Abstract

The authors of this paper are trying to answer the question what treatment of the 'different' children will encourage these pupils to achieve good academic results and let them fully develop their identity while taking their differences into account. In their search they look at the conceptual level as well as at the teachers' perspective. The former is based on the theories of justice and on the ideas of multiculturalism, while for the latter they base their conclusions on the empirical research study carried out on a representative sample of primary school teachers in Slovenia.

Key words: justice, multiculturalism, Roma/Gypsy, migrant children from former Yugoslavia, teachers’ attitudes

Introduction

In Slovenia, as in other EU countries, we are currently restructuring tertiary education as part of the Bologna Process. This is a highly complex process, involving, among other things, a reconsideration of the quality of current study programs in respect to the market demands. This market driven education is an ideology that looks at education and knowledge from a different perspective: rather than education in the service of humanity aiming to shape an individual into a more humane human being it has now become a commodity equipping an individual with the suitable knowledge to make him competitive in the work force. It is not our intention to discuss market economy problems as primary school teacher's work is not directly related to capital and market economy. Focusing on teacher's work which is humane and socially important allows us to indulge in the illusion and maintain the motivation to search for less capital driven solutions. Primary school in its respective definitions in specific countries is not so crudely related to market economy, at least not on the declarative level (Laval 2005). What is maintained, however, is the provision of the basic education with the view of developing specific aspects of children's personality, reflected later in more or less adjusted citizens who help maintain the existing social order by their need to work and their loyalty to the state (Althusser 1980).
It is not quite possible to eradicate all reproductive mechanisms of the school system, nevertheless, many philosophers and practitioners are trying to devise a just system of education that will refuse to build upon unjust starting points of different individuals. The solutions found in response to this challenge are varied. In this paper, we will compare the responses of a representative sample of primary school teachers in Slovenia with answers offered by some philosophers (Rawls, Kymlicka, Noddings) and solutions implemented in the school system in Slovenia, both in principle as well as in practice, all addressing the question of justice in school. Our comparison is based on the assumption that teachers and their perceptions of school as a just institution together with their ability and willingness to respond to the differences in their pupils' starting position in a constructive way are the key elements of a fairer approach to teaching different children. (Cribb and Gewirtz 2005)

The perception of justice in the guiding principles of primary school system in Slovenia

Children in primary school are different. Their differences are the result of their different natural abilities (talents, skills, sensory abilities, etc.) as well as their different social background (family socio-economic status, quality of the social environment in which the child is brought up, nationality and religious preferences). Most of these conditions are by no means the result of child's personal choices but rather a set of circumstances to which the child has been born, yet they significantly affect his future life; it would be unacceptable for school not to take these differences into account. The question is, however, what is the best way of doing this, or, in other words, what should be the same and what different to diminish the influence of these circumstances on the child's development. By development we are not merely interested in the child's academic results but also in all other aspects of his personal growth. Slovenian school legislation is obviously concerned with these aspects, as it includes in its objectives of education not only cognitive but also emotional, spiritual and social development, promoting the encouragement of one's awareness of his personal integrity (Šolska… 1996, p. 109).

In terms of guiding principles in the school system in Slovenia declared in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (Krek 1996), it is clear that all three Rawls's (1999) principles of justice have been adopted, namely, the principle of equal opportunity (regardless of one's sex, social and cultural background, religion, ethnic background, physical and mental handicap) (ibid, p. 15); the principle of fair equal opportunity and the principle of difference. The White Paper declares its support for adjusted or additional programs school should provide for underprivileged children with the view of assisting them in achieving the highest knowledge standard possible. If we take this as an encouragement to design compensation programs, it can be interpreted as an implementation of the principle of fair equal opportunity; if we understand it as taking account of unfair treatment of individuals and supporting the underprivileged, it could also be interpreted as a respect for the principle of difference. By subscribing to the principle of equality and difference (ibid, p. 25), the Paper may even be touching on the principle of multiculturalism and social integration in its 'thin' sense as well as maintaining a special social culture (Kymlicka 2005). However, it should be noted that even in principle the White Paper is mainly focused on the academic results while all other aspects of one's development are pushed to the background. Furthermore, there is no mention of the ethics of care to which teachers should subscribe. (Noddings 1999).

If we look at school in the formal sense we get a different picture of justice in the school system in Slovenia. From the perspective of children with special needs, there is a problem
with the implementation of the principle of equal opportunity as these children can be integrated in the regular school only if their handicap is of such kind and intensity that by receiving additional assistance and following an adjusted program they are still able to achieve the same educational standards as other children. From the perspective of ethnic minorities, the principle of equal opportunity is not implemented in the case of Roma/Gypsy children. They are classified as children with special needs (Navodila… 2000, p. 2), which means that ethnicity is a criterion in deciding who is a child with special needs. Such a definition is in breach with the Slovenian legislation (Zakon… 2000) and in breach with children rights while encouraging teachers to treat the different by redirecting them elsewhere. In this context it is important to note that Roma/Gypsy children are seven times more likely to be sent to primary schools with adjusted program (Strategija… 2004, p. 11, 19).

The principle of fair equal opportunity seems to be problematic too. Let us take as an example those children whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. (Lesar, Čuk, Peček 2006) In primary school, the most exposed groups of children in this context are Roma/Gypsy children and migrant children from former Yugoslavia. First, these children are not given an opportunity to learn their mother tongue and their culture. There is an obvious disregard for the fact that children who fail to learn their mother tongue in elaborate code find it harder to learn the language of their environment which subsequently also affects their academic results in other subjects. It is therefore not surprising that Roma/Gypsy children (Strategija… 2004) in schools in Slovenia (as well as migrant children from former Yugoslavia (Dekleva, Razpotnik 2002) post lower results than other children.

Secondly, there is also a problem of learning Slovenian. On one hand we expect these children to master the Slovenian language while on the other we do not give them enough opportunity to learn. On one hand, every form of separated teaching, even if it means acquisition of basic language skills, is considered bad and unacceptable per se. On the other hand, there is no provision to learn Slovenian as the second language or the language of the environment.

Our school legislation is problematic also from the perspective of building one's identity. A look at the educational objectives in Slovenia (Šolska… 1996, p. 10) shows that there is declarative support for the individual's optimal development as well as for teaching tolerance, nevertheless, children are also expected to adopt the Slovenian language as the one in which they will express themselves, and the Slovenian ethnicity as the one to which they will swear their allegiance. The educational objectives are not conceptual, rather than referring to the development of one's mother tongue and one's ethnicity they specifically expect all children to develop awareness of their Slovenian ethnicity. This example clearly shows no respect for the principle of fair equal opportunity or for the ideas of multiculturalism (Kymlicka 2005).

In regards to the principle of difference, it should be noted that the legislation takes account of it by referring to the principle of individualisation and differentiation in school. To what extent this principle is put to practice, however, depends on teachers, their sensitivity to differences, and their willingness and competence to treat different children differently. Considering the above analysis of the formal school apparatus, it is questionable whether teachers indeed feel addressed to do so. In the following part of the paper this question will be discussed in more detail as we found this aspect as one of the most important in our research of primary school teachers' views.

1 This statement does not apply to children of Italian and Hungarian minorities: their education is in border areas structured differently.
Research objectives

At the end of 2003 and beginning 2004 we carried out a survey on a representative sample of primary school teachers in Slovenia. Using questionnaire 'Teachers on different groups of children in primary school in Slovenia' we were interested to find out teachers' attitudes towards girls and boys, Roma/Gypsy children, migrant children from former Yugoslavia, children with special needs and children of poor and wealthy parents. In this paper we will present partial results of the survey, namely, the part in which teachers were asked to define what kind of school they saw as just and how much of their teaching time was dedicated to activities treating children the same vs. differently. We will also present analyses that have already been conducted on the case of Roma/Gypsy and migrant children in terms of school individualisation and differentiation. (For more information on the methodology see Lesar, Čuk, Peček 2006)

Results

Class and subject teachers responded to the question what kind of school they saw as just in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Just is the school where</th>
<th>Class (%)</th>
<th>Subject (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) most activities are the same for all children</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) activities are adjusted to the needs of individual groups</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) most activities are adjusted to the needs of individual pupils</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage of class and subject teachers and their general attitude towards individualisation and differentiation.

The majority of class and subject teachers in principle believe that a just school is the one where classroom activities are adjusted to the specific needs of individual groups of children or individual children. The smallest was the number of teachers who believed that just school is the one where most activities are the same for everyone. However, when tasked how much time they dedicated to activities that supported this concept, teachers' answers were substantially different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much of your teaching time do you dedicate to activities …</th>
<th>Class (%)</th>
<th>Subject (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) which are the same for everyone</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) which are different for individual groups</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) which are different for each pupil</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Percentage of class and subject teachers and individualisation and differentiation in practice.

The differences in periods of time dedicated to the whole class, individual groups of children and individual children are obvious; it is therefore not surprising that T-test resulted in a statistically significant difference. For the first variable, T-test was -4.864 p=0.000, for the
second 4.742 p= 0.000 and for the third 2.445 p= 0.015. Subject teachers spend considerably more time on activities including the whole class than class teachers, and conversely, they spend considerably less time on activities aimed at individual groups or individual children.

Obviously, there is a big difference between the ideal as seen in Table 1 and the reality in Table 2. Ideally, teachers would spend a lot of time working on individuation and differentiation.

Yet another picture emerges when we look at replies to the question what kind of school teachers see as just.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which school do you see as more just?</th>
<th>Class f (%)</th>
<th>Subject f (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) school that gives all children the same learning conditions and opportunity</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) school that enables everyone to achieve similar results by using different means</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The percentage of class and subject teachers on the definition of just school.

There are differences between the answers by class and subject teachers, yet they are not statistically significant. These results too show a big discrepancy between the general definition of fair and just school and the actual respect for this principle in practice. Considering there is a lot of talk these days about catering for individual needs of all children and that creating the same conditions for everyone does not automatically mean that all children have the same opportunity for achievement academically as well as in terms of personal development, it is surprising to see such a high proportion of teachers who believe that just school is the one that creates the same conditions for all.

The question how to facilitate learning was worded slightly differently in relation to migrant children from former Yugoslavia and Roma/Gypsy children as they are the two ethnic minorities teachers most frequently encounter in primary school in Slovenia. We asked teachers what would be the best way of providing education to Roma/Gypsy and migrant children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MIGRANTS Upper</th>
<th>MIGRANTS Lower</th>
<th>ROMA/GYPSY Upper</th>
<th>ROMA/GYPSY Lower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children … should be taught under the same conditions as Slovenian children from the beginning.</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children … should do a Slovenian language course before enrolling in a Slovenian school.</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children … should be taught on one-to-one basis, separated from other children, as frequently as possible.</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children … should be taught in a separate class.</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Education provision for migrants and Roma/Gypsy children.

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4 Insert “Migrants” or “Romanis” as needed.
Most teachers were of the opinion that both Roma/Gypsy and migrant children should be taught under the same conditions from the beginning, while the fewest chose the segregated form of schooling. When we went back to schools to present the results of our survey, we asked teachers what they meant by ‘the same conditions’. Their replies could be summarised as: all children should have the same choice and possibility of inclusion; they (teachers) make sure they deliver topics in such a way that all children can understand; children are given an opportunity to learn Slovenian on one-to-one basis if a migrant child, for example, is categorised as a child with special needs. In one school, teachers also mentioned that there was a need for content adjustment in syllabus to make school more aligned with their culture.

About a third of teachers agreed that children should do a course in Slovenian language prior to enrolling in Slovenian school. This reply could be interpreted as awareness among some teachers that a child that does not speak the language of the environment cannot participate successfully in other subjects either. It should be noted that Slovenian legislation does not allow for such a course, however, from the perspective of justice in school it may be worth considering it.

It is interesting that a larger number of teachers believed a Slovenian language course would benefit migrant children than, as one would expect, Roma/Gypsy children. The Roma/Gypsy language and culture are much more alien to Slovenian than the languages and cultures of the former Yugoslav republics. As we found the result surprising, we further looked into whether there was a difference in replies by teachers who had had experience with both groups of children and by those who had not. We found some differences only in replies by subject teachers in relation to migrant children (chi-square=7.908, df=3, p=0.048). Teachers with experience with migrant children were mostly of the opinion that the children should be taught under the same conditions as Slovenian children, while teachers without such experience were more inclined to think these children should do a course in the Slovenian language prior to their enrolling in Slovenian school. These differences could lead us to believe that subject teachers are convinced through their experience with migrant children that the Slovenian language presents no problem in school for these children.

Teachers’ answers seem to indicate that teachers favour the concept of school where all children are given the same learning opportunity and conditions. Our analyses above and the qualitative part of our research study have uncovered a few painful truths (e.g., teachers are inclined to categorise a child with poor language skills as a child with special needs; teachers tend to pass the responsibility for these children one from another or do not feel qualified enough to teach children of a different cultural background) which should be subjected to more scrutiny if we are to include in teacher education programs awareness of the needs of those who are different and knowledge on how to treat them.

In the light of the purpose of this paper, we also found it important to know whether teachers who support the same conditions for all were willing to individualise their teaching and thus prevent further segregation in the classroom. Our analysis of the second part of the survey, of which we present here only its conclusions, makes us feel quite sceptical in this respect. It shows that teachers accept a very low level of responsibility for the school results of all groups of children here discussed (Lesar, Ćuk, Peček 2005). In relation to teachers' views on migrant and Roma/Gypsy children, it has also been discovered that their work is not adjusted to the needs of children of a different linguistic and cultural background. As this is probably the only option to assist these children in achieving better school results, many teachers instead try to achieve the same by lowering knowledge standards (Peček, Ćuk, Lesar 2005).
The guiding principles, lowering knowledge standards is specifically declared as unsuitable when dealing with a child that in any way differs from others. The basic results of our survey in relation to Roma/Gypsy children are particularly poignant as only one quarter of all teachers recognise that the language of learning might be a hindrance in the education of these children while almost one third of all teachers do not agree with the thought that the language could be the source of their learning difficulties. It can be concluded from what was said above that teachers show very little sensitivity for an obvious learning hindrance, i.e., different linguistic and cultural background. We can also assume that the principle of individualisation is probably very modestly applied in the case of these children.

Let us here mention that we analysed the differences in teachers' replies in relation to their level of education and work experience. This analysis returned a few statistically significant differences, nevertheless, we could not conclude that teachers with more work experience and/or those who have attained a higher level of education were more sensitive to the needs of the different. On the basis of our results we could say that a higher level of education is in no way related to the fairer treatment of marginalised children. The study programs in Education provide an answer to the question why this is so: both the graduate and undergraduate study programmes contain topics on how to teach different children in terms of their abilities. There is much less tuition, however, on how to teach children of a different ethnic background, how to become more culturally sensitive, what are the key values in this respect, how to make school and classroom more inclusive. Teachers cannot play an important role in treating children justly unless teacher education pays more attention to the teachers' views, prejudices and stereotypes.

What conclusions can we reach on the basis of our research results?

When the school system is undergoing restructuring, the complexity of education process should be always on our mind. Not only in the sense that every child of a certain age in a certain place should have access, but also in the sense that these dependent sensitive individuals in our society need to be provided with an education that will develop their potentials and identity by taking into account their specific needs. In trying to achieve this goal, it is obvious that the existing theories of justice are not satisfactory as they disregard the wholeness of children's development and build mainly upon one (cognitive) of its aspects (Kymlicka 2005, s. 594).

The lacking of justice theories can be compensated by the ethics of care with its focus on care as a basic category in human life (Noddings 1999, p. 3). As Gilligan points out, the moral dilemma is not in realising individual's rights without infringing on the rights of others but rather in how to live morally in specific relations with others, including the duty towards oneself, one's family and people in general. (Gilligan 2001, p. 21) The key element of the ethics of care is the emphasis on the basic relationship and care for another person, on one's responsibility towards oneself and others. On the basis of these principles, it is the responsibility of school to employ caring teachers and give children an opportunity to learn through experience to care for other people. (ibid; Kroflič 2002, p. 84-95)

School as a formal institution ought to be based on the principles of justice; in order to treat children fairly and justly, it is necessary to introduce the principles of ethics of care to ensure and encourage the development of such relationships in school and classroom which are can put these principles to practice. As it is rather difficult to include the principles of ethics of
care in the school system as such, we need to pay considerably more attention to it in teacher education. In other words, teacher trainees should be made aware of their role and responsibility not only for the children's academic achievements but also for building up classroom community in which sincerity and care for each other are the encouraged values. Such an experience can be invaluable in developing children's moral, social, emotional, and cognitive virtues, so important in bringing up actively morally responsible individuals. This is, after all, one of the most important objectives of education.

The results of our research study on the sample of primary school teachers in Slovenia also uncovered a deficiency in knowledge on how to treat children from culturally and linguistically different background: in our undergraduate study program reform we need to pay more attention to this area too. The most important issue, however, is to make trainee teachers more sensitive to children's real problems as they can more appropriately respond as teachers only if they are aware of them. In respect to linguistic problems, it seems much easier to find suitable solutions: on one side, teachers need to be trained to teach Slovenian as the second language; on the other, the system should provide children with an opportunity to learn their mother tongue in elaborate code which in turn will make it easier for them to learn the language of their environment. Overcoming cultural differences might prove a harder nut to crack as they require from teachers not only additional knowledge but also a change in their attitudes. Paccione (2000; similar also King 2005) offers her analysis according to which trainee teachers will become more sensitive to the problems of multiculturalism by coming in contact with different ethnic groups. Trainee teachers should be encouraged to reflect on the nature of xenophobia, intolerance and inequality. The final stage of such first-hand experiences should have a transformative effect on trainee teachers committing them to encourage tolerance and non-discrimination. According to Paccione, the teacher who has experienced this transformation is able to pass it on to her pupils, thus increasing the possibility that the vicious circle of perpetuating intolerance and inequality is broken.

School today is a place where children experience life in a multicultural environment; it should therefore encourage reflection on different cultures and concepts of life. In this process, the teacher whose work “challenge students’ internalized ideologies and subjective identities” (Giroux and McLaren in King 2005, p. 72) is the key player.

References


