



This paper is taken from

*Teaching Citizenship  
Proceedings of the seventh Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2005

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 389 1

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
  - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
  - a official of the European Commission
  - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

***Lesar, I. (2005) Attitudes of Slovenian teachers towards Romany children, in Ross, A. (ed) Teaching Citizenship. London: CiCe, pp 241-248.***

© CiCe 2005

CiCe  
Institute for Policy Studies in Education  
London Metropolitan University  
166 – 220 Holloway Road  
London N7 8DB  
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

### **Acknowledgements:**

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit at the time of the conference, and for the initial stages of editing this book
- Lindsay Melling and Gitesh Gohel of IPSE, London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

# Attitudes of Slovenian teachers towards Romany children

Irena Lesar

University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

## Introduction

One of the guiding principles of the new Slovenian school legislation is the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination. It is emphasised that every person is guaranteed an opportunity for their best development, regardless of gender, social and cultural background, religion, ethnicity, physical or mental constitution (Bela knjiga, 1995). The last census (2002) shows 3,246 Romany living in Slovenia, which represents 0.2% of the total population, but estimates by welfare centres and schools located in the areas where the Romany live suggest that the number is somewhere between 7,000 and 12,000, around 0.5% of the total population (Strategija, 2004, p 25).

In Slovenia, compulsory school attendance is between age 6 to 15; Romany children are initially included in regular classes in primary school where they have equal opportunity to acquire education as all other children<sup>1</sup>. In reality, Romany children are unusually frequently redirected to schools with adjusted programs (Primary School with Adjusted Program – PSAP). In the academic year 2002/2003, there were 1,223 Romany children attending regular primary school and 126 PSAP (compared with all children – 1.48% – the proportion of Romany children in PSAP is seven times higher – 9.3%).

It seems that ... when the logic of programme adjustment gets mixed with prejudice the result in its final consequence is progressive segregation. Poor school results and behavioural problems lead to sending children to PSAP too quickly and easily while the real underlying reasons for poor results (specific culture, poor knowledge of language) remain unaddressed (Strategija..., 2004, p11, p19).

Romany children in regular primary school can also attend *partially homogenous classes* where they are separately taught some subjects (Slovenian Language, Mathematics and Science) as well as entirely *homogenous* classes, where there are a large number of Romany children enrolled. In Slovenia, as in many other European countries, we see a large number of failing Romany pupils, especially in higher grades of primary school. Romany children generally achieve worse school results than other children. It is clear that current solutions do not produce satisfactory results, even though the Slovenian government provides incentives for schools in which Romany children are taught: pupil numbers in classes with Romany children are lower, the school receives extra funding for one-to-one classes and team work, there is additional funding for pupils' lunches, textbooks, excursions, etc.; the government has funded the first textbook to teach the Romany language. The key problem is the linguistic and cultural difference of Romanys compared to the majority population. There have been calls to introduce a new subject, Romany Culture and Language, in schools, as well as to employ special Romany teaching

---

<sup>1</sup> In Slovenia, there is a particular problem about those Romanys without legal status. Their number is not known, they do not send their children to school, as they fear being found and deported (Strategija, 2004, p11)

assistants who could speak Slovenian and Romany and would not only facilitate better learning but also provide a good role model. Other proposals are for the better inclusion of Romany children, familiarising the Slovene majority with the special features of the Romany language, cultural and ethnic identity, taking account of socio-cultural and other circumstances, and raising expectations of Romany children's school results (Strategija, 2004, p5).

There is currently a particularly difficult situation at Slovenian primary schools with around 7% of Romany children, where the parents of the other children wish them to be transferred to other schools in the area. It is clear that current methods of including Romany children are part of a wider problem in society. A systematic introduction of the new solutions detailed in 'The Education Strategy for Romany in the Republic of Slovenia' will probably help, but we believe that teachers are the key factor in implementing good systematic solutions. Hence, this paper tries to uncover what primary school teachers think about the inclusion of Romany children in their classes.

### **Research**

At the end of 2003/early 2004 we asked a representative sample of primary school teachers to complete a questionnaire 'Teachers' Views on Groups of Children in Primary School in Slovenia'. The aim of this was to find teachers' attitudes towards various groups of children<sup>2</sup>. This paper presents partial results of the questionnaire, about teachers' views on Romany children. Because most Romany children do not reach the higher grades of primary school, we will present our analysis only of the class teachers'<sup>3</sup> answers, not the subject teachers'.

### **Teachers' views on their responsibility for Romany children school results**

We asked if it was thought that the factors listed affected Romany children school results. If the response was 'yes', we asked them to assess the degree of this factor's importance. The table presents the factors seen as important or direct<sup>4</sup>: the child's abilities and his activity are factors related to the child's personal traits; the teaching method and class atmosphere are factors related to the classroom; and family culture, way of life and socio-economic status are factors related to the family.

---

<sup>2</sup> The questionnaire is a part of a larger research project titled 'Fairness and Justice in Educational Systems - Comparative Aspect (core research project by the Ministry of Education and Sport), project leader Mojca Peček Cuk.

<sup>3</sup> Primary school in Slovenia takes 9 years and is divided in three three-year triads. The first triad is taught by class teachers, the last triad is taught by subject teachers, and the second triad is taught by a combination of both class and subject teachers.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see Marentič Požarnik, 2000, p132

**Table 1: Factors affecting Romany children school results and their degree of importance**

	NO <sup>5</sup>	YES	DEGREE %
a) Child's abilities	{5} 1.2%	{1} 98.8%	{1} 35.05%
b) Child's activity	{5} 1.2%	{1} 98.8%	{2} 19.11%
c) Teacher's teaching method	{2} 10.1%	{5} 89.9%	{4} 11.81%
d) Atmosphere in the classroom	{3} 8.4%	{4} 91.6%	{5} 10.81%
e) Family culture and way of life	{4} 7.7%	{3} 92.3%	{3} 13.22%
f) Family's socio-economic status	{1} 25.3%	{6} 74.7%	{6} 10.00%

Examining first the third column ('yes'), there is a very high level of agreement among teachers that these factors affect Romany children school results. Most important are child's abilities and activities, followed by family culture and way of life, and then classroom atmosphere. The teacher's teaching method is rated less important. Least is the family's socio-economic status<sup>6</sup>.

Looking at the degree of importance assigned to each factor, we can see that teachers assign a massive 35% to the child's abilities, and a further fifth to the child's activity. The degree of importance assigned to the teacher's teaching method is just over 11%, and to the class atmosphere slightly over 10%. It seems that teachers think that more than half of the Romany child's school success depends on the child himself. Teachers rate themselves as less important to what happens in school than to family circumstances. We can conclude that teachers do not think they play an important role in the results of Romany children; 18.5% of teachers even believe that what happens in school is not an important factor in the school results of Romany children. We found no significant differences between class teachers in regards to their years of experience, level of education, rank, place or gender.

### **Results regarding the class teachers' views on the inclusion of Romany children in primary school**

Respondents were asked to rank statements given on a scale from 1 to 5: Strongly disagree 1; Disagree 2; Unsure 3; Agree 4; Strongly agree 5.

<sup>5</sup> The number in brackets shows ranking.

<sup>6</sup> Slovenian teachers do not know the results of many studies indicating that socio-economic status is an important factor of school results

**Table 2: The frequency structure of the level of agreement by class teacher with the listed statements**

STATEMENTS	Level of agreement (percentages) < disagree ..... agree >				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The success of a Romany child's inclusion depends on the child.	8.8	37.9	17	28.6	7.7
2. Parents of Slovenian children like having Romany children in their child's class.	10.4	35.2	40.7	13.7	/
3. Teachers are less demanding of Romany children.	8.4	29.1	30.1	27.4	5
4. Romany parents are less interested in their children's school success than other parents.	1.7	12.1	37	29.3	19.9
5. Romany children help teach all children solidarity and tolerance of those who are different.	4.4	12.1	25.3	47.8	10.4
6. On average, Romany children have lower abilities than other children.	7.7	34.3	34.3	20.4	3.3
7. Parents of Slovenian children do not allow their children to associate with Romany children.	4.4	24.7	47.8	19.8	3.3
8. Teachers are more lenient when disciplining Romany children.	19.9	45.3	25.4	8.8	0.6
9. Romany parents expect too much from their children.	15.5	35.9	41.4	6.1	1.1
10. The acceptance of the Romany child class depends more on other children/parents than on the teacher.	7.1	30.8	23.6	33	5.5
11. Romany parents do not encourage their children enough to learn.	3.3	8.8	39.8	34.8	13.3
12. Teachers do not feel qualified to teach Romany children.	15.4	41.2	27.5	13.2	2.7
13. Romany parents blame the teacher for the failure of their child.	3.8	25.8	54.9	12.1	3.4
14. Romany children experience learning difficulties because they are not taught in their native language.	6.1	25.4	43.1	19.9	5.5
15. Teachers should be familiar with the Romany culture and language.	5.5	14.3	24.7	46.7	8.8
16. Romany children are intolerant of Slovenian children.	4.4	25.8	57.2	11	1.6

The frequency of answers shows much indecision: it reached over 30% in three statements. This group includes all statements relating to the Slovenian parents (2, 7)<sup>7</sup> as well as to the Romany parents (4, 9, 11, 13). The same applies to all the statements relating to the Romany child (6, 14, 16). It is of note that in the case of 'Romany children have learning difficulties because they are not taught in their native language' teachers not only showed a high level of uncertainty, but were also more inclined to disagree than to agree.

Among the four statements relating to the teacher and her work, two statements showed the highest levels of disagreement (8, 12), one statement received a balanced range of replies (3), and statement 15 ('Teachers should be familiar with the Romany culture and language') met with agreement.

The three statements dealing with the inclusion of Romany children received bipolar replies (1, 10) or a tendency towards agreement (5).

The square rotation of the factor analysis of the key components produced six factors (61.59% of explained variance). Scree test generated six relevant factors which were rotated rectangularly according to the Varimax method and provided the following results:

**FACTOR 1:** *discouraging learning environment for the Romany children.*

Explained variance 17.58%. This factor is most significantly determined by statements relating to Romany parents (4), who are less interested in the results of their children than other parents [0.859]<sup>8</sup> and (11) who do not encourage their children enough to learn [0.663]; to teachers (3) who lower their requirements [0.673] and (6) to children who are less able than others [0.663]. The correlation matrix shows six positive correlations, while the frequency analysis indicates general agreement with these statements (3, 4, 11).

**FACTOR 2:** *Romanys no desired by Slovenian parents.*

Explained variance 11.83%. This includes one statement (8) relating to teachers as being more lenient [0.663] and two statements relating to Slovenian parents (7) who do not want their children to associate with Romany children [0.759] and (2) who do not like Romany children being included in their child's class [-0.594]. From the correlation matrix we can establish a negative correlation, while the frequency analysis indicates a clear disagreement with statement 2. Therefore, this correlation lends itself to the interpretation that the less Slovenian parents approve of including a Romany child in their child's class, the less they allow their child to associate with the Romany child.

**FACTOR 3:** *responsibility for results*

Explained variance 9.54%. This factor is determined by (9) too high expectations by Romany parents [0.736] and (13) blaming the teacher for their child's failure [0.646]. There is a positive correlation between the factors, however, the frequency analysis clearly shows teachers' disagreement with the statement that Romany parents expect too much from their children which means that subsequently they do not blame the teacher for their child's failure.

---

<sup>7</sup> In brackets statement numbers from Table 2.

<sup>8</sup> In square brackets statement values from rotated component

**FACTOR 4:** *importance of language and culture in education of Romany children*

Explained variance 8.40%. This factor includes the two statements relating to the role of the language and culture (14) in school results [0.819] and (15) in teaching Romany children [0.513]. There is a positive correlation between the two. It is interesting to see the frequency analysis which shows that teachers are mostly undecided or even tend to disagree that Romany children have learning difficulties due to their not being taught in their native language, while they show the highest level of agreement that a teacher teaching the Romany children should have some knowledge of their language and culture.

**FACTOR 5:** *influence of teachers' knowledge of the language and culture on value education*

Explained variance 7.48%. This factor includes two positively correlated statements relating to (15) the importance of teacher's knowledge of the language and culture [0.597] and (5) to the influence of Romany children on education of other children [0.879].

**FACTOR 6:** *child's responsibility for inclusion and in/tolerance*

The final factor explains 6.75% of variance and deals with the negative correlation between Statement 1 [0.810] and Statement 16 [-0.547]. The frequency structure shows that class teachers hold bipolar views about Statement 1, nevertheless, the majority leans towards disagreement. A successful inclusion of Romany children does not depend on the children themselves, hence they are intolerant towards Slovenian children, and *vice versa*, it does depend on them and hence they are not intolerant towards Slovenian children.

**Conclusions**

We conclude that the level of teachers' recognition of their own responsibility for Romany children's school results is incredibly low. Even though we received very similar results to the same question about the factors affecting school results of 'ordinary' children, the level of teachers' responsibility for Romany children is at the lowest level (Lesar, Cuk Peček, 2005).

These results seem to indicate that teachers believe that factors relating to family life bear more weight in achieving school results than what is happening in the classroom – which, according to almost one fifth of the teachers surveyed, does not affect the Romany children's school results at all. If we add these conclusions to the results from Statement 14, in which almost a third of teachers do not think that the Slovenian language is the key issue in Romany children learning difficulties, we have to accept that teachers in Slovenia not only feel very little responsibility for the Romany children's school results, but also that their sensitivity to very obvious hindrances in the Romany children schooling is at a very low level indeed. Factor 1 also shows that the Romany child is very much left to his own devices.

With reference to the social inclusion of Romany children, it seems that it depends entirely on the children themselves and on other children's parents who, in teachers' opinion, generally do not like having a Romany child included in the class. The teacher's role in this social inclusion remains rather unclear, as a third of teachers agreed with the statement and another third disagreed. It is interesting to note Factor 5, where there is a positive correlation between the teachers' knowledge of the Romany language and culture

and the influence of the Romany child on education of all others in the sense of tolerance and solidarity. It seems that teachers connect the knowledge of the Romany language and culture more with the educative than instructional side of teaching.

In conclusion, our analysis shows that teachers do not feel much responsibility for Romany children and are also quite insensitive to their problems. When teachers hold such views, it is unlikely that the new proposals will be implemented in a constructive way: if we look only at introducing teaching assistants, a solution which has given good results in most European countries, it will probably lead to even higher feelings of non-responsibility for inclusion of Romany children in regular schools and to passing the buck to the assistant. For this reason, it is necessary to pay utmost attention to making teachers aware of their key role in implementing educative and instructional goals of education, as well as teaching them to be more sensitive to the real problems of Romany children and to be better mentally prepared for multicultural education.

### References

- Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji* (1995) Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport
- Lesar, I., Cuk, I., Peček, M. (2005) Mnenja osnovnošolskih učiteljev o njihovi odgovornosti za učni uspeh, in *Sodobna pedagogika*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp.90-107
- Marentič Požarnik, B. (2000) *Psihologija učenja in pouka*, Ljubljana: DZS
- Strategija vzgoje in izobraževanja Romov v Republiki Sloveniji* (2004) in [www.mszs.si/slo/solstvo/razvoj\\_solstva/projekti/enake\\_moznosti.asp](http://www.mszs.si/slo/solstvo/razvoj_solstva/projekti/enake_moznosti.asp)



