

# THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN SLOVENIA: GOOD PRACTICES FROM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

European society has always been and still is diverse in many aspects, including language, ethnicity, culture, religion and economics. We may thus speak of diversity both within individual countries and among countries – and also within school classrooms. Immigrant children who enrol in the Slovenian school system come to Slovenia primarily because of the family reunion. This paper sets out four examples of good practices (two urban and two rural schools), where various support systems were developed for the successful integration of immigrant children. The integration of immigrant children has been a success at those schools that are familiar with the possibilities under the law and European guidelines for integration of immigrant children, that seek a variety of ways to cooperate with parents, those schools where teachers take regular and additional training, develop their own intercultural competence and collaborate on a variety of projects. The results are even better if the school has support on the local level, and if intercultural competence is developed among all inhabitants.

**Keywords:** integration of immigrant children, intercultural competence, Slovenian as a second/foreign language, mother tongue and culture, active citizenship

## Introduction

“European societies have always been diverse” is something noted in the Council of Europe report *Living together* (2011: 9), and the same is true of Slovenia, which is home to a little over two million inhabitants. Slovenia is inhabited by Slovenians, constitutionally recognised and legally protected minorities with special rights (Hungarian, Italian and Roma) and numerous ethnic communities of immigrants. The largest numbers of immigrants come to Slovenia from the republics of the

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former common state of Yugoslavia (1945–1991): from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia (in the second half of the 20th century these were migrations within the same country), and less from other countries and continents, such as Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and China.<sup>2</sup> After 1991, when the Republic of Slovenia declared independence, refugees arrived in Slovenia after fleeing the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo. When the war was over in the area of the former Yugoslavia, the migrations continued for economic, academic, personal and other reasons.

On the website *Information for Foreigners* (2010), people who come to settle in Slovenia can find basic information about the country: entry and staying, education, social and health care, life in Slovenia, information about Slovenia, the free 180-hour Slovenian language course for citizens of third countries, obtaining temporary or permanent residence permits and so forth, in seven languages (Slovenian, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Bosnian, Albanian). An important support resource is the publication *Integration into Slovenian Society: Information for Foreigners* (Gole Ašanin & Pokrivač 2009), which is available free of charge in 10 languages (Slovenian, English, Russian, Macedonian, Chinese, Croatian, Albanian, French, Bosnian, Serbian) at all administrative units around Slovenia and on the website (<http://www.infotujci.si/publikacije.php>, 27.10. 2012).

The Mipex III (2011) report ranks Slovenia in 18th place out of 31 countries – the most successful of the Central European countries. Out of seven criteria (labour market mobility, family reunion, education, political participation, long-term residence, access to nationality, anti-discrimination), the poorest assessment is given to education (24%): “All migrant pupils may not advance as well through the education system, without equal access to non-compulsory and pre-school education except under reciprocity principles. They are supported in learning their

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<sup>2</sup> The presence of immigrants in Slovenia is reflected in part by the numerous immigrant societies, such as: the Ljiljan Society of Bosnia-Herzegovinian and Slovenian friendship (Ljubljana), the ZEMZEM Women’s Association, the Macedonian Cultural Society of Sts Cyril and Methodius (Kranj), the Croatian Cultural Association (Novo mesto), the Migjeni Albanian Cultural Society, the Montenegrin Society Črna gora (Ljubljana), the Academic, Cultural and Artistic Society Kolo (Serbian society in Koper), the Slovenian-Chinese Friendship Society, The Slovenian-Bulgarian Friendship Society (Kamnik), the Russian Centre (Maribor), the Slovenian-Taiwanese Friendship Society, the Arabic Club in Slovenia, the African Centre Society and more. Some societies offer new immigrants not just opportunities for cultural pursuits, quality leisure time and preservation of the mother tongue, but also “advice in connection with your integration into Slovenian society and the Slovenian labour market in the framework of our possibilities« (*Organisations of the Bosnian Community in Slovenia* 2010)”. About immigrant culture and literature in Slovenia see Žitnik Serafin (2012).

own language and Slovenian, while teachers have some training on their needs. Positive developments in school might not extend beyond the classroom without monitoring or systematic policies to encourage parental involvement (see CA, FI, SE). Intercultural education appears as an official aim and, with 33 points, Slovenia scores above the low Central European average (see HU, PL, CZ). There is ad hoc funding and some possibilities to adapt curricula but no concrete measures to implement intercultural education in all schools, e.g. recruiting migrant teachers (DE, NO, UK).”

However, Slovenia has only become a country of immigration in the last few decades – before then, like many other European countries, it had a long tradition of emigration. Scheffer (2011: 141-144) highlights the difference between the USA and Europe in how we understand immigration. The United States defines itself as a nation of immigrants, who have played a major part in shaping the country. Europe regards immigration as an exception, and immigration was never seen as an important part of its history; moreover, it ignored the fact that over the years, millions of people arrived in European countries from beyond its borders (for instance in the 1960s the number of immigrants living in the European Economic Community doubled from 3.3 million to 6.6 million), and it forgets that prior to the First World War, 45 million people emigrated from Europe.

### **Research and methodology**

There are already many examples of good practices pursued in their own local environment either by individuals or institutions, but they are not aware of each other, they do not link up and do not exchange experiences. Some examples of good practices were presented in the project *Professional Bases, Strategies and Theoretical Frameworks of Education for Intercultural Relations and Active Citizenship* (2010), which was implemented from January 2010 to August 2011 by the Slovenian Migration Institute (SMI) at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SRC SASA). One of the goals was to discover how people from different ethnic groups live together in their local environments. Six regional conferences in different parts of Slovenia were organized and a lot of good practices where people function well in their diversity by the help of local advisers were located. Local employees from primary, secondary schools and universities, from public libraries, adult educational centers, non government organizations, people with their own or their parents` immigrant background and volunteers introduced their solutions for working and living together with people from different ethnic groups and new coming immigrants, developing intercultural relations and active citizenship.

Later on two best practices from each region were chosen, interviews with people involved (performers, users of services and observers from local environments) were made and the situation in different parts of Slovenia was analyzed.<sup>3</sup> Materials from regional consultations, eleven professional publications and other results of the project, which was supported by the European Social Fund and the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sports, are freely accessible in Slovenian on the website (<http://www.medkulturni-odnosi.si/>).

### **Immigrant children and their teachers**

Immigrant children, who are the primary focus of this paper, have come to Slovenia in the first decade of the 21st century chiefly for family reunion. Some research shows that the academic performance of immigrant children is lower than that of other children. Immigrant children, like their parents, are often stigmatised: The stigmatization “is associated with their nationalities, their lack of familiarity with the Slovenian language, foreign-sounding names, and above all with the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices about immigrants from certain countries. The stigmatization is promoted by media, political hate speech and nationalist cultural discourse” (Milharčič Hladnik, 2010: 29).

In the integration of immigrants (children) it should be borne in mind that their experiences are highly diverse.<sup>4</sup> They have come from different starting points and conditions in which they were living in the countries they left. There are differing reasons (or combinations of reasons) why they migrated: economic, family unity, study, marriage, fleeing violence based on religious or ethnic affiliation, war and so on. Children’s lives before and after migrating differ: family members may move all at the same time or gradually, children often live for a certain time separated from their parents or from one parent, and children may move on their own. Some live (before and) after migrating to a new country in a discouraging and economically weak environment. Others live in a stimulating environment, the parents are educated, they are well-integrated into the Slovenian environment and they offer their children support in education, integration and in other (leisure) pursuits. Their

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the results of this project (but they did not focus just on primary schools as this paper does) were introduced on the conference *Local solutions for living together in diversity in Slovenia* in Budapest (21st-23th May 2012) by Marijanca Ajša Vižintin and Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik.

<sup>4</sup> Marina Lukšič Hacin (2010) highlights for instance the children of diplomats, and takes the view that the occupational movement of diplomats represents (permanent) temporary work abroad, and is thereby a form of migration. The children of diplomats, who accompany their parents when they move, are involved in various (re)socialisation processes, just like other migrant children.

home environment is consciously multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic, in an awareness that one's identity is a changing construct, as was well-illustrated by a graduate teacher of Albanian: "I myself speak four languages, and I believe that even though I was born in Albania, which was a very closed country, I am made up differently, I am made up as a very free being. For this reason it was not hard for me to go abroad. I like getting to know new people, I am interested in different cultures, different approaches to life, different thinking. [...] I feel that I am Balkan, European, Slovenian, Albanian and Italian. All of that coexists in me" (Milharčič Hladnik, 2011: 52, 54).

Professional educators employed in the education system play an important part: "Educators at all levels play an essential role in fostering intercultural dialogue and in preparing future generations for dialogue. Through their commitment and by practising with their pupils and students what they teach, educators serve as important role models" (*White paper*, 2008: 32). Teachers in Slovenian primary schools<sup>5</sup> contend with the integration of immigrant children in various ways, stemming from the possibilities under the law: *The Elementary School Act* (1996) and the *Act Amending the Elementary School Act* (2007, 2011, Article 10) enables the immediate inclusion of immigrant children in primary education, Slovenian language courses and, in cooperation with their country of origin, lessons in their mother tongue and culture; the *Rules on testing and assessing knowledge and the advancement of pupils in primary schools* (2007, Article 19) provides them with two-year adapted testing and assessment.<sup>6</sup>

For lifelong learning the European Commission recommends the development of key competences the individual requires for successful functioning in modern society (*Recommendation ... for lifelong learning 2006: 13*). Key competences are divided into eight groups: 1. communication in the mother tongue, 2. communication in foreign languages, 3. mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, 4. digital competence, 5. learning to learn, 6. social and civic competences, 7. sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, 8. cultural awareness and expression. Intercultural competence is one of the social and civic competences. It highlights an

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<sup>5</sup> Slovenian primary education is legally compulsory and lasts nine years (generally from age 6 to 14). For more on the Slovenian education system see *National system* (2011).

<sup>6</sup> See *Zakon o osnovni šoli* (1996) and *Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o osnovni šoli* (2007, 2011), *Pravilnik o preverjanju in ocenjevanju znanja ter napredovanju učencev v osnovni šoli* (2007). Useful documents, but not legally compulsory, are also Slovenian strategies and Guidelines for integrating immigrant children (see *Strategija ... 2007* and *Smernice ... 2011*).

awareness of a diverse, multicultural society, the need for intercultural communication, tolerance, respect and overcoming prejudices.

Developing intercultural competence is something identified by Christine E. Bennett (2011) as one of the elements of intercultural education. She advocates the position where teachers can make an important contribution to changes on the local, national and global level, and they can influence the future citizens of the world. She understands multicultural education as the development of the intellectual, social and personal potentials of all pupils to their highest level. In addition to developing intercultural competences, a comprehensive approach to multicultural teaching and learning requires other elements: fair and equal education practices, reshaping the curriculum from a monocultural to a multicultural form and social justice. Equal education practices strive to achieve impartial educational opportunities for children of all nationalities. Important aspects involve teacher expectations of the pupil's learning, ranking of pupils, educational strategies and school discipline policies and practices. Greater impartiality would contribute to immigrant children and children from lower income families achieving the highest standards and fulfilling their greatest potentials. The relations between the school and community are vital, and the classroom climate is decisive. Christine E. Bennett (2011) takes the view that intercultural capacity is developed among those teachers who are capable of working with pupils, families and other teachers of different races or cultures to their own, who are able to discuss diversity among nations, within the nation and within the classroom. A person with evolved intercultural capacity is faced with the fact that his view of the world has been formed on the basis of his original culture, he is capable of facing up to the origin of his ethnocentrism and of achieving objectivity in judging other cultures; he is also capable of offering help and support in establishing contacts between cultures, of showing cultural empathy and understanding the worldview of others.

Teachers' view and their additional education is extremely important and has an important influence on successful integration of immigrant children (Peček, Lesar, 2006). In Slovenia the majority of teachers have little knowledge or experience of teaching Slovenian as a second language, so they need a lot of time to seek ways in which they can teach it as a second or foreign language. But teaching just the language of the environment represents assimilation, and not integration and intercultural dialogue. Integration is a two-way process that requires cooperation of the majority and minority (Bešter 2007). Successful integration also requires other forms of support in working with immigrant children and their parents, such as those described in the

selected examples of good practices. Organised regional consultations during the project *Professional Bases, Strategies and Theoretical Frameworks of Education for Intercultural Relations and Active Citizenship* (2010) and in-depth field studies have shown that as regards integration of immigrant children, many Slovenian schools and their teachers are already pursuing numerous activities that support the development of intercultural relations and active citizenship, and thereby also the development of intercultural competence among all inhabitants. Below I set out four examples of Slovenian primary schools from different parts of Slovenia that have each found their own path to successful integration of immigrant children.

### **Integration is a process: individual programme and foreigner status**

SCHOOL 1 is an urban school in a distinctly multicultural environment inhabited by immigrants from the republics of the former common state of Yugoslavia and from other countries (some have lived with us here for decades, others moved here a few years ago), internal migrants from other parts of Slovenia and members of the Italian minority. This school, which has been dealing for decades with a variety of mother tongues, original environments, cultures and with a variety of religious affiliations among its pupils, has developed numerous (innovative) forms of integrating immigrant children. It has built upon this experience by participating in various local and national projects, and collaborating with other local institutions (e.g. the adult education school, which offers free Slovenian courses for parents, with the municipality, with organisations offering support to immigrant children to integrate into Slovenian society and to get school work done outside school hours). The school is aware that the integration of immigrant children is a process lasting several years, in which all education workers must be involved (not just those teaching the children Slovenian).

They have developed material for teaching Slovenian as a second/foreign language and Italian as the second language of the local environment (used as internal material for the pupils). The school has introduced what is termed “foreigner status”, within which they have precisely defined the adaptations for adapted testing and assessment. They have developed an internal individual programme in electronic form, which can be accessed by all education staff working with individual children (in the individual programme each teacher sets out the learning targets for his academic subject for the short term, making it easier to monitor the child’s progress, while at the same time monitoring the child’s integration into the school community). In the last week of the summer holidays (end of August), right before the start of the school year, they provide what could be called an induction in the school

premises. This 20-hour programme is important not just for the intensive Slovenian language course, but mainly as a way of familiarising with the school environment and city: children are shown around the school premises, so that on the first official day of school (in Slovenia this is usually 1 September) they feel more secure and welcome among the hundreds of children returning to their school desks. They take a walk around the city and are shown the location of shops, the market, library, bookshop, health centre and other institutions that are important for everyday life. Immigrant children come to the school with their parents, they tour the city together, but are separate for the Slovenian course, which is provided for the parents in a different form. The integration of immigrant children is of course not over in one week, and continues for (at least) two school years: children are provided support in regular lessons by teachers and classmates, in supplementary lessons and individual professional assistance, they are included in special interest activities, in agreement with their parents they are included in morning care and after-school stays, they continue their individual learning of Slovenian and so on.

### **Teaching Slovenian as a second language**

SCHOOL 2 is an urban school that has also functioned for decades in a multicultural environment. Ever since they were built in the 1960s, the apartment blocks have been lived in by people moving here mainly from the republics of the former common state of Yugoslavia. Those running the school are aware that the number of newly settled children has a major influence on their recruitment policy – if there were no immigrant children, they would have to lay off already employed teachers owing to insufficient enrolment. They monitor closely the progress of each individual and regularly cooperate with parents. Many teaching staff speak English and Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian, which is a help in communicating with newly settled children and their parents, but they have difficulties from not knowing Albanian, for instance.<sup>7</sup> With assistance from the school's monetary fund, they try to ensure that immigrant children also go to the school in nature, to language and swimming lessons and that they become involved in special interest activities.

At the start of the increased enrolment of immigrant children approximately seven years ago, all the children were taught Slovenian

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that it is precisely immigrants (children) with Albanian as their mother tongue who have the opportunity in Slovenia to learn Slovenian, for them the language of the new environment, by means of their mother tongue – but this option has only been available in the last few years, e.g. Dralle, Fenner (2010: English-Slovenian-Albanian dictionary) or Pirih Svetina, Ponikvar (2011).

as a second/foreign language by just one teacher. Since there were increasing numbers of children whose mother tongue was not Slovenian, and the sole teacher was overwhelmed, the school opted for teamwork: first-grade pupils were taught Slovenian by one teacher, second-grade pupils by another and so on. The teacher compiled her own curriculum for teaching Slovenian, and this was based mainly on copies from various textbooks for teaching Slovenian expatriates, but the material was arranged into logical sets of content. She provided “her” material and lesson plans to her teaching colleagues. The Slovenian language course is provided intensively for several weeks after lessons. In the final three years, immigrant children are taught Slovenian language by a teacher who also teaches them in Slovenian as a curriculum subject. This is adapted to the learning capacities of the children: weaker pupils are given pictorial material and picture dictionaries; gifted pupils are involved in creative writing and organising intercultural lessons, for instance presenting their country of origin in public afternoon events at the school. Several times the school linked up with a neighbouring school in the intensive Slovenian language course.<sup>8</sup>

Teachers advocate the several-week intensive Slovenian course before the child enters school, and later the gradual form of integration into the class (a combination of regular lessons and continued Slovenian course). Among the immigrant children they identify average and gifted pupils, as well as children with special needs. The largest numbers of immigrants are from Kosovo, but they also come from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova and Serbia. A positive atmosphere and the evolved intercultural competence of the teachers can be felt at the school.

Yet despite their great efforts and painstaking work, it is possible to detect in the local environment a dismissive attitude towards the “immigrant” school from some quarters; some parents do not wish to enrol their children in this school, while the neighbouring school advises immigrant parents to enrol their children in this school, since it has more immigrant children and more experience in working with them. Some teaching staff want more support in the local environment, and not the fact that they have become a stigmatised “immigrant” school. In the future they also wish to introduce lessons in the mother tongue and culture of the immigrant children, but they want to tackle this in a careful and systematic way.

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<sup>8</sup> Five such courses were provided by the Centre for Slovenian as a Second/Foreign Language in 2009-2010 as part of the project Successful integration of migrant children and pupils into education 2008-2011, [http://www.centerslo.net/l2.asp?L1\\_ID=8&L2\\_ID=94&LANG=slo](http://www.centerslo.net/l2.asp?L1_ID=8&L2_ID=94&LANG=slo), 27. 10. 2012).

## **Local support**

SCHOOL 3 is a rural school that was taken by surprise a few years ago by an increasing number of immigrant children. At this school, teachers have a developed intercultural competence and method of working with immigrant children similar to that in SCHOOL 2. They have a partly different approach to teaching Slovenian as a second/foreign language. Slovenian is taught as a second/foreign language by two teachers: a teacher of Slovenian and an external associate, whose mother tongue is Albanian – so immigrant children can therefore learn Slovenian using their mother tongue. The teacher who teaches immigrant children Slovenian differs from many other teachers in that as soon as she received the first immigrant child in her class, she turned for professional help to the Centre for Slovenian as a Second/Foreign Language, attended their training and developed an appropriate methodology and didactic for teaching Slovenian as a second/foreign language.

The school cooperates intensively with the nearby youth centre, which is staffed by volunteers. The head of the youth centre regularly attends the monthly meetings at the school, where they discuss each child separately and the kind of assistance the immigrant child might need: Slovenian classes or support in dealing with the learning material and in doing homework. The youth centre keeps records of each individual that comes, and once school work is done it is an important space for socialising and quality leisure time. Often enough, the very children who needed help a few years earlier, themselves become volunteers after a time, and offer support for the integration of new immigrant children. An interesting feature of this centre is its religious dialogue: the youth centre functions in the premises of a Catholic church, but the volunteers and users of the space belong to various faiths (Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox) or are atheists. Immigrant parents are happy with the collaboration of the school and the youth centre, and are grateful to both institutions for their support. So the school has sought out important support in the local environment. The volunteers include the children of the primary school principal. It is generally young people who work at the youth centre as active citizens, and through their voluntary work they develop their social and civic competence.

## **Lessons of mother tongue and culture, intercultural dialogue**

SCHOOL 4 is a rural school where the integration of immigrant children has focused on teaching Slovenian, adapted assessment, involvement in special interest activities,<sup>9</sup> peer help from other grades (older immigrant children helping as advisers and translators to integrate new immigrant children based on their own experiences) – and on teaching the mother tongue and culture and developing intercultural dialogue at the school, which began to develop seriously only with the arrival of two mother tongue and culture teachers at the school.<sup>10</sup> The school organised a multilingual event, which interwove Slovenian and the languages of the immigrant children. The school library has been enhanced with books in the mother tongues of the immigrant children (in addition to Slovenian books, which are the majority, school libraries usually have a certain number of books in foreign languages that are taught at the school, such as English, German, Italian and French).

In the classes attended by immigrant children, there have been several Slovenian-Macedonian and Slovenian-Albanian lessons, in cooperation with the teachers of Albanian and Macedonian, and with other teachers on the school staff. In the bilingual lessons, the children came to know the reasons for the migration of immigrant children, they placed geographically Slovenia and the country from which the immigrant children came (there was always a map on hand), they came to know the similarities<sup>11</sup> and differences between the countries/lands and languages, they were acquainted with possible different scripts or other characters, the sounds that are not made in Slovenian, they were

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<sup>9</sup> Children have varying strong points, so it is important to discover them as early as possible. If a child is good at sports, they are included in special interest sports activities; if they are good at maths, they are invited to train for maths competitions, and so on. We highlight the reading merits, a mentor form of encouraging the reading of literary texts around Slovenian primary schools, something that has a more than 50-year tradition (children in each school year usually read 3/5 prose texts and 3 poetry collections, and discuss what they have read with the teacher (reading merit mentor), and as prizes they receive awards, a book gift and get to meet a writer). Usually 80% of children in the first two three-year periods of primary school participate in the reading merits system, along with 30-50% of children in the final three-year period of primary school. For immigrant children, the reading merits scheme has been adapted so that they can read some books in their mother tongue.

<sup>10</sup> This action has served to grant “official” status to their mother tongue as a language of equal status to the language of the environment (Slovenian) and to other languages. Children were granted the capacity to identify not just with the host country (Slovenia) but also with the country of origin, the country they left. Collaboration with the teachers of mother tongues and cultures also had a positive impact in terms of developing a sense of being accepted and establishing ties between immigrant children and the majority population (Vižintin 2009, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> About similarities and differences between Slovenians and Albanians for example comapere Lokar (2012).

exposed to an aesthetic treat listening to creative texts in several languages and so on; the content was linked to the curriculum topics for individual subjects. Here are three examples of such intercultural lessons.

*Slovenian-Albanian lesson in the 9th grade.* Each pupil received a study sheet. Firstly they identified the position of Kosovo on the map of Europe, talked about the declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, about the number of countries that have affirmed the independence of Kosovo, and compared the situation with the Slovenian declaration of independence in 1991 (inter-subject connection with geography and history). Two pupils, a ninth grader and sixth grader from Kosovo, who participated in conducting the lesson, presented themselves and told about how much time they had been in Slovenia, how they felt on their arrival and why they moved to Slovenia. Together they then presented the similarities and differences between the Albanian and Slovenian alphabets and sounds (inter-subject connection with Slovenian). The next assignment was connected to the first printed books in Slovenian and Albanian (the first Slovenian books were published by Primož Trubar in 1550, and the first Albanian book by Gjon Buzuku in 1555). In five sentences the class learned to introduce themselves in Albanian, and acted out dialogues (and discovered that this is not easy at all). In conclusion, they listened to a lullaby poem set to music, *Čenčačeva uspavanka* (Pavček 2007),<sup>12</sup> first in Albanian, then in Slovenian, and tried to determine the meaning of certain words (they sensed a familiarity with the words *librat/books*, *shtallë/barn*, *tramvai/tram*).

*Slovenian-Albanian lesson in the 3rd grade.* In addition to the two children from Kosovo, who helped conduct the lesson, other children from Kosovo and their parents were invited. The two Kosovo children presented a famous Slovenian fairy-tale (*Muca copatarica [Cat in Slippers]* by Ela Peroci) in their mother tongue (Albanian). Then the two children asked what cat and slippers are in Albanian; for many in the class, the frequently repeated words stayed with them (*cat/muca/macja*, *slippers/copati/papuçe*). This time, too, the children received study sheets. The presentation in Albanian was simplified. They learned how to count to five and the counting out game in Albanian. The guests (older immigrant children from other classes) that came to the Slovenian-Albanian lesson were asked to disperse themselves around the class during the exercises with dialogues and numbers, and to help practice

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<sup>12</sup> Pavček, Tone (2007): the CD has poems from one of the best known modern poets, set to music and sung in Slovenian, Macedonian, Danish, Japanese, Albanian, Romanian and Russian.

the correct pronunciation. The Kosovo parents who came to listen to their children were asked to introduce themselves in Slovenian. The parents were very proud of their bilingual children. In closing, they heard Pavček's *Čenčava uspavanka* in Albanian and Slovenian.

*Slovenian-Macedonian lesson in the 5th grade.* The class first identified where Macedonia is on the map and all those present were given a study sheet. They focused on the similarities between the two countries: both Slovenia and Macedonia were once part of Yugoslavia, they are approximately the same size, they have approximately the same size of population, their highest mountains are a similar height, the languages are similar (both belong to the southern Slav language group) and both countries have been independent since 1991. The class also discovered just how similar the languages are when they heard the poem *Pogumna Lenka [Brave Lenka]* (Pavček 2007), first in Macedonian, then in Slovenian. The words that stuck most with them were *mama*, *avtobusi*, *kamioni* and *vozovi*. A surprise then followed, when the Macedonian children presented the Cyrillic alphabet, their script. Next to each explained letter, the children gave as an example a word – and again they saw how many words are similar. After the presentation, all those present (children, parents, teachers) signed a big poster in Cyrillic. They listened to a Macedonian folk song and learned to say “thank you/blagodaram”. The class prepared an exhibition of around 20 books in Macedonian Cyrillic, which the school library had received as a gift from the teacher of Macedonian in cooperation with the Macedonian Embassy. In cooperation with the Kosovo Embassy and the Albanian teacher, the book collection both in the school library and the general library accessible to adult readers was also supplemented.

### **Conclusion: educating for diversity**

There are a number of reasons for the success of integrating immigrant children in the selected schools, but we may identify certain common features: teachers have been dealing with the integration of immigrant children for several decades or years, they cooperate with active individuals and institutions in the local environment, they seek a variety of ways to cooperate with parents, they are familiar with the possibilities under the law and European guidelines for integration of immigrant children, teachers take regular and additional training, they develop their intercultural competence and participate in various national and European projects.

The field work that formed part of the study *Professional background, strategies and theoretical thematisations for education for intercultural relations and active citizenship* (2010) showed that many schools and

educators are making exceptional efforts to ensure that immigrant pupils are successfully integrated. In integration they are offered a variety of professional support (teaching the language of the environment, adapted assessment, supplementary lessons, support in doing homework during after-school stays, inter-grade peer assistance, teaching the mother tongue and culture and so forth). Parents are advised to have regular contact with the school, to involve children in special interest activities and to stay after school, since within these pursuits children more easily establish informal contacts with each other. Teachers and the education system are expected to “offer all young people the means to develop key competences to a level that equips them for adult life, and which form a basis for further learning and working life and that adults are able to develop and update their key competences through the provision of coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning” (*Recommendation ... for lifelong learning* 2006: 13), including intercultural competence. The school can contribute to the integration of the child into the class, it can invite parents to the school and organise parents’ meetings so they can get to know one another and establish contact – but parents also go to the shops, to the doctor, the administrative office, and on walks in the neighbourhood. The school and teachers are not able to do all of this alone, and they urgently need support on a personal, local and national level. How far the parents of immigrant children are integrated depends on us adults and the level of development of our intercultural competence – the successful integration of the parents influences the integration of immigrant children. “When the qualities that educators with evolved intercultural competence should have, become guidelines for all inhabitants and educators gain support in their efforts for intercultural education in the broader environment, on the local and national levels, aspirations for evolved intercultural competence will be more acceptable, more visible and effective on all levels of public life” (Vižintin, 2011).

## **Resources**

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