

# **Inclusive education for second language learners: the case of Roma children in Croatia**

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## **Introduction**

The cross-border flow of people and languages, a key feature of globalization, brings many challenges, including the need to support children who arrive in school with little or no knowledge of the language of instruction in the new country (Edwards, 2004; 2009). In many countries, teachers who have been responding to these challenges for several decades have been able to establish models of what is widely considered to be good practice. In other settings, language-in-education policy is at an earlier stage of development.

One such example concerns Roma children in Croatia where a recent court case, *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia* (Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, (2009), has highlighted important differences in both provision and the educational philosophy which underlines it. In this case, the Croatian government submitted that placements of children in Roma-only classes were based on examination by a team of experts of their command of Croatian and their level of personal development. In its view, tests had shown that a majority of Roma children in the respondent schools lacked adequate knowledge of the Croatian language. The Court considered that the initial placement of the applicants in separate classes was a positive measure based on their limited Croatian language skills, designed to help them acquire the knowledge necessary to be able to follow the curriculum. This action was therefore not deemed to constitute racial discrimination.

My aim in this paper is to offer a comparative context against which provision for Roma children in Croatia can be judged. Drawing on the relevant research literature and, where appropriate, legal decisions and recommendations of official committees of inquiry, I will examine the nature of provision for second language learners in a range of countries, showing how and why arrangements have changed over time. Particular attention will be paid to why segregated provision of the kind provided in the respondent schools has been found unsatisfactory in other contexts, prompting a move to alternative models of delivery. I will also examine developments in the theory and practice of second language teaching with implications for both pedagogy and curriculum, outlining the progress which has been made in strengthening the academic rigour of second language teaching in integrated classrooms. Finally, I will draw attention to the complexity of assessing young second language learners, the importance of including a first language dimension in initial assessment and the inappropriateness of using tasks designed for first language speakers.

## **Educational provision for second language learners**

Patterns of educational provision for language learners vary across time, both within and between countries. Nonetheless, it is possible to outline a number of broad trends

which follow a similar chronological sequence: sink or swim; segregated provision; mainstreaming; and bilingual education.

### *Sink or swim*

Initially, the educational response to the large population movements following World War II was one of *laissez faire*: the unquestioned assumption was that children would 'pick up' the new language in the playground. It was some time before the consequences of inaction were finally acknowledged: far too many children were sinking rather than swimming (Edwards, 2004).

Two US class action lawsuits during this period underline the difficulties of separating language and ethnicity in the education of minorities and are therefore of interest to the situation of the Roma in Croatia. When Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to exclude any person from participation in federal programs on the grounds of race, color or national origin, minority groups began to file lawsuits requiring schools to address the language needs of children in English-only classrooms. The landmark case of *Lau v. the San Francisco Unified School District* argued that Chinese students were disadvantaged because they could not understand the language of instruction. After a series of defeats in the lower courts, the Supreme Court finally sided with Lau in 1974 (Del Valle, 2003).

The second example concerns Black English Vernacular (BEV), the focus of a legal challenge in the 1979 case of *Martin Luther King Jr Elementary School v. Ann Arbor School District Board* (Labov, 1982). Two thirds of the plaintiff children had been classified as having special educational needs. The court accepted expert testimony that teacher insensitivity in treating BEV as a series of mistakes, rather than as a valid form of communication, was likely to pose a barrier to learning to read and use standard English. The principle established in the *Lau* case that each district 'take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs' was extended to BEV.

### *Segregated classes*

The sink or swim response has often been followed by attempts to teach children in segregated classes. Early records of classes specifically designed for second language learners can be traced to the Vancouver School Board, Canada, in 1907. Ashworth (2001: 97) argues that some districts used these classes as a means of:

[S]egregating Asian from Caucasian children; (2) relieving classroom teachers of the task of teaching non-English speakers of English; and (3) satisfying parents that immigrant children were not in a position to slow down the teaching/learning process in the classroom through their lack of facility in the language of instruction.

In many other countries, however, separate provision emerged only in response to mass migration following World War II. In England, funding to address the language learning needs of migrant children first became available in 1966 (Edwards, 1985). Teaching took place in special reception centres and 'withdrawal classes' in the same school where the sole emphasis was on learning English. In Australia, the Child Migrant Education Program was set up in 1971 to address similar needs. Students were

withdrawn from mainstream classes for specialist English teaching for one or two lessons each day (Davison, 2001).

Initially segregated provision was justified on the grounds of administrative convenience; its educational value was not questioned. Over time, however, there was growing unease about the effectiveness of this policy.

In the UK, the 'withdrawal' of second language learners was outlawed following two official inquiries in the mid-1980s. In the first, the Committee of Inquiry on the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (Swann, 1985), highlighted the need for the social integration of ethnic and linguistic minorities, an aim considered inconsistent with separate provision. In the second, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE, 1986) looked in depth at the provision for teaching English as a second language in the Calderdale Local Education Authority (LEA) and concluded that separate provision was racially discriminatory in terms of outcome. It judged that English language learners were being provided with a more restricted curriculum than other children; and that their language development and learning were hindered by the fact that they were not able to learn alongside native speakers of English. Empowered by Sections 56 and 99 of the 1944 Education Act and Section 58 of the Race Relations Act of 1976, the Commission gave notice that the Secretary of State for Education should require the LEA in question to change its practice. A circular was issued requiring *all* LEAs to provide information on current provision so that steps could be taken to ensure that unsatisfactory arrangements were changed.

### *Mainstreaming*

For the reasons indicated above, the move from separate to integrated provision started in the mid-1980s in the USA, Canada, Australia and all current member states of the European Union and the European Economic Area. In some cases, pupils are directly integrated into classes where they receive special language support; in other cases, they are kept separate for a limited period and receive tuition adapted to their needs. In most of the countries in question, both kinds of provision exist alongside each other (EACEA, 2008).

The motivation for mainstreaming is two fold: philosophical and pedagogical. The pedagogical dimension will be discussed in below. The philosophical rationale concerns the benefits that accrue to both minority and majority populations, and is reflected in a wide variety of policy statements (see, for instance, Swann, 1985, *passim*; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975, p. 125; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1981, p4).

A number of recommendations relate specifically to Roma children. A 2005 resolution of the European Parliament calls on member states "... in which Roma children are segregated into schools for the mentally disabled or placed in separate class rooms from their peers to move forward with desegregation programmes within a predetermined period of time, thus ensuring free access to quality education for Roma children and preventing the rise of anti-Romani sentiment amongst schoolchildren." Similarly, Primary Education goal 5 of the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015<sup>1</sup>, calls for the inclusion of Roma children in desegregated classes. This initiative, to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.vlada.hr/nacionalniprogramromi/english/Clanak\\_NPR/Odgoj-i-obrazovanje.html](http://www.vlada.hr/nacionalniprogramromi/english/Clanak_NPR/Odgoj-i-obrazovanje.html)

which Croatia is a signatory, is supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the United Nations Development Education Programme.

### *Bilingual education*

The mainstreaming of second language learners is, however, by no means without its critics. This course of action is likely, for instance, to result in *subtractive* bilingualism, whereby the learning of the second language replaces the first language in children's repertoire. Many writers argue instead for the individual and societal benefits of *additive* bilingualism offered by bilingual education (Baker, 2006). They also point to the evidence that the longer children receive instruction in their first languages, the better the educational outcome.

Of particular note in this respect are two large-scale longitudinal studies of children in US schools. The first of these studies examined the progress of 2000 children over four years in three kinds of program – English only; early-exit bilingual programmes, where the home language is used for transitional support in the first two years of school; and late-exit, where instruction in the home language continues alongside English throughout elementary school. Late exit programs were the most beneficial (Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, E., 1991). The second study, based on the records of 700,000 language minority students over a period of seven years, also found that late-exit programs delivered the best results (Thomas & Collier 2002).

In Europe, bilingual programmes have burgeoned in a wide range of regional and lesser-used languages, such as Welsh, Basque and Catalan. In Latvia, large numbers of children are enrolled in Russian-Latvian programmes, and small numbers in Polish-, Ukrainian- and Belorussian-Latvian programmes (Austers, Golubeva et al., 2006). In the Austrian province of Carinthia, more than 40 per cent of children are currently enrolled in Slovenian-German programmes, including an increasing number of children from majority-language speaking backgrounds. A similar model operates in the Austrian province of Burgenland for Hungarian-German and Croatian-German. Evaluations of bilingual education world-wide show that children educated through the medium of two languages consistently perform at least on a par with children educated only through the majority language, while they outperform their peers in the minority language (Baker, 2006; Edwards, 2009).

Several models of bilingual education are available in Croatia, too (Council of Europe, 2005). Roma children are not, however, included in this provision. When Croatia signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 1997, non-territorial languages, including Romany, were excluded from protection and promotion under the Charter. In subsequent evaluations of compliance, the Committee of Experts has expressed disappointment about this continuing exclusion. They also draw attention in their recommendations to the ongoing importance of promoting 'awareness and tolerance vis-à-vis the regional or minority languages and the culture they represent as an integral part of the cultural heritage of Croatia, both in the general curriculum at all stages of education and in the media'.

### **The pedagogy of integrated provision**

The approaches to learning and teaching in mainstream classrooms today are very different from those used in the days of 'sink or swim'. The move from separate provision acted as a stimulus for the development of theory with important implications for both pedagogy and curriculum.

Many of the early attempts to offer specialist programmes for second language learners were based on a behaviourist model of learning: children were required to master the correct form of words and the ways in which they are put together (Edwards, 2009). Emphasis was placed on formal grammar and repetitive, rote drills with no attempt to relate the content of the teaching to the demands of the curriculum. In this approach, then, the content of learning is the language system itself.

As dissatisfaction with separate provision grew, the focus shifted from decontextualised language learning to the learning of language through content (Mohan, 1986). In order to maximize learning, attention was paid to *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1985; Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004), a notion that encompasses the strategies which support learning. Examples might include presenting students with background information that allows them to key in to what is being taught; and the use of graphic organizers such as charts and tables. Enquiry-based activities involving discussion and the flexible use of small group work are also commonly used. This approach is justified on the grounds that, in order to learn a language, we need to participate in its meaningful use.

Another development with implications for second language learners in mainstream classrooms is the distinction between *conversational* and *academic* fluency (Cummins, 2001). Conversational proficiency develops rapidly over a period of one to two years through face-to-face interaction where there is plenty of contextual support for understanding in the form, for instance, of non-verbal cues. Academic language proficiency, in contrast, is associated with academically demanding subject matter where, typically, there is a great deal less contextual support and acquisition is a much longer process – estimates vary from five to nine years. In classroom activities such as synthesis, analysis and evaluation, which demand higher-order thinking skills, the absence of contextual support is likely to place students operating in a second language at a disadvantage. In the past, children tended to receive additional help only until they developed conversational fluency. Increasing emphasis, however, is now being placed on the need to support the development of academic language proficiency over an extended period.

For much of the history of second language teaching, little attention was paid to the maintenance or development of the students' first languages in the transition to mainstream schooling. Traditionally, second language teaching emphasized the exclusive use of instruction in the target language for transitional support and the avoidance of translation between first and second languages.

More recent theories, in contrast, talk in terms of language *users* rather than language *learners* and focus on extending first language skills as part of a single, holistic and more complex system of communication and meaning making (Cook, 2007). In this view, children should be judged by their success as second language users, not by their failure compared with native speakers. Strategies informed by this approach include encouraging students to write stories in their first language which they then talk about with other students in the second language; pairing students from the same language background so that more fluent students can help less fluent peers; encouraging the use of bilingual dictionaries; and providing students with books in both their first and second languages (Edwards, 1998; Cummins et al., 2005).

Mainstream provision emphasizes the linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills necessary for educational success. The aim is to systematically extend students' grasp of academic language across the curriculum. Importance is attached to a fundamental principle of cognitive psychology, namely building new learning on a foundation of previous learning (Brandford, Brown & Cocking (2000). In linguistically diverse classrooms, this is achieved by drawing on the experiences which children bring with them to school, a process which both validates the identities of minority students and challenges narrowly ethnocentric curricula (Creese, 2005). In this approach, the whole school community, including parents, takes responsibility for developing responsive pedagogies and curricula (Cummins, 2001; Department for Children, Schools and Families, undated a). There has thus been an important move away from the pathological model where responsibility for educational underachievement or non-participation is placed solely on children and their parents.

The situation in the Austrian province of Bergenland offers an interesting example of these principles applied to Roma children. Until the mid-1990s, Roma children were frequently designated as having special education needs. The legal recognition of the Roma as an autochthonous minority in 1994, however, fostered self-confidence and acted as a catalyst for civil society initiatives in field of education in which steps were taken to valorise the Romany language and to support children in their learning. The educational outcomes are significantly improved with larger numbers of Roma children proceeding to secondary and higher education than was previously the case (Sarközi, 2004).

There is abundant evidence of success in promoting language expertise, intercultural understanding and educational achievement in mainstream education in a wide range of other settings, including France, Ireland, the UK, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden (Kenner & Hickey, 2008).

## **Assessment**

The assessment of individual children is critical, both on entry to school in order to establish a baseline for future teaching and on an ongoing basis in order to monitor progress. For assessment to be meaningful, however, it needs to be appropriate for the population in question. This requirement was recognized by the Court in the cases of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* (Open Society, 2008) and *Sampanis et Autres c. Grèce* (VLex, 2009), where heavy emphasis was placed on the need for member states to devise appropriate evaluations systems to assess the aptitudes of Roma pupils.

In Croatia, Roma children's progress is assessed through the medium of Croatian. In many other countries, however, the use of assessment tools designed for first language speakers is considered inappropriate. This is the case not only on entry to school but over a prolonged period of time. Research evidence suggests that it takes four to five years of mainstream school experience before second language proficiency ceases to have a depressing effect on scores in reading and other school subjects (Katz, Low, Stack & Tsang (2004).

In the UK, initial assessment is usually undertaken by a specialist teacher of English as an additional language. If the teacher in question is unfamiliar with the language of the child, the school is encouraged to provide an interpreter who can talk to both the child and the parent. The emphasis is not simply on what children can – rather than on what they cannot – do. It is further recommended that assessment of the second language

should take place only when children have begun to communicate confidently in English. Official guidance stresses the importance of carrying out assessments in 'a situation that is familiar to the learner' and ensuring that the children experience no 'distress or discomfort' (Department of Children, Schools and Families, undated b).

Nationally or regionally developed scales or stages of language learning have been developed and incorporated into the curricula of Australia, Canada, the US and Ireland in order to counteract the weaknesses associated with assessment tools designed for first language speakers (Leung & Levkovicz, 2008). Examples include the *ESL Scope and Scales*, produced by the South Australian curriculum authorities (Department of Education and Children's Services, undated), which link the content of the mainstream school curriculum and ESL descriptors. In the US, the professional association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages has produced the K-12 ESL standards to provide teachers with broad requirements for second language development at different stages of schooling (TESOL, 2007).

Other developments in the assessment of second language learners include modifications of the assessment tasks (e.g. introducing assessment in the first language, modifying vocabulary, and the use of visual support) and changes to the assessment procedure (e.g. allowing extra time, giving instructions in the first language and allowing the use of bilingual dictionaries)(Butler & Strevens, 2001; Mackey, 2005).

More generally, there has been a move from summative assessment (the assessment *of* learning) to formative assessment (the assessment *for* learning). The first approach is intended "to certify learning and report to parents and students about students' progress in school, usually by signaling students' relative position compared to other students" (Earl, 2003). In assessment *for* learning, in contrast, teachers observe student responses to questions and tasks and give feedback to the students in order to promote the desired learning.

## **Conclusion**

Language, per se, cannot, of course, be seen as the sole factor in the educational achievement of minorities. The international data point very clearly, for instance, to the strong association between educational failure, on the one hand, and long-term coercive power relations between majority and minority populations, on the other (Cummins, 2001). However, given that the focus in *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia* is on the linguistic needs of the Roma plaintiffs, this paper has foregrounded issues of language.

The large numbers of children who arrive speaking a language other than the language of instruction has been a feature of schools in many countries for several decades. As schools have grown in experience, developments have taken place in three main areas: patterns of educational provision; pedagogical theory and practice; and assessment.

Patterns of provision for second language learners have evolved considerably over time. Initially, children were expected to 'sink or swim' in mainstream classes where no additional support was provided. Later, language learners were placed in separate classes, where they were taught for periods of between one and two years before being returned to the mainstream. Since the mid-1980s, however, such provision has been deemed unsatisfactory in all the countries of the European Union and throughout the English-speaking world. In segregated classes, the only native speaker model is the teacher and access to the full curriculum is limited. The mainstreaming of language learners is also promoted on philosophical grounds in terms of the benefits that accrue

to *all* when education is socially inclusive. The evidence suggests that the best academic results are achieved through bilingual education where instruction in the first language is continued for as long as possible. There is also ample evidence that this is best achieved in mainstream as opposed to segregated provision.

In earlier times, policy was driven by administrative convenience. More recently, developments in theory have determined classroom practice. Interaction with native speakers is now considered essential both for the acquisition of a second language and learners' sense of belonging. This requires that language learners be integrated into mainstream classrooms at the earliest possible opportunity. If language learners are to catch up academically with their native-speaker peers, their mastery of academic content must continue while the second language is being learned. This, in turn, requires that the teaching of the language be integrated with the teaching of the academic content.

Pedagogical interventions are useful but risk losing value or may even be counterproductive when there is a wider environment of discrimination. Successful programs build on the experiences that children bring with them to school rather than trying to replace them. The academic growth of second language learners is increased when parents see themselves and are seen by school staff as co-educators of their children. This requires that schools actively seek to establish collaborative relationships with parents.

International experience of the assessment of minority language speakers has demonstrated the fundamental importance of addressing linguistic and cultural issues. Both initially and on an ongoing basis, assessment needs to be undertaken by properly trained teachers with due reference to children's development in their first language(s); it is inappropriate to use assessment measures developed for first language learners with second language learners. In the case of second language learners, it is particularly important to address not only summative assessment *of* learning, but also formative assessment *for* learning.

In sum, although mainstreaming represents a significant first step in improving the situation of Roma and other minority children, international experience shows that the placement of language learners in the mainstream classroom is not enough in itself to ensure equality of educational opportunity and outcome. Close attention also needs to be paid to developing both pedagogy and the curriculum in ways responsive to the needs of second language learners.

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