcu učiteljev. Iz odgovorov učiteljev je zaznati prepričanje, da mora biti šola pravična do otrok priseljencev in sicer v tem smislu, da otrok ne poučuje ločeno, v posebnih razredih ali šolah. Manj senzibilnosti pa je zaznati na področjih, ali bi moralo biti in kaj, drugačno za otroke priseljence, da bi bili lahko prav tako uspešni, kot njihovi vrstniki. Tega ne moremo razumeti izven formalnih okvirov slovenskega šolskega sistema. Šolska zakonodaja je namreč sama v sebi protislovna, z vidika splošnih načel sicer govori o načelu enakih možnosti s pravico posameznika do drugačnosti, vendar to v konkretnih izvedbah povsem zanika.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: pravičnost, priseljenci iz bivše Jugoslavije, osnovna šola, stališča učiteljev

* Mojca Peček, dr. pedagogike, docentka za teorijo vzgoje na Pedagoški fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani, Slovenija.

INTRODUCTION

Justice is one of the basic values in our society today, and a criterion used to evaluate actions of individuals as well as institutions. While trying to find an answer to the question to what degree school is a fair and just institution we will refer to one of the most frequently quoted writer in the field of social justice, John Rawls.

In his view, justice is not just any one of the social values to which social institutions subscribe, it is one of the core values. He believes the main issue with justice is the “way in which the major social institutions distribute basic human rights and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation” (Rawls 1999: 6) In this regard, Rawls discusses two principles. According to the first principle, all primary advantages, such as rights, freedoms, opportunities, income, wealth and the social basis of self-respect should be equally distributed, whereas the second principle looks at the exceptions, maintaining that the first principle should be applied always, except in the case when an unequal distribution of advantages benefits those who are most deprived. Among them are those belonging to the lowest social classes, the less gifted, and the less fortunate. (Ibid: 266; Kodelja 2001: 10) “This shows us that the general concept of justice is on one hand closely tied to equal distribution of advantages, and on the other, to treating all people equal by eliminating not all inequalities but only those which disadvantage some groups.” (Kodelja 2001: 10)

Applying his theory to education, we can see that the first principle in fact means implementation of equal opportunity in school. This principle had become prominent in school systems around the world in the 60s of the previous century, but in practice it soon became clear that all the measures taken to increase equal opportunity only furthered the advantages of the privileged. Such an understanding of justice in school is based on the belief that all students should be treated equally, but as mentioned before, it overlooks the fact that some are deprived due to their social hardship, culturally impoverished environment, special needs, etc. Treating them all equal would therefore lead to encouraging new forms of discrimination. Understanding justice in school in this sense also passes the responsibility for individual student’s school achievements on the student himself. He is indeed given equal educational opportunity, but it depends on him whether he is going to take it or not. For this reason it is necessary to add to our understanding of justice in the school system today the Rawls second principle, thus creating a situation in which the responsibility to empower the individual to take his opportunities are on the school. The school system needs to work in such a way that it equalises the objective differences among students, including those, which are the result of different socio-cultural factors. (Medveš 2002: 33–34) This would mean that different students should be treated differently with the view of equalising the objective differences and enabling them to achieve the same results. In order to realise this, the second Rawls principle should not be implemented only on the formal institutional level, it is necessary that it also enters the relationship level. Hence it requires a teacher who has the sensitivity to assess what is fair and just for different students on a case-

to-case basis and who can justify why she treats one student differently than others. In this case, according to Rawls, it is possible to talk about a school system which provides equal opportunity. (Rawls 1999: 63; Kodelja 2001: 15–16)

The creators of the Slovenian school system took account of the above mentioned principles in their consideration of a fair and just school. Hence the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, laying down the core principles of the current Slovenian school system, declares that “it is typical of primary school to have a tendency to unite equality with diversity. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the consensus on the universal right to education (without any discrimination of an individual or a group) does not mean equal education for all. Equal opportunities in education should be coordinated with the *individual’s right to be different* and with the society’s right to use the human and material resources available in the optimal way with respect to overall development, as well as with the right of a democratic state to ensure that each individual can be, and is, prepared to participate in democratic processes. Equality should not be a synonym of equalization, nor of suppression of individual differences and restriction of pluralism.” (White... 1996: 42–43) In practice, this means that “additional activities should be organized for *culturally and socially deprived children* to balance out social deprivation and interrupt the vicious circle of academic failure It is highly important that a more effective integration of children from culturally weaker environments into school activities does not lead to lower standards in knowledge or assessment; on the contrary, it should centre on the introduction of mechanisms for balancing the initial state (the so-called starting base) and providing equal opportunities for achievement.” (Ibid: 40)

From the above guiding principles of the Slovenian school system it seems that both the principle of equality and the principle of difference have been adopted. However, their realisation in practice and the organisation of the Slovenian school system itself raise serious doubts that Slovenian school system could indeed be called just and fair. In this paper we will present on the case of migrants from former Yugoslavia how the principle of justice is applied in practice. It has already been indicated that the Slovenian school system has a declared interest in adjusting programs and developing new ones in order to give the so-called ‘different’ students a better starting position and enable them to achieve as high level of knowledge as possible, most effectively and visibly reflected in students’ marks. It, however, raises the question whether this is the right answer to the migrants’ individual needs and potentials and whether it compensates for their lacking arising from cultural differences. In this paper we will also present the answers Slovenian teachers provided when we asked them about their views on the most appropriate form of teaching to cater to migrant students.

WHO ARE SLOVENIAN CITIZENS AND WHAT ARE THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS?

According to the last census in 2002, there are 16.97 % people living in Slovenia who do not describe themselves as Slovenian. The native language data shows a slightly different picture: 87.7 % reported Slovenian as their native language, or, in other words, 12.3 % of the population reported other languages than Slovenian as their mother tongue. Among them, only 0.2 % use Italian as their mother tongue and 0.4 % use Hungarian, the two ethnic minorities living on the territory of Slovenia; a further 0.2 % described themselves as native speakers of the Romani language, their situation also holding a special position in the Slovenian legislation. 2.7 % of the population did not answer the question about their mother tongue. The rest are largely native speakers of the languages spoken in former Yugoslavia.

What are the rights of those whose mother tongue is not Slovenian?

According to Article 61 in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, every person has a “right to freely express his ethnicity, to pursue and practice his culture and use his language and alphabet,” while according to Article 63, it is “unconstitutional... to encourage ethnic, racial, religious or any other kind of discrimination and to incense ethnic, racial, religious or any other kind of hatred or intolerance.” Article 14 is also interesting for our purposes, as it declares: “In Slovenia, every person is guaranteed equal human rights and basic freedoms regardless of his ethnicity, gender, language, religion, political or any other beliefs, wealth, birth, education, social status or any other personal freedom.” (Uradni list RS: 33/91)

Bearing the three articles in mind, it could be assumed that in Slovenia the guaranteed human rights – to which the country fully subscribes – ensure that every person can publicly express his ethnicity, practice his culture and use his own language, while any form of disregard and discrimination is explicitly unconstitutional. It should also be noted that not all ethnic groups who live on the territory of Slovenia (the largest among them are the ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia) have constitutionally and legally regulated status of their political identity, although they are of course all guaranteed all human rights. This is important because in Slovenia there are two ethnic groups (the Italian and Hungarian) who hold a special status as ‘territorially dependant’ enjoying special rights and symbols of their political identity, while the Romani community, as mentioned above, even though treated differently, also holds a special status.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE TO MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS IN SLOVENIA?

At the school level the Act on Management and Funding in Education in its Article 2 lists the objectives of the education system in Slovenia. Among them are:

- to ensure optimal development of every person regardless of his gender, social and cultural background, religion, ethnicity and his physical or mental constitution;
- to promote and develop linguistic skills and awareness of the Slovenian language as the official language in Slovenia; in the areas designated as ethnically mixed, also to promote and develop the Italian or Hungarian language;
- to promote awareness of nationality and national identity and knowledge of history of Slovenia and its culture; as well as
- to encourage awareness of every person's integrity (Šolska zakonodaja 1996: 10).

It is questionable whether these objectives are at all compatible. From the migrant perspective this means that school in Slovenia on one hand guarantees optimal development while on the other it expects migrants to accept the Slovenian language as the language which they will promote and in which they will express themselves. At the same time, they are also expected to develop an awareness of their Slovenian ethnicity. It seems that the objectives do not anticipate the possibility that for some Slovenian citizens Slovenian might not be their native language. The listed goals do not mention development of one's 'native language' but specifically refer to 'Slovenian'; there is no mentioning of any other ethnicity, all Slovenian citizens are expected to accept and develop and promote their Slovenian ethnicity. It can thus be concluded that the objectives are counteractive, in conflict with the human and children rights and in conflict with the core principles of the school system in Slovenia as outlined above. The right of members of other ethnic groups to develop their own and special identity can be deduced from the first objective (ensuring optimal development of each person), they can also be assumed from the respect for human rights, nevertheless, the status of the Slovenian ethnic group is a privileged one *per se*.

Relevant to this issue is also the Primary School Act which in Article 8 states that "for children of Slovenian citizens living on the territory of Slovenia whose native language is not Slovenian, ..., classes shall be organised in their native language and culture in accordance with international agreements, and additional Slovenian language classes can also be provided." (Šolska zakonodaja 1996: 111)

Migrant children are thus entitled to additional hours of Slovenian. In their first year in Slovenia they are entitled to two hours per week of one-to-one or group lessons. A teacher who teaches a migrant child is required to prepare an individual program for the child. (Urejanje... 2004: 3). After the first year, schools can organise additional after-hours classes available to all students with learning difficulties, but usually this is not enough. This is why there have been examples when schools specify migrant children as children with special needs, even though the legislation regulating education of children with special needs does not include them in this context. For schools, this is the way to secure additional finances from the Ministry of Education to fund one-to-one classes with these children. (Skubic Ermenc, 2004) Rare are even academics in the field who support teaching the language of the environment according to the

specific needs of the population or teaching the language of the environment as the second language, as is the usual practice in many other countries.

By law, migrant children have the right to learn their native language and their own culture which could lead us to believe that on the formal level there are traces of multiculturalism in the way Slovenia treats its migrants. However, it is important to note that the Article above adds “in accordance with international agreements”, which in practice means that classes in their native language are organised only when Slovenia and their country of origin have signed an international agreement regulating such classes. Such after-hours language learning is usually provided in three to five hour blocks once a week but mostly not organised within the primary school framework. It has mostly been initiated by the Macedonian, Albanian and Arabic associations and the Macedonian and Croatian Embassy in Slovenia. In the academic year 2003/04, there were 52 students learning Macedonian in Ljubljana, Kranj, Nova Gorica and Jesenice; 16 students learning Serbian in Maribor, and 35 students learning Croatian in Novo mesto, Ljubljana, Maribor and Radovljica. (Roter 2004: 266) According to Skubic Ermenc, schools are not familiar with language learning lessons organised by the associations and are thus unable to send potentially interested parents and children to such facilities. Besides, such a provision of native language learning for migrants and refugees “may be – even if not satisfactory – understandable, but when we are talking about Slovenian citizens (of ‘non-Slovenian’ background) it means passing the responsibility for our own citizens on to other countries and denying our duty of care for their well-being.” (Skubic Ermenc 2003: 155) The writer further points out that the Article above is clearly based on the assumption that migrants will return to their country of origin, even though this assumption was “overcome in the EU countries in the 70s of the previous century when they realised that their migrants were not going to return but had rather become part of their society and culture. In Slovenia we may not expect our citizens ... to leave Slovenia as this would mean a catastrophe for the country and its economy, yet we still do not want to recognize them as equal.” (Ibid: 159) It should be noted that after-hours lessons in the native language organised by associations may be the practice to which they resort in many Western countries, but even there it has been recognised that such lessons do not contribute towards better equal opportunity but merely satisfy the formal requirements of human rights.

In recent years primary school has provided an opportunity to learn one’s native language within optional subjects available to all students in the final three years of primary school. In the year 2003/04, only two schools in Slovenia offered and provided Croatian as an optional subject, a syllabus is currently being developed for Serbian, and an approval for syllabuses for Macedonian, Albanian and Bosnian language respectively has also been granted. (Roter 2004: 267)

It can be concluded that the education policy in Slovenia does not provide migrant children with enough opportunity to learn about their own culture and language; instead it presupposes they will assimilate as quickly as possible and adopt the culture and language of the majority – which is in breach of General Declaration on Human

Rights and other relevant international documents (Convention against Discrimination in Education, Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc.) representing the basic standard upon which the new legislation in Slovenia shall be measured. Another indication that the concept of the Slovenian school system is in conflict with the above mentioned documents is an example of reduction taken from the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia which states: "The ability to communicate, the capacity to understand and express oneself (in the broadest sense of the word) in both *Slovene* and in *foreign languages* is of the utmost importance. Developmental trends in the education systems of the world show that, in addition to the thorough teaching of the Slovene language inseparably connected with its literature, it is necessary to begin teaching a first foreign language as soon as possible... It is extremely important for us, since we belong to a group of smaller European countries." (White... 1996: 38) Of special interest is the stress on the trends in development of school systems around the world which shows the importance of 'thorough teaching of the Slovenian language'. This raises the question whether the claim is an (unwitting) error as other school systems are probably more concerned with their own mother tongue than the Slovenian language. And what does this mean for around 11,000 (around 5.2 %) primary school children, migrants from former Yugoslav republics, whose mother tongue is not Slovenian?¹ It is blatantly clear that in this context they are denied their right to their mother tongue stated in the Convention on the Rights of a Child. Considering the range of languages offered by the Slovenian primary schools, it is obvious there is a hierarchy among the languages: there are desirable languages which students are encouraged to learn (the so-called world languages, such as English, German, French), whereas languages of our co-citizens with precious few exceptions are left out of this offer.

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ON MIGRANT CHILDREN

In the second part of this paper we will take a look at the answers provided by primary school teachers to questions related to migrant issues. We were interested to find out what was in their view the best approach to teaching children from the former Yugoslav republics. At the end of 2003 and beginning of 2004 we surveyed a representative sample of class and subject primary school² teachers using our questionnaire 'Teachers on Different Groups of Children in the Slovenian Primary School'. The aim of the questionnaire was to establish teachers' attitudes towards different groups of children, namely towards girls and boys, Romani children, migrant children from the

¹ According to 2002 census, this is the number of school-age children whose native language is not Slovenian. As the number of non-Slovenians in the population is twice as high, it is possible to assume that the number of these children is actually higher.

² Primary school in Slovenia takes nine years, children start school at the age of six. School is divided into three three-year blocks: the first three years is taught by class teachers, the last three years is taught by subject teachers and the second three years are a combination of both.

former Yugoslav republics, children with special needs, and wealthy and poor children³. In this paper we will present one part of the results: we will look at the part in which we asked teachers the following questions: (1) would they accept a migrant child into their class; (2) what would be in their view the best way of teaching migrant children; (3) what was their attitude towards migrant children learning their native language and Slovenian; (4) to what degree they believed migrant children were affected by not being taught in their native language; and (5) was the Slovenian school system fair and just towards migrant children?

In questions 2 and 3 we were also interested whether teachers' attitudes were correlated to the length of their experience, level of education, position, school location (town versus country), level of teaching (class versus subject teachers) and their gender. As the share of male class teachers is negligible, the last question was analysed only for subject teachers.

METHOD

Research method

Empirical research based on the descriptive and causal non-experimental method.

Sample of the population

The sample of the surveyed population included teachers who worked at primary schools in Slovenia in the academic year 2003/2004. The sample size was determined by the main aims of the questionnaire and included 207 class teachers and 207 subject teachers. Both samples were stratified in accordance with the following criteria: town/country, region, teacher's gender. The choice of schools within these parameters was random. The study included class and subject teachers from 41 schools in Slovenia.

The sample of teachers from first three-year block and partly the second included 3.4 % male and 96.6 % female teachers; 91.2 % were class teachers, 3.9 % taught after-school care classes; 3.4 % were pre-school teachers teaching Year 1 and 1.5 % were subject teachers. Most teachers had university degree (46.6 %), a few less held a teacher college diploma (45.9 %); 7.2 % had high school education and 0.5 % had a postgraduate diploma, masters degree or doctoral degree. Their average age was 38 years, and their average years of experience 15 years. In the final three year block and partly the second all teachers were subject teachers. Among them, there were 19.8 % male teachers and 80.2 % female teachers. Most teachers had a teacher collage diploma (48.5 %), a few less had a university degree (47.5 %), 3.4 % had high school education and 0.5 % completed a postgraduate course. Their average age was 41 years and on average they had 16.6 years of experience.

³ The questionnaire is a part of a larger research project titled 'Justice in Educational Systems – A Contrasting Approach' (core research project by the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport), project leader Mojca Peček.

Method of data collection

Initially, we prepared a draft questionnaire which was tested on a pilot sample of class and subject teachers. Using the answers we were able to make further amendments and then proceeded to create the final version of the questionnaire. We divided it into seven sections: girls and boys, Romani children, migrant children from the former Yugoslav republics, wealthy children, poor children, children with special needs, and justice in education. The survey started on a selected sample of teachers in October 2003 and finished in March 2004. Filling in questionnaires was led by researchers who had in advance organised their meetings with teachers in writing and over the phone. When the basic analysis of the questionnaire was completed we went back in the academic year 2004/05 and presented the results to the interested schools, asking them to interpret their responses⁴. In this way, our quantitative analysis was further advanced by a qualitative analysis.

The reliability of the final questionnaire form was tested by Cronbach coefficient alpha which was for the part of questionnaire under our consideration for subject teachers 0.78 and class teachers 0.74. Its validity was verified by the percentage of explained variance by the first factor in factor analysis. For subject teachers it was 23.16 %, and for class teachers 20.37 %. Its reliability was further verified by factor analysis. With all common factors there is 63.10 % explained variance among class teachers, which means its reliability is $r_{tt} = 0.79$, whereas for subject teachers there is 56.57 % of explained variance, which means that the reliability of this part of the questionnaire is $r_{tt} = 0.75$.

Data processing

The statistic analysis was carried out by software program SPSS 12.0. Calculated were the measures of central tendencies and dispersion. We carried out a chi-square test of the independency hypothesis, as a limit of statistical significance we took $p < 0.05$. We carried out a factor analysis to define validity (% of explained variance by the first factor) and reliability (% of explained variance by common factors) and Cronbach Alpha coefficient as a measure of questionnaire's reliability.

In order to simplify data processing, we adjusted the years of experience for some participating teachers. Based on Razdevšek-Pučko (1990: 147–149) and Marentič Požarnik (1993: 13–15) analysis, teachers professional development could be split into the following stages:

1. period of idealistic vision – the period of study and occupational training;
2. period of survival – the first year of teaching or the trainee period; some data shows this period can last up to two years;
3. period of experienced teacher: teachers believe it starts at around the third year of teaching and continues to around twenty years of teaching;

⁴ Out of 41 primary schools such a wish expressed six schools. Till the moment we finished that article, we realized presentation in four schools.

4. period of renewed susceptibility to influences – twenty to thirty years of teaching experience;
5. period of gradual distancing and getting ready for retirement – over thirty years of teaching experience.

According to this analysis we put teachers with less than two years experience in the first group. Considering the third period in this classification is rather long we further split it into two subgroups: a group of teachers with teaching experience between 3 and 10 years and a group of teachers with teaching experience between 11 and 20 years. Teachers with teaching experience of 21 to 30 years constituted the fourth group, and teachers with more than 31 years of experience were put in the fifth group.

RESULTS

Teachers were asked to choose which children they would accept in their class and which they would not if it were up to them to decide.

It should be noted that we did not include all ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia who live in Slovenia but only a selection. Another thing to note is the name for migrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina which has changed many times in the censuses since the WW II. In 1948, they were recorded as undeclared Muslims (in Slovenian spelled in lower case), in the 1953 census they featured as undeclared Yugoslavs, in the 1961 census they were described as Muslims (spelled in upper case) in the sense of an ethnic group, and from 1971 they have been considered Muslims as a nationality. In the 2002 census in Slovenia, they described themselves as Muslims in the ethnic sense and as Bosnian in accordance with the Bosnia and Herzegovina constitution. (Dolenc 2004: 44–45) Since the term ‘Muslim’ in the ethnic sense has been used in Slovenia for a long time, we also used it in our questionnaire.

Table 1: If you could choose, would you accept a migrant child into your class?

	YES CT (%)	YES ST (%)	NO CT (%)	NO ST (%)	Can't make up my mind CT (%)	Can't make up my mind ST (%)
Muslim	88.9	90.6	3.6	2	7.5	7.4
Serb	90	92	3	1	7	7
Croatian	93.5	91.1	2.5	1	4	7.9
Albanian	87.4	89.6	4	2.5	8.6	8

CT – class teachers

ST – subject teachers

A quick look at the table above shows that quite a few teachers had a problem deciding whether to accept a child of a different nationality into their class or not, and there is even a percentage of teachers who would not accept him at all. In this regard, the class teachers proved a bit less tolerant than the subject teachers. If we add together those teachers who were decidedly against accepting a child of a different nationality into their class and those teachers who were undecided, the total percentage in relation to some nationalities, e.g. Albanians followed by Muslims, is more than 10 per cent.

We get a clearer picture of the conditions under which teachers were willing to accept a migrant child into their class from the results of further analysis. We asked teachers to choose the statement which was the closest to their views on the way in which migrant children should be taught:

- a) From the beginning, migrant children should be taught under the same conditions as the Slovenian children.

ST – 57.0 %

CT – 62.1 %

- b) Before starting school in Slovenia, migrant children should complete a course in the Slovenian language.

ST – 35.5 %

CT – 28.7 %

- c) Migrant children should as often as possible be taught individually, separately from other children in the class.

ST – 6.5 %

CT – 8.7 %

- d) Migrant children should be taught in a separate class.

ST – 1.0 %

CT – 0.5 %

As we can see, less than one tenth of teachers agreed with segregated teaching as offered by answers c) and d). The highest level of agreement was assigned to the statement that migrant children should be taught from the very beginning under the same conditions as Slovenian children. When we went back to schools to deliver the survey results, teachers found this answer self-evident. When we further asked what they understood under 'equal conditions' they described them as equal opportunity to choice and to being included; as a teacher's effort to deliver subjects in such a way that children can understand them; as a right to additional hours of Slovenian language lessons if the migrant child is defined as a child with special needs. In one school, teachers said it would be necessary to adjust the syllabus to accommodate migrant children culture.

The second answer, with which about a third of teachers agreed, suggested a Slovenian language course which children would complete before entering the Slovenian school. This response can be explained as awareness among teachers that a child who cannot speak Slovenian find it hard to follow lessons in Slovenian and that his poor knowledge of the language can lead to poor success in other subjects as well. It should

be noted that legislation in Slovenia does not allow for such an option. It is indeed reasonable to ask whether it would not be better for children if they had the option to attend some kind of a language course. Or in Skubic Ermenc's words: "If many studies show that bilingual children or rather migrant children whose native language is not Slovenian would be given much better opportunity by having some kind of (at least transitional) bilingual schooling, can we really take the responsibility – to ourselves and to the international community – of refusing to even think about it? Based only on our care for our 'little' language? Don't we show so much more care for our language by truly helping those who do not know it to learn it? Is it responsible to say (or send such message by refusing to discuss it) that migrants should worry about it themselves?" (Skubic Ermenc 2003: 156)

We also checked whether there were any differences in replies by class and subject teachers and came to the conclusion that there were no statistically significant differences. There are, however, differences among subject teachers in respect to their gender and education. Gender shows chi-square 9.922 ($p=0.019$) $df=3$ and indicates that males were more inclined to choose answers a) and d), and females answers b) and c). The level of education shows chi-square 21.928 ($p=0.009$) $df=9$. There was a higher share of teachers with teachers college diploma in favour of answer a), whereas teachers with a university degree were more in favour of answers b) and c).

Replies to the next question show an even clearer picture of how teachers see migrant children education. We asked them which statement was the closest to their views on teaching migrant children their native language and the Slovenian language.

- a) Migrants should make an effort and speak Slovenian at home as often as possible.
- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ST – 45.3 % | CT – 53.7 % |
|-------------|-------------|
- b) Migrants should speak to their children in their native language; children will learn Slovenian in their environment, in a day-care centre and in school.
- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ST – 35.3 % | CT – 21.4 % |
|-------------|-------------|
- c) Migrant children should learn Slovenian as well as their native language at home, in a day-care centre and in school.
- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ST – 19.4 % | CT – 24.9 % |
|-------------|-------------|
- d) Migrant children should be taught in a day-care centre and in school in their native language, they should learn the Slovenian language as a foreign language.
- | | |
|--------|--------|
| ST – / | CT – / |
|--------|--------|

As we can see, most teachers agreed with the statement that migrants should make an effort and speak Slovenian at home as much as possible. When we presented

the results of the survey back to teachers and asked them to interpret their replies, some said that every family was in a position to make a decision in which language its members would speak at home. Others believed it was normal that knowledge of Slovenian was required in school as this was the communication language of the majority in this environment, adding that they had cases in school where parents were learning Slovenian through their children. However, there seemed to be a general expectation that the family at home should prepare their child for school in the Slovenian language. The parents could best fulfil this duty by speaking Slovenian to their children. It is questionable whether teachers understand that parents with such an attitude towards their own mother tongue can do more harm than good. First, because they do not have a good command of Slovenian and can pass that on to their children – parents can help their child becoming familiar with, develop communication skills, develop understanding and expressing themselves in the widest sense of the word in their own language, but certainly not in Slovenian. Second, using Slovenian in the family environment could affect their quality and quantity of communication. The next reason comes from studies which indicate that if a child who experiences difficulties with the language of his environment is not given an opportunity to develop his native language in an elaborated code, he finds it even harder to cope with the language of the environment, and subsequently this affects his results in all other school subjects as well. Finally, migrants can do more harm than good by communicating at home in Slovenian as in this way they encourage assimilation into the culture of the majority and deny their child a chance to cultivate and develop his own cultural identity (e.g. Smyth 2001)

Subject teachers chose statement b) as the second most preferred – that migrants should speak with their children in their native language while their children would learn Slovenian in their environment, in a day-care centre or in school. Among class teachers this reply was in the third place. This reply reflects teachers' belief that migrants should keep their native language to the private sphere, although it remains questionable to what degree the private and the public sphere can be separated in this sense.

Class teachers chose the reply that children should learn their native language as well as Slovenian as their second most preferred, whereas subject teachers put this reply in the third place. Taking into account the fact that "the key element of international protection of ethnic minorities, as developed since the end of cold war in Europe, ... is to ensure the conditions in which the minority languages can be used, maintained and developed," (Roter 2004: 238), it is probably reasonable to conclude that this is the most desirable concept from the point of view of international documents. From the point of view of numerous studies this is also the concept recognised as the one which helps migrant children achieve their best school results (Smyth 2001). It assumes teaching migrant children and members of the majority group together by maintaining and encouraging the development of cultural identity not only of the majority but also that of ethnic minorities. Among Slovenian teachers this concept is probably not well-known rather than not acceptable.

Not one teacher chose the last option which is the closest to the Slovenian current situation in regards to ethnic minorities.

Answers to this question showed some statistically significant differences among class and subject teachers. Chi-square is 9.689 ($p=0.008$) $df=2$ and shows that class teachers were more inclined to choose a) and c) replies, whereas subject teachers favoured replies a) and b). This was the only difference shown among teachers in relation to this question.

As we can see, a large number of primary school teachers see assimilation of migrant children into the culture of the majority as fairly unproblematic. In this respect, teachers' replies are very similar to the replies received in other research studies. In a survey of public opinion in 1992, 60 % of the people participating in the survey replied to the question how non-Slovenians from 'other republics' who had lived in Slovenia over a longer period of time should be treated that they "should learn Slovenian and adjust to our situation here, while among themselves they should use their language and practice their culture". The next most preferred reply with which 12.9 per cent of the surveyed population agreed was that "they should drop their culture and language and accept the Slovenian language and culture as their own" (Klopčič, Komac, Kržišnik-Bukić 2003: 106)

The idea of schooling for migrant children in their native language, which would mean a similar arrangement as in the cases of the Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities, received no support among teachers. And what did the above mentioned public opinion survey show? We present the results in comparison with the views on the autochthon ethnic minorities living on the territory of Slovenia, which show a more tolerant attitude towards the minorities than towards migrants. In the public opinion survey in 1990, 83.6 % of the population maintained that a free use of their own language should be included in the constitution for the autochthon ethnic minorities, whereas only 55.5 % of the population agreed with the same treatment of the languages of migrants. 85.8 % of the population agreed with autochthon ethnic minorities practising their own culture publicly and 67.4 % of the population agreed with migrants practising their culture publicly. Giving them a right to develop their own schooling was agreeable to 53.8 % of the population in the case of the autochthon ethnic minorities and only to 24.1 % of the population in the case of migrants. (Ibid: 113) Even though the percentage in the case of independent schooling for migrants seems low, it is still much higher than the percentage we got from teachers. It is true, however, that the public opinion survey was carried out before Slovenia became independent.

It is interesting to see what migrants from former Yugoslavia themselves think about the treatment they are receiving. In a recently carried out research titled 'Perceptions of the Slovenian Integration Policy', migrants were asked how their native language learning should be organised for children whose at least one parent's native language was not Slovenian. Most of the population surveyed (33 %) replied that children should learn their native language at home; 27 % of the population believed they should learn the language in school in an after-hour program; 22 % thought children should learn

the language in school as part of the regular curriculum, offered as an option; 11 % maintained children should learn the language at their ethnic associations, and 2 % believed they should learn it at their own schools. (Roter 2004: 262) As we can see, 49 % of migrants agree with their children being taught their native language at school. The study also showed in some other respects that language was “an ethnic marker in all ethnic communities who live on the territory of Slovenia” (Ibid: 241) On the other hand, they see knowledge of the Slovenian language as the most important factor of inclusion in the Slovenian society (ibid: 248). Migrants have high expectations from school in this respect as they believe school will develop their children’s Slovenian language skills.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the results from another question by which we wanted to find out whether teachers were aware of the problems migrant children might have due to their not being taught in their native language.

Table 2: Migrant children’s main problem is that they have to study in a foreign language.

	1	2	3	4	5
Class teachers	6.0 %	31.1 %	18.6 %	34.2 %	10.1 %
Subject teachers	4.9 %	39.3 %	22.5 %	28.4 %	4.9 %

1 – don’t agree at all, 2 – do not agree, 3 – can’t make up my mind, 4 – I agree, 5 – I strongly agree.

We can see that teachers’ opinions on whether migrant children have learning difficulties because they do not study in their native language are divided. 44.3 % of class teachers and just over a third of subject teachers think so, while other teachers remain undecided or do not agree. Do such results indicate a lack of sensitivity on the part of teachers and their poor understanding of what kind of problems can arise from migrant children not being taught in their native language? Even so, teachers’ replies cannot be fully understood unless we take into account the fact that there is a lack of sensitivity also on the side of politics and in the expert circles.

The teachers participating in our survey expressed their agreement with the statement that Slovenian school is fair and just.

Table 3: Slovenian school is fair and just towards migrant children.

	1	2	3	4	5
Class teachers	0.5 %	2.9 %	16.4 %	52.7 %	27.5 %
Subject teachers	/	3.4 %	19.2 %	49.8 %	27.6 %

See note no. 4.

Most teachers, around 80 %, believe that Slovenian school is fair and just towards migrant children which means that a majority of teachers agree with the school system in regards to migrants as is. 3.4 % of teachers did not agree while almost one fifth remained undecided.

CONCLUSION

Even though a large number of teachers agree with the statement that Slovenian school system is just and fair towards migrant children, we find such a statement hardly acceptable. A comparative analysis by three authors in *Academia Europea* shows, for example, that migrant schooling in Europe has undergone three stages: (1) assimilation; (2) multiculturalism (meaning that migrant children have a right to learn their native language and their culture); (3) integration and interculturalism (establishing a reciprocal system, development of communications between cultures, integration of various ethnic identities and cultures). (Husen et al. in Skubic Ermenc 2003: 15). It is a known fact that the notions of multiculturalism as well as interculturalism are vague and understood differently from one country to another, from one author to another. However, this is not of our concern here. The important thing for us at this moment is the fact that the school system in Slovenia has only started establishing stage two in relation to educating our migrant children.

Teachers answers clearly indicate that teachers firmly believe in a fair and just school for migrant children, namely, they think children should not be segregated, that is, they should not be taught separately, in special classes and schools. They show less sensitivity when thinking about introducing changes, which would help migrant children become as successful as their native Slovenian peers. We have already asked whether teachers show enough sensitivity in regards to the migrant children specific problems, nevertheless, we should not interpret their answers out of the formal context of the Slovenian school system. Our school legislation, as we mentioned above, is ambivalent. At the general level, it subscribes to the principle of fair and just school, equal opportunity and the right of every individual to be different, at the realisation level, however, these principles are negated. The principle of equal opportunity for ethnic groups and communities residing outside the ethnically mixed areas remains on the declarative level only. Migrant children in our school system in Slovenia are not paid enough attention by expert circles, politics and subsequently teachers themselves. Why not?

First of all, because of the way in which the Slovenian school system is dealing with the individual's right to maintain and develop his mother tongue. At the formal level, it allows for additional classes in the native language, however, the way in which this right is supposed to be realised leaves no doubt that it is there only to satisfy some formal criteria and does not arise from a serious commitment of a school system to accept and contribute to the development of one's native language and his special ethnic

identity. This can also be seen from the Slovenian understanding of the project of the European Council to encourage language learning within the European Union. As part of this project, the Ministry of Education and Sport will provide additional funding for assistant teachers for primary and high school to teach English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. Some subjects will even be partly taught in a foreign language. In Slovenia, we understand this project as an encouragement to learn the so-called 'world' languages; in Sweden, for example, they understand it as an encouragement to learn the languages spoken by the citizens and residents of Sweden. In this regard, our thinking in Slovenia is similar to German thinking: in Germany, language learning is an expression of multiculturalism, but in a more international sense, i.e., in the sense of establishing good relationship with nations beyond the country's borders. Such multiculturalism is valued and seen as prestigious, while the need for multiculturalism in schools remains neglected. (Skubic Ermenc 2003: 156–157)

At the level of maintaining and developing child's own culture we can also see obstacles to the optimal individual's development. There is a lack of awareness of what it means to a child to be exposed to two kinds of cultural influences: one kind in his family and another kind in the environment in which he lives. In his mind, there is a unison and a conflict of two cultural traditions, two languages and two different ways of life, since in many cases the family and the environment do not work together as two harmonised factors. This can also be reflected in the development of child's identity. The child's identity can include "elements of the new social and cultural environment, its attitude towards being different and his own position in this situation". (Lukšič-Hacin 1995: 131). In some cases the two sets of processes can lead, according to Lukšič-Hacin, to a split personality. The child feels himself as a member of the new community, yet the community rejects him and makes him feel as an alien. Schools in Slovenia do not deal with this problem. It is often said that migrant children may experience socialisation problems, what kind of problems and how to deal with them remains an open question.

The next problem are Slovenian language classes for migrant children. Neither the expert circles nor the system try to answer the question what kind of problems migrant children encounter in school due to the fact that their native language is not Slovenian. One of the reasons why there is no such awareness lies probably in the linguistic similarity between the Slovenian language and the languages spoken in the former Yugoslav republics which has certainly facilitated easier communications. However, is this difference really so insignificant from the child's point of view? How long does it take before they can fully master the language? Until they master it, would it not be better if they were offered a new subject, Slovenian as a second language, as they do in many other countries? How should children whose native language is not Slovenian be taught at all? Our study has confirmed that migrant children in primary school achieve worse results than their average Slovenian peers, and it can be assumed that this is partly the result of their difficulties with the Slovenian language. Due to their worse results from primary school, migrant children have worse opportunities for future education, which

leads to the feeling of subordination, insecurity, apathy, despair, alienation and poor self-respect. Such feelings are not constructive for an individual or for the development of the society as a whole in the sense of tolerance and acceptance of differences. As we mentioned before, it happens occasionally that such children are specified as children with special needs in order to secure additional funds from the Ministry of Education and Sport for extra one-to-one Slovenian language lessons. Cultural differences are thus perceived as a handicap and bilingualism (in the case when the first or the second language is not one of the 'world' languages) as a deviance which children are advised to overcome as quickly as possible.

Another failing of the Slovenian school system shows in the syllabus themes which do not take into account the features and specifics of various ethnic groups. It would be sensible to take the advice of the High Commissioner for Ethnic Minorities at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe which says that countries should enable "participation of representatives of ethnic minorities in devising educational programs." (Roter 2004: 247)

Finally, we would like to make a note of general atmosphere in schools and classrooms in Slovenia. In this text it has often been questioned whether teachers possess enough sensitivity to deal with the migrant children problems. This does not mean that they are not searching for solutions – in spite of vagueness of the system – to create a better atmosphere in the classroom. Unfortunately, many of their solutions are bound to fail. As long as a school which does not allow children to talk about their ethnicity and religion is presented as an example of a successful school (Zupan 2004: 3) it is hard to believe in fair and just relations in schools in Slovenia.

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POVZETEK

*JE OSNOVNA ŠOLA V SLOVENIJI PRAVIČNA IN POŠTENA: PRIMER
IZSELJENSKIH OTROK IZ BIVŠE JUGOSLAVIJE*

Mojca Peček

Izhajajoč iz Rawlsovega pojmovanja pravičnosti mora šolski sistem, da bi ga lahko imenovali pravičen, zagotoviti formalno enake možnosti izobraževanja, hkrati pa tudi izravnovati objektivne razlike med učenci, oz. dajati različnim učencem različno z željo po doseganju enakih rezultatov. Šolski sistem teh zahtev ne sme uresničevati le na formalnem, institucionalnem nivoju, temveč mora nujno poseči tudi na odnosni nivo. Zahteva namreč učitelja, ki je senzibilen za to, kaj je v določenem primeru za različne učence pravično in kaj ne, učitelja, ki zna tudi strokovno utemeljiti, zakaj z nekim učencem ravna drugače kot z drugimi. Prispevek nam na primeru priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije pokaže, kako se zgoraj pojmovana pravičnost uresničuje znotraj slovenskega šolskega sistema. Najprej kaže, kaj šolski sistem na formalnem nivoju omogoča priseljencem iz bivše Jugoslavije, nato pa si zastavlja vprašanje, kakšen odnos imajo do njih učitelji. Pri tem izhaja iz analize vprašalnika, delanega na reprezentativnem vzorcu razrednih in predmetnih učiteljev v slovenski osnovni šoli.

Iz odgovorov učiteljev je jasno zaznati prepričanje, da mora biti šola pravična do otrok priseljencev in sicer v tem smislu, da otrok ne segregira, kar pomeni, da se jih ne poučuje ločeno, v posebnih razredih ali šolah. Manj senzibilnosti pa je zaznati na področjih, ali bi moralo biti in kaj, drugačno za otroke priseljence, da bi bili lahko prav tako uspešni, kot njihovi vrstniki. Vprašanje ali so učitelji dovolj senzibilni za problematiko otrok priseljencev ne moremo razumeti izven formalnih okvirov slovenskega šolskega sistema. Šolska zakonodaja je namreč sama v sebi protislovna, z vidika splošnih načel sicer govori o pravičnosti šole, načelu enakih možnosti s pravico posameznika do drugačnosti, vendar to v konkretnih izvedbah povsem zanika. Načelo enakih možnosti z vidika otrok priseljencev ostaja na deklarativni ravni. Otroci priseljencev znotraj slovenskega šolskega sistema niso deležni ustrezne pozornosti stroke in politike, posledično tudi učiteljev.