

# EDUCATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN AN INTERNATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRAMME: COMPARISON WITH A SLOVENIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

### **Education of Migrant Children in an International Primary School Programme: Comparison with a Slovenian Primary School**

This paper draws comparisons in the performance of an international and a Slovenian primary school, taking as its case-study a school in Slovenia which runs the two programmes side by side. There are statistically significant differences between the two sets of pupils' views on the quality of the lessons, the teaching staff and relations with their peers, with both groups identifying a lack of contact and co-operation with pupils from the other programme. There are also several more noticeable differences in the level of knowledge between the two groups, although these differences could not be established as statistically significant. We examine the international school programme, which was positively assessed by the parents of children attending the programme, in somewhat greater depth.

KEY WORDS: international primary school, Slovenian primary school, migrations, quality of education

## IZVLEČEK

### **Izobraževanje otrok migrantov v mednarodnem programu osnovne šole: Primerjava s slovensko osnovno šolo**

V članku primerjamo nekatere vidike uspešnosti mednarodne in slovenske osnovne šole. V študijo je vključena šola iz Slovenije, ki izvaja oba programa. Med učenci iz obeh programov obstajajo statistično značilne razlike v stališčih glede kakovosti pouka, učiteljev in glede sodelovanja z vrstniki. Obe skupini učencev ugotavljata manjšo prisotnost sodelovanja z učenci iz druge skupine. V znanju učencev iz obeh programov prihaja do nekaterih opaznejših razlik, katerih statistično značilnih razlik pa ni bilo mogoče dokazati. Nekoliko podrobneje analiziramo izvajanje programa mednarodne šole. Slednji je bil pozitivno ocenjen tudi s strani staršev učencev v tem programu.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: mednarodna osnovna šola, slovenska osnovna šola, migracije, kakovost izobraževanja

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration is an integral part of life. While some authors (Luchtenberg 2004) define migration primarily as a political and economic phenomenon, others (Heckmann 2008; Josipovič 2012; Mlekuž 2010) examine it from the aspect of social cohesion and the stabilisation of democratic culture. Within these frameworks, migration is also an indispensable part of education policy and practice - in fact, we can say with certainty that education is a precondition for all other types of integration. Within the education process, immigrant children acquire a number of key skills, areas of knowledge and social ties that they need in order to integrate successfully into society. The results of a number of studies (OECD 2006; TIMSS 2007; TIMSS 2011; Bibby, Tan 2008; Heckmann 2008; Bešter 2009) show that pupils born abroad attain significantly worse academic results than their native-born peers; the reasons for this are various and complex, and the differences cannot be ascribed to differences in the abilities and efforts of the children themselves. Nevertheless, while the integration of immigrant children into the education system is becoming an ever more important topic for policymakers in all Member States of the EU, a number of authors (OECD 2006; Heckmann 2008; Vrečer et al. 2008; Bešter 2009; Schneeweis 2011) point out that there are a number of approaches to resolving the issue, with differences appearing not only between countries but within them as well. The results of several studies of immigrant children (OECD 2006; TIMSS 2007; TIMSS 2011; Bibby, Tan 2008; Heckmann 2008; Bešter 2009; Schneeweis 2011; Lesar et al. 2012) can help in the search for new solutions; therefore, in this study, we outline some of the aspects of evaluation of one specific but nevertheless interesting educational approach to migrant children attending international schools.

Slovenia has three private international schools (American, British, and French), as well as the International Department at the Danila Kumar state primary school. In addition to the national primary school program, the latter school conducts two accredited international programmes, the Primary Years Programme – PYP, and the Middle Years Programme – MYP (one international programme at two levels – the IB programme), which are run under the auspices of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), an international non-profit educational organisation. The private international schools offer programmes accredited in their own countries, while the International Department at the Danila Kumar Primary School offers an international programme accredited by the global network of IBO schools. Official accreditation of a programme means that it is recognised throughout the world, that a certificate obtained under that programme is valid everywhere, and that pupils can continue their education in similar (and national) programmes in other countries. The children of Slovenian nationals posted abroad and those of foreign nationals posted to Slovenia generally attend schools offering an international programme; they might, for linguistic, educational, security and other reasons, be unable to attend state schools in the host country (Mlakar 2012: 3). The transitions between different countries and cultures are socially and psychologically difficult for such children; they are therefore exposed to significantly greater demands than those placed on young people educated in the same system and in their mother tongue (*ibid.*).

Private international schools are funded in different ways (payment of fees by parents, donations, etc.). The Slovenian state provides partial funds for all children attending the international programme at the Danila Kumar Primary School, whether foreign or Slovenian nationals, with a portion of the school fees being paid by the parents. In addition to the enhanced programme (IB subjects, methods of work, teaching in the English language), all costs of textbooks, teaching materials, daily activities and excursions are included; children are required to bring only a pen, bag and slippers to school and obtain everything else from the school (*ibid.*). The international programme at the Danila Kumar Primary School also includes the children of Slovenian nationals who have lived and worked abroad and who have returned home temporarily. Their children are entitled to attend the international school during the period of their temporary return to Slovenia; this enables the children to enjoy a smoother transition, in terms of language and of curriculum, to another environment and, at the same time, allows them to

retain their ability to learn in the English language should the parents decide to move away again in the future. The school fees for children of Slovenian diplomats, which are under normal circumstances paid by the parents, are paid in equal shares by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

The central interest of this paper is the International Department, which has been in existence in Slovenia since the 1990s. Slovenia's independence and international recognition brought an increase in the number of foreign diplomatic, business, press and other representatives in Ljubljana who, along with other professionals, all remained in Slovenia for longer periods of time with their families. This gave rise, naturally, to the issue of the education of their children, for some of whom it was necessary to provide pre-school and school programmes in the English language. International school departments therefore began to operate at a Slovenian primary school (the so-called 'IB programme'), with education continuing within the grammar school (*gimnazija*) programme, upon the completion of which students ended their formal education and received an internationally recognized school-leaving certificate (*matura*).

The IBO International Department, which is located in Ljubljana, and which organises an international primary school programme, employs a process of education and work that is substantially different from that employed in Slovenian schools. The international primary school lasts eight rather than nine years, the teaching is conducted in English, and class sizes are smaller. Of the 125 pupils attending the international programme at the school, the majority are the children of foreign nationals living and working in Slovenia. In terms of content, the two programmes (national and international) have a great deal in common, with similar objectives and similar subject areas, albeit with certain specific differences. The curriculums of both programmes have a large number of common topics, but are distinct from each other primarily in terms of structure and the way pupil progress is recorded. Slovenian curriculums are more wide-ranging and detailed, and contain precisely determined standards of knowledge; those of the International Department take the form of activities and projects to a greater extent, with the knowledge that a pupil is meant to acquire being recorded by means of more broadly defined descriptive criteria. The greatest differences between the two programmes lie in the method of teaching and in the checking and assessment of knowledge. The Slovenian primary school is more focused on knowledge and on the imparting of information; fewer connections are made between subjects (Mlakar 2012: 3), and the psychosocial aspects of raising children through education are overlooked (Musek Lešnik 2011: 58). The basic characteristics of the IBO are a balanced core curriculum and proper monitoring and assessment of knowledge, which helps pupils develop (Beane 1990; IBO 2006; Hare 2010):

- an ability to learn how to integrate the knowledge and skills they acquire into real life, and to use that knowledge and those skills;
- responsibility for and a positive attitude towards their own studies, with an emphasis on continuing education and development, on learning how to learn, and on using different sources of information and knowledge;
- international and intercultural understanding, joint responsibility, and a sensitivity towards their fellow human beings and the environment;
- an ability to participate actively in local and world affairs.

High academic achievement and a good level of knowledge are not the only important aspects of the programme; there is also and above all the understanding of general concepts, the development of interdisciplinary skills and abilities, the development of a positive attitude towards learning and the world at large, and the creation of conditions that enable pupils to use everything they have been taught in a beneficial and creative way (Marshman 2010). The basic objective is for every pupil to develop in accordance with their own abilities and to become a responsible and active citizen. Teaching and all communications take place in the English language, with pupils from years one to eight learning Slovenian as the language of their host environment. Year five pupils choose between French and German as their second foreign language. The teaching approaches focus on methods of work that en-

courage the methodical, critical and creative acquisition of new knowledge and skills. A global perspective is fostered by directing and encouraging pupils to exchange the ideas and experiences they have acquired in different countries, to respect different perspectives, and to develop an acceptance of other cultures and religions. This is crucial for later life as well, as cross-border cooperation is becoming an increasingly important factor in establishing an environment that encourages business and enterprise. One study (Klun, Setnikar Cankar 2013) has shown that positive attitudes, language skills and common interests are the primary factors that encourage cooperation.

Although it can be seen from the chronology of the establishment and operation of the international school that a not-inconsiderable amount of effort has been invested in this process by both school management and the relevant institutions, a more stable systemic solution has still not yet been found – that is, the school's position in law is still not as secure as it could be. In some countries, international programmes have become part of the state school system (public international programmes); in others they have been established as private schools. In Slovenia, however, the status of the international programme has not been regulated by law; as a result, attempts to reach agreement on the position and co-financing of the programme have to be made anew every year. This wearying round of negotiations causes uncertainty for the school, although it is clear that Slovenia needs a high-quality international school. One needs to ask why the international school's legal status has not been finally and properly settled, despite the need and desire for such a settlement. Clearly, regulation of its status has opened up a whole host of systemic questions, including the language of instruction, precisely whom the programme is intended for, the status of the programme, the attainment of standards of knowledge that bear comparison with Slovenian school programmes, and whether it is a private or a state school. Some of the answers to these questions are given in this research; its findings could be useful in the process of formally regulating the status of the International Department.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

We collected the data for the research in the first half of 2011 from both primary school programmes conducted at the Danila Kumar Primary School: the international programme and the Slovenian primary school programme.

### Purpose and objectives of the research

The purpose of the research was to become familiar with how the international programme at the Danila Kumar Primary School works, and to compare it with the Slovenian primary school programme that runs alongside it. The goals of the research were as follows:

- to determine the opinions of pupils in the international programme on their lessons, and to compare them with the opinions of pupils in the Slovenian programme;
- to test the knowledge of pupils in the international programme and compare it with the knowledge of pupils in the Slovenian programme;
- to determine the opinions of parents of pupils in the international programme regarding the way the school programme is carried out.

### Research method and description of instruments

For the first objective, we sought the opinions of pupils in the international primary school programme regarding their lessons, comparing these opinions with those expressed by pupils in the Slovenian pri-

mary school programme. We used a survey method for this first objective. The questionnaire for pupils in the international programme consisted of three groups of questions (Biggs et al. 2001; Kember et al. 2004). The first group related to lessons and teachers, the second to integration within the school and the relationship between the primary school as a whole and the pupils in the international programme, and the third to the relationship between pupils in the international programme and those in the Slovenian programme. The pupils ranged their opinions on five-point scales, from 'not true at all' (1) to 'completely true' (5). The questionnaire for pupils in the Slovenian programme was similar in content to the questionnaire for the pupils in the international programme. After gathering the pupils' responses, we held interviews with the headmaster of the school and the head of the international programme in order to obtain a more detailed picture of some of the areas examined.

For the second objective, we tested pupils from both programmes across all three terms. We tested pupils in mathematics and environmental studies in the first term, in mathematics, society and natural sciences in the second term, and in mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences, and technical studies and technology in the third term. Pupils from both programmes took a written examination. The tests were in the English language for pupils in the international programme and in the Slovenian language for pupils in the Slovenian programme. The tests were prepared on the basis of a comparative analysis of the syllabuses of both programmes. A network diagram/specification table was designed showing that the tests included a set of tasks that varied in terms of form, content, level of difficulty and classification. The tasks were designed at three levels of classification; in formal terms, there was the alternative type, the selective type, the complementary type, short answers, and answers given in the form of graphic presentation. Teachers were given specific instructions.

For the third objective, we canvassed the opinions of parents of pupils attending the international programme. The parents' survey was conducted by staff at the school. The questionnaire was in English and was the same questionnaire used by the international school for self-evaluation purposes. The questionnaire focused on the level of cooperation between the school and parents, the provision of information to parents, and the opinion of parents on the programme and on the way the programme was carried out. The parents ranged their opinions on five-point scales, from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

## **Description of the sample and the data collection procedure**

We tested the first objective using the data collected from a sample of 44 pupils in the international programme (years five to eight) and a sample of 92 pupils in the Slovenian programme. The research covered all pupils in years five to eight in the international programme and one class from each year from years six to nine in the Slovenian programme. Both groups of pupils were surveyed in March 2011 using a printed questionnaire completed during class time. The response rate was very high – over 90%. We also tested a selected group of pupils from both programmes (second objective). We tested pupils from years two, five and eight of the international programme and from years three, six, eight and nine of the Slovenian programme. Between 6 and 13 pupils from the international programme and between 17 and 24 pupils from the Slovenian programme were given a series of individual tests. Although a 100% response rate could not be achieved owing to the absence of a number of pupils, the rate was nevertheless high (over 90%), giving the data a high degree of reliability. The tests were conducted in May 2011. In order to test the third objective, we surveyed all parents whose children were attending the international programme at the time the data was collected. Forty-nine parents were surveyed; most (58.3%) had one child at the school, 33.3% had two children at the school and 8.3% had three children at the school. Parents were surveyed using a printed questionnaire. They were surveyed in March 2011 during a parents' meeting. Based on the number of enrolled children, we estimate that the response rate for parents was over 75%.

## Data processing procedure

The data obtained from the surveys of pupils and parents was processed statistically. The averages and the associated standard deviations for individual selected indicators (indicators from the pupils' questionnaire in which there were statistically significant differences according to programme were selected) and for structured variables (the sum of individual indicators from a specific group of contents) are calculated and presented. In constructing the variables, the indicators were first checked using the Cronbach's alpha measure of consistency. The results of the pupils' tests were also statistically processed. The average marks attained in an individual test are calculated and presented, along with the associated standard deviations. The differences between the averages (for the survey responses as well as the test results) for the pupils from the two programmes were verified using an appropriate t-test.

## RESULTS

The data obtained in relation to the first objective (Tables 1 and 2) shows that pupils attending the international programme rated their lessons and teachers considerably higher than was the case with pupils attending the Slovenian programme. We found no statistically significant differences between the pupils from the two programmes in their assessment of the school as a whole, nor in their assessment of the level of contact and cooperation between the pupils within their respective programmes. Despite this, there were large and statistically significant differences ( $t = 3.328$ ;  $\text{sig.} = 0.000$ ) between the assessment of cooperation and contact with pupils in the other programme (between the variables shown in Table 1). Pupils from both programmes believed that they had greater contact with peers within their own programme than with pupils from the other programme at the school.

Table 1: Opinions of pupils from both programmes

Area (no. of indicators; Cronbach's alpha)	Slovenian programme			International programme			t-test	
	No. of pupils	Average	Standard deviation	No. of pupils	Average	Standard deviation	t	sig.
Lessons and teachers (16; 0.893)	92	3.77	0.53	44	4.12	0.54	-3.687	0.000
School as a whole (9; 0.821)	92	3.63	0.60	44	3.82	0.84	-1.357	0.180
Pupils from the same programme (3; 0.743)	92	4.02	0.69	44	4.22	0.85	-1.467	0.145
Pupils from the other programme (3; 0.657)	92	2.93	0.89	44	3.01	0.92	-0.521	0.603

The statistically significant differences between the pupils of the two groups regarding lessons (Table 2) appear chiefly in the assessment given to the help provided to pupils by teachers, cooperation with teachers in various projects, teachers' friendliness, pupils' ability to follow lessons without difficulty, whether lessons were interesting, whether teachers made appropriate connections between different subjects in class, and whether pupils were encouraged to solve problems themselves.

Pupils attending the international programme gave a high rating to the question regarding contact and cooperation with other pupils attending the international programme; the same did not apply to cooperation and social contact with those attending the Slovenian programme.

More detailed views and explanations were provided in the contributions of both headmasters at the school. Both were very specific in mentioning the numerous and wide-ranging forms of contact and cooperation between pupils from the two programmes at school, as well as their contact with the

Table 2: Opinions of pupils from both programmes (selected indicators)

Selected indicators	Slovenian programme			International programme			t-test	
	No. of pupils	Average	Standard deviation	No. of pupils	Average	Standard deviation	t	sig.
Teachers are friendly towards pupils.	92	3.83	0.673	43	4.21	0.638	-3.132	0.002
Lessons are interesting.	92	3.34	0.816	43	3.77	0.718	-2.964	0.004
Teachers encourage us to solve problems ourselves.	91	3.98	0.802	43	4.30	0.741	-2.237	0.027
We work with teachers on various projects.	91	3.35	0.993	43	3.95	0.754	-3.879	0.000
Teachers explain the subject in a comprehensible manner.	90	3.74	0.868	44	4.20	0.978	-2.762	0.007
Teachers help pupils in their study.	92	3.43	0.998	44	4.23	0.985	-4.351	0.000
Teachers make appropriate connections between different subjects in class.	91	3.42	1.023	44	3.95	1.011	-2.870	0.005
I can follow lessons without any difficulty.	91	3.74	0.917	44	4.18	0.691	-2.853	0.005
We frequently use various learning aids during class (books, magazines, computers, etc.).	92	3.72	1.113	43	4.16	0.974	-2.252	0.026
We are given the opportunity to explore during lessons.	92	3.22	0.947	44	3.95	1.011	-4.155	0.000
Pupils regularly take part in various competitions in different areas.	91	4.52	0.673	43	3.58	1.029	5.436	0.000
There are a lot of excursions, themed days, etc. organised for us.	92	3.10	1.038	44	4.27	0.899	-6.438	0.000
We take part in drawing up school rules and preparing school activities.	92	3.13	1.121	43	3.98	1.102	-4.108	0.000
Within our own programme, we cooperate with and help each other.	92	3.73	0.840	43	4.23	0.895	-3.182	0.002
We socialise with pupils from the other programme at the school during free time.	92	2.46	1.262	44	3.00	1.329	-2.310	0.022

narrower and wider local environment. They also gave reasons why closer contact and cooperation between pupils might be hindered:

“The obstacles to more thorough cooperation and contact between the pupils in the international programme and the other pupils at the school, as well as pupils from other primary schools, are exactly the same as the obstacles to cooperation between pupils in the national programme and those from other schools. First of all, high-quality lessons have to be provided within the syllabus, and the lack of funds also presents an obstacle. There are also organisational problems caused by the need to obtain the written consent of parents for every activity that is not part of normal classroom lessons” (headmaster of the school).

“I don't agree that contact and cooperation between the pupils of the two programmes is not good. Statistics don't always reflect the real situation. These are two organisational units in charge of conducting their own programmes. I believe that cooperation between the two departments is good, as is cooperation with other schools. We also work with schools abroad. The reasons why pupils and parents feel that contact and coop-

eration are not as good as they could be is that the curriculum in the international department is different and does not permit regular cooperation; the activity days at the international department are linked to that curriculum, so they don't always coincide with activities taking place in the Slovenian department; pupils attending the international programme do not speak Slovenian and some do not speak very good English; lessons take place across several separate buildings; many pupils from the international department do not live close to the school, so they cannot socialise after school; pupils attending the international programme stay for only a short period of time and so cannot establish deeper ties with other pupils; and many teachers in the Slovenian department do not speak English, which means that they cannot take part in activities" (head of the international programme).

One can confirm, on the basis of the interview held with the school heads, that the school does organise a fair number of different activities involving pupils from both programmes.

For the second objective, we present a comparison in the levels of knowledge of pupils from the two programmes. The results (Table 3) show that pupils from the international programme attained a higher average grade in mathematics, social studies, and natural sciences in the second term, and in social sciences, and technical studies and technology in the third term. Their Slovenian peers were better in mathematics and environmental studies in the first term, and in mathematics and natural sciences in the third term.

Table 3: Results of the tests by programme

Subjects by term (no. of points possible in the test)	International programme			Slovenian programme			t-test	
	No. of pupils	Grade Average	Standard deviation	No. of pupils	Grade Average	Standard deviation	t	sig.
Mathematics and environmental studies – 1st term (42)	6	32.00	4.147	17	34.18	4.334	-1.068	0.297
Mathematics – 2nd term (44)	7	29.71	6.317	22	23.64	9.683	-1.549	0.133
Mathematics – 3rd term (41)	12	22.42	6.585	21	26.19	7.600	-1.437	0.161
Society – 2nd term (30)	8	22.75	2.493	24	22.13	4.785	0.351	0.728
Social sciences – 3rd term (24)	13	13.23	4.400	22	12.00	3.008	0.983	0.333
Natural sciences – 2nd term (28)	8	20.56	4.246	23	18.50	4.151	1.204	0.238
Natural sciences – 3rd term (37)	13	15.85	6.022	20	17.83	4.736	-1.054	0.300
Technical studies and technology – 3rd term (18)	13	10.38	2.459	21	8.83	2.472	1.782	0.084

Despite the differences in the grades attained in individual subject areas, the differences in the averages are not statistically significant; this is chiefly the result of the small samples or the number of units compared. Differences do otherwise appear, and are greatest in technical studies and technology in the 3rd term.

For the third objective, we present the views of parents of pupils in the international programme. Parents rated all statements on cooperation between school, parents, pupils and others highly, generally with an average of '4' or above; the averages were also higher than '4' in all structured variables (Table 4). Parents believe that cooperation and communication with the school is good, and that they are provided with sufficient information; they also gave positive assessments of the programme and of the way the programme was conducted at the school. We can state that staff in the international programme (together with management) realise the importance of working with parents and discharge their tasks in this area well.

Table 4: Opinions of parents of pupils attending the international programme

Area (no. of indicators; Cronbach's alpha)	No. of parents	Average	Standard deviation
Cooperation between school, parents and pupils (6; 0.799)	45	4.19	0.524
Provision of information to parents (4; 0.791)	51	4.15	0.656
Communication with parents (5; 0.854)	51	4.42	0.517
Curriculum (5; 0.877)	49	4.38	0.544
Teaching (8; 0.912)	48	4.27	0.581

Below are some of the statements/opinions of parents further clarifying some of the aspects of the research area:

"I think the school is very good and that the teachers are great" (parent 1).

"The school, and particularly the management, could improve communication and be more open to new pupils and to parents that wish to place their children in this school. They should organise an open day and promote the IB programme. English-speaking staff should be encouraged to become involved. The IB programme is a very good philosophy for our children and we are happy with it" (parent 2).

"The school should admit more local (Slovenian) children. This would be good for both – the children from other countries would get to know Slovenian life and culture, while the Slovenian children would be able to choose an international education. There needs to be more written material linked to the contents of the curriculum. Children shouldn't be copying words from a blackboard" (parent 3).

"I think there could be more communication with parents. Using e-mail to inform parents of current events would help a great deal. On a number of occasions, despite my best efforts, I have been unable to find out what's happening in class. I would welcome more feedback" (parent 4).

"The teaching of Slovenian could be more interactive so that pupils could become more integrated into the environment of the host country" (parent 5).

Despite the high marks given in their responses, some parents used the open part of the questionnaire to draw attention to some of the expectations that were not being fully met; these were, in part, linked to a perceived lack of contact and cooperation between pupils in the international programme and their 'closest environment', i.e. pupils from the Slovenian programme at this and other primary schools.

## DISCUSSION

We can see that pupils attending the international school were more satisfied with their lessons, their teachers and the school as a whole than were the pupils attending the Slovenian programme. On the one hand, this is demonstrated by the high level of correspondence between the expectations of teachers and pupils (Farley 2005; Schofield 2006), and on the other hand by the fact that the academic requirements applying to pupils at the international school are not enforced in a rigid manner (Stevens 2007). Tan and Bibby (2011) report similar findings. The authors show that 80% of MYP pupils agree that their schools provide them with a well-supported learning environment, they are sufficiently engaged and that they are encouraged to tackle complex problems. The experiences they acquire in school are a useful preparation for other areas of work and for life in general. Despite the fact that a high percentage of IB pupils, as well as pupils from other schools, agree regarding the question of good relations and good cooperation with the school and teachers, around 5% of pupils in the IB programme did

not rate four of the dimensions as highly: social integration, global learning, personal development and academic orientation. There are likely to be several reasons for this, with one of the main reasons certainly being the influence of the curriculum. The international programme is designed to encourage pupils to acquire knowledge, and to develop the approaches and skills they need to participate actively and responsibly in a changing and ever more complex world (Hill 2002; Hare 2010). This means that the international school's curriculum is a 'living' one (Beane 1990), going beyond the traditional 'imparting of knowledge'. It involves educating children to think internationally and independently, teaching them how to identify the relationships between school subjects and the outside world, adapt to new situations, bring their areas of knowledge together in appropriate ways, and resolve real problems practically and in a socially intelligent manner, on their own or in groups (Perkins 1992; Hill 2002; Zimmerman, Stage 2008).

The pupils in the international programme were fairly critical in their assessment of the level of contact and cooperation with other schools, and even with the pupils attending the Slovenian primary school programme in the same school. They spend little social time with them, and joint work on various activities or projects is the exception rather than the rule. The two schools have separate staircases, which makes spontaneous socialising between pupils at break times somewhat more difficult. That said, we do believe that the way the school is set out, and the cultural and language differences between the pupils, are not the main reasons for the unsatisfactory level of contact and cooperation between the two sets of pupils – particularly since, on the basis of the interview held with the school heads, the school does organise a fair number of different activities involving pupils from the two programmes. It is clear that certain factors or circumstances, which one of the school heads defined very clearly, have a stronger impact on pupils and are decisive in determining their perception of contact and cooperation with their peers.

The pupils from the international school come from a variety of countries and cultural environments. Almost 23% of them attend the international school for less than one year and 39% for between one and three years. This means that a large number of pupils do not live in Slovenia for long enough to form strong ties with their Slovenian peers, or indeed that they change their environment so frequently, in comparative terms, that it discourages them from doing so; as a consequence, they tend to socialise more with schoolmates within the international programme, since what brings them together are similar stories of moving from one place to another and their encounters with strange environments and other cultures. No matter how long the period of residence, life in a foreign country always leaves them feeling like a foreigner and the traces of constantly having to adjust remain with them (Flam, King 2005). At the same time, their social sense develops, alongside a desire for contact and cooperation. This stimulates positive feelings, strengthens ties between individuals and improves children's self-image (Bernard et al. 2007; Fredrickson 2009).

Of course, the language barrier does to some extent hinder closer and more spontaneous contact with Slovenian children, even though this should not be a problem, particularly among older pupils. For example, 19% of pupils in the international programme use English at home, with a somewhat lower percentage using Slovenian alongside English. Among the other pupils, there is a wide variety of languages spoken at home. It is also true that all pupils attending the Slovenian primary school programme learn English, while the pupils attending the international programme learn Slovenian as a compulsory foreign language (a requirement of the IBO programme). The situation could be improved with the more methodical creation of an environment that encouraged contact and cooperation between pupils in various activities in both the international and nine-year primary school programmes. This would enable experiences to be exchanged, help to improve the language skills of both sets of pupils, and strengthen the social ties between them.

Despite the fact that there is no statistical significance in the differences established between the pupils from the two programmes in terms of the average marks attained in the tests, there are nevertheless slightly larger deviations with regard to certain tasks/content areas. Although it is difficult for

us to say that the pupils from the two programmes differ in terms of the way they completed the tasks, differences did nevertheless appear in their knowledge and understanding (although the differences were not statistically significant), and in their abilities to analyse and to apply procedural knowledge; there were also differences in the way they linked and used their knowledge. The research carried out in 2010/2011 as part of the International Schools' Assessment (ISA) presents a similar picture. The findings showed that pupils that attended the MYP programme at an international school attained better results than pupils from other schools at the overall level in all four areas examined: numeracy, reading, narrative writing and expository writing (Tan, Bibby 2010; Tan, Bibby 2011).

There are several reasons for this. In our case, consideration must be given, on the one hand, to the differences in age of the pupils and, in part, to the fact that subjects are taught at different times of the year, although one must certainly also look for answers in the link between teaching and pupil performance (Cankar et al. 2011). The question is whether and how teaching in the international school differs from teaching in the Slovenian school. It would therefore make sense to undertake further research into the issues covered by the second objective and to focus on the 'teaching variable', which is to a large extent determined by the philosophy of the curriculum.

Parents' involvement in schools or other educational institutions is important for both parents and institutions; this is especially true of immigrant parents. Such parents frequently have a lack of knowledge of the education system of the country to which they have moved, and not infrequently have negative experiences expressed as a social distance from the school in the country to which they have moved (Portes, Rumbaut 2006). Our findings show, however, that most of the parents have a good understanding of the ideas and approaches of the international school attended by their children. Parents believe it is important that the school provides a safe and stimulating environment based on understanding and respect, and one that promotes the dimensions of international and intercultural understanding and cooperation. The fact that the majority of parents have moved to Slovenia from other countries in which their children attended a similar school means that they have a very good understanding of the specific features of the international school. The statements and comments provided by parents confirm the findings acquired on the basis of empirical data; at the same time, they clarify in even greater detail certain aspects of the life and work of the school, which can assist in future improvements to the education and schooling process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings show that there are characteristic differences in their views regarding lessons, teachers and cooperation with peers between pupils attending the international school and pupils attending the Slovenian primary school. The pupils attending the international programme are satisfied with their lessons, their teachers and the school as a whole. They were, however, fairly critical in their assessment of the level of contact and cooperation with other schools, and even with the pupils attending the Slovenian primary school programme, socialising with them, in their free time as well, only to a small extent. One can confirm, on the basis of the interview held with the school heads, that the school does organise a fair number of different activities involving pupils from both programmes. It is clear that certain factors or circumstances have a stronger impact on pupils and are decisive in determining their perception of contact and cooperation with their peers. Although the differences established in the average marks attained in the tests between the pupils from the two programmes are not statistically significant, it is nevertheless possible to establish slightly larger deviations with regard to certain tasks/content areas in all subjects in both programmes. Parents are also satisfied, giving detailed analyses of certain aspects of life and work at the school in their statements and comments. They also suggest a number of measures to further improve the quality of life and work at the school. Despite the several limitations imposed by the methodology employed in this research, it is possible to conclude that the international school is

successful and, in this respect, substantially comparable with the Slovenian primary school programme. The results do indicate a number of specific differences; however, these are not of a nature that would enable us to conclude that one programme is more successful than another.

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