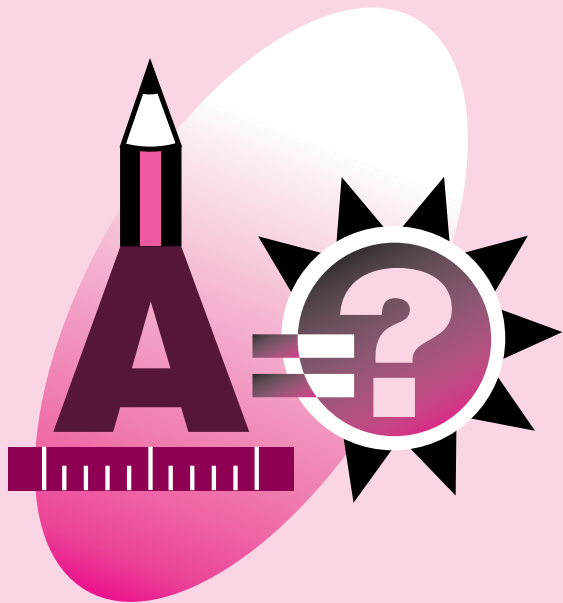


# Primary Schools





## 1 INTRODUCTION

The proposed primary education project for the Republic of Slovenia results from a critical analysis of primary education in our country as well as in other developed countries. The analysis has preserved the system and essential solutions relating to the work and organization of primary schools as they are, wherever there are no good reasons for the introduction of changes; new and different solutions are proposed for those factors that have been found to hinder or obstruct quality, modern and efficient compulsory education. In preparing the primary education project, we have taken into consideration recent findings in education theory, recommendations of the Council of Europe and other international organizations; we have studied development trends in this area and examined systemic and curricular solutions in a number of countries, but were careful not to neglect the situation at home, especially the positive elements in our system of education and sound solutions in educational practice. Trends certainly include some novel ideas introduced by the so-called “innovatory” movement which has developed in many primary schools in the late eighties and early nineties; whereas individual solutions introduced into educational practice by this movement still remain to be professionally verified, legally formalized and regulated.

### Goals

The goals for primary education, which are the basis for defining theoretical points of departure and guidelines on its development and changes, are specific: to make possible personality development of pupils in accord with their abilities and principles of the developmental period (by balancing their cognitive, emotional and social development), to convey to them the basic knowledge and skills that make possible an independent, efficient and creative confrontation with the social and natural environment, to develop their awareness of belonging to a specific cultural tradition and enable them to continue their schooling. Education must be oriented to a complete development of the human personality and enhanced respect of human rights and basic freedoms. It must promote understanding, tolerance and solidarity among people, nations, races and religious communities.

*The primary school accordingly:*

1. conveys knowledge from various scientific areas and educates in the spirit of respect for human rights and basic values deriving therefrom;

2. makes possible the achievement of internationally comparable standards of knowledge after the completion of primary education;
3. stimulates mental development, critical thinking, imagination and the ability to communicate;
4. stimulates environment-related learning and learning as a social activity;
5. stimulates understanding and expression in the mother tongue and acceptance of one's own cultural tradition;
6. familiarizes with other cultures and civilizations and provides the possibility for the study of languages;
7. conveys knowledge about Slovenia's history and tradition;
8. develops abilities for living in a pluralistic and democratic society;
9. stimulates experience and expression in music, plastic arts, dance and other forms of artistic expression;
10. makes possible optimum development of gifted and/or other children with special needs;
11. educates for a healthy lifestyle and stimulates responsibility for the natural environment;
12. stimulates motor skill development and encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own health.

## 2 CURRENT SITUATION

### 2.1 System, management, financing and statistics

Article 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia stipulates that primary education is compulsory and to be financed with public funds. Primary education is regulated by the Primary Education Act (Official Gazette of SRS nos. 5/80, 29/86 and 31/86); the Law on the Education and Training of Mentally and Physically Handicapped Children and Youth

(Official Gazette of SRS nos. 19/76 and 23/79) regulates the education and training of physically and mentally handicapped children. Primary education of children in the Republic of Slovenia is carried out by primary schools, special primary schools (for children with minor physical and mental handicaps) and institutions for the education and training of children with special needs. Primary education within the scope of the guaranteed education program is free and is financed with public funds.

Communities, as founders of primary schools, responsible for the area of primary education, must provide conditions for the implementation of the guaranteed primary education program and see to the programs for additional activities. The statutory program grants all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia the right to receive primary education in the form of instruction and other educational activities to the extent determined by the Primary Education Act and compulsory syllabi for primary school.

According to the Organization and Financing of Education Act, financial obligations are divided among communities and the state. Funds from the state budget are earmarked for wages and for a portion of the personal income of the staff for the execution of the statutory primary education program, as well as for the wages of day-care teachers from the first to fourth grades and for the implementation of the primary music education. Funds from community budgets cover the material costs incurred by schools, costs of the maintenance of school buildings and costs of the purchase of teaching materials and equipment. Communities provide funds for transporting children to school and investments in the primary education system. In addition to the foregoing, communities also provide funds for additional programs that may vary from one community to another. They thus provide financing for day care in the fifth and higher grades, the day care of commuters, optional classes and a greater extent of extracurricular activities, subsidize school lunches and the purchase of textbooks, and co-finance school contests, youth periodicals and clubs. Communities also finance the in-service teacher training and subsidize their meals and commuting expenses. It should also be added that the costs of above-standard services in the area of primary education may also be contributed to by parents and the immediate environment, according to their needs and financial possibilities.

Differences arise between communities in the financing of material costs and other primary education programs. Since the state is obliged to ensure to all Slovene pupils equal conditions of education, the financing by communities enforces the method of the balancing of community budgets. This

means that on the basis of uniform criteria for financing primary education and other community activities, funds of individual communities whose financial resources fail to meet all obligations determined by such criteria may be increased with funds from the state budget.

It should also be noted that, since 1992, when the problem of school lunches was made a public issue, lunches have been subsidized both by communities and from the state budget.

Some statistical information is helpful at this point. One of the basic statistical indicators is the number of registered first-grade pupils. During the period 1984-85 to 1994-95, Slovenia's schools had an enrollment of 25,000 to 30,000 children. The number of enrolled first-grade students was the following: for the school year 1984-85, 29,402; 1989-90, 28,001; and 1994-95, 25,452. Enrollment in Slovene primary schools increased until 1986-87 and has declined every year since. From 30,046 enrolled in the school year 1986-87, the number of first-graders declined to 27,016 in 1990-91 and in the school year 1994-95 the number of pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary school had declined to 25,452.

At the beginning of the school year 1994-95, there were 431 central, i.e. main, and 385 settlement schools. In the same school year, education was carried out in 9,431 classes with 209,833 pupils who received instruction from 14,200 teachers.

The number of pupils in individual classes during the period from 1984-85 and 1994-95 on the average remained the same, with a slight tendency to decline in the past few years. That means that individual classes on the average comprised 23 pupils (in towns 24 to 25, and in rural areas, 20 to 22) and that there was an average pupil-teacher ratio of 15-1.

In special primary schools, bilingual primary schools and schools for national minority children, the average number of pupils per class was lower than the national average because of the specific requirements of work and locally diverse enrollment. The same is true of the pupil-staff ratio.

## 2.2 Organization of compulsory education in Slovenia and some other countries

### *a) Length and beginning of compulsory education*

In most European and other developed countries, children begin compulsory education at the age of five or six; in some countries (Northern Ireland and Luxembourg) even earlier. They complete their compulsory education, which lasts from nine to eleven years, generally at the age of fifteen to sixteen (Structures of Education and Initial Training..., 1990; World Education Report, 1993; The Swedish Way Towards..., 1992).

In Slovenia, children enter primary schools at the age of seven. Primary education, which in Slovenia equals compulsory education, lasts eight years.

**Table 4: Age of school-age children and length of compulsory education**

Country	Age limits beginning and end of compulsory education	length of compulsory education
Slovenia	7-15 years	8 years
Italy <sup>1</sup>	6-14 years	8 years
Portugal <sup>2</sup>	6-14/15 years	8/9 years
Spain <sup>3</sup>	6-14/16 years	8/10 years
Denmark	7-16 years	9 years
Greece	5.5-14.5 years	9 years
Ireland	6-15 years	9 years
Belgium	6-15/16 years	9/10 years
Germany <sup>4</sup>	6-15/16 years	9/10 years
France	6-16 years	10 years
Luxembourg	4-15 years	11 years
Netherlands	5-16 years	11 years
England and Wales	5-16 years	11 years
Scotland	5-16 years	11 years
Northern Ireland	4-16 years	12 years
Switzerland	7-16 years	9 years
Austria	6-15 years	9 years
Croatia <sup>5</sup>	7-15 years	8 years
Canada	6-15 years	9 years
Finland	7-16 years	9 years
Japan	6-15 years	9 years
New Zealand	6-15 years	9 years
Norway <sup>6</sup>	7-16 years	9 years
Sweden <sup>7</sup>	7-16 years	9 years
Australia	6-15/16 years	9/10 years
USA	6-17 years	12 years
Hungary <sup>8</sup>	7-15 years	8 years

*b) Internal division of compulsory education*

Different countries have different internal divisions of compulsory education, which may depend on the structure of the entire school system, including preschool and secondary school education. In Belgium, primary education, which lasts six years and is divided into three cycles (each lasting two years), is then followed by a fourth cycle of compulsory education that lasts three years; in Italy, the first level of compulsory education (*scuola elementare*, lasting from age six to eleven) is divided into two cycles (the first, two, and the second, three years); in Portugal, compulsory education, which lasts from the age of six to fifteen, is divided into three cycles (the first cycle, four, the second, two, and the third, three years); in Great Britain (England and Wales), there are two different types of internal structure: the first level, which lasts from age five to eleven and is divided into two three-year cycles, is followed by the second level—a five-year compulsory education cycle; another structure which includes a first school, for ages five to ten, a middle school, for ages eight, nine or ten to twelve, thirteen or fourteen, and high school, from the ages of twelve, thirteen or fourteen to sixteen; in Sweden (where the period of transition to the beginning of compulsory education at the age of six is in progress), the nine-year primary school is divided into three cycles, each lasting three years.

.....  
To Table 4:

<sup>1</sup> *By ministerial decree, in the school year 1994-95, some schools will start with ten-year compulsory education (upward extension of education).*

<sup>2</sup> *Nine-year compulsory education began in the school year 1987-88.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Educational Reform Act of 1990 introduced ten-year compulsory education.*

<sup>4</sup> *In some federal Länder (like Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen), compulsory education lasts 10 years.*

<sup>5</sup> *New conceptual solutions envisage nine or ten-year compulsory education, and authors at the same time propose various internal subdivisions.*

<sup>6</sup> *Earlier school entry, the age of six, was introduced in 1994.*

<sup>7</sup> *Gradual transition to an earlier school entry at the age of six (transitional period in which children have the right to enter school at the age of six in accord with the decision of their parents and depending on the possibilities of their community, to be in force from 1991-92 to 1997-98).*

<sup>8</sup> *By governmental decree 51/1994, compulsory education is extended to ten years.*

Sources:

Development of Education 1992/94 (1994). Norway, National Report.

The Development of Education (1994). National Report from Sweden.

Enseignement pré-élémentaire (1993). Eurydice.

The Hungarian National Basic Curriculum (1994). Okker Okatusi Iroda.

Organization of School Life in the Member States of the European Community (1993). Eurydice.

The Swedish Way Towards a Learning Society (1992). Ministry of Education and Science.

Antić, S. (1993). Školstvo u svijetu: Komparativna analiza hrvatskog i europskog (svijetskog) školstva. Hrvatski pedagoško-književni izbor, Zagreb.

In some countries, there is no division within the primary education system; Denmark is an example. Specific is also the German model, i.e. a uniform primary school (lasting four years; in some federal states, the fifth and the sixth year of schooling, the so-called orientation years, are added to the primary school) followed by five or six or three or four-year compulsory education in various types of secondary schools: Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium, Gesamtschule.

In Slovenia, primary school is divided into two four-year education cycles: class and subject level.

*c) School year*

There are considerable differences among countries in the organization of school time and vacation; there are also differences as to the beginning of the school year as well as to whether or not vacations are fixed and state-determined.

Though the number of school days varies from 175 to 216 (Luxembourg), in most cases the school year numbers 200 days. Some countries have no uniformly regulated weekly attendance requirements. The school week extends over five or six days, depending on the local authorities' decision. Although a six-day attendance requirement includes a larger number of school-days, the annual number of periods is in both cases the same. Slovenia, with 190 school days, ranks somewhere in the middle between those countries (Denmark, Great Britain, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands) where the number of school days exceeds the number of vacation days. In some countries, this ratio is balanced (Ireland and Portugal); however, in other countries, the number of days off school exceeds the number of school days (Spain, Greece and France).

*Table 5: The number of school days per year*

Country	Number of school days per year	
	1 <sup>st</sup> level (prim. ed.)	2 <sup>nd</sup> level (sec. ed.)
Slovenia	190	190
Greece	175	175
Spain	175	170
France	180	180
Belgium	182	182
Ireland	184	180/200
Portugal	184	172/203
Germany	188/208	188/208
England and Wales	minimum 190	minimum 190
Northern Ireland	minimum 190	minimum 190
Scotland	190	190
Denmark	200	200
Netherlands	200	200
Italy	minimum 200	minimum 200
Luxembourg	212	216
Finland	190	190
Canada	195	/
Malta	195	/
Sweden	200	200
New Zealand	200	/
Austria	200	200

Sources: Organisation of School Time in the Member States of the European Community (1993), Eurydice; World Education Report (1993), Unesco Publishing.

The length and timing of vacation and other days off school vary from country to country, but these discrepancies are not great. In all countries, summer vacation is the longest (in most countries, including Slovenia, from eight to nine weeks; in some countries such as Spain, Greece and Portugal, a week or two longer, while in other countries such as Germany, Scotland and Denmark, it is shorter), generally scheduled in July and August but, in some countries, also in September.

Most EU countries, and in the past two years Slovenia, have a one-week autumn vacation, followed by the Christmas-New Year vacation (which in all countries is between ten and fourteen days), winter vacation (one week in all countries) and Easter vacation (generally two weeks, but in some countries one week only). Some countries (Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia) also have a one-week May vacation. Moreover,

all these countries also have days off school. These are either various national or local holidays (in EU countries, there are between three and thirteen such days). Slovenia's holidays and days off school total fifteen; however, since most of them fall in the period during vacation, only two days off school remain (or maximum three days, if the so-called principal's day is included).

*d) School week*

In all countries, Sunday is a day off. In most countries, the school week includes five days, in Luxembourg six, and in some countries, as it has already been mentioned, five or six days. In countries with a five-day school week, pupils attend school from Monday through Friday (also in Slovenia), the sole exception being France where the day off is Wednesday, but there are classes on Saturday morning (see Table 6).

The number of periods in higher grades is generally on the increase. In some countries, like Italy, Belgium and France, the number of periods on all levels of compulsory education remains the same; however, the duration of periods is not necessarily the same (in Spain the length of periods is variable; in France, in lower grades the length is subject to adjustment by the teacher, and in higher grades it lasts fifty-five minutes).

Because of the above-described differences, an objective comparison of obligatory attendance of pupils in different countries is possible only if the number of school days per year, periods per week and the length of periods are converted into daily, weekly and annual attendance requirement in terms of minutes (see Table 7 below).

**Table 6: The number of periods per week and duration of periods**

Country	1 <sup>st</sup> level (prim. ed.)		2 <sup>nd</sup> level (sec. ed.)	
	No. of periods	Period duration (min)	No. of periods	Period duration (min)
Slovenia	22.5/25.5	45	28.5/31.5	45
Denmark	20/28	45	28	45
Netherlands	22/25	60	32	50
Belgium	28	50	28	50
Germany	17/28	45	26/36	45
Greece	23/32	40 - 50	30/32	40 - 45
France	26	55	26	55
Luxembourg	30	18 periods (55 min) 12 periods (50 min)	30	50
Portugal	25	at teacher's discretion	31	50
Spain	25	flexible	25	flexible
Sweden	20/30	40	34	40
Norway	18	45	27	45
Italy	27	55 - 60	27	55 - 60
Finland	21/23	45	24/26	45
England and Wales	23	30 - 40	35/40	35 - 40
Ireland	22	flexible	45	35 - 40

Sources: Organisation of School Time in the Member States of the European Community (1993). Eurydice; World Education report (1993), Unesco Publishing.

**Table 7: Pupils' daily, weekly and annual attendance requirement at the ages of six and nine (in minutes)**

Country	Daily attendance		Weekly attendance		Annual attendance	
	6 years	9 years	6 years	9 years	6 years	9 years
Slovenia	203	212	1015	1060	38 570	40 280
Germany	180/163	225/203	900	1125	33 840	42 300
Denmark	180	198	900	990	36 000	39 600
Greece	207	288	1035	1140	36 225	50 400
Northern Ireland	210	300	1050	1500	39 900	57 000
England, Wales	252	282	1260	1410	47 880	53 580
Netherlands	264	300	1320	1500	52 800	60 000
Scotland	270	300	1350	1500	51 300	57 000
Ireland	220	280	1400	1400	40 480	51 520
Belgium	280	280	1400	1400	50 960	50 960
Portugal	300	300	1500	1500	55 200	55 200
Spain	300	300	1500	1500	52 500	52 500
France	312	312	1560	1560	56 160	56 160
Luxembourg	265	265	1590	1590	56 180	56 180
Sweden	200	200	1000	1000	38 000	38 000
Italy	324/270	324	1620	1620/ 1800	64 800	64 800/ 66 000

Figure 3: Pupils' daily attendance requirement (in minutes)

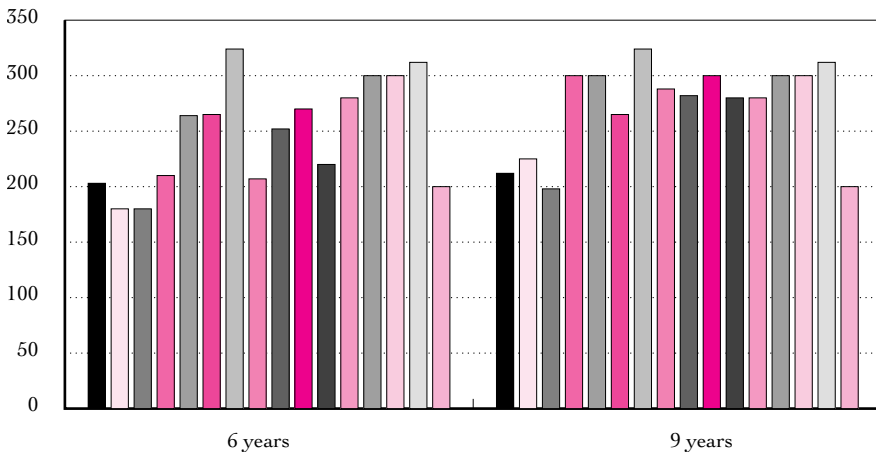
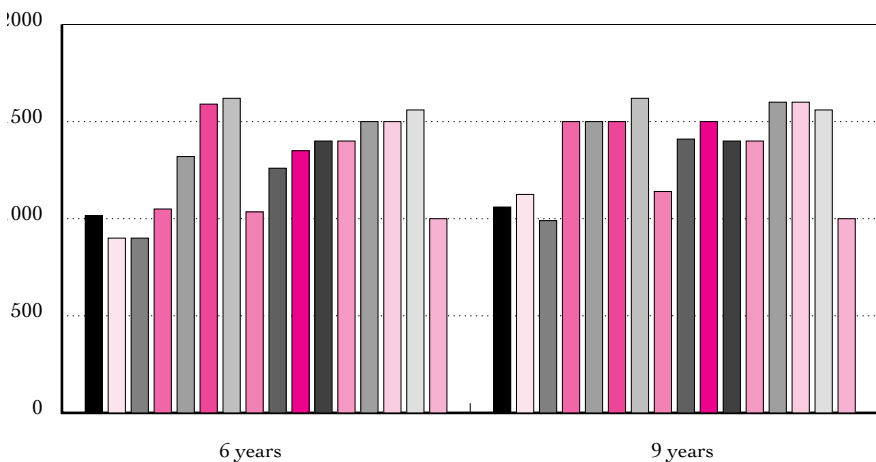


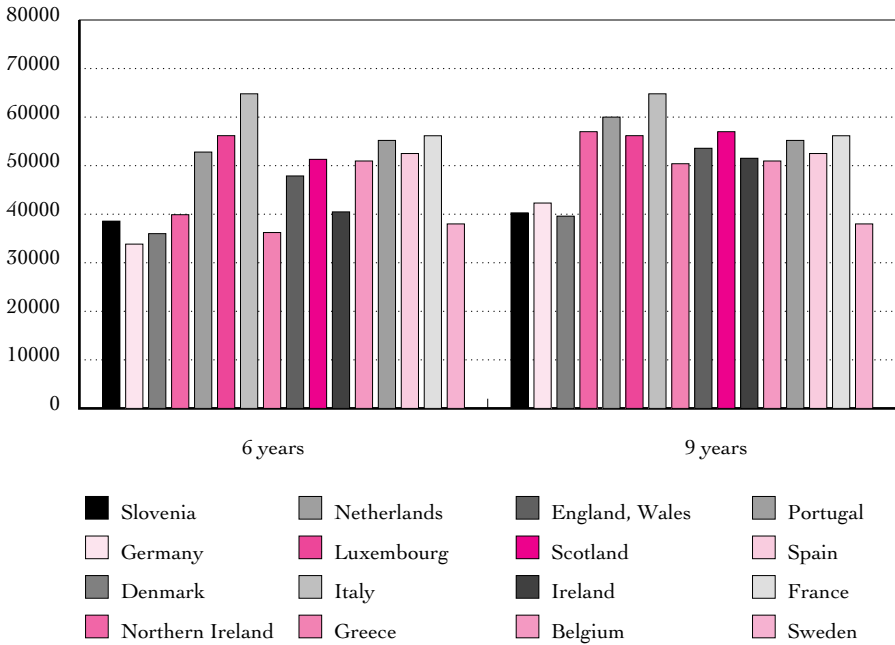
Figure 4: Pupils' weekly attendance requirement (in minutes)



- |                    |               |                  |            |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|------------|
| ■ Slovenia         | ■ Netherlands | ■ England, Wales | ■ Portugal |
| ■ Germany          | ■ Luxembourg  | ■ Scotland       | ■ Spain    |
| ■ Denmark          | ■ Italy       | ■ Ireland        | ■ France   |
| ■ Northern Ireland | ■ Greece      | ■ Belgium        | ■ Sweden   |

Sources for Table 7, Figures 3 and 4:  
 The Development of Education (1994). National Report from Sweden.  
 Organisation of School Time in the Member States of the European Community (1993). Eurydice.  
 World Education Report (1993), Unesco Publishing.

Figure 5: Pupils' annual attendance requirement (in minutes)



Sources:

The Development of Education (1994). National Report from Sweden.

Organisation of School Time in the Member States of the European Community (1993). Eurydice.

World Education Report (1993). Unesco Publishing.

### *ð) School day, extracurricular activities*

In various countries, school days are organized differently. However, there are two predominant models: half-day schooling and whole-day schooling. In the former, classes take place in the morning or in the afternoon only; in the latter, classes are organized so that between morning and afternoon sessions there is a break for lunch (Belgium, Spain, France, Great Britain). The length of the lunch break varies from a half hour to one hour (Denmark, Ireland, and Great Britain) and even several hours in some countries (Luxembourg, France and Spain).

There are also differences in the beginning of the school day. In most countries, school starts between eight and quarter to nine in the morning; in some German Länder even earlier, between half past seven and eight in the morning; and in Portugal, later, between nine and ten in the morning.

In Slovenia, classes are held in the morning (classes in shifts, that is, classes held in the morning one week and in the afternoon the next week, are still organized in seven per cent of the classes in 107 primary schools and 25 settlement schools) and generally start at eight in the morning. After classes, pupils may take lunch at school, and day care is organized for first- to fourth-grade pupils until three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Various other activities, such as optional, remedial and additional classes and extracurricular activities generally take place after school and only rarely later in the afternoon or early in the morning before school.

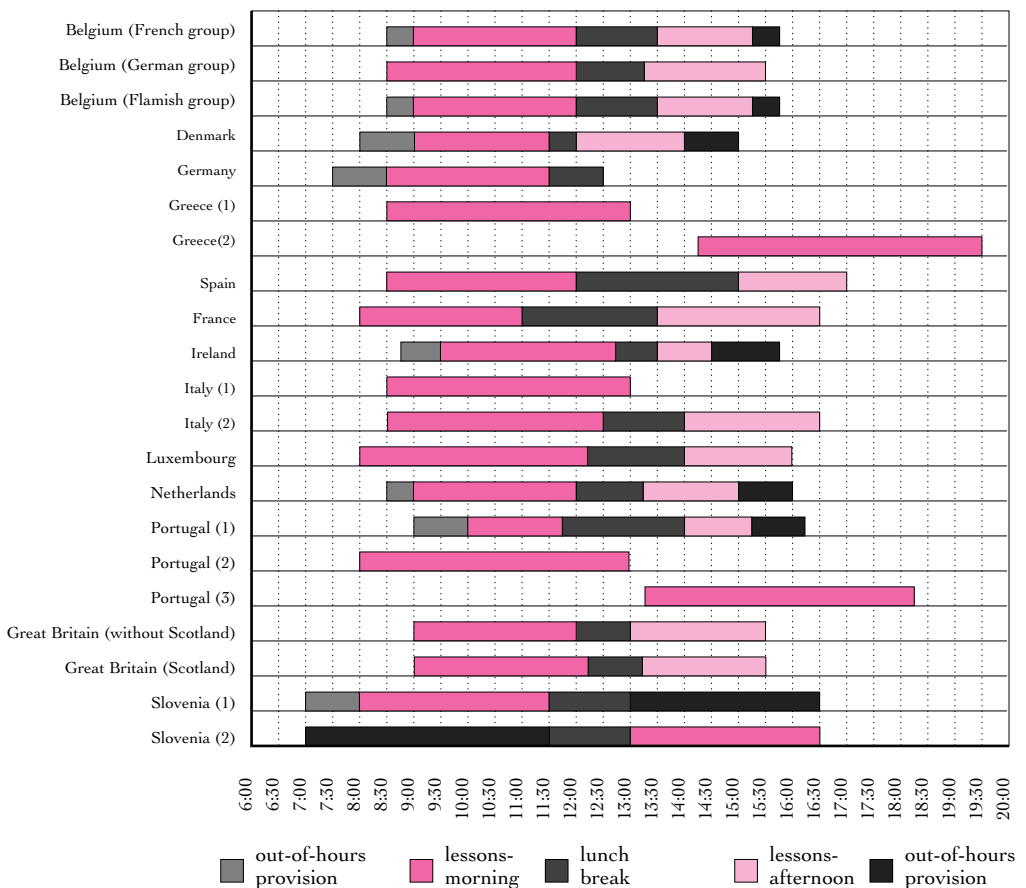
The time spent by pupils at school varies from country to country, which is, of course, the consequence of differences in the organization of the school day. In speaking about a smaller or greater workload of pupils in school, one should not compare only the number of compulsory classes but also those dedicated to other activities, since they all represent the time spent by pupils at school.

Comparative studies conducted among individual countries (Regulations Concerning Compulsory Schooling (1991); Enseignement pré-élémentaire, (1993); Pre-School and Primary Education in European Union, (1994)) show that more and more schools organize various forms of day care that provide different activities for pupils. In some countries, schools thus open one or two hours before the beginning of classes (Belgium, Germany and Greece); in others, pupils spend several hours in day care in the same school after classes are over (France, Belgium and Denmark); or go to day care at other, mainly pre-school, institutions. Day-care activities are in some cases run by teachers and often also by parents and volunteers (depending on the purpose and the method of organization of such activities by the local authorities).

After-school classes include various activities, mainly sports, culture and the arts, and in some cases pupils use them to study or do homework. Extracurricular activities are to some extent coordinated with regular classes, since there are many countries (Italy and Great Britain) where, especially on the first level of education, tasks of increasing, consolidating, systematizing and applied knowledge are integrated into the regular educational process, so that pupils are not expected to do traditional homework. (Of course, this does not exclude exercises like reading and the collection of data which are necessary for joint projects.) In other countries, despite a comparatively extensive number of periods, pupils do their homework either during their stay in day care after school or at home (Germany and France).

In Slovenia, pupils do most of their homework at home; pupils on the class level attending day care after school do most of their homework during their day care (it all represents the school-related workload of such pupils). Some schools are already looking for solutions to integrating a large portion of the homework currently done by pupils at home into classes at school; however, they make it clear that this would require an adequately greater number of periods.

**Figure 6: School day (first level of education) in various countries - distribution of periods within a school day**



\* The graph Slovenia (1) shows the distribution of school-day activities in the morning, which prevails in schools in Slovenia, and the graph Slovenia (2) shows periods in the afternoon in shift-organized lower-level education.

Sources: Pre-school and Primary Education in the European Union (1994). Eurydice, Brussels.

### 2.3 Primary education program

Primary school carries out a guaranteed and an expanded program.

The guaranteed primary school program is defined by the following elements:

*Table 8: The guaranteed compulsory education program*

Grade	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Weekly No. of periods	19	19	20	22	25	26	26	26
Field activities (periods/year)	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Remedial and additional classes (periods/week)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Extracurricular act. (periods/week)	1	1	1	1	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Home class (periods/week)	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Number of subjects	6	6	6	7	10	11	11	13
Weekly periods/class	22.5	22.5	23.5	25.5	30.5	33.5	33.5	33.5
Number of weeks	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38

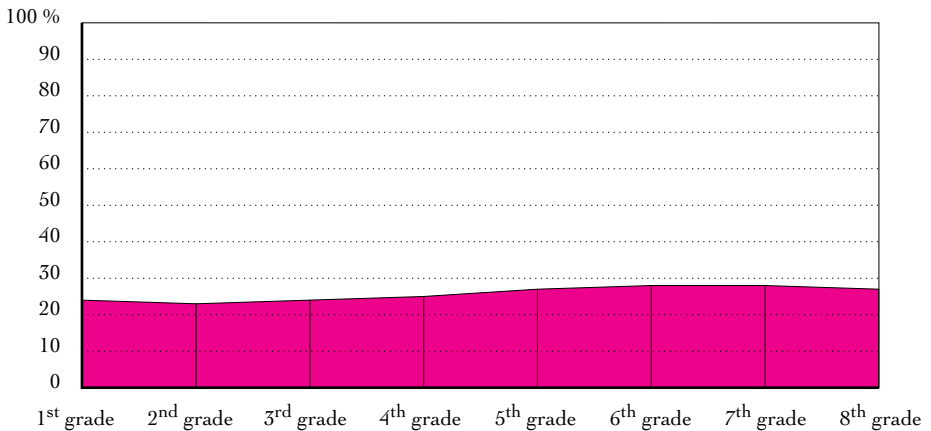
Source: Education in Slovenia for the 21st Century/Izobraževanje v Sloveniji za 21. stoletje - 4 (1991). Board of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

Days of field activities include cultural, science and sports days. Schools organize them in accordance with the syllabus and the education programs, in order to combine the contents of various subjects. Their organization also lays emphasis on a school's particular feature in relation to its environment.

Remedial classes are organized by a school for pupils from the first to the eighth grades who fail to achieve satisfactory results in individual subjects and, therefore, require special assistance in learning on an individual basis. This type of instruction is generally carried out by teachers of individual subjects. Pupils attend such classes until they have made up for the deficiencies of knowledge; however, not more than two hours a week. Schools organize up to two hours of remedial classes in individual subjects per week. The organization of remedial classes before or after regular classes has not proved very efficient.

Remedial classes and other differentiated and individualized forms of education are also organized by schools for pupils with special needs, for socially deprived pupils who require specialized individual help in their learning, and for pupils who need to bridge the gaps in their education, because of prolonged stays in foreign countries with different education systems. Remedial classes are also organized for pupils from first to eighth grades that pass into higher grades with a failure in a subject, as well as for eighth-grade pupils subject to re-examination after a failure.

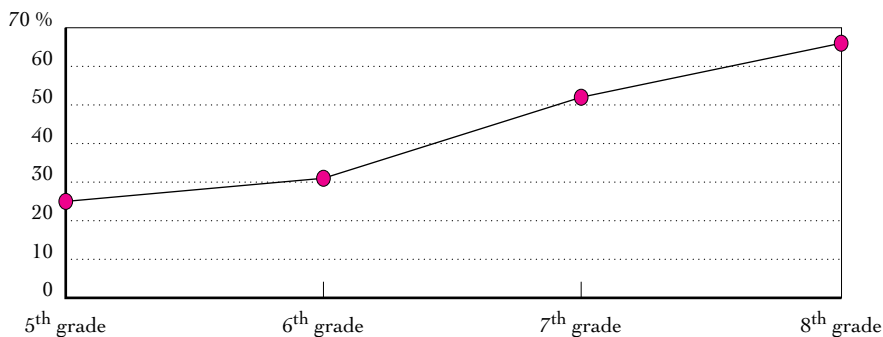
*Figure 7: Percentage of pupils attending remedial classes (end of school year 1992-93)*



Source: Primary and secondary schools at the end of school year 1992-93 and at the beginning of school year 1993-94. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Computer printouts.

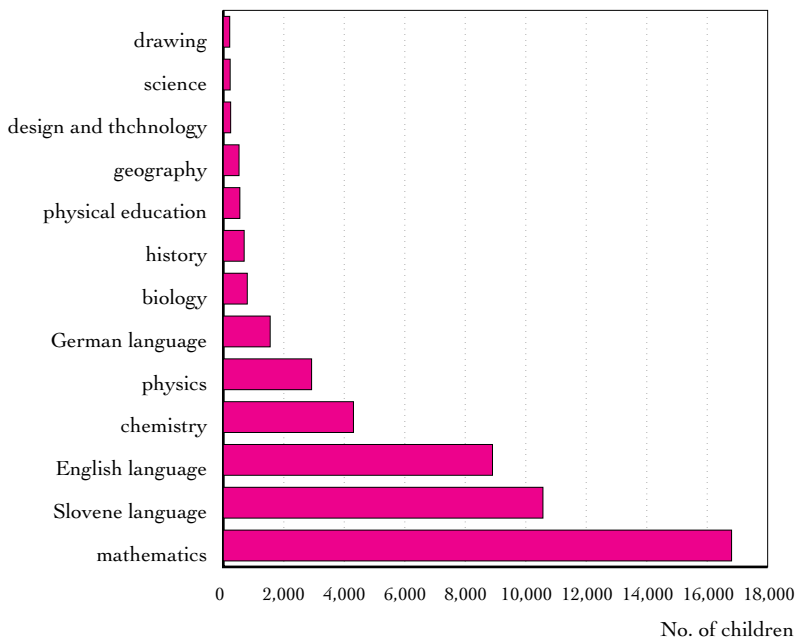
From the fifth to eighth grades, schools also organize additional classes for talented and gifted pupils, in which the emphasis is placed primarily on independent work. Pupils attend classes in a subject of their choice generally one hour per week, exceptionally two hours.

*Figure 8: Percentage of pupils attending additional classes (end of school year 1992-93)*



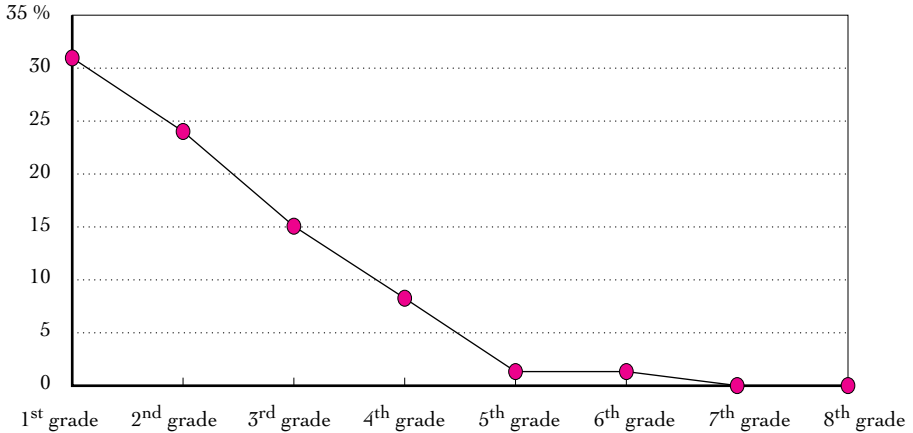
Source: Primary and secondary schools at the end of school year 1992-93 and at the beginning of school year 1993-94. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Computer printouts.

*Figure 9: Additional classes by subjects (end of school year 1992/93)*



Source: Primary and secondary schools at the end of school year 1992-93 and at the beginning of school year 1993-94. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Computer printouts.

**Figure 10: Percentage of pupils attending day-care classes (end of school year 1992/93)**



Source: Primary and secondary schools at the end of school year 1992-93 and at the beginning of school year 1993-94. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Computer printouts.

The school organizes and carries out extracurricular activities throughout the school year, or in the form of short courses, in the following areas: production-technical, research, culture and arts, sports, health care and socio-humanitarian. The school gives every pupil the possibility of participating in at least one extracurricular activity and the privilege of selecting another activity if the first is not satisfactory. Activities are coordinated by a mentor.

The home class includes all pupils within a class that together with their home-class teacher, and, in the case of problems with teachers of individual subjects, counselors, the principal, etc., deal with and learn how to solve problems arising in everyday life at school: they analyze their study results, look for the ways and methods of resolving conflicts in their mutual relations, etc.

The guaranteed program includes school excursions, the school library, counseling services, day care for pupils from the first to fourth grades, subsidized meals and free transport of school-age pupils and accommodations where they attend school, if the school is more than four kilometers away from their homes and adequate transport cannot be provided.

**Table 9: Compulsory primary school syllabus - weekly (W) and annual (A) number of hours**

Educational Fields	1 <sup>st</sup> grade		2 <sup>nd</sup> grade		3 <sup>rd</sup> grade		4 <sup>th</sup> grade		5 <sup>th</sup> grade		6 <sup>th</sup> grade		7 <sup>th</sup> grade		8 <sup>th</sup> grade		Total No. of periods	%		
	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L				
<b>I. LANGUAGES AND ARTS</b>																				
1. Slovene language	5	175	24%	5	175	23%	5	175	21%	5	175	19%	4	132	13%	4	128	13%	1275	19%
2. Foreign language	2	70	10%	2	70	9%	2	70	8%	2	70	8%	2	66	7%	3	96	10%	407	6%
3. Drawing	1	35	5%	1	35	5%	2	70	8%	1	35	4%	1	35	3%	1	32	3%	485	7%
4. Music	1	35	5%	1	35	5%	2	70	8%	1	35	4%	1	35	3%	1	32	3%	345	5%
Cultural activity days	16	2%		12	2%		12	1%		16	2%		16	2%		12	1%		112	2%
<b>II. SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ECONOMICS</b>																				
5. Social studies							3	105	13%	2	70	8%							175	3%
6. Geography										2	70	7%	2	66	7%	1.5	48	5%	184	3%
7. History										2	70	7%	2	66	7%	2	64	7%	200	3%
8. Civic education													1	35	3%	1	32	3%	65	0%
<b>III. SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS</b>																				
9. Science and social studies	3	105	14%	3	105	14%													624	9%
10. Science							2	70	8%	2	70	8%							315	5%
11. Biology													2	66	7%	1.5	48	5%	140	2%
12. Chemistry													2	66	7%	2	64	7%	184	3%
13. Physics													2	66	7%	2	64	7%	130	2%
14. Mathematics	5	175	24%	5	175	24%	5	175	21%	4	140	16%	4	132	13%	4	128	13%	1240	18%
Science days	12	2%		16	2%		16	2%		12	1%		12	1%		16	2%		112	2%
<b>IV. PRODUCTION-TECHNICAL EDUCATION</b>																				
15. Design and technology										1	35	4%	2	70	7%	1	35	3%	202	3%
16. Home economics													1	35	4%	50	3%	95	1%	
Community work and other activities	12	2%		12	2%		12	1%		12	1%		12	1%		12	1%	96	1%	
<b>V. PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE</b>																				
17. Physical education	3	105	14%	3	105	14%	3	105	13%	3	105	12%	3	105	11%	2	64	7%	760	11%
Civil defense course																30			40	1%
Sports days	20	3%		20	3%		20	2%		20	2%		20	2%		20	2%	160	2%	
Number of subjects	6			6			7			10			11			13			960	14%
No. of periods per week	19	725	100%	19	725	100%	22	850	100%	24	900	100%	26	970	100%	26	978	100%	6852	100%
<b>VI. AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES</b>																				
18. Remedial and additional classes	2	70		2	70		2	70		2	70		2	66		2	64		560	
19. Extracurricular activities	2	70		2	70		2	70		3	105		3	99		3	96		685	
20. Home-class periods	0.5	17.5		0.5	17.5		0.5	17.5		0.5	17.5		0.5	16.5		0.5	16		137.5	
Periods per week per class	23.5	38		23.5	38		26.5	38		29.5	38		31.5	38		31.5	38		8224.5	
No. of weeks																				

Sources: Program življenja in dela osnovne šole (1984), Board of Education and sport of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana; conclusions of the Council of Experts for Education of the Republic of Slovenia on changes in the primary school syllabus (1984 - 1994), (1984-), Board of Education and sport of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana. - Minutes.

### 3 PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF CHANGES

Characteristics of the Slovene system of compulsory education and those of some foreign systems described in the previous chapter point out the similarities and differences among them. This chapter and the following present the proposed changes that take into consideration both the comparative advantages of educational systems in other countries and efficient solutions from the Slovene experience in education.

The structure of the contents of these two chapters is such that the principles and objectives of changes are followed by detailed descriptions of the current situation of elements that are now subject to change, as well as by a rationale for individual changes. There is also a detailed account of and justification for each change.

#### **Principles of introduction of changes into the school system**

##### *1. The principle of gradual approach and provision for adequate conditions*

Any change aimed at achieving better results may, in the educational system, achieve the reverse, unless it has previously been verified and evaluated. By taking into account the current level of development in Slovenia (the experience with preprimary school), we are striving for a gradual introduction of all necessary changes in compulsory education; at the same time, this principle must be associated with adequate content, materials, organizational and human-resource related conditions.

##### *2. The principle of the modification of parts depending on the whole*

A systematic modification of individual compulsory education elements is needed; however, it should be made clear how partial changes will be integrated into the compulsory education system as a whole. Schooling cannot begin earlier than it does now without the adaptation of other elements of the system, as well (curricular elements, grading, division of compulsory education, various forms of differentiation, possible forms of integration of handicapped children and solutions to human resource problems).

### *3. The principle of international comparison*

In setting up a compulsory education system that will be comparable to education systems in developed industrial countries, one should objectively take into account other countries' solutions and experiences (ensuring a continuity between preschools and schools and the beginning of compulsory education, an equal method of assessment and transition to the next level of education).

### **Principles of the structuring of the school system**

#### *1. The principle of equal opportunity by taking into consideration individual differences among children and the principle of the right to choose and be different*

All children must be given the possibility of an optimum development of their potentials and systematic acquiring of general and special knowledge, taking at the same time into account individual differences in the pace and style of development and learning. In other words, compulsory education should enable development and advancement of all pupils by taking into account their differences. Therefore, diverse systems of differentiation and organizational and didactic forms should be developed that would, as far as possible, take into account the differences in the pace and particularities of a child's development, her/his talents and pace of advancement, thus, on the one hand, give pupils more knowledge and, on the other, guarantee them a successful completion of education. Decisions on more radical forms of differentiation should be postponed to a later date, because external differentiation does not eliminate differences in pupils' ability to learn, nor does it improve their learning efficiency.

#### *2. The principle of successful completion of primary school and continuation of education*

The contents and organization of the primary school should be devised so that it may be successfully completed; at the same time, school should provoke the curiosity of apter and above-average gifted pupils. The aim, therefore, is to set up a system of knowledge assessment and grading that would take into account children's development and learning capacities and gradually pass from a descriptive and internal to a numerical and external assessment. Grading models should give more consideration to differences in the process of learning, and at the same time ensure the parity of knowledge to abilities. Efforts should be made to give all pupils the possibility of continuing their education on adequate levels after they have completed

primary school. The intention is to ensure that pupils not continuing their education in general education programs on the secondary level have basic vocational training. This requires a national standard of general education, so that vocational training will not be subordinated solely to the requirements of the labor market.

*3. Principle of maintaining balance among the various aspects of children's physical and mental development*

In the realization of this principle, one should take into account the characteristics of developmental periods, transitions from one qualitative developmental stage to another, and critical periods of learning. All children should be ensured regular and systematic education in the period of their most intensive development, as well as the possibility of acquiring knowledge and experience in different areas (cognitive, emotional, social, motor).

*4. The principle of cooperation between pupils, teachers and parents*

Cooperation between pupils encourages solidarity and tolerance and is the basis for participation in democratic processes. The principle of mutual cooperation among above-mentioned subjects complements the principle of respect for individuality and integrity of the individual and is directly connected to the requirement for unlimited freedom.

Parents must have a part in the school's life and work: they must have access to the information about the operation of the school as an institution and about their children's education; they may take an active part in the school's work; however, under the condition of clearly defined limits of problems that lie within the scope of the profession.

The school must provide the protection of pupils' and parents' right to privacy.

*5. The principle of integration of handicapped pupils*

The education of handicapped pupils should be carried out in such a way and in such an environment that would present minimum possible restraint and enable them to make adequate progress, to control their disabilities and mitigate effects to the maximum possible extent.

*6. The principle of maintaining a general education orientation of the primary school*

The primary school is an establishment for general education and should in none of its aspects carry out systematic and specific vocational training. Optional subjects should also have a general educational character, though also a practical orientation.

*7. The principle of school autonomy and professionalism of teachers*

The principle of autonomy refers to the school as an institution in relation to authorities, politics, religious communities and political parties, as well as to the autonomy and academic freedom of teachers and pupils.

The teaching staff must be independent and autonomous in their sphere of activity, especially in the field of methodology, with educational objectives, standards and contents defined by the national curriculum. Education of the teaching staff (contents, methods, relationships) must also be in accord with the national curriculum.

The school must provide for the protection of the teachers' right to privacy.

## 4 PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The following paragraphs provide a more detailed presentation of those parts of primary school education which, in our opinion, need to be modified, professionally improved and/or regulated.

### **4.1 Duration of the primary school, beginning of education**

*a) Current situation*

The primary and compulsory education in Slovenia are of the same duration (eight years) so that, by finishing primary school, pupils also complete their statutory compulsory education. After primary school, most pupils continue their education. The percentage of pupils not continuing post-primary school education is between ten and fifteen percent and has been in the past two years on the decline. In the school year 1985-86, the percentage was 14.5%, two years later 12.1%; in 1990-91, it sank to 10.1%, and in 1992-93, it was 11.4%. These pupils remain without basic vocational edu-

cation and with an extremely low level of general learning, so that they face a permanent threat of unemployment.

According to the Primary School Act (1980), children in Slovenia who, by the beginning of the school year (September 1) turn six years and six months of age, enroll in the first grade; or, in other words, school-age children are those who in the current school year turn seven by the first of March (chronological age of children on entering school is between six years and six months and seven years). Children may also enroll in the first grade who are age six by the beginning of the school year; and younger children who, in the current school year, from March first to September first, turn six (chronological age of children on entering school is between six and six years and six months). These children may enroll in primary school if relevant administrators find them adequately prepared. The level of their aptitude is to be determined by the Commission for the Admission of New Pupils; the Commission may also propose the postponement of admission of individual pupils. Parents should comply with the Commission's decision.

The Primary Education Act does not regulate the compulsory establishing of children's readiness for entering school; however, testing of the entire generation of school-age children is still very much viable, and test results are frequently used by schools for the purpose of grouping first graders.

Children are enrolled in the first grade of primary school in September of the current year for the following school year. All children must receive preprimary education one year before their enrollment in primary school. From the point of view of organization, number of periods of the entire preprimary school, program and personnel involved, preprimary education is highly diversified. Children attending preschool institutions go through the preprimary program in full-time programs, and children not attending preschool institutions go through this program outside full-time programs (the so-called external preprimary school). In the school year 1993-94, preprimary school within full-time programs was attended by 72% of children, and external preprimary school by 28% (source: information of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia for the school year 1993-94). External preprimary school includes from 120 to 521 hours a year, either in the morning or in the afternoon, depending on the possibilities of preschools and schools engaged in this kind of activity. The preprimary school is generally carried out by preschool teachers, but may also be carried out by school teachers and some other specialists (psychologists and pedagogues).

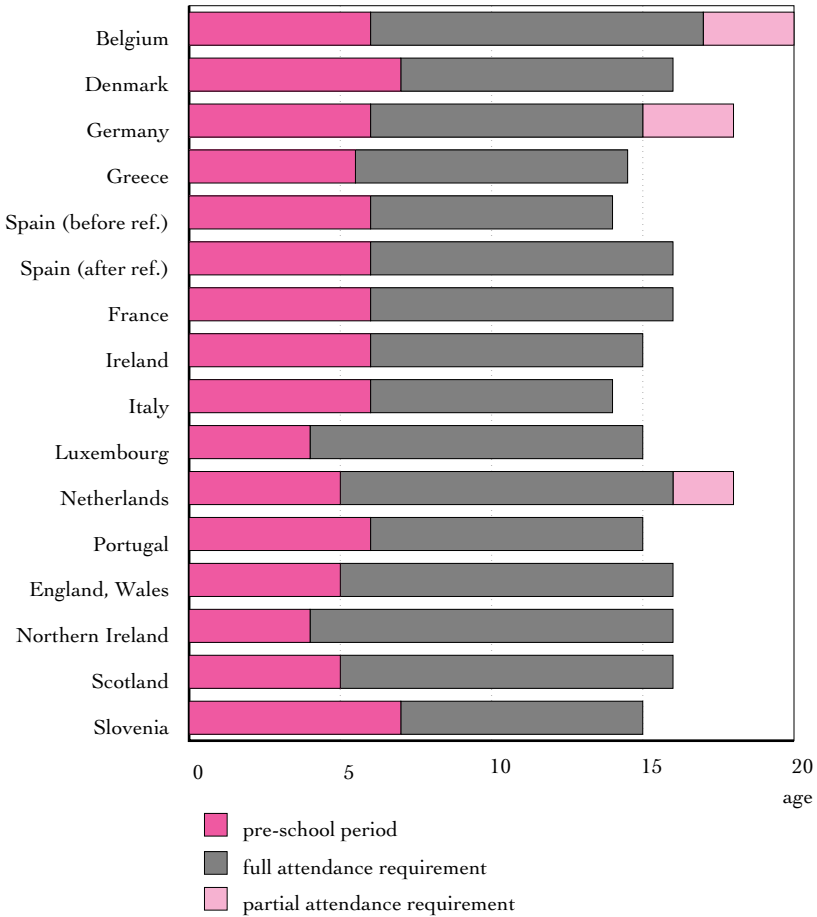
Preprimary classes generally include children aged between five years and six months and six years and six months, but may also include younger children, as well as those who, due to a postponed enrollment in primary school (generally younger, but possibly also school-age children), attend preprimary school again. In recent years, the age span of children attending preprimary school is relatively broad, which is also because preschools systematically form mixed-age groups (there are many advantages in such groups, especially from the point of view of socialization), with an age span mainly from three to seven (these groups, therefore, also include children attending preprimary school).

The program base for preprimary school is laid down in the Education Program for Education and Care of Preschool Children (1980), which after more than ten years requires changes in contents and methods and a clearer definition within the concept of education on the initial primary school level. This does not diminish the importance of the role played by the compulsory preprimary school in 1980s as far as its contents are concerned, especially for culturally deprived children (Toličič, 1986). Preprimary school also pointed out the importance of a systematic and professional influence on children's' development and learning as early as the preschool period. Compulsory preprimary school represents the first steps toward the introduction of the nine-year compulsory education.

*b) Reasons for changes*

In most countries, compulsory education starts at the age of six (Spain, Belgium, Germany); in some countries, at the age of five (Greece, the Netherlands and Scotland) or even four (Luxembourg and Northern Ireland). In Sweden, an early beginning of education, at age six, is currently being introduced. Therefore, children in most countries start their education earlier than those in Slovenia, and compulsory education lasts nine or more years.

**Figure 11: Duration of compulsory education in EU countries and Slovenia**



Sources:

Les Systèmes Éducatifs en Europe, 1990.

Organization of School Time in the Member States of the European Community (1993). Eurydice.

In any discussion about the beginning of a prolonged primary school education at an earlier age, the importance of the early developmental stage (from three to eight years) for a child's later development should be pointed out, namely, from the point of view of providing conditions for the development of a child's potentials for and possibilities of systematic learning. In the majority of European countries, preschool institutions are attended by a considerably higher number of preschool children than in

Slovenia. For instance, in Belgium, France, Greece, and Spain, all five-year-olds attend preschool institutions (Primary Education..., 1990; Early Childhood Education Explained, 1992), while in Slovenia, only 52% of children of that age attend preschool institutions. As a matter of fact, most countries take into consideration those theoretical points of departure, declaring that preparation for school should be an integral part of the entire institutional preschool education; preschool education programs, therefore, should be suited to the developmental stage of children and not merely represent a preparation for the subsequent level of education (Kagan, Zigler 1987; Learning to Succeed, 1993; Gipps, 1992; Melhuish, Moss, 1991).

In Slovenia, the existing preprimary school is unified neither from the point of view of organization (numbers of classes, implementation) nor contents and, as such, does not give all children sufficient possibilities for the development of their potentials. Preprimary school is carried out as a one-year program one year before entering school. For this reason, it is largely subordinated to the expectations and requirements of the first grade of primary school, i.e. to the immediate preparation of children for the beginning of their education and not to the principles of their development.

Since the state also provides the possibility of opening private preschools, which often have philosophical premises and pedagogical principles of their own, a uniform school preparation has become uncertain from that point of view as well. The question is whether or not private preschools will carry out preprimary school and in what ways laws should regulate their carrying out of such programs.

To summarize: an early beginning of education is justified both from the point of view of children's development and from the point of view of guaranteeing the opportunity for systematic learning to all children. The current preprimary school is not unified, and the preprimary school program requires changes to the contents and methods. For this reason, many children in the very important early developmental stage lack sufficient possibilities for the development of their potentials.

The decision concerning the extending of the duration of primary education to nine years is made in order to mitigate the time pressures and workload on pupils in the existing primary education; and, at the same time, to raise the citizens' level of education, as it is in most developed European

countries. This will require an extension and improvement of the existing contents of learning, especially the so-called formative aspects, and a reduction of the predominantly informative and trivial ones.

The current division of primary education into class and subject levels does not match the principles and dynamics of children's development and the role of learning on individual developmental stage (Educational Provision..., 1993; Early Childhood Education Explained, 1991; Bredekamp, 1986). The transition from the class to the subject level is too hasty. According to its contents and methods, the subject level is organized so (based on formal-logical thinking) that it requires all children (chronological age of about 11) to uniformly make the leap to a qualitatively higher developmental stage. With the transition to the subject level, knowledge also becomes highly fragmented and the transfer value of contents deteriorates since various teachers of particular subjects often teach "past" one another.

If we want to have a primary school that will follow modern principles and objectives, thus ensuring that pupils achieve a higher level of general knowledge and for the most part continue their education, the eight-year compulsory education is too short. As shown by comparisons, compulsory schooling is in many countries not restricted merely to the duration of primary education; however, in Slovenia considerations about the duration of "compulsory education" are also defined by the valid constitutional provision that limits such education to the period of "primary school education."

### *c) Proposed solutions*

We propose an extension of compulsory education to nine years; by doing so, we extend the duration of primary education by one year. Primary school is divided into three cycles: the first includes the first, second and third grades; the second, the fourth, fifth and sixth grades; and the third, the seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

Individual cycles (three years) are relatively integral wholes that, despite their specific features (development characteristics, principles of learning and teaching, methods of knowledge assessment and grading, differentiation of instruction...), ensure a continuity of knowledge.

The first grade of primary school belongs in the first cycle (it is a period of transition from a pre-operational to an operational level of thinking - this

transition does not occur at the same time nor in the same way with all children) which is, from the point of view of development and the curriculum, a relatively integral whole. This means that certain standards for the skills of reading, writing and calculation are not required from all pupils at the same time—that is, after the first grade—but after the first cycle considered as an integral whole. Pupils thus have enough time to consolidate their knowledge and experiences; moreover, there is also a greater possibility of considering individual differences in development.

Transfers from one cycle to another (in the first cycle, the average age of pupils is six, seven, eight years; in the second, the average age of pupils is nine, ten, eleven; in the third, the average age of pupils is twelve, thirteen, fourteen) are almost in line with the transitions between developmental stages mentioned by qualitative development theories—Piaget, Erikson, Freud, Sears (Charlesworth, 1992; Maier, 1978). At the same time, it is possible to set global development and educational goals defined as standards of knowledge for individual cycles.

The beginning of the compulsory education is prolonged and moved to an earlier age, which means that children enter school one year earlier than they do now. More precisely, children enrolling in the first grade will in the calendar year of entering school turn six; these are children who at the beginning of the school year (September 1) will be at least five years and eight months and not more than six years and seven months old. For readiness reasons, the beginning of education of children of compulsory school age may be deferred for one year.

In the future, the establishing of children's readiness for entering school will not be obligatory as well. However, parents who wish to have their child's readiness established before he/she enters school, will have that opportunity and the results will be intended as a guide to parents, teachers and as assistance to children.

Children in preschool institutions (naturally, if they attend any form of preschool programs in preschool institutions) and schools will be monitored by counselors primarily in order to provide assistance in each particular case to children and counsel to parents and preschool and school teachers.

An earlier beginning of education should be introduced gradually, subject to previous fulfillment of basic conditions:

- A professionally prepared curriculum for the first grade and for the entire first cycle.
- Timing and the organization of premises for the educational process in schools (taking into account ergonomics in furnishing classrooms designed for six-year-olds).

In view of the existing public preschool and school network, solutions must be found that may vary according to the environment, e.g. the first grade may have its premises either in a preschool or in a school, and activities after classes (day care, extracurricular activities) may be organized in a preschool. (Similar solutions are also applied in other countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Germany and France).

- The change requires 1.5 teacher per class; therefore, the problem of staffing must be solved as well. The first grade will be taught by a class teacher, and the second teacher will be a class teacher or a preschool teacher. The class teacher will follow children from the first grade to the second and third grades (and is, therefore, a teacher of the same pupils over the entire first cycle); whereas the second teacher will remain with the first grade.

Both school and preschool teachers will undergo additional training (adequate educational modules) for the teaching of first-graders.

Regarding the proper conditions that must be fulfilled prior to the introduction of an earlier beginning of primary education, it is proposed that the changes should begin to be gradually introduced in the school year 1998-99: in the first year, only on a minor, yet representative sample of schools, and in the second and third years, on a broader sample in accordance with the methodological plan (all schools included in this sample will have to comply with the conditions for enrollment of younger children). In the fourth year, when the introduction of changes will have been assessed, provided that adequate decision has been taken in accordance with the procedure for the adoption of primary school education programs, the changes will be introduced for and applied to the age cohort of six-year olds. (A similar process is now in progress in Sweden, where the introduction of early beginning of schooling was initiated in 1991-92 and enrollment of all six-year olds is scheduled for 1997-98; Curriculum for Compulsory Schools, LPO 1994.)

As has already been mentioned, in the European Union there is a tendency to extend the duration of compulsory education to ten or eleven years. In order to achieve the European standard and ensure to the majority of pupils further education after primary school, in addition to the extension of compulsory education to nine years, another year, the tenth grade, of education should be provided as well. Although the tenth year of schooling would not be compulsory, the state should provide programs for all pupils who might wish to exercise this right.

Pupils who have not successfully completed the ninth grade of compulsory education, or those who are not satisfied with their grades in the final assessment of knowledge, may enroll in the tenth grade. In the course of this tenth grade, they may acquire knowledge that is necessary for the completion of compulsory education or improve their results in the final assessment and enroll in secondary schools. In this way a successful continuation of education is made possible also to those pupils who develop their interests at a later stage than others, as well as those making slower progress.

The right to the tenth grade in this form should also be enjoyed by adults to 25 years who have interrupted their education after nine years and wish to continue, i.e. complete their primary education or improve their final assessment results. The right to free primary education for adults has no connection with this form of education.

Those adults who have not taken the advantage of the possibility of the tenth grade of primary education are also entitled to free education in the equivalent of one year. The preliminary condition for reimbursement of the cost of education to an individual is that, on the completion of such education, she/he be issued a state-approved certificate. The same also applies to the certificate system; however, in this case, a period of at least two years must pass between the completion of compulsory education and entering another program in order to prevent orientation of the young to educational programs that provide no formal vocational or general education. This right must be stipulated by the law.

#### **4.2 Organization of school time, primary school program**

##### *a) Current situation*

In Slovenia, 190 school days per year are organized in a way similar to those of most European countries. It is true that in quite a number of coun-

tries (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy), there are more school days per year, but there are also countries with fewer school days per year (Greece, Spain, Portugal). The school week (five school days) is of equal duration in the majority of European countries, whereas the length of the periods varies between 30 and 60 minutes. In Slovenia, the school week has five days and each period lasts 45 minutes.

Slovenia has fewer periods obligatory for all pupils than most other countries. Even if the information about the annual number of school days and weeks, as well as the number of periods per week and their duration, are translated into the pupils' annual attendance requirement expressed in terms of minutes, pupils in Slovene schools have a lower attendance requirement than those in most other countries. Of course, this requirement for Slovene pupils is not entirely comparable to that in countries with a different internal concept and organization of education, in which pupils do their homework and complete all or at least most of other duties during regular classes.

In addition to regular classes (according to the syllabus), the compulsory program of Slovene primary education includes an additional half hour intended for the home class period, field activities, additional and remedial classes, extracurricular activities and day care.

All these activities generally take place in the morning. Classes start at eight and, after four, five or six periods of instruction (with several short and one long break), pupils on the class level (first to fourth grades) may attend day care. (During this time, they may have lunch, do their homework, relax, or engage in various extracurricular activities). Older pupils may also have lunch at school. In early afternoon hours (or immediately after classes), these pupils may also take part in various extracurricular activities and additional classes; remedial classes generally take place before or after regular classes.

#### *b) Reasons for change*

Comparative studies of school systems (Organisation of School..., 1993; Regulation Concerning Compulsory Schooling, 1991; Pre-School and Primary Education in the European Union, 1994) show that the organization of school time varies; at the same time, there is a more and more clearly noticeable wish for a system that would ensure all pupils general education and offer them adequate opportunity for choice (subjects that pupils might select

out of their own interests and expectations). The school should also provide for a safe and active passing of spare time at school (including various forms of day care, recreational, sports and cultural activities). It is important that schools treat each child as an individual and impose workloads that take into consideration the child's interests and specific features of individual developmental stages. It should also not overlook the needs of the child's family (adapt the organization of school time and day care to their needs).

A review of compulsory education syllabi of developed countries (for individual cycles and on the whole) shows that syllabi in their basic set-up are very much alike, but that for the most part they maintain a balance between basic knowledge and skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic (at the early stages of schooling) as well as basic knowledge in social sciences, humanities, science, arts, design and technology (at later stages). The differences arise in the number of periods assigned to individual subjects (Galton, Blyth, 1989; Comparative Study....1993; The Development of.... 1994; The Structure... 1993).

If we add to this information the findings of some empirical research that deals with effects of education in conjunction with the curricula of the basic areas of primary schooling (The Structure..., 1993; Elley, 1992; Lapointe et al., 1992; Foreign Languages..., 1994; Orešič, 1994; Superfine, 1992; Kozinc, 1990; Gradišar, 1993; Two workshops of the Council of Europe. Edinburgh, 1990; Sevre, 1993), it is clear that primarily in the first cycle of compulsory education, syllabi of the majority of countries studied dedicate more periods per week to the study of the mother tongue than does Slovenia. Thus, in the first cycle of education, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, France and Spain dedicate from 30% to 50% of periods to the mother tongue, and Slovenia a mere 25% (Gradišar, 1993; Kozinc, 1990). It should also be pointed out that in some countries, especially in lower grades, instruction is not divided into subjects, and that language study is linked to the study of science and social studies (Belgium and Denmark); or that periods dedicated to the mother tongue are more broadly conceived and, in addition to linguistics, include reading and style (England and Scotland).

In many countries, syllabi for the first cycle include a foreign language; and in some countries, the teaching of the first foreign language is still at an experimental stage. (They are developing the didactics and methods for the early learning of foreign languages or testing models of teaching on younger children).

Intensive developments in this area may be illustrated by the information on the beginning of the first foreign language teaching at the compulsory education stage in some countries: in Austria, at the age of eight (experiments are underway also with six-year olds); in Belgium and Germany at the age of ten (in some of their federal lands experiments of teaching foreign languages in the first and third grades are in progress); in Spain, Sweden and Finland between ages eight and nine (in Sweden, foreign languages are taught on a trial basis in the first grade); in France between ages eight and nine (an experiment involving about 27% of pupils is underway); in the Netherlands, between ages nine and ten; in Switzerland between ages six and eight or ten and eleven (there is no uniform language-teaching policy); in Luxembourg, between ages six and seven; in Croatia, at the age of ten (on a trial basis, foreign languages are also taught to six-, seven- and eight-year-olds); and Italy is conducting a comprehensive experiment of teaching foreign languages to second graders. Results of the experiment with seven-year-old pupils in Norway are very encouraging; therefore, school authorities there plan to introduce the instruction of foreign languages at the age of nine, and not at ten or eleven as it is practiced now (Superfine, 1992; Tempus 3767, 1994). Compulsory education syllabi often include a second foreign language as a compulsory or optional subject that pupils begin to study at the ages of twelve to thirteen. A second foreign language is thus compulsory in Belgium (English, German or Spanish), Luxembourg, and Finland, as well as in others such as Denmark and Sweden; in Switzerland, it is an optional subject. With the adoption of a new syllabus, which will become effective in the school year 1995-96, Sweden is introducing a second foreign language as a compulsory subject for first-to-seventh-grade pupils, and in 1997-98 for all pupils. Sweden also offers the choice of a third foreign language.

Upon the recommendations of the Council of Europe (Two Council of Europe workshops: Edinburgh, 1990; Sevre, 1993), most European countries strive to provide an effective and diverse language instruction to pupils within the compulsory education programs and to start teaching them the first foreign language between the ages of five and eleven.

### *c) Proposed solutions*

It is proposed that the school year should last 38 weeks, or 190 school days, and be divided into assessment cycles. Classes should be held five days a week, and each period should generally last 45 minutes.

Pupils' weekly attendance requirement should comprise:

- in the first cycle not more than 22 periods (the number of periods increases from the first to third grades);
- in the second cycle not more than 26 periods (the number of periods increases from fourth to sixth grades);
- in the third cycle not more than 30 periods (the number of periods increases from seventh to ninth grades).

The primary education curriculum comprises a compulsory and an extended program, which is not compulsory for pupils, but the school is obliged to provide it.

The compulsory program includes compulsory and optional subjects, days of various field activities (cultural and science days, practical activities, sports days) and the home-class period.

The primary school offers the following compulsory subjects: Slovene language, foreign languages (English, German or French), mathematics, history, geography, ethics and society or civics, chemistry, biology, physics, drawing, music, design and technology, physical education, and home economics.

In the first and the second cycle, subjects may be linked and/or merged into subject areas (e.g. science, which includes biology, physics, chemistry; the field of arts, etc.); they are justified by the discoveries in these fields, the developmental particularities of children of certain ages, and methods and forms of work.

Optional subjects (electives) are taught in the third cycle. In the seventh grade, pupils choose three subjects (two teaching periods a week) which they continue in the eighth and ninth grades. Optional subjects are classified into two groups: social studies and humanities, and science and technology. In the first group, the school must offer a foreign language. Pupils elect a total of three subjects, but not more than two subjects from each group. Each of the two groups therefore offers the choice of at least one subject.

For compulsory subjects, the point of departure is the existing situation. A higher degree of flexibility in the creation of a new syllabus will be offered by grouping into subject areas. The number of teaching periods is not determined and is left to the judgment of curricular working groups, which

will include experts in various fields. Possibilities in the optional program remain open, however, within the two groups. In view of the growing interest in our schools, as well as in view of international trends, in this section, a second language is defined as a possible compulsory elective subject.

Negotiations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church in 1994 resulted in a proposal for introducing religion and ethics under the umbrella of the social sciences and humanities.

In relation to the existing situation and the above-described reasons for change, it is proposed that, in the syllabus of the first cycle, the number of periods dedicated to the instruction of the mother tongue be increased and that simultaneously the importance of the mother tongue in the complete syllabus be adequately defined.

The beginning of instruction of the first foreign language should commence not later than the fourth year of compulsory education.

The entire instruction is organized so that, from the point of view of programs and contents, it is complemented by the extended program, obligatory for schools to offer but optional for pupils.

The extended program that must be offered by schools includes various items:

- Day care designed for pupils in the first and second cycles. Pupils are provided safe care and have the possibility of engaging in various sports and cultural and artistic activities; they may also do their homework and fulfill similar obligations.
- Extracurricular (cultural and artistic, sports, research, technical) activities designed to permit pupils the opportunity to satisfy their interests.
- For pupils from the first to ninth grades, additional (in connection with compulsory subjects and designed for pupils wishing to acquire knowledge and skills that exceed the standards of knowledge for individual subjects) and remedial classes (generally for pupils wishing to fill the gaps in knowledge of individual subjects or subject areas) are intended.

### 4.3 Assessment and conditions for advancement

#### *a) Current situation*

The assessment in primary school is, on the general level, regulated by the Primary Education Act and, in detail, by the Regulations on Assessment and Advancement of Pupils in Primary School (Official Gazette of SRS, No. 5/80). In 1989, these regulations were somewhat modified and amended in order to avoid the inhibiting of, or to leave formally unregulated, many positive changes and developments in the school practice. Of course, adjustments of the regulations did not override some points of departure pertaining to this area, which are provided by law but are today already completely inadequate—detailed regulation of the frequency and forms of knowledge assessment and system of grading (two grades in each assessment cycle, one for oral and one for written examinations), etc.

The current system includes three methods of grading: numerical scale (from one to five) in “instructional” subjects, a three-level grading scale (very successful, successful, less successful) in “educational” subjects and special grading of behavior (exemplary, proper and less proper).

In the first assessment cycle of the first grade of primary school, teachers do not grade pupils numerically, but they monitor their progress and report it to their parents.

The acquired knowledge of pupils in individual subjects, determined by the compulsory primary school syllabus and program, is, in subsequent assessment cycles of the first grade, graded in the same way as in the following grades. Each pupil’s general achievement is determined at the end of the school year. On the completion of classes in the first semester (or trimester), and at the end of classes in a school year, the pupils’ behavior is graded as well.

As a rule, pupils advance to a higher grade. The decision that a pupil repeat a year is usually made by the primary school teaching staff on the basis of the home-class teacher’s written statement of cause. Pupils cannot pass to a higher grade if they fail in the same subject for two subsequent years. Eighth-grade pupils that fail in one or more subjects may sit for an examination to improve their grades.

In the school year 1991-92, the external assessment of knowledge in the Slovene language and mathematics was introduced for eighth-graders. The

entire process consists of two stages: a preliminary examination that introduces pupils to this type of knowledge assessment, and the main examination which may be repeated. Examination results do not affect the grade-point average on completion of education, but are one of the criteria for enrolling in secondary schools with limited enrollment. It is justly pointed out that the external assessment of knowledge organized in this way might cause a fragmentation, narrowing and adjustment of instruction and, in the long term, also focus the entire curriculum on knowledge assessment (teaching to the test), because, in this case, other system elements have not been adapted to the external knowledge assessment in the eighth grade.

*b) Reasons for change*

Comparative studies of assessment systems (Assessment of Pupil..., 1989; Razdevšek-Pučko, 1992; Education program Reform..., 1993; Measures to Combat..., 1994) show that the numerical method of grading in the lower grades of primary school is an exception and that changes are planned also by the countries where such method of grading still exists (Austria).

The numerical grading of knowledge and the grading of mere achievement are based on external motives for learning; therefore, teachers have less possibility of taking into account the entire learning process, the understanding of different notions and relations, the use of knowledge, the possibilities of the generalization and durability of knowledge, etc., in their classes.

By taking into account the contemporary findings about the significance of internal motives for learning in lower grades of primary school, assessment at the initial stage of education is in various countries organized differently.

During the year and at the end of the school year, pupils are assessed descriptively (various forms are used for this purpose that specify subject areas or subjects and defined objectives, standards, etc.). Such solutions are used, for example, in France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Portugal.

Teachers assess pupils' progress and knowledge in all subjects in both a numerical and descriptive way (Italy), or assess the knowledge of some subjects numerically and other subjects descriptively (Germany, the Netherlands).

In different countries, the assessment of pupils' knowledge and progress is organized in various ways also at the higher levels of compulsory education (in Germany, for example, the assessment is numerical only after four years; in Denmark, after seven years of compulsory education). Assessment is also regulated differently in transitional stages between individual cycles and at the end of compulsory education: in England, pupils undergo external assessment of knowledge at the ages of seven, eleven and fourteen; France uses national examinations to assess the knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics at the beginning of the second cycle of compulsory education (ages eight to nine) as feedback information. At the transition from the primary to the secondary level (at the age of twelve) — both part of compulsory education — the Netherlands uses national examinations for the purpose of pupil's guidance and assistance; in Northern Ireland and in Luxembourg, such examinations are made as early as age eleven for the purpose of selection; and in Northern Ireland, pupils' national examination results are incorporated into annual reports which are then sent to parents; New Zealand periodically (every four years) administers standardized examinations that are not compulsory for all pupils, the purpose of which is to obtain information about the achieved level of knowledge and to plan improvements, if necessary (Pre-School and Primary..., 1994, Educational Assessment, 1992; Education program..., 1993).

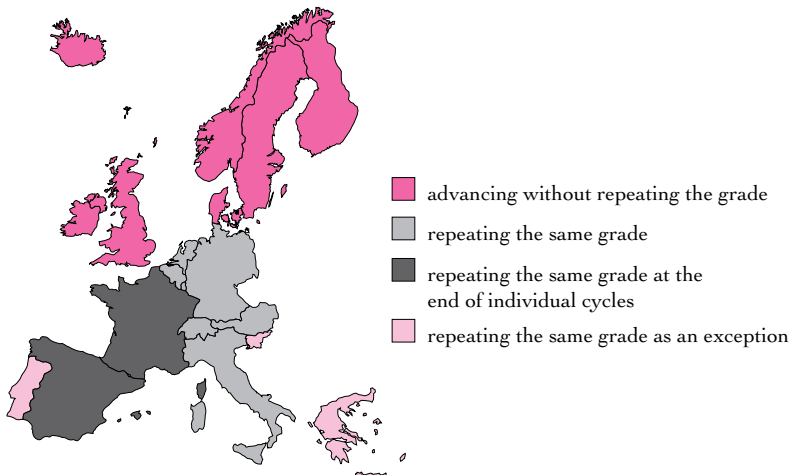
Two ways extreme ways of assessment must be pointed out: the one emphasizing that, in the advancement to a higher level of education, the teacher's evaluation of pupils over a longer period of schooling is more important and more thorough than a single assessment of knowledge; and the one basing evaluation on a single and external knowledge assessment for passing to a higher level. Of course, each of the two approaches has its advantages and shortcomings. It is true that nobody knows pupils better than their teacher, but it is also true that the question of standardizing the conditions of the educational process and standards of knowledge for a whole generation of pupils at the points of transfer and the completion of their education is important. At the same time, it is also true that standardization of the conditions of assessment makes it possible to compare results of examinations, sets up uniform standards for the evaluation of schools and teachers; however, for the very reason that external assessment of knowledge is needed in an objective form (standardized examination, objective-type tasks), objective tests may assess only a part of the educational process and certain types and aspects of knowledge. The result of such assessment must not, therefore, present the only information about a child's development and progress, especially if it is known that the effects of a continued assessment by means of standardized

examinations are not the same as the effects of a single assessment for selection purposes or the ensuing remuneration of teachers.

Slovene assessment systems approach more nearly the first model. In order to overcome some weaknesses resulting from the above two extreme solutions, it is reasonable to consider the possibility of complementing grades given by teachers with the results and grades received in external knowledge assessments. It also is important that, in the course of their education, pupils become familiar with different methods of knowledge assessment and gradually become accustomed to external knowledge assessment.

The system and method of assessment is also linked with advancement to higher grades. Different countries have different ways of resolving this problem: in Denmark, Ireland, Greece and Great Britain pupils on the primary level of education do not repeat the same grade (exceptionally the case in Portugal). However, at the end of individual cycles, the same grade may be repeated in France and Spain. In Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands pupils may repeat any grade (Pre-School and Primary Education..., 1994). To illustrate, let us mention the percentage of pupils who fail and must repeat the grade on the primary level of education: Belgium 16%, France 5%, Greece 0%, Spain 4%, Portugal 2%, the Netherlands 3%, Norway 1% (World Education Report, 1993).

*Figure 12: Advancing to a higher grade on the first level of education*



In the entire school population of Slovenia (between the first and the eighth grades) in the school year 1992-93, 4% of pupils failed (pupils passing to a higher grade with failure in one subject, pupils taking the same grade again and those who remain unassessed), of which 2% were required to repeat the same grade. In the first grade, for instance, the rate of failure was 2.7%, and 1.4% of pupils were required to repeat; in the third grade, the rate of failure was 1.4% and 0.8% of pupils were required to repeat; in the fifth grade, the rate of failure was 6.2% and 2.7% of the pupils were required to repeat the grade; in the seventh grade, the percentage of failure was 8.6% and 3.8% were required to repeat; in the eighth grade, the rate of failure was 0.6%, and the percentage of pupils repeating the grade was 0.5% (Statistical Yearbook, 1993).

The current system of passing to a higher grade (with a failure in one subject, repetition of a grade decided by the teaching staff) has some positive as well as some negative effects. Experts often point out the danger of development of very large gaps in knowledge if pupils are allowed to pass to a higher grade with a failure in one subject; however, at the same time, repetition, especially of an entire grade, although a pupil has failed only in two or three subjects, is not always the best solution, especially not from the point of view of motivation for learning and social experiences of the child.

### *c) Proposed solutions*

The system of assessment, which is one of the elements of changes in primary school, must be logically incorporated into the entire system of education and must have a clearly defined internal structure (assessment in individual cycles, in transitions among individual cycles and on the completion of primary education).

The current system of assessment (numerical, three-level assessment scale, special assessment of behavior) does not maintain a balance of importance among individual subjects, since the pupil's attitude toward a subject is largely determined by the assessment and not by the knowledge and skills obtained. This system also pays too little attention to the characteristics of a child's development (individual differences, pace of development) and learning (types and levels of knowledge, usefulness of knowledge) both at the beginning of education and in individual cycles.

In the first cycle (the first, second and third grades), teachers in individual subjects or subject areas assess a pupil's progress by using descriptive

grades. Each pupil receives a descriptive grade based on observation and various forms of knowledge assessment. The basis of their records are national formulae that, by taking into account global objectives and standards of knowledge, break down assessment areas for individual subjects (mathematics: the notion of numbers, measurements, arithmetics, geometrical concepts, logical mathematical constructs) and assessment instructions. Pupils and parents receive reports on the pupils' achievement at least twice in a school year and at the end of each school year.

At the end of the first cycle, the knowledge of pupils is assessed by means of national tests in the mother tongue and mathematics. These are tests that are in accord with catalogues of required knowledge, prepared outside the schools themselves (the National Examination Center and other professional institutions); there is a standard procedure. The assessment is internal, results are used as feedback information for schools, pupils and parents and must influence neither the grades nor the passing from one cycle to another.

Pupils are made familiar with the results achieved at the external knowledge assessment and with the percentile ranking of all pupils within the same age cohort. Parents are apprised of these results as well.

In the second cycle (the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades), teachers use a combination of descriptive and numerical assessment in all subjects and in all subject areas. In this cycle, too, descriptive assessment is based on national formulae. Numerical grading is also introduced in order to make pupils gradually aware of the significance of individual numerical grades. Descriptions (similar national formulae as in the first cycle) that break down and explain numerical grades (where and what progress a child is making) offer a wider possibility of active participation of pupils, teachers and parents in the process of learning and assessment.

Reports on the pupils' achievement are given to pupils and parents twice during the school year and, at the end of the school year, they receive report cards with numerical grades in individual subjects and a grade in overall achievement.

At the end of the second cycle—the same as at the end of the first one—pupils' knowledge is assessed by means of national tests in the mother tongue, mathematics and a foreign language. Assessment is internal and is used as one of the criteria for the differentiation of pupils in the third cycle

and, at the same time, represents additional information about the achieved knowledge that makes it possible to compare the results of the work of an individual and to evaluate the school's quality, but must not exert any influence either on grades or transition to another cycle.

In the third cycle (the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades), teachers assess the pupils' progress during the year by means of numerical assessment.

Reports on the pupils' achievements are given to pupils and parents twice during the school year. At the end of the year, pupils receive report cards with numerical grades in individual subjects and a grade in overall achievement.

Subjects in which eighth- and ninth-grade instruction is carried out on different ability levels, pupils are on all levels graded numerically, with grades of 1 to 5. Numerical grades are modified according to the ability level—5A, 5B, 5C—in order to at least partly adapt the assessment to the pupils' different learning capacities and at the same time provide better motivation for learning, since grades are not limited to a narrow span from 1 to 3, 3 to 5 and the like.

Grades that are marked according to the ability level must be adequately weighted at the end of the eighth and ninth grades. Thus, grades 5A, 5B, 5C may not have the same absolute value, a process of which pupils and their parents must be made aware.

At the end of the third cycle, pupils' knowledge is assessed by means of national tests in the mother tongue, mathematics, a foreign language, one subject from the social studies and one from the science area previously selected by the pupils (final assessment of knowledge). Tests are constructed to gauge the standard of knowledge that must be achieved by pupils if they want to complete their primary education. Assessment of knowledge is external (external evaluation and assessment is provided).

The school uses the results of national tests in relation to the clearly defined scope of external assessment of knowledge on the completion of individual cycles. Results of national tests must not be made public, nor may they be used as a criterion for the remuneration of schools or teachers.

The report card, which is received by pupils at the end of their primary education (final report card), lists a grade for each subject consisting of

equal proportions of results of final knowledge assessment and final grades given by teachers.

Experiences of other education systems show that, by means of compensation mechanisms, pupils may also receive a passing grade in subjects in which, according to the assessment criteria for individual subjects, they achieve a result within the range of the total number of points, as explained in the following paragraph. A pupil may thus successfully complete primary education by receiving passing grades in all subjects in the ninth grade and by, in subjects of the final assessment of knowledge, achieving the national standard of knowledge.

A pupil who has passing grades in all subjects and who has in one, or not more than two, subjects of the final assessment of knowledge, achieved:

- in the first case, at least 80% of the total points necessary for a passing grade in that subject, has passed, if in at least one compulsory or optional subject at the end of the ninth grade has obtained a final grade of "fair," or if in at least one of other final examination subjects has obtained a final grade of "fair";
- in the second case, at least 90% of the points necessary for a passing grade in that subject, has passed if in at least two compulsory or optional subjects at the end of the ninth grade has earned a final grade "fair," or if in at least two of other final examination subjects has earned a final grade "fair."

The introduction of this mechanism makes possible:

- the maintenance of standards of knowledge laid down by subject commissions,
- at least the same proportion of successful pupils in the final assessment of knowledge with the achievement of equal or even higher standards of knowledge.

The school must provide terms for final knowledge assessment twice each year.

Pupils do not generally repeat the grade in the first and the second cycle; and, at the end of the second cycle (transition from sixth to seventh grade), they repeat the last grade of the second cycle if they have not earned passing grades in all subjects. In the future, there will be the possibility of two-paced advancement, which means that pupils failing to meet the set standard of knowledge for a particular grade in one school year will have an

opportunity of complying with this requirement over a longer period of time without having to repeat the grade.

Pupils who, in the last grade of the second cycle or in the third cycle in the completion of individual grades, fail in one or two subjects may sit for a re-examination before the beginning of a new school year. They must repeat the same grade if they fail to achieve the required standard of knowledge at the re-examination, or if on the completion of a particular grade they fail in more than two subjects.

Pupils who, at the end of the ninth grade, have passing grades in all subjects, but fail in the final assessment of knowledge in a number of or in all subjects, may pass into the tenth grade (compensation year), after which they may take their final knowledge assessment again. The same also applies if they wish to improve their achievement in final assessment, and if they believe that the tenth grade might be of assistance in this purpose. Pupils who, despite the possibility of repeating individual grades, have not completed their primary education, receive a certificate of attendance with the indication of the highest successfully completed grade.

It should be pointed out that all of the proposed solutions are not entirely new: Slovenia already has some experience with partial modifications of individual elements. Experimental introduction of descriptive assessment has been well accepted by both teachers and pupils and their parents; the three assessment cycles, during which pupils receive report cards with numerical grades only once a year, but both pupils and parents receive annual information of achievement by different means, have also met with a favorable response.

#### **4.4 Differentiation at school**

##### *a) Current situation*

It should be noted that our otherwise uniform primary school has so far agreed to differentiate educational forms and methods and proceedings of teaching, but has rejected the differentiation and individualization of educational goals and tasks and contents of instruction. At the same time, it devoted more attention to less successful pupils, and it was only with the otherwise disputed Primary Education Act of 1980 that individualization as a compulsory pedagogical standard was enacted, thus allowing more attention to gifted pupils. The schools have had to incorporate such princi-

ples in working programs; additional classes have also become compulsory; the number of in-school and out-of-school activities has increased; optional subjects have been introduced, as well as a wider range of extracurricular activities.

In sum, as systematically organized forms of differentiation and individualization, our school system has so far effected additional and remedial classes and extracurricular activities.

By following the changes in school practice, one could say that, from the point of view of uniformity and differentiation, primary school in Slovenia is no longer as it was ten or more years ago; nor from the point of view of educational goals, tasks and contents. Even sports classes and classes in Latin, etc., have been introduced. However, regulations lag behind changes in primary school practice, where various models of school differentiation are already in place, but are still not fully professionally evaluated. These models point to the different views and orientations of experts in this field; for example, to the need for a grouping of pupils into successful, less successful and unsuccessful collects in the future, or to the need of providing the possibility for resolving differences among pupils primarily by means of differentiation in the teaching process itself, also in the future, which makes its legal, formal curricular and organization regulations (Strmčnik, F.: *Sodobna šola...*, 1987; *Učna diferenciacija v osnovni šoli* - collection of papers, 1991) entirely unnecessary.

#### *b) Reasons for change*

The principles of uniformity, justice, equal opportunity, transfer and assurance of achievements at school to all pupils form today the basis of organization and development of primary school in Europe. The development tends to abandon radical forms of external differentiation and heads in the direction of greater heterogeneity and unity. An externally differentiated primary school is thus preserved in increasingly fewer countries (Germany, Austria, German-speaking cantons of Switzerland), and a uniform primary school consisting up to nine, ten or even eleven years of education is gaining ground instead. However, this "unity of primary education" (Italy, France, Great Britain, and all Scandinavian countries) does not mean that, like in Slovenia, all schools follow the same curricula, but primarily that the former separate forms, methods and institutions of primary education have been replaced by a comprehensive school. Even in German-speaking countries, where external differentiation still pre-

dominates, the grammar school (Gymnasium) is losing its elitist character and becoming a general education establishment for the majority of the young.

Requests for a higher degree of differentiation in Slovenia thus at first may seem to be in contradiction with the above-mentioned trends. But considering the fact that common education in developed countries is much more individualized and internally differentiated than that in Slovenia, and has a larger proportion of optional programs - in the view of that trends towards a higher degree of differentiation may be characterized as trends towards the elimination of radical egalitarianism in terms of education program, trends towards a curricular diversification and differentiation which could bring learning requirements in closer alignment with pupils' different abilities, motivations, and interests.

### *c) Proposed solutions*

In the first two cycles, external differentiation is not even carried out in a modified form. Characteristic of these two cycles is a didactic differentiation with all its modifications, though. It has a focus of individualization and provides possibilities for the most effective development and learning to each individual pupil.

In the second cycle, different forms of internal flexible differentiation are being introduced (at least in two subjects, probably mathematics and a foreign language, possibly also in the Slovene language); that is, different combinations of basic instruction and ability groups. In subjects where the above-mentioned differentiation forms are carried out, pupils spend most of the time in heterogeneous (home) classes, where they deal with the basic subject matter, and not more than 25% in homogeneous classes, where instruction is based on the ability levels.

In the third cycle, a partial external differentiation with electives and ability groups is being carried out: pupils are assigned to various classes or homogeneous groups, in not more than three subjects with regard to the ability level and to optional subjects.

In the eighth and ninth grades, classes are organized on three ability levels in at least two (mathematics, foreign language) and not more than three subjects (mathematics, foreign language, Slovene language). Criteria for the assignment of pupils to ability levels by classes are results of national

tests at the end of the sixth grade, achievement in a particular subject in the seventh grade, and wishes and interests of pupils and their parents. The ability level is decided upon by the pupils, considering the above-stated criteria and based on the professional counseling at school. In the eighth and ninth grades, pupils may transfer from one ability level to another at the end of individual assessment cycles, exceptionally, also during an assessment cycle.

Optional subjects are listed in the syllabus for the seventh, eighth and ninth grades (they are discussed in more detail in the chapter on the organization of school time and the primary education programs).

Optional subjects should not aim at initiation to a particular profession, nor should they offer various formal possibilities of advancing to a higher level of education, although pupils generally decide on further education according to the selection of subjects.

#### **4.5 Education of pupils with special needs**

##### *a) Current situation*

The Law on Education and Training of Physically and Mentally Handicapped Children and Youth (1976) and regulations pertaining to the education of handicapped children in Slovenia categorize as such mentally handicapped children, children with hearing and speech impairments, blind and sight-impaired children, as well as children with other disabilities; children with behavioral and personality disorders and those with multiple handicaps.

There is a universally accepted term of "children with special needs" which designates a group of children that includes children with learning, behavioral and emotional problems. Children with special needs are therefore all children with motor, sensory, emotional, behavior and learning impairments, defects, weaknesses, problems and disorders (Galeša, 1992). Experts have determined that in the population of children from ages three to seventeen, according to the European standards, there are about 20% to 25% with special needs: 37% have learning disorders, 30% have speech disorders, 18% have mental handicaps, 8% have emotional disorders, 1% have multiple disorders, 1% have skeletal deformities, 1% of them are deaf, 0.5% are blind, 0.05% are blind and deaf, and 3% have other problems and disorders. The first four groups include 93% of children with special needs,

and the majority of them receive education in regular primary school (Sprinthall, 1990).

Many authors include among children with special needs gifted children as well, thus greatly increasing the number—all pupils who need special education in order to develop their abilities. What all children with special needs have in common is that they require differentiated and individualized forms of education.

The findings of some of the research conducted in Slovenia show that almost one-half of pupils at least once during their primary education experience problems that require special assistance. Thus, difficulties with reading at an initial stage are experienced by about 25% of pupils (approximately 10% because of specific reading and writing disorders, and some an insufficiently developed sensory capacity), and 15% of pupils have problems with mathematics (about 3% because of specific disorders in calculation). These problems are either recurrent or not, but may be associated with a particular subject, subject matter or teacher (What We Want and..., 1992).

Statistical data also show that since 1976 the number of pupils in special primary schools has declined by more than 50% (On The New Conception..., 1992). In the school year 1988-89, the enrollment of children ages seven to fifteen in special institutions was 2.5%, while 1.5% underwent periodic logopedic treatment in outpatient clinics, consulting centers and mobile units (Galeša, 1992). That same school year, regular primary school had the following enrollment: 159 slightly mentally handicapped children, 35 children with hearing disorders, 17 children with visual impairment, 24 children with other physical and motor handicaps, 216 children with behavioral and personality disorders, and 86 children with multiple disorders. This information points out that in Slovene schools the process of integration of handicapped children is already in progress, but that the link between different education programs, from the most segregated to the most integrated, has not been specified and defined with more accuracy (special problem are education programs of the tenth, ninth, eighth and seventh level of integration; moreover, some education programs are not of the highest quality).

*Table 10: Continuum of different education programs from the most segregated to the most integrated*

Level of integration	Education program Organization form	Segregation level
12	regular class without any assistance	1
11	regular class with normal additional assistance (home-class teacher)	2
10	regular class with a higher degree of additional assistance (home class teacher and special educator)	3
9	regular class with additional assistance outside the class (special educator, psychologist, social worker, social pedagogue)	4
8	regular class with additional assistance within and outside the class (special educator, psychologist, social worker, social pedagogue)	5
7	regular class with periodic special treatment in accordance with specified topics and subjects (home-class teacher, special educator, psychologist, social worker, social pedagogue)	6
6	special class in regular primary school	7
5	special school (special educator, psychologist, social worker, social pedagogue)	8
4	home for the handicapped, special educational establishment (children go home week-ends only)	9
3	hospitals and health resorts (children with chronic diseases that cannot go home)	10
2	special establishments (children are unable to go home and are only visited by parents)	11
1	prisons, asylums (high disorder level and severed links with the environment)	12

*b) Reasons for change*

Various international organizations (e.g. UNESCO, European Union programs such as HORIZON, TIDE, HELIOS) and specialist commissions (International League of Associations for the Assistance to Mentally Handicapped Persons) invite their member countries to integrate handi-

capped children in regular schools wherever practicable and to provide adequate curricula for their education.

In Slovene primary schools, there is a relatively large proportion of children with special needs (especially those with learning, behavioral, emotional disorders and gifted children); therefore, it is urgent to organize professional services in schools (psychologists, pedagogues, social workers, special educators, and social pedagogues) that would help these pupils in their education (integration as a method of work in class) and, if necessary, work on an individual basis with pupils, teachers and parents.

At the same time, mainstreaming of handicapped children into the regular educational process should be continued, which requires the provision of education programs devised by experts, adequate conditions (premises, staff, etc.) for the education of handicapped children, as well as adequate regulations.

It is becoming increasingly clear that a classification of children according to the findings and opinions of a commission of experts cannot always serve as a valid prediction of a child's further development and her/his educational capacities; therefore, a single and static classification may be inadequate, or at least not equally appropriate, for all groups of children (children with handicaps resulting from an inadequate social and cultural environment).

Parents of handicapped children are increasingly participating in the preparation and implementation of programs, and they should closely cooperate with corresponding professional teams.

### *c) Proposed changes*

Instead of the current, relatively static, classification of handicapped children, a developmental process classification of children is proposed by using individual and individualized education programs that suit a child's developmental stage, learning ability (what he or she is capable of learning and how), and ability to achieve set goals, as well by providing him/her with the necessary assistance.

Commissions in charge of the classification of handicapped children and youth will thus, on the basis of a child's diagnosis, plan an individual annual education program for each particular child. In addition to experts, these committees will include parents and teachers.

Successful work with handicapped children largely depends on parents; they will be, therefore, involved at all levels of decision-making, planning, direct work with children and evaluation of children's education program and progress. Teachers, pedagogues and special educators teaching classes of regular primary schools integrating handicapped children should be properly trained for the job.

In the first phase, handicapped children will be in schools that meet the integration requirements and where principals, teachers and counselors are prepared to work in classes that include handicapped children. These schools will be guaranteed a professional advisory assistance (supplement and development of individual programs, search for adequate social integration strategies), as well as professional guidance and supervision in resolving professional dilemmas either in the school or in the class integrating handicapped children, or in relations with their parents.

Some basic conditions that must be provided to schools with classes integrating handicapped children (some schools already have such classes) must also be listed:

- an additional number of educators and advisory staff (depending on the number of integrated children, type of handicap and disorder) to teach or participate in teaching in and outside the class;
- a reduction of the number of children in a class with integrated handicapped children.

If there is one handicapped child in a class, the highest limit is 24 pupils per class; if there are two handicapped children in a class, the limit is 21 pupils; and if there are three handicapped children in a class, the limit is 18 pupils per class.

A maximum of three handicapped children may be integrated per class.

The number of pupils in classes integrating handicapped children also depends on the type and degree of handicap.

For children with special needs that have already been integrated into regular education, an additional teaching period designed for individualized and differentiated forms of work (special classes, appropriate forms of assistance based on an individualized education program, etc.) and an extra professional (based on the needs of children and work organization in the school, the school shall decide at its discretion whether it will be a teacher, special educator, etc.) will be provided.

## 4.6 Teacher training

### *a) Current situation*

In primary schools in Slovenia, class teachers teach at the class level, and subject teachers at the subject level.

Over the past decade, there has been a shift in the training of class- and subject-level teachers from two- to four-year studies at institutions of higher education.

Teacher training on the subject level has thus become placed on the same level as training of secondary school colleagues—on the curriculum basis. Teacher training on the subject level is no longer carried out only at specialized (at the two faculties of education) but also at other university institutions (Faculty of Letters and Arts, Faculty of Science and Technology, Biotechnical Faculty, Music Academy, etc.). On the one hand, this has resulted in a higher level of education in selected professions and, on the other hand, it has resulted in a higher risk of neglecting specific professional elements of training for the teaching profession.

It is also true, however, that some more systematic assistance has been given in recent years to teachers and trainee teachers in the first year of their service (according to the international definition, this is the most delicate and the most difficult period of their career), while their mentors received more adequate training. A system of continuing in-service teacher training as well as a system of promotion to teaching titles (mentors, advisers) has also been introduced. The concept of traineeship and state examinations still needs to be improved (especially as an assistance aimed at providing professional certainty in counseling and study conferences during the half-year assistance period).

It may be concluded that, at least as far as the length of teacher training is concerned, Slovenia has achieved the same as and even higher standards than most European countries.

### *b) Reasons for change*

Although Slovenia has achieved a significant improvement in some formal characteristics of teacher training (especially in respect to the level and type of formal education of teachers), there remains a series of unresolved problems concerning the organization of pedagogical study programs and the quality of their implementation.

Teachers should be properly trained for new requirements and challenges of pedagogical practice that the Conference of European Education Ministers has defined as follows:

- prolongation of the compulsory education and participation of an increasing number of the young in secondary education;
- an increase in differences in relation to culture, interests and abilities among pupils and the integration of an increasing number of handicapped children into regular education;
- a more comprehensive and demanding subject matter resulting from new knowledge and findings, and from the development of new subject areas and subjects, as a consequence of an increasingly complex and unforeseeable social and technological development and the need for more and more professions;
- new information technologies (computers, video, multimedia) as competitors of teachers in the future of education;
- opening of the school to the environment - closer contacts with parents and cultural, economic and social institutions;
- pluralism of values in the wake of the disintegration of traditional values.

In addition to the mastering of constantly new content areas and in consideration of preliminary knowledge, interests and needs of pupils, all this also requires teachers to choose, adapt, and structure the contents and to accustom their pupils to learn independently, to critically choose information and use it in problem-solving under new circumstances, as well as to the judgment of values. Novel solutions in the teacher-training system and programs are necessary in Slovenia also because of the changes introduced into schools with the changes in the social set-up, as well as those due to the changes and innovations in the concept of primary education.

In view of the changes in the requirements for today's teachers, certain basic issues concerning the models of their training should be pointed out. Contrary to the traditional "minimum competence" model, modern theoreticians increasingly advocate the model of "open professionalism." Decisions as to autonomous professionalism also significantly influence the definition of teaching methods of teachers both during their studies at the university and later.

High-quality teacher training also requires a coordination of pedagogical study programs which are, in addition to the two faculties of education, defined and carried out by various other higher education institutions

without a clearly determined relation between the so-called “professional” and “vocational” part of education and the professionally guided practical training. Flexibility of these programs (possibility of choice, transfers, additional qualifications, post-graduate studies) and of the general educational policy in this area (several paths leading to the same objective, the possibility of reorientation of experts to the teaching profession, possibilities of advanced study courses, etc.) is still insufficient and needs to be modified. Among the urgently needed tasks in this area also belongs the laying down of uniform criteria and regulations as to who may teach (titles, licenses).

*c) Proposed solutions*

Pupils in primary school are taught by class and subject teachers. The second teacher in the first grade is a class teacher or preschool teacher. All classes (from the first to the ninth grade) in which handicapped children have been integrated are taught by special educators.

A class teacher generally “advances” together with pupils to the second and the third grade (teaches during the whole first cycle), while the preschool teacher or the second teacher, who teaches one half of the classes, remains in the first grade.

Teachers in the second cycle are class and subject teachers, who will undergo additional training. From the fourth to the sixth grades, the proportion of subject teachers gradually increases, so that pupils get accustomed to being taught by several teachers. Most of the classes in the fourth and fifth grades are taught by class teachers, whereas foreign languages and educational subjects may also be taught by subject teachers. In the fourth grade, subject teachers may not teach more than two subjects, and not more than three subjects in the fifth grade. Sixth-grade pupils are taught by both subject and class teachers.

Teachers in the third cycle are subject teachers.

There is no more question about whether teachers should be trained at the university level. With respect to concrete models of education, it is proposed that class teachers should be educated according to the integrated model and subject teachers according to the parallel model. In the education of secondary school teachers, especially in two-course studies, the consecutive model should be tried as well.

Pedagogical study programs should define the minimum program equivalent that should be included in all programs of this kind. They should be used to establish a balance between narrow-professional, general-educational and professional (pedagogical-psychological-methodical and educational practical) elements with respect to international standards. At least 25% of such elements are recommended for primary school and not less than 15% for secondary school teachers.

An important element of pedagogical study programs is practical educational training, which is, in the existing system of teacher training, still largely insufficient. Studies should gradually include six- to ten-weeks' of practical training in order to bring them closer to those in countries with high-quality teacher-training programs.

Special support should be given to post-graduate studies of special didactics at home and abroad, including doctoral studies, as well as to more intensive development and research work in this area. In this way, it will be possible to provide professionals for the areas lacking such profiles and, at the same time, to ensure a faster renewal and expansion of the ranks of the university staff in this field.

Higher education institutions and the two universities should pay more attention to the development of teacher training, which is, as a special task, also one of the competencies of the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia.

As has already been pointed out, many of the recent changes in teacher training represent a basis for the implementation of new concepts of education. Their implementation will require further endeavors in the years to come. In this respect, it should be noted that many questions concerning teacher training do not arise in the area concerning primary school only, but, in addition to the existing shortcomings, also stem from the changes in the secondary school area. This especially applies to vocational schools, practical training, some professional theoretical subjects and the education of adults. This is why one of the major development tasks for the forthcoming period is also the elaboration of sound and integral teacher-training strategies in general.

### The genesis and development of “Primary schools”

*The Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia began with the preparations for “Primary schools” as a whole, and particularly with some of its parts, which comprised the continuation, deepening and reconsideration of the studies already made and published. Let us mention only two of those studies considered to have been conducted especially well: “The Slovenian school for the 21st century” (The Board of Education of the Republic of Slovenia) and “Perspectives of the development of primary schools in the Republic of Slovenia” (leading researcher D. Piciga, PhD). This method of preparations for the conception demanded that individual experts reconsider, further substantiate, and improve particular solutions. Clearly, it was to be expected that the experts’ solutions would not be uniform, since every solution had its pros and cons, and that it would be necessary to make compromises and reach a consensus about the content of the conception of primary schools. The result of this kind of work did not entirely follow the “concepts” of the latest trends — whatever their importance — or even of an individual expert; it was the simultaneous outcome of the considerations and investigations of the individuals of various orientations.*

*What were the phases in the development of the conception? First, the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia asked experts to make proposals for a new conception for primary schools (both of its entire structure and of its individual facets and spheres). The following experts put forward their proposals: B. Baskar, PhD, J. Bečaj, PhD, M. Bitenc, MA, S. Gaberšek, PhD, M. Galeša, PhD, D. Golli, MA, A. Kozinc, L. Magajna, MA, M. Milharčič Hladnik, PhD, B. Marentič Požarnik, PhD, L. Marjanovič Umek, PhD, Z. Medveš, PhD, V. Milekšič, M. Peček, MA, D. Piciga, PhD, L. Plut Pregelj, PhD, C. Razdevšek Pučko, PhD, V. Skalar, PhD, M. Šetinc, MA, I. Vilic, and J. Zalaznik. On the basis of their studies, an integrated version of the conception for primary schools was prepared by D. Piciga, PhD, M. Javornik, MA, and M. Šebart, MA.*

*D. Piciga, PhD, made an analysis and synthesis of the proposals for the following chapters: “The conceptual starting points and the methodology of individual authors,” “The strategy of changes in compulsory education,” “Streaming in primary schools,” “External examinations in theory and practice,” “The beginning of primary school and the first level of primary school,” “The structure of primary school,” “The transition from primary school to secondary education,” “Testing and assessment in primary schools,” “Teacher training,” and “The role of primary school managers and their in-service training.” M. Javornik, MA, and M. Šebart, MA, made a synthesis and analysis of the proposals for the chapters on “Education of pupils with special needs,” and of “The community-school relationship” and were involved in the review of the entire integrated version as well. The first integrated version of the conception — “The*

*Conception of Primary Schools in the Republic of Slovenia*—comprised approximately 150 pages. It was sent to all the authors, who assembled for a coordinative consultation in Bohinj on 12 and 15 February 1995.

The result of this coordinative consultation was a paper called “The consensus, dilemmas, and majority opinions about the conception of primary schools.” The paper reveals that, in that phase, many dilemmas remained to be solved; therefore, another consultation was organised in Poljče on 26 and 27 February 1995, with 150 experts invited. The following experts, among others, took an active part in the discussion: M. Resman, PhD, S. Flere, PhD, M. Strojín, J. Muršák PhD, L. Marjanovič Umek, PhD, M. Kramar, PhD, D. Piciga, PhD, B. Marentič Požarnik, Ph.D., C. Razdevšek Pučko, Ph.D., A. Barle, MA, E. Bahovec, Ph.D., D. Štrajín, PhD, M. Galeša, PhD, M. Tome, L. Horvat, PhD, M. Adamič, PhD, Z. Kodelja, PhD, and V. Troha, PhD. The result of this consultation was a paper called “The consensus, dilemmas, and majority opinions about the conception of primary schools.” This paper was then discussed at the consultation in Radovljica, with the participation of 50 experts in preschool, primary, and secondary education, and later at several consultations and expert meetings of principals, teachers, and experts from all the regions of Slovenia. The following consultations deserve to be mentioned in particular: the consultation of primary school principals in Portorož, the consultation of the Pedagogical Association of Slovenia, the discussions at the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education, etc. Approximately five thousand representatives of the expert public participated in these discussions. It should also be stressed that the first integrated version of the basic text was sent for a review to fifteen experts even before the Poljče consultation. Let us mention but a few: D. Žagar, PhD, A. Fošnarič, MA, J. Sagadin, PhD, M. Kramar, PhD, S. Flere, PhD, J. Zalaznik, D. Štrajín, PhD, F. Pediček, PhD, F. Strmčnik, PhD, M. Pšunder, PhD, L. Horvat, PhD.

On these bases, “The conception of primary schools in the Republic of Slovenia” was created. It should be emphasized that its solutions are, to the highest degree, the result of a consensus reached by a coordination of the different views of experts at the Bohinj and Poljče consultations. Where a consensus could not be reached, or where the solutions were already reaching the level of implementation, the ministry decided on compromises which did not entirely exclude any of the participating views.

It is of particular importance that, in the development of “The conception of primary schools in the Republic of Slovenia,” a high degree of consensus was reached about some key issues of the changes in primary schools: the prolongation of primary schools, assessment, the integration of children with special needs, teacher training; a high degree of consensus was also reached about the setting in the last cycle of primary schools and the preservation of primary schools without radical streaming.

*The integrated version of “The conception of primary schools in the Republic of Slovenia” was prepared by L. Marjanovič Umek, PhD and M. Šebart, MA; the final version was edited also with the participation of J. Muršak, PhD, Z. Kodolja, PhD, E. Babovec, PhD, P. Zgaga, PhD, T. Valenčič, MA; the chapters on principles and ability grouping by F. Strmčnik, PhD; the chapter on assessment by F. Strmčnik, PhD, and C. Razdevšek Pučko, PhD; the chapter on ability grouping by F. Strmčnik, PhD, D. Piciga, PhD; the chapter on the integration of children with special needs by M. Galeša, PhD, V. Skalar, PhD, and M. Peček, MA.*

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