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**THE BILINGUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM - AN AID IN MAINTAINING AND DEVELOPING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS\***

The ethnically mixed area in the communes of Lendava and Murska Sobota, along the border between Hungary and Yugoslavia, is about 20 kilometres long and about 8 kilometres wide. But for a small discontinuity near Kobilje, it covers the whole easternmost part of the region of Prekmurje with its compact settlements.

The bilingual education system was launched in the ethnically mixed area of Prekmurje in the school year 1959/60. In the year before the introduction of this new educational system, which took place only gradually, the commune of Lendava had (in the school year 1958/59) no fewer than 1,206 pupils of the Hungarian nationality - out of a total of 3,067 pupils - which means that 40% of all the schoolchildren were Hungarian. Before the introduction of the bilingual education system, the Hungarian children had attended either the Hungarian departments (825 pupils or 69%) or, for the sake of gaining better possibilities for subsequent schooling, they went to school in the Slovene departments (381 pupils or 31% of all the Hungarian schoolchildren). This situation appeared to be most critical in the two schools of Lendava at that time, where over 50% of the schoolchildren of the Hungarian nationality attended the Slovene departments of the elementary schools. These children nearly all came from the villages in the environs of Lendava; only two children of the Hungarian nationality from the town Lendava itself attended the school departments before the introduction of the bilingual education system, while all the others were enrolled in the Slovene departments. The Hungarian parents enrolled their children in the Slovene departments because they were better organized than the Hungarian ones, the quality of work was better, and they offered better possibilities for further schooling as well.

Before the introduction of the bilingual education system, the Hungarian departments were attended mainly by peasant children who, after they had finished their elementary education, stayed at home and would not continue their schooling. In the ethnically mixed area of Prekmurje there existed Slovene and Hungarian schools before the introduction of the bilingual education system. This caused extreme anomalies in certain places, in that all eight grades merged into one single class, with only one teacher (Mostje), or five or six grades together forming one single class (Genterovci, Radmožanci, etc.) because there were so few pupils. Both the Slovene and the Hungarian schools reached a critical point in the school year 1958/59. In some schools there

\* Original: Slovene

were far too few children and even those were divided in the Slovene and Hungarian departments, which caused an extremely high degree of combination of divisions.

Such working conditions inevitably led to poor educational results and a very strong assimilation of the Hungarian children occurred, as the Hungarian departments were badly organized and understaffed. This very state of affairs called for certain measures aiming to change the situation in the Slovene and Hungarian departments. A new way of organizing the school system legally, pedagogically and organizationally was required in order to establish a form of organization of the elementary school system which would offer better quality and whose organizational basis would be more varied. This form was searched for in the direction of a bilingual schooling system. After having held wide-ranging general and professional discussions, and above all thanks to a thorough professional analysis, the bilingual education system was gradually introduced in the ethnically mixed area of Prekmurje. This process was started in the school year 1959/60.

After two years of preliminary forms of introduction of the subjects of Biology or Geography, which were taught in grades 4-8 in the Hungarian departments in the Slovene language, while on the other hand, these subjects were taught in Hungarian in the Slovene departments, a start was made in the school year 1959/60 in all first grades of the six elementary schools in this area, with preparations for and gradual introduction of the first experimental bilingual divisions.

Parallel with the beginning of the realization of this bilingual education programme, preparations were made for the provision of bilingual teaching material - only stencilled at first - which would form the basis of later bilingual schoolbooks. Together with the transition to bilingual work in elementary schools, which was started in the school year 1959/60 also the education-cum-childcare institutions (nursery schools) started on the programme of bilingual work in the school year 1961/62. Today, children follow a two-year preparatory course before entering the bilingual elementary school.

The schoolchildren themselves - irrespective of their nationality - immediately accepted the conception of bilingual work in the classroom, this model was met with different reactions by a number of members of the community and with the parents. The fact of national diversity had already been present earlier, and nobody had had any experience whatsoever with this new bilingual education. People were afraid that the new system would entail a lower quality of education and they expected difficulties with subsequent schooling possibilities as well. All these doubts and hesitations, however, called the attention of the initiators to possible dangers of the new system and made them aware of the fact that only bilingual teaching of really high quality, i.e. with a vast knowledge and successful education results would offer an effective argument against any doubts about the true values of the conception of bilingual education. The greatest difficulties we encountered during the gradual introduction of the idea of bilingual education were caused by the teachers: there were too few teaching staff available and most of the

teachers did not master both languages which, of course, was a prerequisite for the realization of quality work in bilingual teaching. Thus intensive language courses had to be designed, as well as teaching preparations in both languages and this had to run parallel with the introduction of the new teaching system. Nowadays teaching staff is qualified for their task in bilingual schools during their regular study in both languages simultaneously. Thus the bilingual education system has become a test in solving problems in the field of the existence and development of the national consciousness of the people in this area.

We are aware that in the conception of bilingual education there lies some kind of an extra burden on the nation and the national consciousness: the schoolchildren involved should reach additional pedagogical-educational goals, as they have to learn a second language besides their own and have to become acquainted with a second culture which is unlike their own. Nevertheless, the conception of bilingual education as posed here has grown out of a complex of already existing needs, conditions and interests; by reaching good pedagogical-educational results thanks to such a conception we are forming an atmosphere of mutual understanding, tolerance, coexistence, interdependence of and interrelation between the nation and nationalities. This conception enables developments in the national, linguistic and cultural fields in terms of equality.

It is precisely for this reason that in developing the bilingual education system, we should take into consideration its many different aspects. With this conception of work, success is scored regularly in reaching coexistence through the life and work in these schools, while the two-language system enables all the children of different nations equally to achieve the necessary forms of expression in speaking as well as in writing.

It should be emphasized here that there is a high degree of sensitivity present in the solving of such an educational concept since it is precisely in school problems that different nations are most directly confronted with their own basic interests, such as culture, language, coexistence. We are very much aware that national feeling cannot be preserved only by speaking one's own language within one's immediate environment. We want therefore to help to develop national consciousness and we are of the opinion that within the majority nation the culture of the minority in a certain area should be allowed its place with equal rights and values. This goes also for the use of the language of that minority, while also its social norms and the idea of peaceful coexistence should be respected.

The conception of such an educational system as outlined here was difficult to develop in the beginning. We had no examples whatsoever and only with the experience we gained in this way could we smooth out the rough path. An unavoidable precondition was a very high quality of work, which had to confirm the rightness of the goal we had set out to achieve.

For the completion of this model of bilingual education we took into consideration that such an educational system must be based on an optimal coordination of realistic pedagogical and social

requirements and a number of needs, interests and possibilities of the individual pupils, be they Slovene or Hungarian. Hence it was necessary to define the relation between the socio-legal norms that are based on the demand that the children should acquire knowledge of both cultures and both languages, and the need of those children - also in the bilingual elementary school - to gain so much general knowledge as to have fair possibilities of continuing their schooling as successfully as possible.

Taking into account social needs and pedagogical laws, we decided to bring into our model of the bilingual elementary school as much internal democracy and individualization of work as possible. Therefore, the set aims and ways of bilingual education belong to the principles that, in our opinion, can solve the problem of co-existence of different nationalities in the best possible way; consequently, a school-system like this one carries into effect the equality of rights and thereby develops the national feeling as well, as it consequently eliminates from everyday life the problem of the contrariness between the nation and nationality.

Through such a conception of bilingual education, schoolchildren are educated from their early youth in an atmosphere of co-existence with other children of their own age but of different background. This leads to joint efforts and achievements in the spirit of national broad-mindedness in the attitude towards the other nationalities. Such principles can be of great help in solving the problem of intolerance of one nation towards the other, and in securing such relations as are based to a large extent on the moral qualities of young people and on the wide-ranging relations among people (pupils) who become co-creators of the same goals and ideals.

Conceived in this way, the additional aims of our bilingual education system are based on and are hence in accordance with the Declaration on Human Rights and thereby secure the maintenance and development of one's own nation. Only because the whole society has fully accepted this conception of bilingual schools and supports it with its constitution and laws, have we been able to develop it, and to help solve the nationality question in a concrete environment. This in turn has created a genuine atmosphere and provided all the preconditions for the realization of such a concept of school. It is worth mentioning here that this school system is more costly than the regular one and that our social community has successfully dealt also with this issue.

It is important that the possibility of co-operating in the realization of an educational project of this kind should be given to all the members of the community and to the parents in particular, and that they should be enabled as well to carefully monitor its efficiency. A new inspiration, which enriches and ennobles also the community members and parents, should originate from these bilingual schools and permeate the entire environment. The community members themselves, on the other hand, must have an opportunity to clearly see that this is quality work crowned with success.

For the success and implementation of this conception of bilingual education system it is very important that it be also completely accepted by the schoolchildren themselves. Education designed in this way offers them a great deal of flexibility and attractiveness of educational work. It is essential that all work and the attitude towards the child during the educational work be very secure and consistent, to provide the pupil with true linguistic and overall equality of rights. In this education system we lay a special emphasis on the educative elements which help to form new co-existence through which the child becomes motivated and successful in his schoolwork.

Such a model must be endorsed also by the teachers. They are the very persons who, through their pedagogical, methodological, psychological, and educative work, carry the responsibility for the outcome of the pedagogical-educative work that must be flexible and interesting to the pupils.

Apart from the acceptance of our education system by the society at large and by members of the community, parents and schoolchildren, along with the ardour with which the teachers realized their task, we shall have to create favourable possibilities for providing qualified teaching staff and to solve the unavoidable pedagogical, didactic, organizational and material problems, if we are to attain truly quality work. In developing our cadre of teaching staff we feel that it is very important that the pedagogical-educational work be performed by teachers of both nationalities. Teaching in a bilingual school demands free communication in both languages and a high degree of commitment. This is why we train our prospective staff quite severely: we want our trainee teachers to meet the requirements of high quality in their future work in both languages. We therefore set up programmes of regular permanent linguistic training of teachers in both languages.

In order to reach the quality aimed at, we must take account of the fact that material conditions are of great importance for high-quality modern pedagogical work. We are receiving more financial support for our bilingual education, because our pedagogical work is more difficult to perform than that in customary schools; we need additional educational material, equipment and technology (for the nationality-programme), libraries, etc. The relaxed system we apply within our classrooms also calls for a high degree of organization. It gives each of the children the possibility and the right to get up, go to his classmate and talk with him about his work or exercises. There is a consequent use of notices and captions always in both languages: all the items of educational equipment are labelled in two languages and thus the child is continually moving in an environment where his mother tongue is present while he is at the same time confronted with the language of the other ethnic group.

The pedagogic and didactic considerations that together with the other factors help to realize the set aims of bilingual teaching, surely occupy a central place in the framing of this conception.

We have therefore created additional pedagogical objectives, inserted elements of the culture and language of the nationality, and implanted in the minds of pupils the principle of education

for co-existence. Only these elements have given real value to our bilingual education project. The school programmes have been designed in such a way that learning one's native language is compulsory while the possibility of acquiring an active knowledge of the other language is also continuously present.

When introducing culture as an essential element and objective into the educational programme, we feel it important that all the children get acquainted with the culture of the ethnic majority as well as with that of the minority group and of their parent nation. In fact, three cultures are involved. Knowledge about Hungary itself and its history forms part of regular instruction.

Language itself also occupies an important place in our bilingual school system. Each language is included in the syllabus on par with the other, with the same number of lessons and with the same level of planned proficiency. In fact both languages - Slovene and Hungarian - are subjects on a par with each other, both appearing as languages-in-use during the classes in other subjects and being completely equal means of communication.

The affiliation of pupils with each ethnic group and their number are not essential elements of our bilingual schoolwork, because the teaching programme requires the child to become literate in the language he usually speaks at home. Thus the sheer number does not influence the bilingual teaching. During the classes in all the other subjects the teaching is conducted bilingually in the first grade insofar as the work is oral, while in writing the child expresses himself in his native language. In the second grade this is reversed and the writing is done in the language that the child is not used to speaking at home. From the third grade onwards the teaching is completely bilingual, both orally as well as in writing. However, we continue teaching the structure of both languages.

In grades 5-8, the so-called "subject level" of the elementary school (where the various subjects are no longer taught by one class-teacher, as in grades 1-4, but by several subject teachers), there exists complete bilingualism in all the subjects except for each of the languages. At this level bilingual schoolbooks and workbooks as well as practical workbooks are in use. Only language-workbooks (exercise books) are separate, while the textbooks themselves are bilingual.

The subject level (grades 5-8) consequently proceeds with the instruction and enrichment of the knowledge of the structure of both languages using separate exercise books and readers. During the lessons in the other subjects, the direct teaching is done in Slovene, followed by reinforcement, a deepening of the subject-matter, summaries in Hungarian and the writing down of the relevant Hungarian terminology. On the other hand, the Hungarian national subjects are taught in Hungarian first, while reinforcement, summary and terminology follow in Slovene. It is very important that the pupils be able to use their terminology successfully both in speaking and in writing. The textbooks of the Hungarian national programme are written in Hungarian, while all the other textbooks for the subject level are in Slovene with additional Hungarian textbooks in which the subject matter is

given in a condensed form (essential data only) in the Hungarian language.

Much attention is paid to the exercises in special workbooks. We see to it that each pupil solves certain exercises in his mother tongue, and some in the other language, be it orally or in writing. All figures, tables, pictures, charts and other teaching material offered to these pupils are given with the terminology in both languages.

The Hungarian national programme mentioned above is implemented first in the Hungarian language as a subject and as the language of instruction for the other subjects; later, Hungarian is also used in subjects like Introduction to Nature and Society, History and Geography of the Hungarian People's Republic, Social-Moral Education, Music and Plastic Arts, Literature and Physical Education with Rhythmics, etc.

The Hungarian national programme embraces 50% of the teaching matter in grades 1-4 (the so-called "class level," where all the subjects are taught by one any the same class-teacher), while on the so-called "subject level" (grades 5-8) this figure is 35%; where other school activities are concerned, it is again 50%. In this way, the Hungarian national programme is present in the overall work of our bilingual schools with a percentage of 44%.

Besides the regular education we pay great attention to music and folklore activities as well. Competitions in reading, common in other Slovene schools, regularly engage our children irrespective of their nationality; they play an important role in our striving for a better and deeper knowledge of both languages.

The pupils who have finished our bilingual schools have the possibility of further training in all appropriate institutions throughout Slovenia as well as in the People's Republic of Hungary, especially in (junior) colleges and universities.

On the secondary-school level they can attend two bilingual programmes in Lendava; the possibility of a further study of the Hungarian language also exists in all other secondary schools in Prekmurje. In the field of pedagogical studies, Hungarian is taught at the Teacher-Training College in Maribor.

In everyday practice this education is closely tied also to the educational systems of both Slovenia and Hungary, which adds quality to our bilingual work. Everyday praxis gives proof of the necessity of a specially developed tolerance on the part of the ethnic majority as well as of the minority, if we are to reach progress with our bilingual education system. We must, however, consider the fact that solving all the problems may well be impossible, at least in the foreseeable future.

The development in the last 25 years of the bilingual education system encourages and stimulates, showing visible results that are confirmed also by the attained results in the subsequent schooling of our pupils and in their everyday life. The conception of bilingual education has clearly helped to develop national consciousness and to mutually enrich both nationalities.