

THE RESPONSE OF SLOVENIAN TEACHERS TO THE MIGRANT CHILDREN FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

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ABSTRACT

The response of Slovenian teachers to the migrant children from former Yugoslavia

This article looks at the options primary schools in Slovenia offer children of immigrants from former Yugoslavia in regards to their cultural and language differences. The paper is based on the results from empirical research which indicate that the existing system in Slovenian schools developed to cater for the needs of immigrant children is not successful, be it in terms of learning or in terms of personal development. The question therefore is where this feeling of irresponsibility towards immigrant children felt by teachers comes from, given that the teacher plays a key role in realising formal requirements set by the education system.

KEY WORDS: migrant children from former Yugoslavia, Slovenian primary school teachers, school results, social inclusion, teachers' responsibility

IZVLEČEK

Odziv slovenskih učiteljev na otroke priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije

V prispevku izhajamo iz konkretnih rešitev, ki jih slovenske osnovne šole ponujajo otrokom priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije zaradi njihove kulturno jezikovne drugačnosti. Pri tem se opiramo na rezultate empirične raziskave, ki kažejo, da trenutno vzpostavljen sistem za otroke priseljencev ni uspešen niti iz vzgojnega niti iz izobraževalnega zornega kota. Ob tem se sprašujemo, čemu lahko pripišemo v raziskavi prepoznani občutek neodgovornosti učiteljev za otroke priseljencev, še posebej zato, ker predpostavljamo, da je učitelj bistven pri konkretizaciji zahtev na formalni ravni.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: otroci priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije, slovenski osnovnošolski učitelji, učni uspeh, socialna inkluzija, odgovornost učiteljev

PROLOGUE

The aim of this article is to highlight the situation of the migrant children from former Yugoslavia in primary school in Slovenia.

Contemporary school presents teachers with new and relatively high demands, which should contribute towards democratisation of relationships and social justice in school. From the aspect of learning outcomes, teachers are required to offer differenti-

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ated and individualised lessons which should enable students to acquire as high levels of knowledge as possible.

From the developmental aspect, they are required to include all students who should with maximum assistance achieve at least minimal levels of knowledge. Thus, the teacher is expected to be willing to build a class community of individuals who show solidarity and responsibility towards each other, who are able to show respect for and acceptance of difference, and are thus developing their skill to constructively participate in a society of different human beings.

We asked ourselves to what extent teachers felt responsible for the migrant children school results and their social inclusion in the class. With regard to the first question, we asked a representative sample of primary school teachers whether factors such as the child's traits, the situation in the class and the situation at home affect the migrant child's level of school achievement, and if so, to what extent. As regard the second question, we tried to establish the role of the child's parents, the child himself, the other children and their parents, and the teacher in the migrant child's social inclusion in the class.

Slovenian teachers feel considerably less responsible for the achievements of migrant children than for the achievements of other children, and, furthermore, do not feel responsible for migrant children's successful inclusion in the class. The question therefore is where this feeling of irresponsibility towards migrant children felt by teachers comes from.

For this reason, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to making teachers aware of their key role in implementing moral and educational goals of education as well as teaching them to be more sensitive to the real problems of migrant children and to be better prepared for intercultural education.

Introduction

In the 90s of the previous century, education in Slovenia had seen dramatic changes both in the sphere of the school system, including education management and the scope of choice, and in the sphere of redefining the educational function of school. The teacher today needs to be a real expert in order to do her/his job well as she/he is expected to satisfy a complex set of educational goals. The Act on Education Management and Funding in the Republic of Slovenia lists 15 goals, including the first two quoted below:

- "to ensure optimal development of every person regardless of one's gender, social and cultural background, religion, ethnicity and his/her physical or mental constitution;
- to promote tolerance, to develop awareness of gender equality, to respect difference and to co-operate with others, to respect child's and human rights and basic freedoms, and to develop the skill of living in a democratic society." (Šolska zakonodaja 1996: 10)

Ensuring optimal development for all students is closely related both to acquiring quality knowledge and to developing personality traits which will contribute to tolerance, solidarity and responsibility, the three basic values on which school today is founded. Clearly, the teacher is the key element in achieving these goals: the quality of her/his work very much depends on her/his awareness of one's responsibility both for the development of knowledge and personality traits in the students.

In this paper we will try to provide an answer to the question how the changed teacher's role in the new system of primary school is defined in the founding documents, which outline education in Slovenia, as well as in academic papers relating to this sphere. In continuation we will also take a look at how teachers see their responsibility for the school results and inclusion of migrant children from former Yugoslavia.

How much responsibility is put on teachers to fulfil the declared educational goals?

In recent years, the views on the teacher's role have considerably changed in the Western countries: the teacher today is no longer 'the only disseminator' of knowledge, she has to overcome the role of the 'solo player' in which she/he spreads his/her knowledge to the ignorant pupils, and to adopt the role of an 'assistant' who should help students find, organise and manage their knowledge. (Učenje – skriti zaklad 1996: 136) There is also a clear link between the teacher's teaching and the learner's learning according to which the teacher is expected to promote learning at higher levels by using a wide range of teaching techniques and methods as well as adjusted instruction matter to suit the needs of the students. Such an understanding of a changed teacher's role and her/his influence on the students builds on awareness that mostly the reasons for poor school results can be found 'in the teaching system rather than with students themselves.' (Blažič et al. 2003: 91)

The researchers believe, that what takes place in the classroom, along with the factors linked to student's personal traits (skills, previous knowledge, emotional and behavioural features, metacognition and learning strategies), is the second very important factor directly affecting students' learning results. Beside these two factors, there is another group of elements directly affecting results, namely, the family, its culture, the way of life and the socio-economic status. (Požarnik 2000: 132)

In our core documents, the emphasis is not only on every child's right to basic education but also on every child's right to good quality knowledge and development. Hence they pay a special attention to the role teachers have in facilitating educational goals, which translate at the classroom level into flexible adjustments to teach real students with their specific needs with the view of enabling every student achieve the best possible school results, and to the teacher's awareness of her responsibility for students' school results.

What kind of expectations of responsibility for fulfilling moral and value dimension of educational goals is placed on teachers by the system and by the discussion in academic circles?

The teacher's role and her understanding of her own responsibility are very important from the point of view of fulfilling moral and value goals. Clearly, the teacher's work cannot be simply split into strictly personality development and strictly knowledge teaching for we subscribe the Herbart's principle of 'Make your instruction educative'¹. In this age, it is not possible to overlook the educative effects education has (instructional matter, techniques and methods of work). Many factors can be classified as educative factors, their inclusion very much depending on the classification criteria and the educational discipline to which we subscribe. Within the curriculum theory, they can be categorised as factors of hidden and official curriculum, didactics puts more weight on the study matter, techniques and methods of work, the whole learning situation as well as the teacher's and student's roles in the pedagogic communication. Most academic papers in Slovenia on school education discuss them as the efficient (hidden curriculum) or the most acceptable factors (as highlighted by didactics). The question, however, is whether this idea of education, which is in Slovenia recognised as the only acceptable path of school education really brings satisfying and indeed even acceptable results.

The most interesting classification of educative factors for us is the one based on the basic principles of personalism and Gogala's "attempt at transferring the personalistic concept of human being and mind to the field of pedagogy." (Kroflič 2004: 81) In this respect, the "key factor in education in public school is /.../ a personal contact carrying values over a wide range of personal relationships and providing an experience of values lived by the school community." (Ibid) The teacher should play an active and not passive role in the shaping of the class as a school community generating ties of belonging, commitment, solidarity and responsibility.

Awareness of the key role the teacher plays is important in realising the requirement of school today to include all students. We are interested here in the inclusion of every individual who in one more or less important aspect differs from others (socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, religious background and those with different mental or physical abilities). By inclusion we do not mean adjustment of the minority to the majority, but maintaining one's own identity. Being different should not threaten either the majority or the minority population; instead, it should be a source of enrichment and a challenge to find new forms of living together (cohabitation).

In the second part of this paper we will take a look at how teachers see their role and understand their responsibility for the school results and the social inclusion of migrant children from former Yugoslavia, who represents the majority among the one tenth of non-Slovenians.

¹ With notion "educative" we mean moral and value dimension of education.

Research

At the end of 2003 and in the beginning of 2004, we asked a representative sample of primary school teachers to fill in our questionnaire titled 'Teachers on Different Groups of Children in Primary School in Slovenia'². In this paper we will present partial results of the questionnaire, namely the part in which we asked teachers about their views on the factors affecting the school results of migrant children from former Yugoslavia and on the factors affecting migrant children's social inclusion in the class³.

The results and interpretation of the question regarding the factors affecting the school results of migrant children

First we will present teachers' answers in regard to the question about the factors affecting children's school results. We asked them whether in their view the listed factors affect the school result of migrant children from former Yugoslavia. If they answered YES, they were further asked to decide on the degree to which the factor was important.

The factors, which affect the school results of migrant children from former Yugoslavia were ranked by teachers in the following manner:

Table 1: Factors affecting the school results of migrant children from former Yugoslavia and their degree of importance.

	NO	NO	YES	YES	DEGREE %	DEGREE %
	CT	ST	CT	ST	CT	ST
a) Child's abilities	(5) 0.5 %	(5) 1.5 %	(1) 99.5 %	(2) 98.5 %	(1) 32.96 %	(1) 32.63 %
b) Child's activity	(5) 0.5 %	(6) 0.5 %	(1) 99.5 %	(1) 99.5 %	(2) 19.87 %	(2) 21.43 %
c) Teacher's teaching method	(3) 6.3 %	(2) 12.2 %	(4) 93.7 %	(5) 87.8 %	(3) 13.40 %	(3) 12.92 %
d) Atmosphere in the classroom	(4) 5.3 %	(4) 8.4 %	(3) 94.7 %	(3) 91.6 %	(5) 11.42 %	(5) 11.96 %
e) Family culture and the way of life	(2) 10 %	(3) 11.1 %	(5) 90 %	(4) 88.9 %	(4) 12.95 %	(4) 11.22 %
f) Family socio-economic status	(1) 24 %	(1) 27.5 %	(6) 76 %	(6) 72.5 %	(6) 9.40 %	(6) 9.84 %

CT – Class teachers, SP – Subject teachers

() The number in brackets shows ranking.

² The questionnaire is a part of a larger research project titled Justice in Educational Systems – A Constrasting Approach (core research project by the Ministry of Education and Sport), project leader Mojca Peček-Čuk.

³ About the research method, the sample of the population, the method of collecting data and about data processing see the article of Peček, published in this volume of the journal Two Homelands.

If we first take a look at the first two columns which show teachers' agreement, it is clear that most teachers believe that the listed factors are relevant to the results of migrant children from former Yugoslavia. In assessing the degree of importance for each factor, the class teachers and subject teachers seem to agree. More than 50 % of school results are subscribed to children themselves, the rest is divided among other listed factors. The classroom atmosphere seems to be slightly more important than the family circumstances. It may be interesting to note the number of teachers who believe that the classroom atmosphere is not a factor affecting the school results of children from former Yugoslavia: among class teachers, this number is almost half (11.6 %) of the number of the subject teachers (21 %).

We expected teachers to distribute their answers more evenly among the factors related to the child itself, the classroom and family circumstances. Considering the results from other research studies⁴ we expected that ours will also show around a third of vote assigned to each group of factors.

It should be noted that in the questionnaire we also asked teachers about the factors affecting school results of 'ordinary' children in primary school in Slovenia, which showed very similar results to those presented above. (For more see Lesar, Čuk, Peček 2005).

Results on the teachers' views about the inclusion of migrant children in schools in Slovenia

We asked teachers to choose the level of their agreement with the statements listed below (see table 2):

Bearing in mind these results, it can be concluded that teachers in their work do not differentiate between migrant and other children, they have similar expectations from both and they see migrant children as helpful in teaching everyone tolerance. They seem to have a similarly constructive opinion about the migrant and other parents. They are undecided with regard to how migrants' culture and language affect the migrant children's school success, to what degree the migrant child is responsible for his/her own inclusion in the class, and to what degree Slovenian parents are happy with having migrant children in their child's class.

Rectangular rotation of factor analysis of the main components resulted in six factors in the class teachers group (63.1 % of explained variance), and five factors in the subject teachers group (56.57 % of explained variance). Scree test in both groups produced three important factors, which we rectangularly rotate according to the Varimax method.

⁴ Meta-analysis of many research studies from the USA shows that subgroups of direct factors are ordered hierarchically according to their importance, or rather their intensity of influence, however, the intensity of influence among all three subgroups is about equally high. Average T-results between each group of factors and school results /.../ produced results: 55, 53, 51, /.../ respectively."(Marentič Požarnik 2000: 132)

Table 2: The frequency structure of the level of agreement by class and subject teachers with the listed statements.

STATEMENTS /level of agreement	1 f (%)		2 f (%)		3 f (%)		4 f (%)		5 f (%)	
	CT	ST								
1. The success of child's inclusion depends on the child itself.	10	4.4	33	33.8	16.5	13.7	33	35.4	7.5	12.7
2. Parents of the Slovenian children like having a migrant child included in their child's class.	2	2	25	21.4	36.5	44.8	33.5	30.8	3	1
3. Teachers are less demanding on migrant children.	22.5	19.4	48.5	51.8	10.5	12.9	18.5	15.9	/	/
4. Migrants are less interested in the school success of their children than other parents.	10	8.3	50.5	41.7	19	27	18	18.6	2.5	4.4
5. Migrant children help teach all children the value of tolerance towards those who are different, solidarity.	2.5	2.5	15.1	14.3	19.6	23.2	49.7	51.7	13.1	8.3
6. On average, migrant children have lower abilities than other children.	33.2	28.1	48.7	51.7	10.6	11.3	6.5	7.4	1	1.5
7. Parents of Slovenian children do not allow their children to associate with migrant children.	18.5	16.3	49.5	56.2	23.5	18.1	8.5	6.9	/	2.5
8. Teachers are more lenient when disciplining migrant children.	32.7	23.5	59.3	62.2	5	7.4	3	6.9	/	/
9. Migrants expect too much from their children.	8	7.8	47.7	50	30.2	30.9	14.1	10.8	/	0.5
10. How well the child is accepted in the class depends more on other children and their parents than on the teacher.	7.5	2.5	36	25.7	19.5	25.7	32	40.6	5	5.5
11. Migrants do not encourage their children enough to learn.	9.5	4.4	51	47.1	24	27.5	15	18.6	0.5	2.4
12. Teachers do not feel qualified to teach migrant children.	31.2	23.2	54.3	59.1	7	14.2	5.5	2.5	2	1
13. Migrants blame the teacher for the failure of their child.	10.5	8.3	43.5	43.1	30.5	30.4	13.5	16.2	2	2
14. Migrant children have learning difficulties because they are not taught in their native language.	6	4.9	31.1	39.3	18.6	22.5	34.2	28.4	10.1	4.9
15. Teachers should be familiar with the migrant child's culture and language.	5.1	5.9	28.3	24.1	22.7	26.2	35.8	39.9	8.1	3.9
16. Migrant children are intolerant towards Slovenian children.	13.5	13.7	55	46.1	22	26.5	9	12.2	0.5	1.5

1 – don't agree at all, 2 – don't agree, 3 – can't make up my mind, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree

The factor solution indicates not only there is a similarity in factors for both groups of teachers but also that correlations between specific statements were based on similar grounds. The common denominator to all these correlations could be an insufficient role of the key actors, namely teachers in the child's inclusion in the class, and intolerance, be it on the part of migrant parents, other children and their parents and the teacher her/him self.

What has the analysis of statements and factors affecting school results shown us?

We have to conclude that teachers in Slovenia perceive their responsibility for the migrant children school results as very minimal since they assigned most importance in this respect to the factors related to the child's personal traits. Considering that migrant children's school results are worse than those of ordinary children, it is clear that in this context the migrant children are deprived twice. Our study shows that teachers do not make adjustments in their teaching to accommodate the linguistic and cultural differences which could help migrant children achieve better results; instead, some teachers try to achieve the same result by lowering the criteria. This option is underlined in the White Paper on Education as especially inappropriate in the event when teachers are faced by a child who is in any way different and requires a different approach to teaching.

Another equally alarming conclusion is related to the teachers' recognition of their role in the migrant child's inclusion in the class. The factor solutions show that there is a very frequent view of the basic population of teachers in Slovenia that they have no active role in 'different' child's inclusion in the class. This means that it is very likely that teachers do not see their role in shaping up the class as a community of interrelated individuals and thus fail to take a very good opportunity to teach the class how to include children who are different.

The situation we found among teachers is probably related to the situation in the expert discussion in the field. Paying attention to educative dimensions and moral values is often seen as unacceptable. At the same time, it is argued that the only acceptable way for the educative dimension is indirectly, through knowledge acquisition. But are not undesirability of speaking about other potential educative ways in school and discouraging thinking about basic values in the teacher's work counterproductive?

The results presented above seem to indicate that Slovenian teachers do not see themselves as an important factor in the migrant children's school results or in their social inclusion. This means that they do not see themselves as key actors in migrant children's education. This situation is worrying as it means that the discussion on how to achieve the educative goals of school in Slovenia needs a more systematic approach and should provide teachers with models on how to realise them. It is also very important that this new knowledge is included in the future teacher training in Slovenia.

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POVZETEK

ODZIV SLOVENSКИH UČITELJEV NA OTROKE PRISELJENCEV IZ BIVŠE JUGOSLAVIJE

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Namen pričujočega članka je osvetliti položaj otrok priseljencev iz bivše Jugoslavije v slovenski osnovni šoli.

Sodobna šola pred učitelje postavlja nove in relativno visoke zahteve, ki naj bi prispevale k demokratizaciji odnosov in pravičnosti šole. Z vidika doseganja kvalitetnih izobraževalnih učinkov se pred učitelje postavlja zahteva po učni diferenciaciji in individualizaciji, ki naj bi učencem omogočala doseganje čim višjih nivojev znanj. Z vzgojnega vidika pa je pred učitelje postavljena zahteva po inkluziji vseh učencev, ki zmorejo ob maksimalni pomoči dosegati vsaj minimalne standarde znanja. Ta med drugim predpostavlja učiteljevo pripravljenost oblikovanja razredne skupnosti med seboj solidarnih in odgovornih posameznikov, ki zmorejo spoštovati in sprejemati različnost in na ta način razvijati zmožnost konstruktivnega sodelovanja v družbi različnih.

Zastavili smo si vprašanja, koliko se slovenski osnovnošolski učitelji čutijo odgovorni za učni uspeh in socialno vključenost otrok priseljencev. V zvezi s prvim vprašanjem smo reprezentativni vzorec osnovnošolskih učiteljev povprašali, ali dejavniki, vezani na značilnosti učenca, dogajanje v razredu in razmere doma, vplivajo na učno uspešnost učenca

priseljencev in če da, v kolikšni meri. V zvezi z drugim vprašanjem pa smo preverjali, kakšno vlogo igrajo pri socialni vključitvi priseljskega učenca v razred njegovi starši, otrok sam, starši ostalih otrok, ostali otroci in učitelj.

Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da se slovenski učitelji čutijo manj odgovorni za učni uspeh priseljskega učenca kot za uspeh ostalih učencev, kot tudi, da se ne čutijo odgovorni za uspešno socialno inkluzijo otroka priseljencev v razred. Vprašanje torej je, čemu lahko pripišemo v raziskavi prepoznani občutek neodgovornosti učiteljev za otroke priseljencev?

Ugotavljamo, da bi bilo potrebno največjo pozornost namenjati tako ozaveščanju učiteljev o njihovi ključni vlogi pri doseganju vzgojno-izobraževalnih ciljev šolanja kot tudi senzibilizaciji učiteljev za realne težave učencev priseljencev in še zlasti ozaveščanju učiteljeve lastne pripravljenosti za interkulturno izobraževanje.