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Review paper

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VALUING, TOLERATING OR LABELING DIFFERENCES IN FORMAL EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES FROM SERBIA*

The subject of the paper is diversity in formal education and linking international documents in the field of education policies with the application in educational practice in the Republic of Serbia (RS). The aim of the paper is to find connections between the normatively expressed needs of the child/student in the development of authenticity and personal competencies and skills, with application in real situations in educational practice in the RS. An overview of planned measures, actions and their implementation in formal education in RS, in the period covering the first and second Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015; 2016-2025), is presented. The influx of migrants was intense at that time, so the efforts of the Ministry of Education to include children and students from the migrant population in the national formal education system were emphasized. At the same time, there is a debate about other differences that are equally important for the child and the quality of his/her life and development that can cause damage if they are not recognized, respected and supported by adults and peers. The examples of good practice show the tendency that exists in society, while at the same time they open up new issues and non-coverages that require pedagogical interventions and implications.

Keywords: diversity, discrimination, migrants, education policies, children's rights

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first European Anti-Racism Summit took place on 19 March 2021, and the European Parliament called for an end to structural racism and discrimination, racial profiling and police brutality, as well as the right to peaceful protest in the resolutions adopted (EPRS 2022). The principles of equality and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin have a legal basis in the EU contracts: The Treaty on European Union, in particular Article 2 (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2016a, C 202/17), the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2016b, C 202/73), as well as in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2016c, C 202/389), which has the same legal weight as the Treaties according to the Lisbon Treaty. The Charter explicitly states that all are equal before the law and that any discrimination based on gender, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation is prohibited.

Diversity is a recognized value in the provisions of the Constitution, laws and by-laws and international regulations concerning human and children's rights. On a personal and institutional level, diversity is (not) accepted, (not) appreciated, and (not) valued. In itself, diversity is very multifaceted, appreciates authenticity and provides an abundance of possibilities, which can be seen as its advantage. As such, it seeks creativity in the approach of adults in the education system, so that this kind of appreciation spills over to peers and becomes a personal reference and institutional framework. However, it is not necessary that diversity will always or often be seen as an advantage.

A research among students of the third grade of secondary schools from five cities/municipalities in Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (APV) who are educated in Serbian, Hungarian, Slovak and Ruthenian language, with a focus on the knowledge of the rights of members of national minorities living in APV and exercising the right to education in their own language, was carried out in the school year 2008/09 by the Provincial Ombudsman (*Izveštaj Pokrajinskog ombudsmana za 2009. godinu*, 2010: 81-84). Several researchers from the study conducted a similar study in the same schools in the school year 2014/15 and found a serious decline in certain aspects of rights related to national minorities. The students showed the lowest level of knowledge about discrimination in the media and about the obligations of the state to protect the right of minorities to freedom of opinion and expression. They were

not sufficiently aware of the government's obligation to protect national minorities, which is why they in a certain way approved of their discrimination in the media (Lazić & Perić 2017; 2018), which distanced them from understanding different ethnic or national origins, religious affiliation, as well as from the guaranteed rights of national minorities to freedom of opinion and expression, which has been confirmed by other studies (Patten, Kymlicka 2003; Basta-Fleiner 2013; Vuković-Ćalasan 2014). Their testimonies are a consequence of growing up in a monocultural environment that treats the issues of national minorities selectively and with reservation and fosters ethnocentrism. Such a relationship is explained in other studies by the absence of encounters with diversity (Kristović 2012; Dimitrijević, Petrović 2014; Giurgiu, Marica, Ionescu 2015; Tomanović, Stanojević 2015).

In the repeated study, the existence and perception of diversity in the dominant group which contributes to reducing prejudice and discrimination against minority groups was noticed only within the Slovak national community (Lazić & Perić 2017; 2018). This has also been confirmed by other studies (Brauer & Er-rafly 2011; Milošević Đorđević 2015).

The aim of this review paper is to find connections between the normatively expressed need of a child/student in developing authenticity, personal competencies and skills with their application in real situations in educational practice in the Republic of Serbia. To this end, an overview of planned measures, actions and their application in formal education in the process of educating students of Roma nationality, as well as students with refugee/migrant status, is presented. In order to approach the concept of authenticity and integrity of a person, the paper presents the terminological determinations of diversity through the concepts of valuation, tolerance and labeling. In support of the above, key competences for lifelong learning are presented according to two key documents of the European Union (Official Journal of the European Union 2006) and the European Commission (European Commission 2019). The conclusion is achieved by presenting the Council of Europe document entitled Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2018) and its implications for building intercultural dialogue and democratic culture.

After the introductory considerations and presentation of research on diversity in Vojvodina, the province with the largest number of national communities, as well as the broader European framework in the domain of authenticity, which make up the first part of the paper, the analytical framework of the research follows, which is complemented by insights into competences in education, presentations of situations from the real education program in the Republic of Serbia, and examples of good practice.

The concluding considerations may open up space for new reflections on this topic.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAME

In order to approach the research objective of this review, the authors sought to find a connection between the normatively expressed needs of the child/student in the development of authenticity and personal competences, on the one hand, and their application in real situations in educational practice in the RS, on the other. For this purpose, authors consulted sources relevant to the topic of diversity, authenticity, identity, competences in general, key competences for life-long learning, cross-curricular competences in order to find some explanations.

The dominant attention in the work is devoted to the question of whether there are opportunities for displaying children's authenticity in the formal education system in a predominantly nationally oriented curriculum and how to understand and accept diversity in a real program? The research was carried out through a logical and value-based exploration of the issue of diversity and competences, in order to determine the guiding thread in understanding and living diversity, which is seen as the backbone of democratic culture in schools. In other words, it is implemented in the corpus of the hermeneutic and exploratory paradigm, which enables a more complete understanding of these issues, relevant for the creation of positive values in education.

In order to find answers, the research was conducted in the form of theoretical research and the application of content analysis of international and national normative documents, as well as material sources on the implementation of modern national educational policy, i.e. international project activities that support the achievement of diversity defined in the research question in the national education system. Everything presented in this review is publicly available on the websites of the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute for the Improvement of Education, i.e. scientific publications to which the authors refer in the paper.

3. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DIVERSITY? HOW IMPORTANT AND PRESENT IS IT IN FORMAL EDUCATION?

In the context of human rights, diversity is understood as a standard rooted in the belief in human rights, which is recognized as a unifying principle in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Based on this, the Convention on the Rights of the Child

emphasizes diversity through identity, especially clarifying it in Articles 8, 27, 28, 29 (*Convention on the Rights of the Child* 1989). In this way, **authenticity** is valued and understood as a personality trait characterized by truthfulness, originality, and credibility. As a verb, to be authentic means to be real, genuine, original, credible, which is not falsified (Klajn, Šipka 2006). The terms associated with them are tolerance, valuation, and labeling (Table 1).

Table 1 – Tolerance, valuation and labeling

Tolerate (verb) 1. To allow or permit. 2. To accept, recognize, respect rights, opinions, customs, etc. of other people and communities. 3. To have resistance or resilience to the influence of something (Klajn, Šipka 2006). - The noun tolerance denotes a relationship in which one completely accepts other people, their different customs, beliefs, opinions, etc. - Synonyms include forbearance and patience.
Value (verb) It is difficult to pinpoint its meaning solely through the definition of the word, but synonyms such as <i>evaluate, assess, appreciate, valorize, rank</i>, etc. can help in clarifying it. (Kontekst.io 2024). - The noun valuation denotes the process by which one determines how useful, qualitative, effective, or valuable something is in relation to certain criteria or standard (<i>Value Meaning</i> 2024).
Label (verb) 1. To attach a label. 2. To express an unsubstantiated judgment, an opinion about someone or something (Klajn, Šipka 2006). - As for the opposition etiquette vs. informality, the following is noted: "The local civilian population is mostly grouped into those who define good behavior by using the most unnatural language and movements, and those who behave "totally relaxed", not hesitating to stick a finger in the eye, if necessary (Pavlović 2017).

If diversity is seen as a principle for building a society in which all social groups deserve equal respect and recognition, then the structural dimension and the cultural or dimension of diversity point to the fact that “it is not possible to effectively solve problems of inequality without accepting diversity, and it is not possible to accept diversity without solving problems of inequality” (Bell 2016; Fraser 1997 according to: Pikić Jugović et al. 2023: 192). This further implies that awareness of diversity can lead to the commitment of teachers and students to developing the skills necessary to create lasting change. According to Jugović, Puzić and Mornar (2020), recognition of socio-cultural differences is at the heart of a critical analysis of teaching practices that (do not) recognize diversity and inequality.

The idea of appreciating diversity in the Serbian language (and education) began to take shape in the first decade of the 21st century through the term ‘tolerance’, which was thought to carry with it the meaning of ‘valuation’. The concept of ‘labelling’ was not considered, because it was believed that through tolerance and evaluation, the process of making a judgment was rounded up, without the need for unsubstantiated presentation and unfounded interpretation. The discourse of the common spoken Serbian language does not reflect on the meaning of the terms ‘tolerance’ and ‘valuation’ and their differences, although the differences are visible. In the context of social constructivism, which questions the viability of two fundamental claims of scientific realism, there is also a difference (Milutinović 2016). It implies the view that knowledge is produced in a society in which facts are a product of human reality, while knowledge is something that is built by the social activity of people. (Steele & Thompson 1995; Stojnov 2005; Gutvajn, 2009).

In the national education policy, this was emphasized in the school year 2001/02, when Civic Education was introduced, first as an optional and then as a compulsory elective subject. The program was based on interactionist theories of development, and relied heavily on similar European programs for the development of democratic and civil society (Gajić 2009). It was studied through a cognitive, cultural and participatory dimension that enabled children and students to better understand education ABOUT, THROUGH and FOR human rights (Klemenović and Lazić 2007; Torney-Purta et al. 2008; Gollob et al. 2010). The contents of Civic Education have been improved over the last 20 years, providing resources for implementation in all grades of pre-university education. Children’s participation in issues that concern them has opened the door to an active approach to school as a mini-community that functions according to common rules, with the application with which it is possible to meet the needs of students, and through the subject Civic Education, they empower students to stand up for themselves and make an active contribution in the local community. Thus, students grow up in a world of diversity, trained to develop interactions with others, those who are diverse and different, in which tolerance, as a key civic skill, gains importance (Willems et al. 2010). School thus becomes a place where social acceptance and happiness of students are nurtured (Orkibi et al. 2014). Care for others is developed, responsible decisions are made, and students are more successful in overcoming various situations, and participate in decision-making whenever possible and useful (Klemenović 2009; Tošić Radev and Pešikan 2017). This meant that social constructivism, together with critical theory, opened the door to critical constructivism and pointed to the need to take personal and social responsibility (Milutinović 2015,

2016). It meant achieving equal opportunities, along with the development of a culture of law and taking personal and social responsibility (Lazić, Matović, Maričić-Mesarović 2023). It can be said that social constructivism situates knowledge in a social and cultural context, exploring the ways in which social phenomena develop. On the other hand, critical constructivism focuses on the possibilities of self-reflection, management of one's own life, and critical action (Freire 2002). Therefore, the focus is on the study of language, culture, and power, and the political nature of critical constructivism is reflected in the fact that the object of analysis is the general welfare and continuous development. In this sense, the actions of people who see themselves as responsible in social relations reflect the main ideology in society, which overflows into numerous content-related activities, including education (Lazić, Matović, Maričić-Mesarović 2023).

4. COMPETENCIES IN EDUCATION

Improving the quality and importance of development of competences is seen as one of the three priority areas, as it has been observed that many young people leave formal education and vocational training without being sufficiently prepared to enter the labour market, or to start their own business, or to successfully cope with dynamic changes in society and economy (Bachman & Holdsworth 2016). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has raised two central questions: What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will today's students need to thrive and shape their world? How can education systems effectively develop these skills, attitudes, values and knowledge? (OECD 2018a). The OECD prioritizes accountability and empowerment "putting cooperation above divisions and sustainability above short-term gain" for every child entering an institutional education system (OECD 2018a).

In this way, the OECD describes three **transformative competences** that help shape the future: creating new value, resolving tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility (OECD 2018b). The OECD also mentions three areas of **fundamental basics** with "basic skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are required for further learning. They provide a foundation for the development of child support and transformative competences" (OECD 2018c). The three **areas** of fundamental basics consist of: cognitive foundations (include literacy and numeracy on which digital and data literacy can be built), health fundamentals (include physical and mental health and well-being), and social and emotional foundations (include morality and ethics).

Both areas (i.e. transformative competencies and foundational foundations) include elements of life skills/transversal skills which are sets of competencies that are independent of specific objects (Table 2).

Table 2 – Transformative competencies and Fundamental Basics

Transformative competencies	Fundamental Basics	Area
Creating new value Resolution of tensions and dilemmas Taking responsibility	Knowledge Attitudes Values	Cognitive basis: broadly understood literacy and computation, in which they are involved with digital literacy and literacy in working with data
		Health basis: physical and mental health and well-being
		Emotional basis: morality and ethics
Cross-curricular Competences / Transversal Skills		

In the 21st century, we are looking for an individual who will be able to tackle challenges, to enter the process of learning and solving problems, in order to successfully meet the set criteria in a short time and come to a satisfactory solution. Key competencies are relevant for all individuals (*Vaspitanje u funkciji dobrobiti i celovitog razvoja deteta* 2023 acc: Vuković, Čaprić, Lazić 2023) and:

1. They are transversal because they enable successful inclusion in all spheres of personal, professional and social life;
2. They correspond to both economic and social purposes (from better health, parenthood to social activism);
3. They promote shared values, imply the ability to cope with change, learn from experience, and act with a critical attitude.

The introduction of the concept of competence (*Vaspitanje u funkciji dobrobiti i celovitog razvoja deteta* 2023) in education policies is associated with the beginning of this century and is visible in two documents: *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (Official Journal of the European Union 2006) and *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (European commission 2019) (Table 3). They show a developmental upward arc and-completeness in the understanding of each individual competence.

Table 3 – Key Competences for Lifelong Learning according to two key documents

2006.	2019.
1. Communication in the mother tongue	1. Literacy as a competence
2. Communication in foreign languages	2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Mathematical Competence and Basic Competencies in Natural Sciences and Technology	3. Mathematical competence and competence in natural sciences, technology and engineering
4. IT competence	4. Digital competence
5. Ability to learn	5. Personal, social competence and learning as taught
6. Interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence	6. Civic competence
7. Entrepreneurship	7. Entrepreneurship competence
8. Cultural awareness and expression	8. Competence of cultural awareness and expression

Following the European Framework of Competences for Lifelong Learning, laws in pre-university education and upbringing in the RS define cross-curricular competencies (Table 4).

Table 4 – Cross-curricular competencies

<i>Zakon o osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju (Law on Primary Education)</i> , Article 21a General Cross-curricular Competencies for the End of Primary Education	<i>Zakon o srednjem obrazovanju i vaspitanju (Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing)</i> , Article 2a Cross-curricular Competencies for the End of Secondary Education
1. Learning competence	1. Competences for lifelong learning
2. Responsible participation in a democratic society	2. Communications
3. Aesthetic competence	3. Working with data and information
4. Communication	4. Digital competence
5. Responsible attitude towards the environment	5. Problem solving
6. Responsible attitude towards health	6. Cooperation
7. Entrepreneurship and orientation towards entrepreneurship	7. Responsible participation in a democratic society
8. Working with data and information	8. Responsible attitude towards health
9. Problem solving	9. Responsible attitude towards the environment
10. Cooperation	10. Aesthetic competence
11. Digital competence	11. Entrepreneurship
	12. Orientation towards entrepreneurship

The 2017 Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture from the 2017(hereinafter referred to as RFCDC) of the Council of Europe (hereinafter referred to asCoE) represents a new model of competences that includes the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding that citizens need to actively participate in a democratic and culturally diverse society, but also to contribute to the development of democratic culture (*Vaspitanje u funkciji dobrobiti i celovitog razvoja deteta* 2023). In the final declaration adopted in April 2016 in Brussels by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the CoE (*Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, 2018), the ministers called on the CoE to continue the development of the RFCDC and to assist Member States in examining and implementing the framework in their national education systems, in dialogue with the educational community. Real-life challenges that we face in modern society are: intolerance, discrimination, lack of empathy, intolerance and prejudice towards minority ethnic and religious groups, peer violence (Klett 2023; *Vaspitanje u funkciji dobrobiti*

i celovitog razvoja deteta 2023), domestic violence, low turnout among voters, increased distrust in politicians, high level of hate crimes, hate speech, support for violent extremism, etc.

Vuković and Vuković (2021) refer to the Intergroup Contact Theory, presented by Allport in 1954, indicating that a “constructive” intergroup contact reduces the prejudices of the majority population against migrants (*outgroup*). Further developing the argument, Pettigrew (1998) suggests that another component is important in reducing prejudices, and that is the potential for an in-depth contact (and not just an unhindered coexistence). Based on this *Vaspitanje u funkciji dobrobiti i celovitog razvoja deteta* theory, they hypothesize that inclusive education is very important for immigrants in the early stages of their arrival. Accommodated in reception centers, often remote from other residential constellations and thus isolated from the real world, migrants and asylum seekers do not have many opportunities for intergroup contact. School, as a place of daily interaction between children belonging to the majority population and migrant children, is a physical and social space for achieving an intergroup contact that has the potential for deeper connections. Intergroup contact theory encounters several implementation difficulties, one of which is that people with prejudices are often the least inclined to come into contact with migrants (*outgroup*). However, taking into account the obligation of primary education, contact between migrants and children of the majority population is natural, which overcomes this problem and reduces the possibility of creating prejudice in children. In the context of the above, it can be said that adopting a mentality of social justice, general knowledge and learning, intercultural connections and interactions, as well as respect and appreciation of others are important factors in the development of awareness of diversity (Pikić Jugović et al. 2023). In other words, awareness of diversity is built on competencies that are necessary in preparing teachers and young people for life in societies characterized by socio-cultural diversity.

5. SITUATION IN PRACTICE

Systematically organized classes in Serbia for migrant and refugee children have been implemented since the school year 2017/18 and so far about 4000 students have passed through the education system (*ECRI Report on Serbia* 2024). RS in terms of access to education, registration of students, the principle of equal treatment, prevention of xenophobia and intolerance, fulfills its obligations in accordance with the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and

Members of Their Families (2003), Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments. Article 71 of the Constitution of the RS stipulates that everyone has the right to free and compulsory education in primary school, while secondary education is free. All citizens have the right to access higher education under equal conditions. The education of migrant students in Serbia is an example of good practice in Europe. The system of education and teachers' competencies for working with migrant students has been improved in order to implement the Expert

Instruction for the inclusion of refugee/asylum seekers students in the education system¹ and through the creation and adoption of a new Curriculum for the subject Serbian as a Foreign Language. The framework relied on the 8 key competences of lifelong learning from 2006, which are shown in Table 3.

The education system has accepted the fact that any exclusion from the education system is on the line of extremes that leads to complete social exclusion that can be abused, and that is why inclusion through the education process is very important. Data from the Ministry of Education (hereinafter MoE)² show that 95% of migrant school-age children, who are accommodated in reception and asylum centers, are included in the formal education system. In schools where migrant students are educated, the environment of tolerance and respect for diversity in schools has improved through the development and implementation of 2000 support plans for migrant students and 71 support plans at the school level.

Similar results are recognized in the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 as well as a political commitment by European governments to eliminate discrimination against Roma and reduce the gap between Roma and the rest of the society. The Decade focused on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing, and committed governments to take into account other fundamental issues of poverty, discrimination and gender equality (Živković 2015). The initiative continued after 2015 as a multinational project. It brought together governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as Roma civil society. Serbia participated in the program, and the education department showed results even after the implementation of the decades. Affirmative measures for the education of students belonging to the Roma national minority in Serbia during the Decade of Roma enabled priority enrollment of Roma children in preschool institutions, affirmative enrollment in primary schools and enrollment without identity documents, free textbooks, as well as measures of affirmative action of enrollment in

1 <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/STRUCNOINSTRUCTION.pdf>

2 More on: www.mpn.gov.rs

secondary schools, which resulted in increased coverage of Roma children up to 5 years of age in preschool education. Currently, 80% of Roma children attend preschool in the year prior to the beginning of school, while 85.4% enroll in primary school. Dropout from the system has been reduced by 7%, and 27% of Roma girls enroll in secondary schools that have enabled affirmative enrollment for 25,000 students. A significant measure of support is the presence of 280 pedagogical assistants in the system.

Although the education of the Roma community has been improved, there are still instances of discrimination and discriminatory behavior in educational institutions.

For this purpose, regulations have been adopted³, and the Team for protection against discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect in each educational institution develops and implements prevention programs, as well as interventions for each school year based on the analysis of the situation and needs of the institution. On the website of the MoE, there are resources for strengthening competencies in education in the field of prevention and protection against discrimination, which was created within the framework of cooperation between the MoE and civil society organizations with the support of international donors.⁴

From 2021 to 2024, the MoE received 24 notifications of situations of discriminatory behavior among students. In the majority of cases, the personal characteristic cited as the basis for discrimination was belonging to a national minority (19 situations), followed by gender identity, i.e. sexual orientation of students (5 situations). In accordance with the prescribed procedures, educational and disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against students who have committed violence or discrimination, and plans for intensified educational work have been developed, with the involvement of representatives of the external protection network (social and health care, police and prosecutor's office). Protection plans have been developed for students who have suffered discriminatory or violent behavior. Institutions are also obliged to do increased educational work with the entire class, but also to intensify preventive activities.

In the Catalogue of CPD Programs for Teachers, Preschool Teachers and Professional Associates for the school years 2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025⁵, there are 7 programs with the topic of interculturalism, 5 programs focused on gender equality,

3 (2016): *Regulation on the detailed criteria for recognizing forms of discrimination by an employee, child, pupil or third party in an educational institution*; 2018: *Regulation on the conduct of the institution in case of suspicion or established discriminatory behavior and insulting the reputation, honor or dignity of the person*.

4 More at: <https://prosveta.gov.rs/kategorija/publikacije/>.

5 More at: <https://zuov-katalog.rs/>

and 20 programs addressing the topic of protection against discrimination. During 2023, 600 employees from the education system participated in trainings on protection against discrimination, 200 participants attended interculturalism trainings, and 100 participants took part in trainings addressing gender equality.

6. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The most important project was created in cooperation between the MoE and the CoE for the implementation of the RFCDC, which contains 20 competencies (attitudes, skills, values, knowledge), which creates a safe and engaging school environment, while strengthening the competencies of education staff to eliminate violent, discriminatory and anti-democratic structures within schools and their surroundings, improving the school ethos and providing support to students. These school activities significantly contribute to promoting intercultural and multilingual perspectives in education. The project *Quality Education for All*, which started in 2019 with a total of 60 schools and The Institute for Improvement of Education, continued the work on connecting competencies for democratic culture with teaching and learning curriculum. A package of materials in the field of democratic culture was created⁶. Over 25,000 school employees (including students) were trained and/or supported through tailored conferences, trainings and mentoring, meetings, peer learning (not counting the participation of the local community and parents). 16 trainings on RFCDC were created and officially accredited, and 550 teachers from 60 schools were trained, and the developed knowledge and skills on the topic were transferred further in schools and local communities. Schools and 36 mentors have included gender equality in their action plans, which has become an integral part of curricular and extracurricular activities for more than 50,000 students. The Teacher training program has been accredited and included in the list of the nationally significant programs approved by the ministerial decision. The first training cycle involved 1,500 teachers who successfully completed the program in 2022. During 2023, 80 mentors were trained, with feedback from schools and parents indicating the positive impact of project activities and the reduction of incidents caused by violence and discrimination.

As part of the National Education Portal, a platform has been set up for teachers of Civic Education⁷ as a form of assistance in the implementation of the program for the third and fourth grade of high school, which is also useful in teaching History,

6 Publications: <https://prosveta.gov.rs/kategorija/publikacije/>

7 More at: <https://zuov.gov.rs/gradjansko/>

Sociology, as well as the optional program called Individual, Groups and Society. The platform is designed to provide support to teachers in the process of planning teaching and learning, through finding relevant materials for work and a work methodology that helps teachers in designing direct work with students. The project activities described in this chapter have sustainable significance because the Platform is open in content and can be continuously supplemented with new materials.

The same portal contains content in the field of Democratic Culture in Teaching and Learning, which is built across all subjects and levels of formal education, as an integral part of every aspect of teaching and learning⁸. This page offers guidelines, examples of good practice and resources to support teachers in the application of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in teaching and learning. The portal contains publications related to cross-curricular competences that represent skills, values, attitudes and critical thinking. The latest publication is Guidelines for Integrating the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture into Selected Teaching and Learning Programs 2 (2025), and teachers can also use artificial intelligence services in preparing lessons.

7. CONCLUSION

The presentation of a wide range of norms, by-laws, research and active work of educators and relevant bodies in order to empower teachers in primary and secondary schools to acquire a broader picture of the importance of their personal and professional work and contribution in working with students, once again highlighted the scope, importance and specificity of the teaching profession, as well as the questions that remain unresolved. Addressing issues that are sensitive, challenging and often avoided represent real-life questions that teachers have to deal with. Their personal, professional, legal and moral responsibility and the position they hold compel them to engage with these matters. As such, these issues reach into the field of educational work, enter legal frameworks, but also intensely navigate through moral beliefs, often failing to provide fully satisfactory answers. Hence the resistance.

This is also the starting point for a new understanding of the issue of valuing, tolerating or labeling diversity in formal education in Serbia and represents a change in personal and professional paradigms. Therefore, teachers' competencies should be approached from the perspective of inclusive education, which includes understand-

8 More at: <https://zuov.gov.rs/nop/demokratska-kultura/>

ding, cooperation, adaptation and the development of specific skills. It is important that a teacher's personal and professional paradigm supports an inclusive approach and the belief that every child is valuable in their own right, capable of learning and developing because only by changing personal attitudes, beliefs, competencies and behaviors they can successfully contend with their personal and professional life and challenges. This supports the view that not only institutions, but also individuals, have a duty and responsibility in establishing equality and social justice.

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VREDNOVANJE, TOLERISANJE ILI ETIKETIRANJE RAZLIČITOSTI U FORMALNOM OBRAZOVANJU: ISKUSTVA IZ SRBIJE

Sažetak:

Predmet rada je različitost u formalnom obrazovanju i dovođenje u vezu međunarodnih dokumenata iz oblasti obrazovnih politika sa primenom u obrazovnoj praksi u Republici Srbiji (RS). Cilj rada je pronalaženje konekcija između normativno iskazane potrebe deteta/učenika u razvijanju autentičnosti, ličnih kompetencija i veština sa primenom u realnim situacijama u obrazovnoj praksi u RS. Prikazan je pregled planiranih mera, akcija, te njihove primene u formalnom obrazovanju u RS, u periodu koji zahvata prvu i drugu Dekadu Roma (2005–2015; 2016–2025). Priliv migranata u to vreme bio je intenzivan pa su apostrofirani naponi Ministarstva prosvete radi inkluzije dece i učenika iz migrantske populacije u sistem nacionalnog formalnog obrazovanja. U isto vreme se polemiše i o drugim različitostima koje su jednako značajne za dete i kvalitet njegovog života i razvoja, koje mogu učiniti štetu ukoliko se ne prepoznaju, uvažavaju i podržavaju od strane odraslih i vršnjaka. Navedeni primeri dobre prakse pokazuju tendenciju koja postoji u društvu, dok u isto vreme otvaraju nova pitanja i ukazuju na nepokrivenosti koje traže pedagoške intervencije i implikacije.

Ključne reči: različitost; diskriminacija; migranti; obrazovne politike; dečja prava

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