

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN CZECH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The paper deals with Czech teachers' experiences of teaching immigrant children in Czech schools at the primary and lower secondary level. Upon introducing the theoretical context the paper presents the results of empirical research based on semi-structured interviews with teachers. The survey demonstrates teachers' attitudes to the current state of integration of immigrant children and the extent to which they are prepared for teaching this group of children. Teachers have a wide variety of opinion on different measures for improving the education of immigrants. Their attitudes towards immigrant children are largely influenced by the amount of previous experience with teaching immigrant children. An individualized teacher approach to immigrants plays an essential role in the successful integration of immigrant children in schools, as do the quality of interaction with immigrant parents, the similarity of the immigrant family culture to Czech culture and the range of measures designed to improve integration.

Key words: teachers; immigrant children; elementary school; integration of immigrants; attitudes; ethnic stereotypes; the Czech Republic.

Introduction: Readiness of the Czech education system for immigrant children

In this part we present the basic theoretical context of the topic—brief outlines of the Czech school system, integration policy, curricular provisions relating to multicultural education, teacher training and further development.

The Czech education system consists of: preschools (for children aged 2 or 3 to 5), elementary schools (for ages 6 to 15), technical secondary (high) schools, grammar schools (gymnasium), vocational schools, and universities. The basic level of education, which we deal with in this article, is provided by what are known as elementary schools (in Czech *základní škola*). These are comprised of nine grades that provide the first two stages of education: primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1 and 2). The first stage comprises years 1–5 and the second years 6–9. At stage one the children are taught by one teacher for all subjects¹ (usually there is another teacher for foreign language lessons).

¹ Subjects at the first stage are Czech, first foreign language (usually English), mathematics, computer science, basic history and geography, basic science, art, music, physical education and manual skills. Subjects taught at the second stage are Czech, literature, first foreign language, second foreign language (obligatory in years 8–9), mathematics, computer science, history, geography, civics, physics,

Education at this level is obligatory; children study free of charge at state elementary schools. There are also fee-paying private or faith elementary schools. Some elementary schools may specialize (in foreign languages, sports, math, etc.) and may have stricter acceptance criteria. Children (also immigrant) can attend their local school in the catchment area or parents can choose another school and make their own decision. This is usually based on how close the school is to work, its reputation and quality and the availability of Czech courses (META, 2016).

Several laws and decrees (more or less directly) relate to Czech school education. The Education Act (Act no. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, vocational and other education levels, §16, 20) (MŠMT – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2016) is the most important one that provides equal access to education for all. According to the act, schools must ensure that immigrant children have equal access to education under the same conditions as citizens of the Czech Republic. Immigrant parents who are citizens of EU member states are not required to provide evidence to schools that they are resident in the Czech Republic. Immigrant parents who are citizens of third countries must prove that they are legally resident in the Czech Republic no later than the date school attendance will commence. Compulsory school attendance applies to all immigrant children residing in the Czech Republic for more than 90 days.

The integration of immigrant children in the Czech Republic is quite decentralized; next to several ministries (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Culture; Ministry of the Interior) a number of non-profit and other organizations (e.g. Center for Integration of Foreigners, Association for Integration and Migration, Organisation for Aid to Refugees, Association for Opportunities for Young Migrants, Association of Teachers of Czech as a Foreign Language, National Institute of Further Education) are also involved in helping immigrant children integration. Understanding (and finding one's way around) all the documents issued by these bodies is complicated and finding a clear answer to information sought can often be a challenge (Drbohlav, 2011; Günter, 2007; Faltová, 2011; Jarkovská, Lišková, Obrovská, & Souralová, 2015).

The education of immigrant children is covered in the Education Act in paragraphs 16 and 20. § 16 *Supporting the education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs* was most recently amended in September 2016. Previously children had been categorised according to the nature of their special needs. This does not appear to have been retained in the new paragraph. According to this, we understand a child with special needs to be a person who needs any kind of support in order to be able to achieve the appropriate educational outcome. Support refers to any necessary adjustment to teaching and education services relating to health, cultural, environmental or other aspects of the child's life.

The nature of the education provided in elementary schools (stages one and two) is determined by the curriculum: the Framework Education Programme for Elementary

biology, chemistry (obligatory in years 8-9), music, art, physical education and sometimes manual skills. More information in English about education in the Czech Republic can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/education-czech-republic_en, <http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=CZE> or <http://info.edu.cz/en/education>.

Education (FEP EE, in Czech *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání – RVP ZV*), which is approved by the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports. The schools then have to prepare their own syllabi for the subject areas and these are known as school education programmes. The framework sets out nine main educational areas consisting of one or more subject areas, cross-curricular topics, related subject areas and stipulating the key competences a school leaver should have. Multicultural education features in the following cross-curricular subjects: personal and social education, education for democratic citizenship, education for thinking in a European and global context, multicultural education, environmental education, and media studies (MŠMT, 2006).

As for teachers, the obligation to ensure in-service training for teachers in public and state schools is stipulated in the Act on Educational Staff. In-service training is organised by higher education institutions, institutions that provide in-service training for teaching staff and elsewhere provided accreditation has been granted by the education ministry (MŠMT, 2012). Those wishing to teach at the primary and lower-secondary levels must have a Master's degree or equivalent (4 or 5 years course at a faculty of education), which includes a relatively short practicum. Teachers at the primary level are general subject teachers while lower-secondary teachers specialise in one or more subjects. They do not have the status of civil servants and their prescribed teaching load is 22 lessons per week.

There are no university courses specializing in the teaching of immigrant children, but here are a growing number of modular options. The National Institute for Further Education offers an increasing range of teacher development courses. It provides mainly in-service training programmes for teachers. Higher education institutions offer refresher training courses for teachers returning to the profession after a long interval, training courses to upgrade educational qualifications, specialised courses, and postgraduate courses for graduates from non-teacher training faculties. Also the Society for Young Migrants and other state and non-profit organizations offer courses or workshops on teacher development (MŠMT, 2012).

Compared to countries that have a long experience of immigration, the topic of immigrant integration is still relatively new in the Czech Republic. The country began to deal with this issue more comprehensively after 1989 (the end of the communist era), and particularly after 2004 (when the country joined the European Union). Its integration policy began to emerge during the 1990s. The number of immigrants and their status in Czech society has changed in tandem with the political, economic and social situation in the Czech Republic. The total number of immigrants is growing and the long-term projections clearly indicate that the number will continue to increase. It is important to mention that many Czech people perceive the number of immigrants to be too high. In reality, the percentage of immigrants is far below the average in other developed European countries, which is 8-10%. In the Czech Republic immigrants make up around 4.2% of the whole population, which is about 450,000 people, according to the Czech statistical office (ČSÚ, 2015; ÚVČR, 2016).

With the growing number of adult immigrants, the number of immigrant children in Czech elementary schools is also increasing. In the 2004/2005 school year, there were 12,113 immigrant children at Czech elementary schools. Ten years later, in 2014/2015, there were 16,477 immigrant children attending Czech elementary schools. The largest group of immigrant children in schools comprises Ukrainians (4,039), followed by Slovaks (3,775),

the Vietnamese (3,220), and Russians (1,321). Bulgarian (385), Mongolian (343), Moldavian (339) and Polish (302) pupils make up the other larger ethnic groups in Czech schools (MŠMT, 2015).

Immigrant children tend to attend schools in the capital or in the bigger regional and border towns, but as migration grows, they have started to attend other schools. Thus there are schools that have more experience of teaching immigrant children, which have more structured strategies for teaching and integration, while many other schools, with much less experience in this area, deal with the situation as best they can. Teachers may have substantial or very little to no experience of teaching foreign pupils. The aim of this study is to show how teachers from various Czech elementary schools perceive working with immigrant children.

Research method and participants

Given the goals of our research, we decided to collect the data via semi-structured interviews, a qualitative research method. The respondents were selected using the purpose sampling method. This involves critical consideration of the population parameters and focuses on carefully selecting environments and individuals in which the phenomena are likely to occur (Silverman, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

When selecting schools and teachers we tried to capture the specific nature of the Czech education system in relation to the immigrant children education. We did this by including a school that deals particularly with education for immigrant children located in a regional capital, and contrasting schools from a small town where there is minimal experience of working with immigrant children. We wanted to ascertain whether the amount of experience teaching immigrant children could be a factor influencing the relationship between teachers and immigrant children—and thereby the whole integration process. In the end we choose three schools which differ greatly in level of contact with immigrant children—one school focuses specifically on educating immigrant children, while the two other schools are located in smaller towns where the teachers stated they had no or minimal experience in this area. Furthermore, the teachers were chosen according to subject: they teach Czech language and literature, since teachers of this subject have to deal with the biggest pressures in teaching immigrant children; science and technical subjects at the lower secondary level and teachers teaching all subjects in the primary level. We also took account of the positions occupied by the respondents in the school—principal (and also teacher), deputy principal (also teacher) and ordinary teachers. Basic information on the respondents is given in the Table below (names are changed):

By purpose sampling certain types of schools and teachers according to subject and position, we tried to capture the maximum diversity of experience working in multicultural classes.

Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were held with the teachers during the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 school year. Like many researchers dealing with textual data, we decided not to use an exact predetermined protocol but created an individual form of analysis (Peräkylä, 2005). All the data were transcribed and paper-pencil coded, and then analysed by the authors independently. A few sets of statements were obtained, grouped according to wider topics or categories (Agar, 1980; Gavora, 2006; Weitzman, 2003). A

Table 1. Description of respondents

Name	Position	School	Subject	Teaching experience	Experience with teaching immigrant children without knowledge of Czech
Helena	Principal	A	ICT	30 years	Yes, regularly
Marie	Teacher	A	Class teacher (1 st – 2 nd grade)	5 years	Yes, regularly
Standa	Teacher	A	Class teacher (3 rd – 5 th grade)	22 years	Yes, regularly
Stephan	Teacher	A	Math	20 years	Yes, regularly
Vanda	Deputy Principal	B	Czech language	23 years	Little
Karla	Teacher	B	Czech language, Social Sciences	26 years	Little
Hana	Deputy principal	C	Math, German language	30 years	None

comparison of the results led to the identification of several categories which we both agreed on and subsequently processed descriptively in relation to the research question: What experiences and opinions do Czech teachers have regarding the integration of immigrant children in Czech schools? The following six categories which emerged out of the coding seemed to be most important to Czech teachers: *School placement policies*; *Teachers training and further development regards working with immigrant children*; *The difficulty of teaching immigrant children*; *Family is the key*; *Ambivalent approach to multicultural education*; *Teachers' ethnic stereotypes and prejudice*. The good contact we managed to establish with the teachers during the interviews is reflected in the quality of their statements. These proved to be so informative and valuable in their own right that we decided to use mainly their own words to illustrate the teachers' opinions because they were more revealing than any other comments. This way will also enable readers to form their own opinions, regardless of any interpretation provided by the researchers which is by definition subjective. The quotes selected are briefly discussed and where necessary accompanied by data. To conclude, we summarize and discuss the results of the survey.

Results: working with immigrant children from a Czech teacher's point of view

School placement policies

The teaching methods portals, provided e.g. by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (www.rvp.cz) or Association of Opportunities for Young Migrants (www.inkluzivni.skola.cz) gives recommendations on how school principals should place a new immigrant child in the appropriate year. Nevertheless, this is just a recommendation not official policy,

so principals are not obligated to follow this and can choose the year at their own discretion. The school management will usually try to allocate the pupil to a class in the appropriate year according to age if possible. This was confirmed by one of our respondents, the principal of a school who also teaches, who said:

There is no law or policy on selecting the year a new immigrant child should attend; it is up to the principal. So if the child knows a little Czech and I agree with the parents, I will try to send them to the year they would have gone in if they have been in their own country. If the child cannot speak Czech at all, I usually send them to the year below – 4th grade instead of 5th grade for instance, (Helena, school A, 30 years of teaching experience).

We asked all teachers what integration measures schools should implement for immigrant children. Helena (school A, 30 years of teaching experience) stated:

The support measurements concern only Czech language. But, in a project we are running, they can have also an extra hour of mathematics per week. So we have two Czech courses for children from non-EU countries, and another one for kids from EU countries and one course for children from other schools in the city (...). We have three projects running and this allows us to hold Czech language courses for kids who need them for free.

The state does not fund the school's integration measures for immigrant children, except above mentioned language support for some groups of children. Consequently the principal has to raise the money herself by creating projects and applying for Czech and European grants.

The teachers agreed that it was a great advantage when the immigrant child was supposed to attend the first year:

They have a huge advantage in the first year. They can use the same textbooks as the rest of the class. Because in essence, an immigrant child learns as well as a Czech one in the first year. The letter A, this is how you read it, this is what it looks like, and that is how it is written. That is the content of what I do with them here in the first year. They have to learn the alphabet, they have to be able to learn to read and write it, (Marie, school A, 5 years of teaching experience).

Teachers who have less contact with immigrant children agree with the more experienced respondents:

If the child has to go into the first year, there is no problem for us, but if they have to go into second grade, we would have to think hard which class to put them in, (Hana, school C, 30 years of teaching experience).

Teachers consider the child to benefit more if he or she arrives at the beginning of the school year, but in practice unfortunately this does not happen so often:

They come throughout the whole year and it's kind of stupid. There is a French girl, she came to my class in January without knowing a single word of Czech or English, and it was bad, (Stephan, school A, 20 years of teaching experience).

The teachers stated that all immigrant children have an individual plan that should be completed. Teachers give new tasks to the immigrant children at the beginning of every

lesson and try to spend time with these pupils or groups of pupils individually. One of the teachers questioned mentioned that he feared Czech pupils would leave the school because the immigrant children would slow them down:

What worries me is that this kind of teaching slows Czech children. If I only had the Czech children, I could have practice more with them, repeat things with them and go much faster in new things. Specifically, in Czech, they are quick, good, but my attention is spread primarily among those immigrant children, and I don't pay much attention to the Czech children, (Standa, school A, 22 years of teaching experience).

The principal cited above who is dedicated to teaching immigrant children said that regular schools are not currently in a state ready to admit immigrant children and are not interested in teaching them:

The regular schools do not respect the fact that a child who does not speak Czech can attend their school. These schools don't provide support for Czech as a second language. So the children usually just end up with us as at our school. Sometimes the other schools try to get rid of them immediately and send them to us, we are happy to accept them ... but it doesn't mean that this is good practice...it is not, (Helena, school A, 30 years of teaching experience).

Teachers with less or no contact with immigrant children have supported this statement. These teachers visibly fear having immigrant children in the class and they have a tendency to avoid working with them by sending them to schools that specialize in working with immigrants:

They are entitled to attend a preparatory class, but I do not have a preparatory class here. If for example a Vietnamese child came (that has actually never happened yet) with no knowledge of Czech, I would send him immediately to our other school, which is legally the local school for immigrant children in our area. Although I cannot imagine how they are able to create a special class for three immigrant children there either...they don't have many immigrant children there with no knowledge of Czech, (Hana, school C, 30 years of experience).

Another teacher adds:

At our school, we are not able to provide a preparatory class for immigrant children, no one has ever asked us to do it, and they would simply have to go somewhere else...to another school, (Karla, school B, 26 years of teaching experience).

Teachers training and further development regards working with immigrant children

Teaching immigrant children is without doubt a challenging task, particularly when they are taught in the same class with children from the majority population, in our case, Czech pupils. We wondered during the research where Czech teachers obtained knowledge on how to educate immigrant children. All the respondents stated that they had not heard anything about teaching children with different first languages whilst studying at university. Most of the teachers had studied during the totalitarian regime and one of them laughed saying:

Well... it is like this. Given that fact that I studied at the faculty under socialism, Marxism-

Leninism didn't provide me with information about teaching immigrant children, (Standa, School A, 22 years of teaching experience).

However, a teacher who had completed his or her studies a few years ago had not had any courses on teaching immigrants. Today there are some faculties that offer a few shorter courses, rather than whole semester courses in which students can learn the basics about educating immigrant children where they are given practical recommendations. The fact that universities have recently started introducing such courses reflects the increasing number of immigrants in Czech society and the need for more teacher training in this area.

The teachers confirmed that they drew mostly on their own experience and on sharing experience with other colleagues. They agreed there was a lack of educational material for teaching immigrant children. However, some of our respondents had rather negative attitudes to further teacher development. They justify this attitude by stating that the teacher development and seminars were not based on practice, with a senior teacher saying:

Well, they send us to things where I sit and listen to theoretical crap from people who have never taught immigrants in their lives, (Standa, school A, 22 years of teaching experience).

This negative attitude to teacher development also occurs among teachers with less contact with immigrant children:

I do not need any courses (...) up there at the ministries and universities everyone thinks that there exists a template for everything, but down here, in reality, everything is individual, (Hana, C school, 30 years).

Some of the teachers who had had no contact with immigrants would rather have general training, attend a session about teaching Czech as a second language for foreigners:

Absolutely I would like to attend courses on how to teach Czech for foreigners. Because when you do a course like this, you see how Czech is taught differently than it is for Czech pupils, (Karla, school B, 26 years).

Our research has shown that teachers have different views on the quality and quantity of materials available for teaching immigrant children. Most of the teachers repeatedly displayed disappointment over the lack of teaching materials and stated that they have to create appropriate materials on their own:

There is a lack of materials ... for the older ones, who want to learn Czech, there are more available materials, but for the little children there it is just an ABC-book and that's it. I have to make a lot of materials for the kids myself (...) I need to create exercises to practice what we have learnt. I would be happy to have more textbooks and exercises available here. So that I could skip all the Internet searches, searching in bookstores, asking colleagues etc., (Marie, A school, 5 years of teaching experience).

Only a teacher who taught Czech to Vietnamese, Ukrainian and Russian adults and their children did not complain about the lack of materials:

There is already quite a lot of material on the Internet and also in the bookstore that you can choose from. (...) I know of an organization, META, and they have lots of materials on their

website available to the public. I have also used that, (Karla, school B, 25 years of teaching experience).

A statement by Standa (school A, 22 years of teaching experience) reveals the reason for the inconsistency in teacher satisfaction with the teaching materials. He is not satisfied with the range of materials for teaching immigrant children but loves to use materials for children with special needs. He defended this by saying:

Publishing adult immigrant materials is quite lucrative today, but I cannot use them here, because they are for adults and aimed at making money out of them. Maybe it sounds funny, but the materials for special schools are excellent for me here. Because it is taught in a basic way, with lot of images, it is visually interesting, that's what I need, (Standa, school A, 22 year of teaching experience).

The difficulty of teaching immigrant children

As mentioned above teachers have great difficulty preparing visual materials, individual exercises and tasks for every single immigrant child taking into consideration its knowledge of Czech. Teachers working at school A described their work in linguistically heterogeneous classes as very demanding for other reasons as well:

It's in the approach to pupils here, it's just more difficult. Not only because of the teaching preparation, but also because the teacher is more like an actor here. The teacher needs to play more. You cannot be afraid to demonstrate that you are walking or that you are sitting on the chair, or that you are laughing, you really should take the time for this and stop teaching and really explain and show the crucial concepts. But it is time consuming. It is necessary to teach children the fundamental concepts right from the beginning when they start at the school, phrases like bring me your student book, throw it in the trashcan, and open the window ... They do not know things like that, (Marie, A school, 5 years of teaching experience).

All teachers agree that teaching in multicultural classes is demanding; the teachers have to work harder with their voices and need to be able to handle multitasking while they have to check all the children's different assignments. One teacher commented that working with immigrant children was the toughest part of his educational career:

I had never done such demanding work before, until I started in this school. I had taught students who were integrated, but not enough and not in such diverse groups as here, yeah, because here it's really hard work, (Stephan, school B, 20 years of teaching experience).

Teachers with less contact with immigrant children expressed concerns and fears about working with them. The most common concerns were because of the overall difficulty of teaching in multicultural classrooms and because of the teachers', pupils' and parents' poor foreign language skills. These teachers compare teaching immigrants to teaching talented pupils or pupils with learning disabilities:

It's not possible to focus only on the immigrant child in the classroom. I imagine that it is the same like when you have a Czech child with learning disabilities in your class. You teach the average in the class and everybody who is above average gets an extra assignment and those

who are below average gets extra time to do it or I give them less exercises, (Hana, school C, 30 years of teaching experience).

Another teacher adds that compared to Czech children with learning disabilities, with immigrant children there is an extra barrier—the language of communication:

There is also a difference in the communication language, which means that the teacher needs to spend much more time on everything, (Vanda, school B, 23 years of teaching experience).

Some teachers have great concern about having to deal with students who do not speak a word of Czech:

I really cannot imagine getting a Vietnamese pupil without a word of Czech in my sixth grade. It would be very difficult for me to handle the situation. It would be challenging for me, and for the child and the family, I am sure. Without having an assistant in the class, I cannot imagine it at all. It would be better with an assistant I guess, (Hana, school C, 30 years of teaching experience).

One of the teachers was also afraid of a situation in which more than one immigrant child might start in her class:

It may happen that we get some of those refugees – it is hypothetical because they will probably be located in the big cities. However, they are still just people, they will move eventually, and it is possible that within a couple of years we will have to deal with this for real. What will I do if more than one of them comes to my class at once? Where would I put them? I am not able to cope with six children with no Czech knowledge in my class. That is too many. I would say that four immigrant children are too many for one class. Two is perfect, they could get along and be friends, (Hana, school C, 30 years of teaching experience).

The RVP (Framework Education Programme) teaching recommendations (Šindelářová, 2011) state that it is appropriate not to have a greater number of immigrant children in one class (unless it is a language training or preparatory class). Three to four immigrant children in one class is the maximum, which is recommended so that students can engage more easily with the Czech group of pupils without segregation. Four immigrant children is really the maximum for one class for Šindelářová (2011).

Teachers with poor contact with immigrants agreed that they are afraid of teaching pupils who cannot speak Czech because of their own poor language skills:

I do not know what the average age of our teachers here is, but I think it is quite high. There are many teachers in my age, and we are a generation which learned Russian at school and we didn't come across English at all. So when you think of English as the language of communication with immigrant parents, as a language we should know, there is a majority of teachers who do not speak English. So knowledge of Czech is still crucial, (Karla, school B, 26 years of teaching experience).

Since the teachers do not speak foreign languages well enough, they put greater emphasis on the fact that pupils and parents should be able to speak Czech when dealing with the school. One teacher clearly stated that she would welcome a course in Vietnamese so that she could greet Vietnamese parents, as that is the main immigrant group at school B.

The teachers were also asked what they would like to improve in the teaching of immigrant children and integration into the Czech educational system and society. They all agreed that they would welcome the establishment of preparatory classes for immigrants and that they would welcome the hiring of teaching assistants as well. Standa (school B, 22 years of teaching experience) said:

They should attend a two-month intensive course first at least, which would focus only on the language. They do everything here together right from the beginning. I would definitely like to have a preparatory class here and then teaching assistants. We do not have single assistant teacher here. But they are needed.

The principal at school A said that she has been trying to establish preparatory classes for several years. But she had failed so far to get any funding:

I would like to have a preparatory class here ... but you have to push and fight to get the funding ... We have been trying for many years now ... the regional politicians are helping me but we still cannot persuade them yet, (Helena, school A, 30 years of teaching experience).

Family is the key

All the teachers stressed how attitudes to school vary from family to family:

It is very individual; their attitude also depends on whether the parents want to stay here longer. If the parents say to their children that they don't need to worry about school, the pupils will not try to do better. However, this is not just about immigrants. If a student has no foundations, but the family supports him in school, the child knows what attitude to have to school, what his responsibility at school is, then it is enough for the teacher to say once what is wanted, and then it usually works. Then on the other hand there are children whose parents don't support them in school and in their relationship with school. It doesn't matter whether they are an immigrant or Czech. If the family won't support them in school, will not help the child, then it is very difficult, (Marie, A school, 5 years).

According to the teachers, the attitude of immigrant families affects not only whether the pupils integrate successfully and gain new friends among Czech fellow students, their school achievement, and the amount of teacher's work with the child as well:

It depends on the parents whether they are willing to cooperate ... for example on their knowledge of Czech. If they don't want to learn it, then you're reliant on yourself and the child ... then it's just up to you whether you want to succeed or not. And if you want to, then you must work hard individually with the child (Hana, C school, 30 years of teaching experience).

Teachers claim, that the parents willing of cooperation is crucial, even if they do not know Czech. Vanda (school B, 26 years of teaching experience) sums up the situation very clearly:

The family background and support is crucial. How the family helps is crucial. The parents can help even if they don't speak Czech. They can help their child by showing an interest, by being with him, by listening to him as he reads.

Ambivalent approach to multicultural education

The teachers have rather ambivalent approaches to planned and structuralized multicultural education; it is worth of emphasize, that they have them regardless of the extent of their contact with immigrant children. But it does not mean they are not discussing different cultures, nationalities, identities at all—they usually do, but as an ordinary part of class, such as Marie (school A, 5 years of teaching experience):

I talk with the children about differences in cultures and between nationalities. Now in natural history we are learning about the human body, there were figures of white people and black people, so we discussed where they come from, and where we come from and so on. So yes, we talked about it and I try to get them to notice things like the fact that the world is nice in the way it is colourful, and the kids respond perfectly.

Other teachers also stated that they naturally included the topic of multicultural education in their classes, but don't like the label *multicultural education*:

Multicultural education is a very modern concept. How should I do it during the math class? Seems to me that it's always been here, we talked about different nationalities, tolerance, in history, geography, social sciences. Just today, suddenly there has been such a fuss about it and I will not put it unnaturally somewhere where it does not belong. I talk about Germany in the German lesson. When we have the topic of the EU, I speak about the EU, we talk about different problems and nationalities. But a multicultural education will not change pupils' attitudes towards each other, (Hana, school C, 30 years of teaching experience).

Some of the teachers reacted even negatively to the topic of controlled multicultural education and shows that planning it is not necessary:

I do not have to talk about such things, they see it every day on their own. He can see that the Chinese have slanted eyes, that an African has black skin, they can see it every day and accept it naturally very well. So they can talk about cultures and differences between people at other schools where there aren't any foreigners. They can talk about what they look like, what to do when you meet other cultures, how to behave ... kids here, they experience everything themselves every day at school, (Standa, school A, 22 years of teaching experience).

A teacher living in a region with a high number of Vietnamese and Russian immigrants gives another example of multicultural education in practice, talking about negative ethnic prejudice in her class. She warned that there had been a deterioration in the attitude of her students to the theme of immigration and the refugee crisis:

We discuss racism often, prejudice against different ethnicities, and so on. Very often now we talk about refugees. The pupils have started to speak about these things in a worse and worse way. What I see is that those strong individuals in the classes have a very negative mind-set. Yeah, like what do they want here and things like that. So I try to talk about it with them. But think about the region we are in, the attitude to these things is unfortunately very negative in general here, (Karla, school B, 26 years of teaching experience).

Teachers' ethnic stereotypes and prejudice

The teachers seem to have clear approach to some ethnic groups. E.g. they repeatedly stated that Slavs integrate into Czech society without any problems. They also think the same about the Vietnamese, known for emphasizing the importance of their children's education. The concerns that the teachers have are often connected to Muslim children and their families. Standa (school A, 22 years of teaching experience) talked about not very positive experience with an Arab pupil; according to this experience he had developed a prejudice against Arab men:

I am quite shocked by the Arab boy. I could not understand his soul and his way of thinking and feeling. He thinks and feels in a way that I cannot understand. The difference between his and my culture is simply too big, I just do not understand him and he doesn't understand me. To force him to respect some rules, it is almost impossible. But fortunately you don't have to face these things so often.

Another teacher also admitted concerns about working with Muslim children:

I cannot imagine how it would be if a Muslim child came. What you haven't experienced, you don't know. Slavs and the Vietnamese are okay ... I do not want to generalize, because I don't have that much experience, but it is just what comes into my mind. Well, you cannot speak like this in these times so openly, people don't like to hear it, but I can imagine that there could be a problem if I got a Muslim girl who wore a headscarf in my class. I know this from my colleagues from Germany that this is a problem there, that the German children don't accept them. But still I think it is important that the teacher does not encourage xenophobic stereotypes among pupils, (Hana, school C, 30 years).

Hana's comment on what is "politically correct" regarding to the topic of immigrants is worth to emphasize.

Although the teachers—even those from school A, with great experience with working with foreign children—mentioned some of the fears and prejudices they have, the principal at school A vigorously denied that the teachers at her school had any prejudices against nationalities, stating:

If we do this job, we cannot have any prejudices. On the contrary, you learn so much about other cultures and learn to treat people in a way that is tolerant of their habits and you teach it to our pupils as well ... if there was such a thing as prejudice here, well we could not do that, (Helena, school A, 30 years of teaching experience).

Summary and discussion

The analysis of the interviews with the teachers led to three main conclusions.

Firstly, the results confirm the key role played by the extent to which the teachers' contact with immigrant children in shaping their attitude to immigrant children and to immigrant integration in general. This originally brought us to select the type of school and the teachers according to experience of teaching immigrant children. Teachers with less or no contact with immigrant children expressed great concern about the complex nature of teaching

multicultural classes. It is difficult for them to imagine having immigrant children in the classroom. They didn't dare guess what they might have done differently when teaching multicultural classes. These teachers have a tendency to avoid working with immigrant children and send them to other schools. In comparison, teachers who have regular contact with immigrant children specifically stated exactly what would be needed to teach in multicultural classes because they were able to draw on their own experiences.

Furthermore, teachers with little experience of immigrant children stated that they had little or no knowledge of foreign languages. Most of them speak English badly or not at all. This *handicap* is another reason why they are afraid of working with immigrant children. These teachers are afraid that they will have no common language to communicate with immigrant parents and their children because of their lack of English. It is hard for them to imagine how they could agree on anything with immigrant parents. Compared to them, teachers in the school that specializes in teaching immigrant children had attended English language courses and did not report having poor knowledge of foreign languages nor any other concerns regarding teaching immigrant children.

As a comment to this we can say, that knowledge of foreign languages is for sure important for teachers working in multicultural classes, but we could discuss if this is really as crucial as teachers claim. Knowledge of English or other foreign language may comfort teacher and save his or her time and effort when communicating practical things with child or its parents, so teacher does not need to ask bilingual pupils, family members, community volunteers, etc. for help. But the emphasis in class is on developing the child's language skills as quickly as possible, and here one of the most useful strategies is using Czech only. Due to our experiences, language skills is not a universal cure to every problem; positive attitude and good pedagogical skills could be much more important when working with a foreign child, than knowing his or her mother tongue or any *lingua franca*. We have the impression, that teachers' complains about the lack of language skills in fact may conceal another lack; the lack of overall comfort, the feeling of general uncertainty with the situation.

Secondly, we found that there were some shared approaches and experiences which the teachers agreed on regardless of their level of experience. None of the teachers interviewed had had the opportunity to attend a course on teaching immigrant children at university. Such courses were not available at the time the teachers were studying. They work intuitively with immigrant children, drawing on their own experiences and sharing their knowledge with colleagues. Often they are not aware of the further education courses now available. A lack of teacher awareness about the materials available for teaching immigrant children in the Czech Republic was also in evidence. Most teachers said that few of the materials they required were available and that they had to create most of the materials they needed themselves. Even if the range is rapidly expanding and the materials can be found, they are not centrally available but can be sourced from government and NGO websites and bookstores. Often teachers do not know where to look for these materials. The teaching of Czech as a second language is now the subject of expert studies and covered in modern textbooks and methodological materials for teaching foreigners—but they are primarily focused on adults. Teaching resources designed specifically for children have only begun to appear more recently—e.g. the Association of Teachers of Czech as a Foreign language has been paying attention to educating children-foreigners and offers on their website methodology books

aimed at teachers with no experience, also at primary and lower secondary education level (for further information see Doleží, 2014, 2016). The teachers, however, showed that they are resourceful in this area, mentioning that they use e.g. materials intended for special schools primarily for their simplicity and readability.

Regardless of the extent of their contact with immigrant children, teachers have ambivalent approaches to the idea of controlled multicultural education. They show that planning it is not necessary; they have always been discussing different cultures, nationalities, identities—but as a natural part of class.

Teachers show a variety of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices—both positive and negative—based partly on their own experiences. They consider the Slavs and the Vietnamese to integrate more easily, but are worried about teaching children from a very different cultural background, particularly Muslim children. Teachers in the Czech Republic do not have extensive experience of Muslims and their fear can be partly explained as a *fear of the unknown*. The fact that there are widespread ethnic stereotypes and prejudices among Czech teachers is demonstrated in another piece of research on the subject (Leix, 2015a). It should be noted that in both cases the data collection was carried out before the migration crisis of 2016 occurred and have probably even raised the level of criticism of Islam.

Thirdly, the level of knowledge of Czech language among immigrant children has been shown to be crucial in all the statements by teachers. Knowledge of the majority language is not only an indicator of immigrant integration but also influences the teacher's approach to immigrant children from the very first moment. Even teachers with no contact with immigrant children often stated that if the children learn Czech, they cease to be *special*; their “strangeness” is no longer considered to be fundamental. The question of knowledge of Czech seems to be key, and it is thus clear that this aspect deserves special attention when planning strategies for the integration of immigrant children. Not surprisingly, similar conclusion emerges from an analysis of the current situation regarding immigrant integration in Czech nursery schools (Leix, 2015b).

One Czech researcher critically states: “Immigrant children adapt easily to our education system, but our education system does not adapt to them” (Gabal, 2008, p. 61). Nevertheless, school support during adaptation is a prerequisite to successful integration, and for immigrant children to achieve at school. This is confirmed by the situation in other countries, which traditionally come top in the PISA tests, namely Norway and Finland. Immigrant education is one of the priorities of Norway's education and integration policy. The Norwegians e.g. employ bilingual teachers in schools and emphasize cooperation between parents and teachers. In Finland (and other Nordic countries) there is a particularly apparent effort to minimize inequalities among people—including ethnic and racial ones. The Scandinavian approach to equality is quite different from countries in which there is increasing support for talented pupil programs—the Czech Republic is one such country. Scandinavians provide support pupils who for whatever reason lag behind (Průcha, 2015; Záleská, 2015). Immigrant children are usually found in this category of children who get support. The role of teachers in this process is essential.

It should be noted that the policies implemented by the above mentioned countries—on teachers' language skills, the emphasis on cooperation with parents, teaching assistants and preparatory classes etc—are also essential for Czech teachers. But when we discussed

what the teachers had stated about the situation (and how they talked about it), we came up with other suggestions as to how teachers who have similar problems could be supported: 1. There is already quite a variety of support available to teachers, both in terms of continuing education and the resources that can be used to teach immigrant children. The problem is that the teachers are not informed about these, and the quality varies, meaning that sometimes it is just “*theoretical crap from people who have never taught immigrants in their lives*”, to quote one of the teachers; 2. The general results of this survey, as well as clear statements from some of the teachers show that there are teachers who have experience of teaching immigrant children and who have been successful and so contact with them could be of great support for those with less experience. This could be used to prepare effective teacher development courses for teachers from small towns and villages; 3. Given that ethnic stereotypes and prejudices are widespread in Czech society (not only among teachers), we suggest that more attention should be paid to social psychology issues relating to dealing with diversity during teachers’ university training².

The world changes rapidly, much faster than people do. The media discusses immigrants on a daily basis, but teachers are the ones who have to work with them every day. They have to cope with the challenges on the spot. The purpose of the article was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of how they deal with immigrant children and thus to provide an insight into the reality in Czech schools for readers within and outside the Czech Republic. We did not want to create universally valid conclusions based on the statistical analysis of large data, but to survey the reality in schools, which we believe is similar to many schools in the Czech Republic, and to convey the words of “real” teachers. We believe that by exploring the world of teachers’ experiences, their views and concerns, we may contribute to a better understanding of teachers’ needs, which we consider to be essential if we want (not only) immigrant children to receive a good quality education.

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² As a university teacher I believe that social perception is a social and educational psychology topic that appeals greatly to university students in the Czech Republic (A.L.)

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