

Slavko Gaber: THE DECADE OF CHANGE

e-mail: slavko.gaber@guest.arnes.si

### *Introduction*

Tedesco (1998) claims that in "the past three decades at least, in response to the new challenges of social development, education systems have been subjected to a succession of diverging reform proposals (...)" (79). Authors of the Eurydice's *A Decade of the Reforms at Compulsory Education* (...) (1996) point out that throughout "the 1980s and the early 1990s, education systems in the European Union (EU) and EFTA/EEA countries underwent numerous reforms which effected different areas and levels depending on the country concerned" (7).

Tedesco in addition states that all the reforms, "paradoxically, have increased their (i.e. education systems' (S. G.)) rigidity and opposition to change" (Tedesco 1998, 79).

Nevertheless, Tedesco's claim seems too courageous. It may well be that numerous reforms in certain countries produced "opposition to change", but on the other hand, it is also true that in a number of cases changes took place simply because it was the right time for them. Although in every system of education there is a degree of rigidity and opposition to change, the real dilemma is neither whether we should start changing our education or not nor whether the push for change should come from outside or from inside the system – the real question is: is the time right for change or not? And of course there is another important issue concerning change in education – in which direction, how are we supposed to change it?

Slogans like "education is constantly changing", etc. are far from reality – the validity of such a claim equals to the claim that the system of education is rigid and always the same.

My first thesis is that the system of education – pretty much like every other system – is part of change, even the promoter of change or an element of the conservation of the status quo in relation to the *Zeit Geist*.

"The changes introduced during the past decade throughout the whole educational scene in the EU and the EFTA/EEA countries seem to indicate that the social, cultural and economic demands as the century draws to a close have lead Europe to redefine its educational policies and training systems" (A Decade (...), 1996, 7).

While agreeing with the authors of A decade (...), I don't want to claim that in recent reforms in Europe nothing has happened which will produce "rigidity and opposition to change". On the contrary, each change or reform<sup>1</sup> is in danger of introducing change where this is not sensible and not taking into account the real bonus of the change.

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### *Changes in Slovenia*

Slovenia is a country lying to the south of central Europe, "between the southeastern margin of the Alps and the northern Adriatic. To the west, Slovenia borders the northern Italian flatlands, to the east it opens

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this text I will use the distinction between change and reform used in A Decade (...): "not all changes, superficial or more radical, transient or longer lasting, are worthy of the name reforms. The concept of reform adopted for this study is therefore: any change in the education system which

- is intentional and far-reaching, responding to a specific educational policy and introduced with the intention that it should be lasting; and
- has emanated from the government or a regional education authority with full power in education and has been translated into a binding legislative measure." (7)

towards the Pannonian Plain and to the southeast towards the Balkan Dinaric Alps" (Prunk, 1996, 7). This country, which has borders with Austria, Italy, Croatia, and Hungary, lies in a territory which "throughout history has always been an expressly transit area" (ibid.). Slovenian territory is a crossroads linking central Europe with the Mediterranean and the Balkan Peninsula and Italy with the Pannonian Plain.

The newly established country started with the mix of hope and fear for its future. Hope for better nevertheless prevailed. The urge for better and new which was intertwined already with the reality of the last years of the Slovenian "spring" in the former Yugoslavia was only strengthened by the independent state. Education was an important element in the structure of the nation's expectations before the independence and even more so after the independence was gained.

Independence; the transition from socialism to representative parliamentary democracy and thus to a plural system of values; efforts to join the processes of European integration combined with the developments in the sphere of production and scientific disciplines demanded changes – reforms in the field of education.

Even more so because the process of significant change started already during the *ancien régime*. Teachers and school heads started with a number of innovative projects. Furthermore, one of the most important "projects" of the opposition to the former political leadership was to reestablish formerly abolished grammar schools (Gymnasium), to reintroduce the Matura, and to substitute sociology, civic culture, etc. for the former civics (Self-Management and Marxism). The Chamber of Small Business on the other hand demanded the inauguration of the dual system again.

My second thesis therefore is that Slovenian educational reforms took place in a surrounding which demanded changes.<sup>2</sup> However, the

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<sup>2</sup> "Recent demands for changes in the education system in Slovenia were expressed in evaluation studies at the end of the 1980s. However, the change of the social system

changes that were taking place and were supposed to take place with a prevailing support of citizens, teachers and parents, like elsewhere in Europe, didn't face the "lack of opponents to them, whether among politicians or teachers or parents themselves" (Decade of (...) (1996, 7).

1. A number of questions were raised before the group of experts coming from the former opposition and now being in position to inaugurate changes (reforms). Being now in position to make proposals and act, the former oppositional *School Field Group* decided for the step-by-step approach.

The presumption for such an approach was that the changes were already taking place and going in the right direction. A country with a solid system of education should not change the system of education rapidly and at any cost, regardless of the changes to the political system and of independence. To find out what precisely we are supposed to change and how – that was the challenge.

2. The reform in the sense of the "intentional and far-reaching" process thus started with the reconsideration of concepts.

The backing-up of the proposals for changes in the existing system with comparative analyses of different foreign systems and the drafting of conceptual solutions did away with the "past practice in which missing conceptual solutions were often replaced by laws, or their absence (...) was concealed" (Krek (ed.), 1995, 7).

The authors also wanted, by presenting different solutions, to do away with the practice in which references to expertise meant primarily the concealment of differences within experts and the fetishizing of "expert solutions".

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meant that changes in the education system became a necessity. Thus at the start of the 1990s Slovenia joined the European trend towards reforms of education systems." (Svetlik, Barle 1999)

Coming from various theories and philosophies, experts had different views even on some of the essential new issues, e.g. the introduction of compulsory education at the age of six. Despite these differences and through a number of discussions, they nevertheless reached a high level of agreement on individual issues in the drafting of proposals. Where the consensus could not be reached after several attempts, the decisions of the majority of experts prevailed. Svetlik and Barle (1999) suggest that "it was perhaps the euphoria following the changes in the social system that created the illusion that it would be possible to formulate a concept for reforms to the education system directly from various academic discussions and conferences involving a large number of experts, educators and parents." We could add that academic discussions and conferences largely paid off and were a necessary part of reforms. However, when from time to time they went too far, we should, besides the "euphoria following the changes", blame the decision-makers at the ministry of education<sup>3</sup> for the illusion of how far open discussion can go.

"After two years of numerous yet varying proposals and concepts submitted at these conferences, it became clear that they had to be brought together into a single coherent entity. It was for this reason that the state of Slovenia, in the form of the Ministry of Education and Sport, appointed a group of experts who worked out a basic strategy for the new education system" (*Education in the Republic of Slovenia - White Paper* 1995). "This academic paper represented the basis for the formulation of new education laws." (ibid.)

2.1. In individual chapters of the *White Paper* it is possible to trace expressive signs of the state of different parts of education in the country. At first glance we see a diverse range of individual chapters and different explanations of the comparisons and proposals derived from them. This divergence points to the fact that separate parts of the system of education in Slovenia were adequately redefined and

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<sup>3</sup> The minister and one of his two deputies came from university posts (sociology and philosophy of education).

reformulated as early as the second half of the 1980s, and that in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall Slovenia did not start from square one. In general we can say that, despite the new codification of the entire system of education, today's system has been derived from something which was hidden in the system of education before representative democracy was introduced, rather than being an absolute replacement of the *ancien régime*.<sup>4</sup>

A typical example of this type of approach is included in the chapter on *grammar schools*. After the authorities abolished grammar schools at the beginning of the 1980s<sup>5</sup> and along with them the Matura (school-leaving examination), academic circles developed a sort of resistance, which resulted in one of the strongest areas of conflict with the *ancien régime*.

In the late 1980s, before the establishment of parliamentary democracy, this opposition resulted in the general liberalization of the field of education. Control of schools was substantially reduced and inspection did not interfere either in the content or in the form of the conduct of

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<sup>4</sup> In some respects, Tocqueville's deliberation on the necessity of the French Revolution can be applied to the transition of Slovenia from socialism to representative democracy. The difference lies in the fact that in France the revolution occurred despite the fact that the new was already contained in the old and that it would have come to the surface even without radicalism and bloodshed, while Slovenia, with a great deal of luck and a bit of wisdom, succeeded in undergoing a "velvet" transition to a new system. See Tocqueville, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> "The Board of Education (...) in February 1975 drafted the Theses on Careers-Oriented Education in the Field of Secondary Education." (Cimperle, Vovko, 1987, 104). Within the elaborate concept of education which should be connected with industry and prepare students for a vocation, the abolition of grammar schools was the issue most discussed. The authorities at that time reproached grammar schools for their "elitist character, causing dualism in the secondary school system, which takes away from vocational-school students the possibility of further education" (ibid.). Elements of careers-oriented education were introduced in the 1975/76 academic year for first-year grammar-school pupils. The abolition of grammar schools took place in the 1981/82 academic year after the adoption of the Careers Education Act in April 1980." For more on this issue see Milharčič-Hladnik, Šušteršič, 1986.

school syllabuses. The criteria of "political irreproachability" and membership of the League of Communists as a condition for taking the position of headteacher disappeared. The victory of the new approach was reflected in the preparations for the reintroduction of the supposedly elitist grammar schools (Gymnasiums). The Council for Education<sup>6</sup> decided to reintroduce grammar schools in 1990. The Matura was again recognized as the form of completion of grammar school education and the first Matura took place in 1995.

*Unlike grammar schools*, the area of primary schools (with the 1999/2000 academic year 42 schools have started the experimental stage of the introduction of the nine-year primary school) has been paid a lot of attention, as has the issue of the dual system of vocational education.

3. Chronologically, the drafting of the White Paper on Education took place at the same time as the modernization of school systems in Europe and elsewhere in the world. It emerged in the period of the intensive exchange of views on the future of education. The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, which includes deliberations entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within* and the European Commission White Paper entitled *Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society*, represent only two examples of this type of endeavor.

Both reports stress the significance of education for the future of humankind. The UNESCO Commission emphasizes "its belief that

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<sup>6</sup> The Council of Education was and still is a supreme decision-making body in the field of education in Slovenia. It independently defines the contents of education in schools and pre-school institutions, as well as the contents of adult education. The difference between the system which existed for so long and today's arrangements is merely the fact that in the previous system a unified council adopted programs independently, while the new system has introduced a Special Council for General Education (pre-school education, primary education, general secondary education), a Council for Vocational Education (secondary and post secondary non-university vocational education) and a Council for Adult Education.

education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development" (Delors 1996, 13). While it is clear that education is not "a miraculous cure or magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained" (ibid.), it is one of "the principal means available to foster a deeper and harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war" (ibid.).

In addition, the European Commission stresses in particular the importance of education for Europe and its capacity to face the rest of the world. "Be as it may, the countries of Europe today have no other option. If they are to hold their own and to continue to be a reference point in the world, they have to build on the progress brought about through closer economic ties by a more substantial investment in knowledge and skills" (Teaching and Learning 1995, 15).

Both elements - the first, basic recalling of the humanistic part of our being (to reduce poverty, exclusion, etc.), and the second, readiness for competition - are also woven into the White Paper on Education in Slovenia.

The laws drafted on the basis of the White Paper define the objectives of education to be:

- "provision of optimal development of individuals, irrespective of sex, social and cultural background, religion, nationality, and physical and mental constitution;
- promotion of mutual tolerance, development of the awareness of equality of the sexes, acceptance of different people and cooperation with them, observation of children's and human rights and basic freedoms, promotion of equal opportunities for both sexes and thus development of life skills in a democratic society" (Laws 1996, 10).



In addition, one of the most important objectives of the entire process of education is hidden in the short statement which requires from education that it "enable inclusion in the European distribution of labor" (ibid., 165).

Like it or not: western rationalist concept is behind the curtain. Human rights, with the idea of tolerance therefore presents the basis for the deliberation on the current situation of education systems. The attempts to avoid the exaggerated Eurocentrism of the entire concept by quoting examples from the Third World and by stressing the fact that "education would fail in its task if it did not produce citizens rooted in their own cultures and yet open to other cultures and committed to the progress of society" (Delors 1996a, 6) appear to be a warning of the internal tension of the rationalist concept of education, which excludes not only national particularities, cultural differences, and so on, but considers the individual to be common and is trying to find general laws.

Contrary to the prevailing attitude, which considers education to be the process of amalgamating reality into something common and the characteristic into something "essential" to be the limit of Western education, it needs to be emphasized that the "reduction of complexity" is a pre-condition of education. The abandonment of the basics of the enlightenment approach is therefore much more dangerous to education than its own, by no means negligible, deficiencies.

What exactly is hidden in the core of the enlightenment approach to education? Directly and roughly speaking, knowledge. Or, as Delors puts it, the first pillar of education is education for knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge is the first and foremost objective of education; to be able to function on the basis of this knowledge, to be and to live together are all objectives or pillars derived from the primary objective, i.e. they cannot exist without it. It holds true, of course, that persistence with the first alone, or the exclusion of the other three pillars of knowledge has to a large extent afflicted the existence of the nearly always exclusive principle of formal education; but in an era

characterized by the unreflected stressing of the insufficiency of knowledge as the point of departure of education it is necessary to draw attention to the presence of not only deficiencies but also of large mistakes made in relation to the departure from the premises of education to the world of play, sensitivity and the development of "non-cognitive functions". Somehow it seems to be superfluous to note that education in the form of the world of play and other non-cognitive functions is also education - although all this happens with and through the crucial function, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge which provides us with the power to face reflectively the world in which we live.

Talk of the dangers of the so-called efficiency driven school, which was during the drafting of the White Paper, and which is still today one of the fundamental ideological questions, represents more or less a sign of unconsidered flight from the fact that the field of education is in fact a field of work and not a field of play, and is linked to the spreading of demands for an elimination of the distinction between freedom and necessity. The process of education is a process which at its core belongs in the field of necessity. The field of freedom constitutes this process only at its margins, or put another way - freedom is constituted in the background of knowledge. School represents an unavoidable condition of freedom, while itself from the outset is set in the field of necessity.

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On the basis of concepts written down in the White Paper in February 1996 the Slovenian parliament adopted legislation. The great majority of conceptual solutions, written in the White Paper as proposals, were adopted and today represent the legally enacted framework of the structuring - of changing and preserving - of individual parts of the system.

1. *The Organization and Financing Act* determines: the aims of education, procedures for founding public and private institutions in this

field, mechanisms and methods of adopting curricula, methods of organizing education and apportioning finance to the different parts of the system between local communities and the state, the required level of education and teaching obligations of the teaching staff, and so forth.

Councils of experts represent one of the typical elements in the adoption of curricula. Slovenia has a long tradition of nationally determined curricula, and a greater decentralization in determining the content of teaching did not appear to make sense, even alongside the changes that are currently taking place. Here it is important that a decision was also made for the future, whereby the content of individual subjects and the curriculum will be determined by Council of Experts, which is appointed for six years and is not subject to changes in government or actual changes in parliament. The majority of members of these three aforementioned councils are proposed by the university, the professional association for individual subject areas (e.g. the society of historians), and in the area of vocational education the unions and the chambers of commerce and small business.

A further peculiarity of the current system which it would seem appropriate in reasonable time to change is the level of centralization of financing. In spite of the fact that the founders of pre-school institutions and primary schools are local communities, it is the government - particularly where primary schools are involved - which finances the pay of school employees and covers almost half the running costs. Local communities are therefore left with funds for building, maintenance, and extra standard of schools. It is interesting that during the process of adoption of the relevant legislation, the greatest pressure for increased centralization of management came from schools which were convinced that the state would guarantee a basic standard for all schools. To them, numerous newly formed, and in many cases small and economically weak, municipalities (192) were an unreliable financial source for the normal functioning of schools. The distrust of the source of financing spread to the lack of trust in granting approval to the appointment of headmasters of pre-school institutions and schools. According to the

law, the headmaster of a school is appointed by the school council, which is also the administrative body of the school. It consists of the representatives of teachers, parents, and the founder<sup>7</sup>. For the candidate having been selected in a public tender, the approval of the Minister of Education must be acquired. Also in this respect, the level of centralization is higher than that expected for the future. The legislator has established that even here, demands expressed by schools and a part of the professional public must be heard, demands which warned against the excessively politicized issuing of approval by local community councils or mayors. The truly overly politicized appointments of headmasters witnessed after 1990, which would be difficult to imagine in the majority of existing stable democratic systems, have resulted in the demand for the centralization of decision-making. According to the prevalent opinion, the approval of the Minister should be less dependent on daily politics and the Minister's responsibility for the normal functioning of the system should be greater than the responsibility of local authorities. Possibly, once the structures of local authority are stabilized and political passions contained, the power of granting approval will be returned to local authorities. At the same time, financing will need to be decentralized.

2. *The Pre-school Institutions Act* introduces new features chiefly in the sphere of expanding the possibility of founding private pre-school institutions. As in the case of private schools (primary and secondary), the activities of pre-school institutions will be 85 % financed through public funds otherwise allocated by the state for the education of individuals in the public system of schools. With what is by European standards substantial financial support to private education, it is our intention to enable parents to assert their right to "choose education suitable for their children". The possibility of choice and greater possibility of founding private pre-school institutions and schools should

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<sup>7</sup> As a rule, it consists of eleven members, five of which are teachers, while the remaining six are representatives of the founder, parents and, in secondary schools, students. (Article 46)

also increase competition and contribute to the better quality of education.

The increase in the quality of work should also be encouraged by the legislative provision stating that the number of children per group should gradually decrease by between 25 to 30 %, i.e. crèche groups will have 12 children maximum per group, and preschool groups will have 22 children maximum per group.

Along with smaller groups of children, higher qualifications of personnel and more varied activities would be introduced in pre-school institutions. Whole-day programs would be supplemented with half-day and short programs, lasting from 240 to 600 hours a year (Article 14). Along with the pre-school education at home "for children who are prevented from attending pre-school institution by illness" (Article 19), an individual institution may "organize the education of children in a family child care system. This form of education and child care is carried out in family homes by teachers or their assistants employed by the pre-school institution or a private tutor." (Article 18) Requirements of qualifications are raised from those of secondary school and college to higher education degrees for teachers and completed four-year secondary school for their assistants. The transition will be gradual, although this year, the eighth generation of students is entering the relevant higher education course at the faculties of education in Maribor and Ljubljana.

In accordance with the new legislation, norms on the number of children in a group are already changing and the payment by parents, who in Slovenia on average cover 23 % of costs of the operation of public pre-school institutions, is adjusted to new provisions.

3. *The Primary Education Act.* Apart from the possibility of founding private schools, the most important change in primary education is the introduction of nine-year primary schools. In Slovenia, primary education coincides with compulsory education, which in number of countries

apart from primary school years encompasses the years of the lower secondary school.

According to the Act (Article 105), the introduction of the new nine-year primary school will be gradual from the 1999/2000 school year, a small number of primary schools will in suitable spatial and staffing conditions, and with the special permission of the Minister introduce an experimental new first year. Nine-year primary education will become obligatory in the 2002/2003 school year. Children will start attending primary school at the age of six. The fact that primary school will in future start for children earlier presents an obligation for the state to ensure one teacher and a half on average per class. Teachers and pre-school teachers<sup>8</sup> of the new first year are trained with a special additional training course lasting approximately one semester of continuing education. The additional training course, which was prepared by the faculties of education began, in October 1996.

The introduction of a foreign language earlier on in primary education (compulsory classes in the new 4th year - two years earlier than at present) and the possibility to choose a second foreign language in the 7th year is in accordance with the wish to prepare young people for integration demanding the ability to communicate in foreign languages.

The introduction of descriptive grading in the first three years of primary school and the second teacher in the first year is based on the conviction of the necessity for primary schools that will not stigmatize beginners' problems but would rather introduce them to the world of knowledge with encouragement and an individual approach. This belief is connected with the awareness of the reality of the world in which we live and which demands knowledge and the ability to compete with others. Descriptive grading, assistance in case of problems, a smaller number of children in classes and better equipment, the internal

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<sup>8</sup> In the period from 1990 to 1996 a school-experiment was carried out in a selected number of Slovenian schools in order to establish the optimum models of cooperation between two class teachers. For more, see Pučko 1994.

assessment of knowledge with national exams at the end of the third and sixth years should facilitate a reasonable combination of different elements aiming for better education.

Examinations at the end of the ninth year are a part of external examinations. With the examinations at the end of the third (mother tongue and math) and sixth year (mother tongue, math and foreign language) - which are not compulsory - students, teachers and parents will test the acquired knowledge according to national standards. The results of tests after the first and second three years present merely feed-back information - they are some sort of a mirror prepared by the national examination center, while the grading will be carried out by schools according to a standardized procedure.

As in case of the "Matura exam", it is illegal to use results to establish the successfulness of schools and teachers or for some other end not explicitly defined in the Act (Article 65). The external grading at the end of the ninth year is a part of the final primary school results and represents 50 % of grades of five subjects. Three of these (mother tongue, math and foreign language) are compulsory, while the other two are selected by students from subjects in science and social studies.

Selected subjects from science and social studies represent one of the major new features of the compulsory nine-year primary school. "The school must organize classes in at least three optional subjects from each field. (...) From among the optional subjects the students must choose three subjects, of which at the most two may be from an individual group." (Article 17) The system of options, together with grade teaching and integration of special needs children, introduces into primary education in Slovenia elements which take away the completeness from the so-called unified primary school. The possibility of choosing, not simply a public or private school, but also within a public school to choose subjects which are closer to the interests of the pupils, and also to choose the level on which in the eighth and ninth years teaching will be conducted in the Slovenian language,

mathematics and a foreign language (Article 40), presents in the primary school system a method of implementing one of the fundamental liberal principles - the right to choose.

The possibility, too, for special needs children, where possible, to find a way of being integrated into the ordinary school program, such that "the school adapts the methods and forms of work to them and makes it possible for them to participate in additional lessons and other forms of individual and group help" (Article 12), means the further possibility of choosing the form of education. (Article 5)

3.1. In spite of the fact that to this possibility of choice we may add the possibility of education at home (Articles 88-92), greatest debate in parliament has been aroused only by one of these possibilities or rights to choose.

In proposing the enactment of the possibility for developing private schools, the ministry proposing the act decided to separate confessional and public schooling. Article 72 of the Organization and Financing Act states that "in public pre-school institutions and schools and in pre-school institutions and schools with a concession, confessional activities shall not be permitted."

Confessional religious education, religious rituals, the content of school subjects is part of private schools, and not of public schools and schools with a concession.

In public debates during the adoption of this legislation, this system was sharply attacked by the Catholic church, which held that in this way the constitutional rights of citizens had been violated, while it forgot about Article 7 of the Constitution, which states: "The state and religious communities shall be separate." By putting pressure on the legislators, radical church circles were attempting to prevent the clearly established



autonomy of the school, in this way their desire for domination in the area of education came to light<sup>9</sup>.

The Catholic church claimed there was a contradiction between the Organization and Financing Act and the constitution and the international declarations on human rights; however, the Act inaugurated the system which allowed people to choose a private education, and which also allowed a school funded with public money to provide education in the spirit of a particular confession, while not allowing a system which in the area of public schooling adapted education to one of the particular conceptual horizons.

To the radical circles in the church there was also controversy in the system which in the primary school prohibited confessional activities, while at the same time as part of the optional subjects in the final triad charged schools to offer among the social sciences and humanity subjects non-confessional teaching on religion and ethics. (Article 17)

Apparently the church circles were aware that with the implementation of the possibility of choice, offering information on the religions of the world as a non-confessional subject in public schools, they had lost maneuvering space for their insistence on the impossibility of acquainting pupils with different religions, and here they gave away their covert desire for domination in public education.

The right to acquire additional knowledge on religions in a non-confessional way was not a problem simply for extremists in the Catholic church, but also for a section of the left wing, which saw in every teaching about religions a concession on the part of the church and its demands for the renewed ideologization of public education in Slovenia.

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<sup>9</sup> See Kodelja 1995.

Today – almost four years after, when the Council of Experts passed the program of the optional non-confessional subject on religions and ethics, it seems that the decision adopted by the majority in parliament, when it said "no" to confessional public schooling and "yes" to providing knowledge about religions on the one hand and "yes" to the right to choose confessional teaching in private schools on the other, was right. Nevertheless the church is still claiming "its rights".

4. *The Grammar Schools Act* does not introduce any essential structural changes into the system. In spite of the fact that it brings in so-called technical grammar schools, which offer 4-year study programs, in this way it only solves the problems which arose at the so-called technical schools with the introduction of the Matura exam. Classes at these schools which until now had prepared for the Matura will in the future be established at the beginning of secondary school and will be separated from the ordinary classes of a technical orientation. Otherwise the legislation as a whole does not introduce any major new systemic features, and with the adoption of the law on the Matura exam, which has been drafted and awaits parliamentary adoption, the legislation will complete the changes to education leading to university studies which started at the end of the eighties.

5. *The Vocational and Professional Act* in contrast to that for grammar schools, sets out important steps towards restructuring its range of education. It enables a dual system of education, in an altered form it reintroduces the so-called apprentice system, which puts greater emphasis on practical work in education for a profession and concern for successful education is transferred from the school to the private trader and his business. Indeed in the adoption of decisions in this area the law includes the chambers of commerce and small business, as well as the unions (see Articles 14-16). Everyone, including the state, acts as a partner in the area of vocational education. Naturally it will depend on the strength and cooperation of the partners to what extent the dual system will thrive. The law offers this simply as an opportunity, just as it offers other very broad possibilities. In the event of the partnership not

thriving, the state still has at its disposal an ongoing system of so-called whole-year organization of education within public vocational schools.

Alongside the implementation of the dual system it would be prudent to mention the fact that with the separation of professional and vocational education from the preparation for the Matura exam in grammar school programs, a dualism has been reintroduced in education for vocations and for continuing studies at university. The reintroduction of dualism seemed sensible on the basis of the assessment that the preparation of pupils both for vocations and for further university study did not satisfactorily perform either of the two tasks it was set.

The legislation does not enable the aforementioned unity, but it allows the possibility that from two separate verticals undergraduates may transfer to one or another stream by completing the Matura exam or a vocational course. After completion of a general or technical Gymnasium, it is possible to obtain a vocational qualification even without the Matura examination, by attending one-year vocational courses offering the possibility to upgrade general knowledge with more specialized and practical vocational education and training to Gymnasium graduates. The fairly broad general education basis makes a high level of vocational flexibility possible. This type of education is also accessible to people with jobs but without suitable vocational qualifications. On the other hand, the graduates of secondary vocational and technical schools wishing to pass the Matura examination and continue their education at universities will have the possibility to enroll in a one year Matura course. Similar programs will be offered to adults wishing to take the entire Matura examination or individual parts thereof. Recently, in the discussion on the Matura, the ministry of education has proposed the inauguration of a possible fifth Matura subject as an entrance condition for the limited (inside the vocational vertical) spectrum of university programs.

The next important new feature legally enshrined in the system of vocational education is the possibility of non-university post-secondary

education in professional colleges. "After secondary technical schools and vocational-technical schools, it is possible to continue studies at two-year post-secondary technical colleges. So-called differential examinations make it possible for applicants with a master craftsman's examination to enroll in these colleges too. They form part of the vocational education and training system; although they are a special form of tertiary education, they are separate from higher education. They are different from professional higher education institutions in that they have a markedly practical character. They are designed for plant engineers, who need a high level of general and professional knowledge and extensive direct practical experience in more demanding technological processes. These schools bridge the gap between secondary and higher education, which has been open until now." The adoption of the law enabled the introduction of professional college programs in regional centers outside Ljubljana and Maribor – for example: Velenje (electronics), Bled (catering and tourism), Novo mesto (mechanical engineering). and Celje (tool making) New programs are, at the same time, as a rule established around strong secondary school centers.

In contrast to those already discussed, the Higher Education Act was adopted back in 1993. Higher education includes universities (University of Ljubljana, 1919; University of Maribor, 1975) and free-standing higher education institutions (at the moment two graduate schools and five professional institutions of higher education). There are also some professional institutions of higher education which belong to the universities. There are two types of undergraduate study programs: university (lasting 4 to 6 years) and professional programs (lasting 3, exceptionally 4 years). University programs are research based; the admission requirement is a successfully completed Matura examination. Professional programs are applied in nature and include practical training. Applicants have to pass either the Matura or final secondary-school leaving examination. Graduate programs offered are specialization (to 2 years), master's (2 years) and doctoral (4 years) programs. The Higher Education Act will have been changed by the end

of the year. Greater financial autonomy (lump-sum budgeting) is to be introduced and the premises are to be owned by the university and not by the state anymore.

6. *The Adult Education Act* provided a new systemic framework for education, which is growing in size and importance. The coming period will definitely be marked by various forms of acquiring knowledge, which will be needed both for work and for life in the complex world of representative democracy and even more so market economy. The programs "for raising the general educational and cultural level of the population, functional literacy, .... education for democracy, learning of foreign languages" (Article 7) and so forth, will without doubt represent an important condition for normal involvement in life in the coming decade.

Here it is realistic to expect that we will witness continuous additional education and training for work, which will not be subordinated to the criteria of formal education. The introduction of the so-called certificate system and proof of acquired knowledge, which in fact allows people through the system of credits to acquire a publicly valid education (Articles 7-9), will remove the system of adult education from the traditional "route generally pursued by the individual, (which) is the quest for a paper qualification." (Teaching and learning 1995, 7) For Act, which governs adult education in Slovenia, it is also true that although it does not bring into question the "traditional route as such, ... (it) advocates that a more open, more flexible approach should be adopted alongside it." (ibid.) The idea of the so-called "personal skills card" will gain increasing currency in Slovenia, which is otherwise rather traditionally orientated towards the value of paper qualifications.

For Slovenia the adoption of this philosophy is particularly important, since within its population structure it has a large group of people who hold a relatively low formal education and who will require major supplementation of their knowledge before they complete their working life. It will not be possible to substitute for the shortfall with formal types

of education, and it will be necessary to develop as many different types of non-formal education as possible, thereby meeting the shortfall in the past generation.

The national program of adult education, which is due on the basis of the law to be adopted by parliament, has already been drafted and should undergo a reading this autumn in the government and then later in parliament. Even more importantly – this year the ministry of education and the ministry of labor launched the program for unemployed called Program 5000.

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First the White Paper (1993-1995), then the legislation (1996) and after that the reworking of the curriculum. Such was the order of events envisaged at the start of the systematic changing – the reform of the education system in Slovenia.

1. Following the second reading of the legislation in parliament, when it was clear what the essential elements of the new legislation would be, the Ministry of Education proposed the appointing of the National Curriculum Council (NCC), a body of experts from different fields relating to education. The government gave the Council the task of determining, while taking into consideration the basic principles embodied in the White Paper on Education in Slovenia and the new legislation, the fundamental aims of the change in the content of the curricula; of appointing commissions for specific fields (for pre-school institutions, primary schools, grammar schools, vocational education, and adult education) and subjects; and of coordinating the work of the commissions and submitting to the councils of experts proposals on reworked and mutually coordinated programs for the entire vertical axis of education.

2. "The NCC was aware that there was no single solution for curricular changes, and so the first step of the NCC was to learn about experience

in other countries. The NCC carefully studied the strategies of change and the major difficulties other countries had to face." (Svetlik, Barle, 1999) By doing so the NCC followed the philosophy of the reform or change: experts were constantly using the knowledge and experience already acquired elsewhere trying to find out what the best possible solution could be.

"A common vision of curricular changes was adopted in the document entitled *Guidelines to the Curricular Reform*. This document was sent to all educational institutions in June 1996. The Guidelines included the broader context of the education system in Slovenian society, major difficulties, aims, and goals of curricular changes, the strategy for solving problems, the main values, the strategy, and the schedule of the curricular reform. This document represented the framework and guidelines for further work of the NCC and all its bodies." (Svetlik, Barle, 1999)

One of the most important bodies were five field curricular commissions for pre-school education, compulsory education, grammar schools, technical and vocational education, and adult education appointed by the NCC. These commissions included 80 experts from the university, institutes, economy and educational institutions. They were supposed to ensure the coherence of the program in their areas.

The NCC also appointed 42 subject and cross-curricular commissions bringing together 278 experts. The same subject commission made proposals for syllabuses for all parts of the education system. In this manner, the vertical integration/differentiation of subjects was to be ensured. Because of the complexity of technical and vocational education, 27 program curricular commissions were established involving 158 experts. More than 500 experts were involved in total across all the curricular commissions. About 40 % of them have been teachers. In addition – and this is one of the decisive part of the curricula renewal – all teachers from preprimary to including secondary

education have been included in reviewing and elaborating new curricula<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Svetlik and Barle (1999) describe the procedure using compulsory education as an example:

"The field curricular commission for compulsory education analyzed the existing program and compared it with the programs in foreign countries. On the basis of this analysis, it prepared a proposal for a new program and timetable.

In line with the proposal of the timetable and the time allotted to the specific subject or subject area, the subject curricular commissions produced the first drafts of syllabuses for their subjects. Before this they had to analyze at least three syllabuses from other European countries.

The field curricular commission then organized a seminar for all subject commissions, where the drafts were discussed with all other commissions. After this they revised their drafts from the cross-curricular point of view.

The new draft version was sent to samples of teachers' circles, i.e. to 20 % of all Slovenian teachers of the particular subject. Teachers' circles discussed the drafts and sent their comments, proposals, etc. to the relevant subject commissions. Subject commissions had to analyze their comments: they could either include them in the new draft or explain to the teachers why their comments were not included. Afterwards, the new (third) drafts (together with the analysis of teachers' remarks) were sent to all Slovenian teachers.

They discussed the drafts and wrote down their comments. All teachers could also complete a questionnaire. In fact 70-80 % (varies according to subject) did so. The questionnaire was analyzed for each subject and each year separately.

On the basis of these analyses, a fourth version of each syllabus was made, which was then sent to the samples of teachers' circles in March 1998. They could compare the new version with the old one and determine which and how many comments and proposals the subject commission included in the new version of the syllabus. After the presentation of new versions of syllabuses to sample teachers' circles, the latest version was prepared for discussion in all circles in May 1998. Once again, the procedure was the same. In fact, four versions of syllabuses were produced solely on the basis of teachers' proposals. The 'final' version was prepared after the discussion in the field curricular commissions in May and June 1998.

The field curricular commissions reviewed all syllabuses, and once they had established that they were appropriately updated (according to the guidelines they adopted), they presented them to the NCC. The NCC decided on the proposals. When it considered them appropriate, it sent them to the Council of Practitioners which was established in the course of the curricular reform and whose role was to assess the proposals in terms of applicability. It could demand amendments, and the NCC had to consider them before it sent the documents to the Council of Experts for adoption."



Lively discussion took place during the curriculum renewal. Between the spring of 1998 and the spring of 1999 more or less all the programs, with the exception of very diversified programs at the field of vocational education, were accepted by the Councils of Experts.

2.1. The debate on reworking of the curricula, which was expected to bring with it mutually more harmonized programs in individual parts of the system and do away with unnecessary duplication of material, was set in motion. It took into account the need for modern society to see knowledge not simply as a means for achieving certain goals but also as an end in itself: "its basis is pleasure of understanding, knowing and discovering." (Delors, 1996, 87)

In the spectrum of non-instrumental knowledge, the "well-trained mind needs a broad background and the opportunity to study a small number of subjects in depth. Both need to be encouraged during the whole of a person's education " (ibid.).

We do not need any unnecessary dealing with everything that results in universal ignorance and superficiality, nor at the same time do we need any dealing with the methods of teaching in the form of learning without any in-depth addressing of the knowledge which is the fruit of the efforts of our forebears and of our generation, "learning to know presupposes learning to learn, calling upon the power of concentration, memory and thought. (...) Using the memory, is a necessary antidote to being swamped by the instant information put out by the media, it would be dangerous to imagine that memory has become unnecessary because of the incredible capacity to store and circulate information now at our disposal. We must certainly be selective about what we learn 'by heart', but the specifically human faculty of memory by association must be carefully cultivated. All specialists agree that the memory must be trained from childhood and that it is inappropriate to eliminate from school certain traditional, supposedly boring exercises." (ibid. 88)

The emphasizing of deeper knowledge and learning in the form of memorizing of course does not simply mean training the brain and knowledge of material. It involves much more. Knowledge which is not simply superficial and inaccurate allows us to discover the sense of individual phenomena, it allows us to consider things which beyond a certain level of knowledge are hidden, it teaches us to be thorough, weans us away from dilettantism and encourages application. It is difficult to say how far the curricular reform in Slovenia has reached in this respect; we shall have to wait and see.

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Conceptual considerations, legislation and the reworked programs are mere scribbles on paper if in the education system there are not the proper material conditions for its functioning. The appropriateness of material conditions can most often be measured by the share of GNP a country allocates for education. In recent years Slovenia has supported its decision to restructure the education system with a higher share of GNP for education. In 1991, in line with the UNESCO methodology, we invested 4.76 per cent of GNP in education; in the period 1991-1999 the funds have amounted near to 6 per cent of GNP.

More funds have been allocated for providing premises for the work of students and teachers. Additional funds have also been invested in equipping schools and in particular equipping schools with computers.

With the average proportion between the remainder of finances and the finances earmarked for capital expenditure in OECD being 9 per cent, in Slovenia in recent years being a little higher than 9 per cent, thus reaching the level of investment which in the long term allows normal renewal of the system, especially given the assumption that GNP will continue to rise.

At a time when there is a decline in the number of children enrolling in the first year of primary school, and at the same time there is an

increase in the number of those attending post-secondary non-university and university institutions, relatively stable financing of education is essential and will be a measure of the wisdom of the government that will lead Slovenia in a time of the largest generations of secondary and post-secondary education.

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