INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE AND PRINCIPLES OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: THE CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIA

Međuetničko nasilje i principi međukulturnog obrazovanja u školama: studija slučaja Slovenije

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the main findings of a study on interethnic violence carried out in the school environment in Slovenia. It examines the occurrence and perception of different forms of violence and the role of educators and the commitment of schools to promote nonviolence and the wellbeing of pupils, which is reached mainly by applying principles of intercultural education. The quantitative and qualitative findings take three perspectives into account: (1) pupils' opinions and experiences, (2) perceptions of educators and (3) perspectives of experts in the area of (interethnic) peer violence. Special emphasis is placed on the informants' perceptions of the school environment, their experiences of interethnic violence and interventions in cases of violence in schools aimed at its prevention. The paper argues that despite the general acceptance of principles of intercultural education in Slovenian schools and the recurrent self-initiatives of individual educators, a coordinated and integrated approach is needed both for dealing with (interethnic) violence and for promulgating values of intercultural coexistence in schools.

KEY WORDS: interethnic violence; intercultural coexistence; intercultural education; educators; school environment

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Introduction

Over the course of the last few decades, Europe has been facing significant political and demographic changes in which the rise of internal and external migration flows has resulted in increased ethnic and cultural diversity. In this context, the issues of intercultural coexistence and intercultural education have become important issues in the last years. There were a number of different initiatives to address the issue of cultural diversity, many of them at the level of intercultural education, such as for example, European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (Council of Europe, 2008) and EC directives such as the White Paper on Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (European Commission, 1996), the General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education (ECRI, 2006). Despite many intercultural initiatives, nowadays Europe is still dealing with intolerance, hostility, prejudices, discrimination and xenophobia towards immigrants, members of certain minorities and religious groups (e.g. Muslims) and currently refugees. (see e.g. Crozier and Davies, 2008; Suleiman, 2009; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2012; Allen, 2010; Strabac, Listhaug, and Jakobsen, 2011; Eurobarometer, 2012). To some extent, this reality is reflected in the attitudes of pupils and students and in their expressions of racism in more subtle or overt forms. According to Vryonides (2014) who reviewed research on racism in schools, teachers are often not aware of its existence, because it is usually thought that racism is obvious, manifested in the form of overt violence, while it can be much more covert and subtle.

In this context, recognition of various forms of racism and interethnic violence in schools as well as the schools commitment to intercultural education that truly contributes to changes in the society is of particular importance. As an
institutions, school can play an important role in recognizing violence as well as fostering values of tolerance, respect and solidarity and creating an environment for children in which they can express themselves and feel accepted. Above all, school should transmit effective intercultural communication and peaceful conflict resolution skills. Moreover, it should question the existing world order, hierarchies of power and inequalities.

Despite the fact that implementing intercultural education can also be problematic as it often actually reproduces inequalities, hierarchies of power and racism (see Stam and Shohat, 1995; Kumashiro, [2004] 2009; Gorski, 2008; Jaramillo and McLaren, 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Vryonides, 2014), we understand it in terms of its ability to foster intercultural understanding as well as to prevent intercultural or interethnic violence. We thus see it not merely as a subject or curriculum, but as a principle that questions the existing hierarchical order and power relationships in a way that also provides a space to the culturally marginalised (Gorski, 2008; SkubicErmenc, 2006; Vrečer, 2012). But how does it really work in practice? In our paper, we will address the issue of intercultural education through the case study of interethnic violence in Slovenian schools. While intercultural education in the European context has been widely thematised over the last few decades (Clay and George, 2000; Portera, 2008; Heckmann, 2008; Faas, Hajisoteriou, and Angelides, 2014) also having positive effect on children’s interethnic attitudes (Verkuyten and Thijs, 2013), the issue of violence in ethnically diverse schools has only recently been gaining in importance. Researchers investigated victimisation and bullying in ethnically heterogeneous classrooms (Verkuyten and Thijs, 2002, Strohmeier et al., 2008, Vervoort et al., 2010, Tolsma et al., 2013) as well as risk and protective factors on the individual and the class level related to bullying and victimization in ethnically diverse schools (Stefanek et al., 2012).

In Slovenia, violence in the school environment, especially violence prevention initiatives, has caught the attention of scholars and policy makers only in the last two decades. The specific issue of interethnic peer violence in schools is still largely an under-researched phenomenon however there have been some researches on peer violence in school in general (for example Dekleva, 1996; Pušnik, 2004, 2006; Krek et al., 2007, Mugnaioni Lešnik et al., 2008, Pavlovič et al., 2008; Razpotnik and Dekleva, 2015), but none took in consideration ethnicity. On the other hand, there has been some research that focused mostly on youth violence and ethnicity in general. For example, the research Odklonskost, Nasilje in Kriminaliteteta/Deviance Violence and Crime (Dekleva et al.) implemented in 2000 and 2001 analysed the connection between nationality and peer violence – either at the side of victims or on the side of perpetrator. They found out that ethnicity itself is not an important factor of peer violence for neither victims nor perpetrators, but highlighted other factors, such as attitudes towards violence, lack of skills for non-violent conflict solving, the attitude towards masculinity and relationship between gender in relation with ethnicity.

This paper discusses the main findings of the Slovenian case study on interethnic violence in the school environment with special emphasis on pupils’
and students’ perceptions of violence, the role of educators and the commitment of schools to promote nonviolence and the wellbeing of pupils and students of different ethnic backgrounds. It discusses different forms of violence since it is thought to be important to address not just the visible forms of violence but also – as studies show the importance of tackling – its covert forms and related underlying tensions (Henze, Katz, and Norte, 2000, Vryonides 2014). Therefore the aims of the paper are to: (1) identify the perception and existence of various forms of interethnic violence in Slovenian schools; (2) to examine the role of educators and schools in preventing and dealing with interethnic violence using principles of intercultural education. The main research questions of our exploratory study were: Is there a difference in perceptions and experience of interethnic violence between Slovenian children and those of mixed or other ethnicities? Does the school recognise and prevent (interethnic) violence? The paper builds on the results gathered through the research project Children’s Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children’s Rights in the School Environment (2011–2012), funded by the European Commission.\(^4\) First, perceptions and experience of interethnic violence among children will be presented, followed by children’s views on interculturality and finally, we will present school context, reaction to interethnic violence and prevention strategies.

**Contextual background**

Slovenia is a small country in the northwest part of Balkans. It was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until gaining independence in 1991. It is not a traditionally significant immigrant country; however, it has witnessed two major immigrant flows: between 1960s and 1980s, at a time of economic prosperity, when immigrants from other parts of Yugoslavia migrated to Slovenia; and in the 1990s, when it accepted refugees from the Yugoslav Wars (mostly from Bosnia). Nevertheless, Slovenia is usually perceived as a country whose population is ethnically relatively homogeneous. According to the last census in which data on ethnicity/nationality was gathered (2002), out of 1,964,036 inhabitants, 83.06% declared themselves to be of Slovenian ethnic origin.

Those belonging to non-Slovenian ethnicities can be roughly divided into two groups: (1) historical national minorities – those defined by the Slovenian constitution as autochthonous – who enjoy special rights (the Italian, the Hungarian and partly the Roma community); and (2) the informal or ‘new’ national communities, comprised of the members of the nations of the former Yugoslavia, who, even though they present much larger communities than historical national minorities or some have been living on the Slovenian territory for centuries, e.g. Croatians and Serbs (Kržišnik-Bukić 2010; Rončević 2009), do not have official minority status and, consequently, do not have any special or additional political, economic or cultural rights (Croatians, Bosniacs, Serbs,

\(^4\) The project was implemented in Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Cyprus and United Kingdom (http://childrenvoices.eu/).
Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians). In part, this is a result of the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” present in the multicultural and multi-religious former Yugoslavia in which ethnicity issues were “under-communicated” (Eriksen, 1993, see also Sedmak, Medarić, and Zadel, 2013). This differentiation between communities is reflected also in the Slovenian education system. While some aspects of intercultural education had been implemented in ethnically mixed areas of Slovenian Istria and Prekmurje over fifty years ago in the form of bilingual education, in relation to the Italian autochthonous minority (Slovenian Istria) and Hungarian autochthonous minority (Prekmurje), there are no similar standards for Roma children and children members of the Former Yugoslavian Republics (Rončević, 2009; Kroflič, 2012). Also in Slovenian public opinion migrants from former Yugoslavian countries are among least accepted ethnic groups (Zavratnik Zimic et al., 2008) and together with Roma they are the most common ‘targets’ of stereotypes, hate speech and discrimination (Kroflič, 2012). Slovenians, once part of the most economically developed Yugoslavian republic refer to migrants from other former Yugoslavian countries as (dirty) “Southerners” and use several other ethnic slurs for them, such as “Čefur”, “Čapac”, “Balkanec/Balcan”.

Similarly, Roma are, according to previous research, the least respected ethnic group in Slovenia (Toš 2009). They are also exposed to intolerance and stereotyping in other European countries (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2012; Kirbiš, Flere, and Tavčar Kranjc, 2012; Sauer and Ajanovic, 2012; Delli Zotti and Urpis, 2012).

Slovenian public discourses, in accordance with “nesting orientalism” (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 2007), represent Slovenians as Europeans/Western/Superior and other Yugoslavian nations as Eastern/Oriental/Inferior and try to distance themselves from southern neighbours, belonging to the so called Western Balkans – this differentiation has been accentuated since the 1980s, the decade before the independence (Bajt, 2011: 254) and has been particularly strong in the process of European integration (Petrović, 2009). At the time before and also after gaining independence, the discourse of Slovenian distinctiveness was gaining popularity. As Veronika Bajt points out “/o/ne of the most important elements of every successful nationalism is its primary belief in the distinctiveness of its nation” (2011: 252). In this context, often minor differences are accentuated so to establish clear differentiation between “us” and “them”. In this regard, the Slovenian nation began to distance itself from Yugoslavia in 1980s, when even the theory of its Venetic, instead of Slavic origin gained popularity (Bajt, 2011: 253–254). In the Slovenian case, these “small differences” in relation to other Yugoslav nations gained importance. Furthermore, with the aim to distance itself from the Balkan framework, Slovenia started to scorn everything Yugoslavian, which could also explain the discrepancy regarding the educational policies

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5 There actually exist two different systems of »bilingual« education: While in the case of Hungarian minority, pupils actually attend bilingual classes with both languages of teaching/learning, Italian minority schools are in fact monolingual with Slovenian language as a school subject. Accordingly, the (majority population) schools with Slovenian teaching language also teach Italian as a school subject.
in the nationally mixed area of Italian and Hungarian minority (and Roma children) compared to minorities of ex-Yugoslavian nations.

In Slovenia, principles of intercultural education are being adopted following European strategies and guidelines, particularly regarding the inclusion of children of other ethnic background than Slovenian in the educational system. These developments are especially evident in the Elementary School Act (1996), the Strategy of Inclusion of Migrant Children, Pupils and Students into the Educational System of the Republic of Slovenia (2007) and Guidelines for the Integration of Migrant Children in Kindergartens and Schools (2009–2012).

However, all of these actions are focused on the language and there were only little changes made to the school curricula regarding the teaching of cultures of other ethnic groups, teachers rarely introduce new teaching techniques. And even when these occur, these cultures are usually still presented as inferior and in a hierarchical way –the role of minorities and immigrants is not presented in a way that students would understand their positive role in the society (Vrečer, 2012). Accordingly, it is not surprising that previous research also shows that immigrant children are in unequal position and have lower educational success (Medveš et al., 2008).

Moreover, in 2007 Klara Skubic Ermenc assessed the “education for coexistence”, one of the educational goals of Slovenian schools system and critically noted:

“I claim that Slovenian school and society have not established appropriate conditions for the education for coexistence and cooperation. Pupils are not raised in a spirit of respect of otherness and learning of solidarity of different persons. If we sometimes do succeed in this then it is not due prevailing educational messages but in spite of them!”

Research methodology

The research methodology followed a two-stage sequential design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach encompassed paper-and-pencil questionnaire – self-administrative survey with guidance of the researchers when needed (more specifically among the primary school pupils). The questionnaire comprised 44 questions, encompassing demographic information (gender, age and self-definition of ethnic identity of the interviewed children as well as their parents, parents’ education etc.), ethnic structure of the school and classroom in question, several Likert type-scale questions on multicultural attitudes and a number of questions regarding the occurrence and experience of interethnic violence based on individuals’ different ethnic background (culture, language or religion). Experienced and witnessed cases of interethnic violence were reported on a four-point scale (ranging from 1– No, never to 4 – Yes, very often), what was later joined into a dichotomous variable measuring the presence of violence.

During the quantitative phase of the research, a total of 767 respondents from eight primary (390 pupils) and nine secondary schools (377 students)
The selected schools, where the survey was conducted, were all ethnically plural and situated in four ethnically mixed regions, namely: Slovenian Istria, Ljubljana region, Jesenice region and Prekmurje region. The four multicultural regions were chosen according to the following criteria: closeness to the border, urbanity of the area, “attractiveness” of the region for migrants (high level of economic migrants). Then, in each region, two primary schools and two secondary schools were chosen (non-probability expert sampling). Due to the use of non-probability sample, data can be subjected to coverage error, thus limiting possible inferences about the segment of the population manifesting certain characteristic. However, the presented research was exploratory as there are no previous researches on interethnic violence in schools in Slovenia, providing the grounds for the conducted analysis of the phenomena.

Overall, 65.7% of pupils included in the survey were from a Slovenian ethnic background while 34.3% were from an ethnic background described as ‘other’, mostly of Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosniac and Macedonian ethnicity, including a large share of mixed ethnic backgrounds (one of the parents of other ethnic background and the other Slovenian or both the parents of other ethnic background).7

The second, qualitative phase of research was carried out in 10 of the schools where quantitative research was carried out and consisted of 20 focus groups with children (5–6 children in each), 20 interviews with school staff and 6 interviews with experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with issues of (interethnic) violence. Focus group participants were selected by teachers, who were asked to select according to the following criteria: gender balance, ethnic heterogeneity and loquacity.8 Hereby we also must emphasise the role of the qualitative data in providing a deeper insight into the potential origin and interpretation of the violence experienced on the basis of different culture, language or religion.

Interethnic violence and interculturality in Slovenian schools

The prevalence of interethnic violence in the school environment was furthermore examined with additional analysis where various statistical tests were conducted. Article firstly presents results of multiple regression analysis researching the influence of various factors on interethnic violence in the school environment.

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6 The overall gender breakdown was the following: 50.2% of male pupils and 49.8% of female pupils. Pupils in primary schools were mainly 10 (77.2%), followed by 11 years old (19.2%). In secondary schools, the majority of pupils were aged 17 (71.2%), followed by 18– (15.2%) and 16-year-olds (12.2%).

7 Despite the fact the term 'of mixed ethnic background' is not an official category in Slovenia, in the last decades there are initiatives towards recognition of mixedness as social and political category (Sedmak, 2011).

8 The criteria used in acquiring focus groups’ participants could potentially lead to selection bias, as it could have excluded children who are due to the suffered interethnic violence and thus produce a skewed image on the interethnic violence in the school environment.
environment. Furthermore, we analysed chi-square measures of association linking ethnic background to the violence experienced among schoolchildren.

**Perception and experience of interethnic violence**

The application of principles of intercultural education in schools was not introduced with the explicit objective of preventing interethnic violence; however, its main aim, to foster interethnic and intercultural understanding and the acceptance of diversity, also helps to diminish its occurrence.

Even though, as stressed in the interviews, interethnic violence was generally not seen as major issue by school staff, some occurrence of interethnic violence can be observed through the results of the survey: cases of physical violence as well as cases of bully via SMS or computer are actually rare while other, subtler forms of violence were more widespread, e.g. name-calling, talking behind someone's back and avoiding, as evident in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. Have you ever experienced violence because of your ethnic background (different culture, language or religion)?

![Graph showing percentages of different types of interethnic violence](image)

We also performed multiple regression analyses in order to analyse the influence of different demographic factors (age, gender, respondents' ethnicity, place of residence and parent's education) on experiencing different types of interethnic violence. Additional analysis regarding reliability of the various dimensions of interethnic violence (Cronbach's α=0.872) showed a high internal consistency of the single interethnic violence scale. In spite of the established high internal consistency, we present the detailed analysis of multiple regression model for each form of interethnic violence separately in order to provide a deeper insight into the factors of different dimension of interethnic violence, thus also making a distinction among covert and overt types of violence.

The conducted analysis confirmed the statistical significance of the proposed models in the cases of the experienced name-calling, talking behind their back, ignorance and physical violence, whereas regression analysis did not confirm
statistical significance of the models in cases of cyber-violence and destroying personal property. Albeit as evident in Table 1, the stated models explain only a little percentage \((0.01 \leq R^2 \leq 0.06)\) of the different types of interethnic violence variation, which can be attributed to the regression model.

Students’ or pupils’ ethnic background proved to be the statistically significant predictor of interethnic violence along with age, gender and mother’s education in case of experiencing teasing and name-calling. Furthermore, age as well as ethnicity have a statistically significant effect on being talked about behind someone’s back and also to being ignored or excluded. Additionally, age, gender and mother’s education are shown to be statistically significant predictors of the rude physical behaviour on the basis of ethnic origin. Hereby we confirmed the statistically significant effect of respondents’ ethnic background (culture, language, religion) on the experience on multiple forms of interethnic violence, more specifically on different covert and overt manifestations of psychological violence, such as name-calling, being subjected to ignorance and avoidance as well as being talked about behind someone’s back.

Table 1. Regression model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other pupils</th>
<th>Other pupils send me insulting SMS, e-mails, comments because of my ethnic background</th>
<th>Other pupils</th>
<th>Other pupils hit me, kick me, spit at me, or express other forms of rude physical behaviour to me because of my ethnic background</th>
<th>Other pupils hide or destroy my things because of my ethnic background</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tease me, call me names, or insult me because of my ethnic background</td>
<td>insult me, avoid contacts with me because of my ethnic background</td>
<td>ignore me, avoid contacts with me because of my ethnic background</td>
<td>hit me, kick me, spit at me, or express other forms of rude physical behaviour to me because of my ethnic background</td>
<td>hide or destroy my things because of my ethnic background</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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**Coefficients**

| Age | -0.14 | \(0.00^*\) | -0.11 | \(0.02^*\) | -0.042 | 0.339 | -0.149 | \(0.00^*\) | -0.10 | \(0.03^*\) | -0.10 | \(0.02^*\) |
| Gender | -0.13 | \(0.00^*\) | -0.06 | 0.12 | -0.063 | 0.089 | -0.052 | 0.15 | -0.12 | \(0.00^*\) | -0.05 | 0.20 |
| Place of residence | 0.00 | 0.91 | 0.02 | 0.67 | -0.006 | 0.884 | 0.009 | 0.82 | 0.00 | 0.99 | 0.00 | 0.95 |
| Ethnicity | 0.14 | \(0.00^*\) | 0.08 | \(0.04^*\) | 0.005 | 0.898 | 0.103 | \(0.01^*\) | -0.01 | 0.87 | 0.02 | 0.61 |
| Parent’s education | -0.12 | \(0.00^*\) | -0.08 | 0.07 | -0.072 | 0.089 | -0.050 | 0.23 | -0.05 | \(0.20^*\) | -0.09 | \(0.03^*\) |

* Statistically significant influence of the independent variable

A comparison according to ethnicity also shows that the students of non-Slovenian ethnic backgrounds experience violence more frequently than the
others (Figure 2). The association of the ethnic background and experienced violence on the basis of ethnicity was later tested with chi-square measure of association.

![Figure 2. Have you ever-experienced violence because of your ethnic background (different culture, language or religion)?](image)

Statistically significant association with the ethnic background was confirmed in the cases of children having experienced name-calling ($\chi^2(1) = 26.45, p = 0.00$), being talked about behind back ($\chi^2(1) = 12.49, p = 0.00$) and being ignored or avoided ($\chi^2(1) = 17.93, p = 0.00$). Thus responses indicated that children of a mixed or other ethnicity are more frequently victim of name-calling, talking behind their backs and social exclusion than their Slovenian classmates. Additionally such association was not established in cases of cyber-bullying – e.g. sending insulting SMS or computer-mediated communication ($\chi^2(1) = 1.53, p = 0.22$), physical violence – hitting, spitting etc. ($\chi^2 = 1.64, p = 0.20$) or destroying property ($\chi^2(1) = 1.30, p = 0.25$).

**School context, reactions to (interethnic) violence and prevention strategies**

The last section of this article looks at the school context, perceptions of and reactions to interethnic violence. According to Verkuyten and Thijs (2013) intercultural education positively influences cultural knowledge and understanding of children and establishment of anti-racism norms in the classroom. The school context and especially the classroom environment have been found to be very important also for the prevention of interethnic violence (Barrios et al., 2005), especially in terms of creating a caring and supportive climate with established relationships of trust between students, teachers, school staff and parents.
The role of the teacher

The role of educators is very important in this matter. It could be argued that teachers and other school staff have the ethical and legal responsibility to create and maintain a protected atmosphere in school. According to previous research, there exist differences between educators and students regarding perceptions of the frequency of intervention in bullying – usually teachers perceive their interventions as more frequent than students (Pepler et al. in Strohmeier and Noam, 2012). In interviews teachers tend to state that they always intervene; however, pupils have reported some cases of (intentional) non-intervention and highlighted that teachers are sometimes not aware of violent behaviour of children. Thus their involvement in the relationships between pupils and students and concern for their well-being – or its lack – is quickly recognised by pupils and students, especially in the case of school violence:

*It depends on the teacher. The one we had last year... she didn't intervene! We had to pull them apart, she didn't do a thing! As if nothing happened. She pretended she was writing something.* (m, 12)

According to primary school students within our research, teachers almost always intervene (66% ‘always’ and 30% ‘sometimes’), while secondary school students saw teachers’ interventions as less frequent (66% ‘sometimes’ and 18% ‘always’). Similarly, primary school pupils more frequently confide in their teachers when experiencing violence than secondary school students, who usually tell either their friends or nobody (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Whom do you tell when you experience interethnic violence (by age)?**

![Bar chart showing whom students tell when they experience interethnic violence by age for primary and secondary school students.]

One of the main responsibilities of the primary school is also education in the sense of values (besides the family the primary school is the institution involved in raising children and fostering values of tolerance and intercultural understanding), while the secondary school is seen more as learning for-the-job
education and to a lesser extent as an institution concerned with teaching of
values. This is also evident from the responses of pupils, who see the role of the
teachers as being to intervene in cases of violence in schools (Figure 4).

When asked about the responsibility for dealing with interethnic violence,
the school counsellor in primary school stressed the importance of the active
role of every particular individual, but especially of the school staff:

*Here it is hard to define one [responsible party], because we all are
[responsible]. There it is the teacher, schoolmates, if [we follow] the principles
to respect others, that everybody has the right to go to school and be successful
at that – to develop his/her competences – and others don’t have the right to
restrict it. These duties derive already from the basic principles of elementary
schools, such as the right to education. Everybody, the whole school has to be
responsible. Neither the cook nor the janitor should be excluded. We are all
bearers. Of course, mostly teachers, who teach children. (school counsellor,
primary school)*

In this view, the ‘role model argument’ seems important as teachers should
assume the competence of all pupils regardless of their ethnic background and
encourage them to do their best (Allen, 1995). But, as it turns out, not all teachers
are ‘culture-blind’ and not all treat their pupils and students on equal footing.
Although the majority of pupils and students agree that teachers treat pupils/students
the same way irrespective of their ethnic origin, primary school pupils
feel that they are treated more equally (4.23) than secondary school students (3.38).
Additionally, some cases of unjust grading in secondary school were reported:

*Yes, we have a professor who does not accept them [non-Slovenian
students] and this is evident... /.../ when it comes to giving grades; it is not
objective, in cases when essays are graded, etc. (m, 16)*

The role of teachers in addressing the needs of children and youths from
other ethnic backgrounds proved to be very important since they tend not to
disclose their experiences of interethnic violence as frequently as their Slovenian
peers. In this sense, teachers could potentially become the persons to whom they
might confide. The role of teachers seems crucial also if we look at the places
in which interethnic violence usually occurs i.e. places were the presence and
supervision of teachers are insufficient or missing altogether. As reported in our
study, violence usually occurs in school corridors (51%), the school playground/courtyard
(44%), on the way to/from school (38%), in the classroom (36%), in the locker area (31%) and – more recently – in cyberspace.

**Approaches to prevent violence
and foster intercultural understanding**

Introducing simple ad-hoc methods for preventing violence and fostering
intercultural understanding is always welcome; however, an integrative holistic
approach, which is still missing from the Slovenian school system, is more likely
to be effective at the national level and in the long term:
The role of the state... we miss common guidelines, circulars that would inform the school staff how to recognise various forms of violence, how to deal with the occurring violence. (Deputy Ombudsman)

Despite the common guidelines, every school is left to itself to manage cases of violence and to promote intercultural understanding. The common practices established in the guidelines mainly refer to the ‘zero tolerance towards violence’ approach, which is seen as the most appropriate response for violence prevention as well as for gaining the trust of pupils.

As previously discussed, it is often only physical violence that is perceived as violence – not only by pupils and students, but by teachers, too. Thus, when physical violence occurs, school staff members generally intervene, but when it comes to the subtle forms of violence, such as name-calling, avoidance, etc., the responses usually depend on the social sensitivity of individual teachers. However, it is particularly important for schools to not only react to the conflict but also to tackle these less visible forms of violence and discuss underlying tensions (Henze, Katz, and Norte, 2000).

School staff believes that the best way to prevent interethnic conflicts and violent behaviour at school is to apply principles of interculturalism and tolerance in the curriculum. According to our research, students mostly agree that they learn about different cultures and religions in the class (3.82 for primary school students, and 3.58 for secondary school students) and participate in special activities that encourage them to be equal and understand their differences (3.98 and 2.69 accordingly). Still, the most frequent activities that encourage them to be equal often take the form of cultural festivals featuring a presentation of folklore and typical dishes. Since they present culture of the ‘minority’ to the members of the host society, some educational aspects to these kinds of events are acknowledged. Nevertheless, they are often presented in a relatively superficial manner and, as Gorski puts it, can contribute to ‘essentialising the lives and diverse cultures of an already-oppressed group of people, then presenting that group as a clearly identifiable “other”’ (2008: 516). Similarly, Pajnik and Zavratnik Zimic point out that ‘we are witness to a kind of folklorisation of immigrants with their culinary skills, dance and music being highlighted, but their political activity not being recognized’ (2003: 175–6).

Furthermore, the difference between primary and secondary school is visible in the teaching of moral values; secondary school students participate in fewer activities focusing on intercultural understanding, while they have many subjects where they get to know other cultures, such as Geography, History, Slovenian and foreign languages, Education for Peace, Family and Non-violence. In the last years, school curricula have been changed to also include values of intercultural ‘coexistence’. But, as Vrečer mentioned, even such subjects as, for example, Geography fail to cover or insufficiently deal with issues facing minorities and immigrants in such a way that pupils and students can understand their role in the society (2012: 54). Additionally, one of the interviewed sociology teachers in secondary school believes that learning about other cultures is diminishing, instead of increasing:
In school curricula there is less and less of this [learning about other cultures]. There is more about health – anorexia and bulimia and so on – but [learning about other cultures] is diminishing. There is a section on the European Union, but it is very general. /.../. And I miss it, but as I said, I can make a decision [to include intercultural issues] ...

Because they [students] mentioned, that just Sociology is the subject in which they learn about other cultures.

Well, as I said, I decided to do also that and I did... We watched some movies... (sociology teacher, secondary school)

In this sense, Resman even suggests that school curricula should not just be designed at the national level but should also include the local population and parents from ethnic backgrounds other than the majority (2006: 211–212). Thus he recognises the necessity for a more holistic approach towards intercultural education, including schools, local communities and families.

Teachers and experts in our research also frequently expressed the opinion that one subject is not sufficient to teach children to respect diversity. In their view, interculturality as an educational principle should pervade all school activities, from the youngest age, while the majority of subjects mentioned are taught in the last years of primary school or secondary school and usually do not address the relevance of intercultural understanding directly (with the exception of Ethics and Civil Education) – intercultural values are mainly present on the declarative level. However, some teachers and other school staff try to make use of them even in everyday situation and not just as a school subject.

For example, when a new pupil comes in the classroom I always try to work on their social skills, to engage them in social games, role playing, for example 'get to know me', or 'ask me a question'. This really, really helps since the process of getting to know someone evolves quickly –and the level of trust as well. I think that it really helps them to get rid of their uncertainties and prejudices... (teacher, primary school)

In one primary school the social worker prepared some workshops for pupils with which they can acquire a sense of being a stranger and not understand the language:

I gave them a paper on which it was written in different languages that you have to introduce yourself, tell your name and surname, if you have any relatives... the form they have to fill in when they arrive in asylum. And then I came in and told them that I was somebody else, I wasn't counsellor today and that they had to figure out who I was. /.../ I told them they can't consult their classmates even though they were soon in distress because they didn't know how to answer. /.../ And afterwards we analysed the situation, who was I /.../ probably it was happening in another country, /.../how did they feel and then I related this to how they would feel, if they came to another country. (school counsellor, primary school)

Unfortunately, not all teachers are so forthcoming. A school counsellor reported about the case of tensions between a teacher and a parent when the
teacher declared: ‘I’ll talk with the lady, when she’ll speak Slovenian!’ In this situation the school counsellor took on the role of translator in order that the mother could get some feedback of her child’s school progress.

An inclusive environment certainly creates a positive school climate. In some schools teachers and others mentioned different practices used to improve the school climate – generally it seems that there are fewer tensions among students in environments in which children/students have the possibility to relax during breaks, engage in sports activities and communicate with teachers:

It largely depends on the school atmosphere. If a school is more productively oriented, this is expressed in rising violence, both in didactic issues and issues concerning nationality. If a school is more liberal and enables children to relax during breaks, to play football, talk with their teachers in hallways, then tension is dispersed regardless of nationality problems. (school counsellor, primary school)

In the light of the cases mentioned, it seems that at least some teachers and other school personnel are trying really hard to educate children in the spirit of intercultural understanding and acceptance. The question, however, is, whether this can be enough and truly contribute to changes? How critical are they towards wider school or public discourse? Do educators really question social order? Or can it be that, as Skubic Ermenc (2007) puts it, such behaviour of individual teachers is subversive in the view of the unified standard practice?

The results of our study show that interethnic violence as well as intercultural understanding are becoming important issues within schools, however there is still a long way to walk before the potential of intercultural education will be seen in full effect.

**Discussion**

The present study was conducted in the Slovenian schools with the aim of providing an exploratory analysis of violence on the basis of different ethnic background. The results acquired through the conducted study show the presence of the subtler forms of interethnic violence, such as name-calling, avoidance, talking behind someone’s back (experienced by 12–17% of pupils/students taking part in the survey), while cases of physical violence, destroying property and cyber-bullying were less frequent (approx. 6%) among the students participating in the research. It is the subtle, more covert forms of (interethnic) violence as that educators should be particularly sensitive to, as it is important to detect these in order to apply effective interventions. Therefore, the educators should, as Strohmeier and Noam affirm (2012), learn how to: (1) detect violent behaviour; (2) distinguish trivial from serious cases as well as intervene differentially with bullies, victims and bystanders; and (3) prevent bullying, all with particular attention to ethnic diversity.

With regard to our research question whether there exists a difference in perceptions and experience of interethnic violence between Slovenian children
and those of mixed or other ethnicities we found some differences between the two groups. Through the conducted analysis we confirmed the statistical significance of the established model in all cases, except in the case of cyber-bullying. However the proposed model with demographic variables (age, gender, students’ ethnicity, parents’ ethnicity and their education) provided only limited (around 5% in average) explanation of the variation in occurrence of interethnic violence, thus pointing to a significant number of factors that are intertwined in the occurrence of interethnic violence. The importance of interplay of different factors (intersectionality) in peer violence, ethnicity being just one of them, has been recognised in previous studies (Kralj, Žakelj, and Rameša, 2013; Hrženjak and Humer, 2010; Busche, Scambor, and Stuve, 2012; Peguero, 2012). Additional analysis has however shown significant association between child’s ethnic background and his experience of different types of violence based on different culture, language or religion, confirming that children of different or mixed ethnic background were to a higher extent subjected to interethnic violence, particularly name-calling as found by some previous studies (Verkuyten and Thijs, 2002; Monks et. al 2008).

The last section of the article was dedicated to the recognition and prevention of interethnic violence by the school. Since school is a crucial context of secondary socialisation, where children spend a considerable amount of time, the overall school climate and actions of educators can play an important role in transmitting the values of intercultural coexistence as well as in the prevention of violence. Our results on interethnic violence in schools show that educators generally try to pursue these goals; however, there are a few important points to be considered. Firstly, subtle and covert forms of violence (also in the case of interethnic violence) are difficult to recognise and therefore it is important for educators to learn how to detect them in order to adequately intervene. Secondly, with regard to detecting and reacting to (interethnic) violence, there do not exist any common guidelines or directives for educators who lack additional education in this field – a lot depends on educators’ social sensitivity and their independent initiatives. In this context it is also very important to address tensions underlying interethnic violence and not merely react to violence (Henze, Katz, and Norte, 2000). Despite several programmes in the field of prevention of violence offered by governmental and non-governmental institutions, these often tend to be limited and of short duration due to a lack of financing. These programmes are also very fragmented. Namely, despite their initiative, educators sometimes lack the time, financial resources and/or training to effectively tackle (interethnic) school violence. There are many programmes and initiatives but there is no coordinated or integrated approach in tackling school violence problems in Slovenia.

Thirdly, even though the principles of intercultural education have been widely accepted in Slovenian schools, educators express the necessity for a more coordinated and integrated approach in this field. Implementation of interculturality as an educational principle, permeating all school activities, therefore still depends to a large degree on the personal initiatives and sensitivity of educators. Moreover, in depends on their ability to implement intercultural
education that is critical, questioning existing social order in a context which
does not provide them sufficient support.

While nowadays interculturality has been recognised as an important part of
everyday life – ‘Coexistence has become a value, being different is a right. Consequently, people declare their difference.’ (researcher, Institute for Ethnic Studies) – we are at the same time still faced by intolerance, hostility, prejudices towards ‘others’ (migrants, minorities) perpetuated through media and political
discourses (Zavratnik Zimic et al., 2008; Toš, 2009; Erjavec et al., 2000; Kirbiš,
Flere, and Tavčar Kranjc, 2012). Despite the fact that school sometimes works
as a ‘protected space’ (Sauer and Ajanovic, 2012), it is not cut off from the wider
society and – as our results show,– children and youngsters express stereotypes,
differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ as well as reporting about interethnic
violence in schools.

Schools can certainly make an important difference by providing ‘safety, a
sense of belonging, and a valuing of diversity’ (Inman, McCormack, and Walker,
2012). It is true, however, that schools are set in a wider context; thus, it is
crucial to include local communities as well as national level policies in fostering
values of intercultural respect and coexistence as well as combating interethnic
violence in schools. This means that there is a need for changes not only in the
consciousness of teachers, who often only reproduce the existing inequalities
(Gorski, 2008), but also in the curriculums which currently do not sufficiently
include racial and ethnic issues (Skubic Ermenc, 2007) and finally, in the society
as a whole. An integrated approach in tackling interethnic violence is essential
especially in the current times of socioeconomic crisis when interethnic and
interreligious conflicts and intolerance appear to be on the rise.

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