

# Professional Development Programs as a Support for Teachers at the Beginning of Their Career

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## Abstract

*In Serbia, beginning teachers are under constant pressure since they are obliged to follow and implement all education laws and by-laws which determine the accountabilities of all the stakeholders of the educational system, even though during the initial teacher education they do not meet with the mentioned legislation. Beginning teachers are also required to implement different teaching methods, to adjust classroom conditions and instruction to the students' individual needs. This often becomes a barrier and what is more, schools often lack the capacity to provide enough support for beginning teachers, while the existing accredited professional development programs do not cover the necessary content. A way to bridge the gap between the initial teacher education and the existing offer of professional development programs is to identify the types of support the beginning teachers need and to create professional development programs tailored especially for them. Driven by this proposition, the Regional Centers for Professional Development in Serbia conducted a research study among teachers who have up to 5 years of work experience in order to create a program that fully meets their needs. The results of the research will be presented in this paper.*

**Key words:** *initial teacher education; in-service training; needs of beginning teachers.*

## Introduction

Over the last decade the educational system in Serbia has been under constant reform. The scientific community has always agreed that innovations in education are necessary, but experts in this field have perceived the content and dynamics of this process differently. By appointing new ministers along with every political change, the vision of the contemporary education system has also changed, and with these changes all the previous reforms of former ministries and ministers have been discarded and new ones have been initiated.

The innovations which have been introduced soon found their place in education laws and by-laws without the detailed analysis of the possibilities of their implementation in practice and without taking into account the technical, physical, or other capacities of the educational institutions, such as the competences of educators (i.e. teachers) who need to implement those innovations. On the other hand, while the innovations have been rapidly introduced in primary and secondary schools, the programs at the teacher education faculties were not keeping pace with these changes and innovations, thus causing thousands of students to graduate from universities without acquiring the necessary competences in the course of their initial education.

In a way, this deficiency should be compensated by the induction and professional development programs (further: PD). However, in reality, the situation is quite different. Although there are some formal mechanisms which can enable young teachers to become better acquainted with the teaching profession through the internship and development of the necessary competences needed for overcoming different obstacles which may come along the way, this is not always easy. In practice, the internship program does not meet the expectations and beginning teachers (i.e. interns) are often left to fend for themselves, while developing competences by attending a great number of accredited seminars and other PD programs, as is required by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Center for Professional Development (by choosing PD programs from the Catalogue), taking up too much time and money which is exactly what beginning teachers do not have.

The purpose of this paper is to present one out of many possible ways of overcoming the gap between the initial teacher education and the accredited professional development programs by creating new PD programs and in-service trainings which would have a clear objective and which would be based on the needs assessment of the beginning teachers.

In 2013 the Network of Regional Centers for Professional Development of Educators in the Republic of Serbia (further: the Network) conducted a survey entitled “*Needs Assessment of the Beginning Teachers*”, assessing the needs of teachers with up to five years of teaching experience, in order to gain some insight into what kind of support they needed the most. The purpose of this assessment was to create a program which would cater for those needs.

The results of the survey will be presented later in this paper; first, we shall analyze the current situation in the Serbian teacher education and training system. Special attention will be paid to the initial teacher education, the induction process, the process of the professional development of teachers and to the current accredited PD programs in Serbia.

### ***The Importance of Initial Teacher Education***

Teachers have a crucial role in supporting the learning experience of children, youth and adult students. They are the key resource for the development of the education system and the implementation of the education reforms. Their work is inspired by the social values and the need for cherishing and developing the potential of all students. The teacher has a strong influence on the society and a crucial role in improving and developing human possibilities and molding future generations. A great number of studies on educational effectiveness reached the conclusion that teacher-associated variables at the teacher level have an immense influence on students' achievements. It has been confirmed that the classroom climate, interaction between teachers and pupils and setting high expectations are very important for effective teaching. Kington et al. (2005), underline the importance of a positive classroom climate, setting clear objectives and a well-organized structure of lessons, receiving support and help from other teachers and the entire community, engaging students via assignments and various activities, purposeful learning, high-quality testing (i.e. evaluating) and providing feedback for students. It is highly important to emphasize the complexity of the teaching profession, which some people see as one of the most complex professions. The teacher has to keep in mind the cognitive, social and affective aspects of the situation, different needs of children, and the necessity to create shared meaning, to support and influence the development of children.

The education of new teachers is multidisciplinary and must consist of subject knowledge, curriculum content, pedagogy, innovation, research, and the social and cultural dimensions of education. All this allows teachers to meet the needs of each student completely. Teachers should also be supported in their continuous professional development and career advancement. They should be aware of the importance of lifelong learning and adopting new knowledge (European Commission, 2005). Although teachers play a critical role in the society, they cannot act alone. High quality education system of some country needs to be set within the context of coherent national or regional policies that are appropriately resourced. These policies must address initial teacher education and continuing professional development, but must also be set within the broader context of education policy in general. Those who train teachers have an impact on the quality of learning and, therefore, they need to be supported as part of the national or regional system (European Commission, 2005).

In the Western Balkans, including Serbia, there is a widespread attitude that educators do not receive adequate training and that there is a lot that can be improved when

it comes to initial teacher education and continuous professional development. In order for an individual to become a teacher in Serbia, it is necessary to either graduate from a teacher education faculty, and thus become a lower-primary (from first to fourth grade) school teacher, or to graduate in the field which is taught at higher-primary (from fifth to eighth grade) and secondary schools (general or vocational) and thus become a subject, general subject or vocational subject teacher. Those who teach vocational subjects at secondary schools do not take pedagogy of teaching and learning and psychology during their initial education, nor do they have methodology of teaching and learning. This deficiency should be compensated during their first year of internship in schools or during their preparation for the license exam through the various professional development programs and trainings and induction (i.e. mentoring).

At the universities (i.e. teacher education faculties) and other institutions for teacher education, there is a great discrepancy between studying theory and acquiring practical pedagogical skills (Pantić, 2008). It is often argued that the theoretical knowledge which is acquired during the initial teacher education is not enough for the implementation of the “new” skills necessary for the teaching practice. Lesson planning at the teacher faculties is mostly content oriented, with the emphasis on the fulfillment of the curriculum and almost no attention is paid to the learning process in schools, acquiring knowledge in child psychology or introducing students to the different learning styles which are associated with certain personal characteristics or different levels of individuals’ abilities. These claims have been confirmed by several studies conducted in the region in the recent years (Rajović & Radulović, 2007; Vizek-Vidović, 2005; Zgaga, 2006), emphasizing the fact that teachers lack knowledge on how to identify and solve problems in a particular surrounding.

A well-developed and high-quality system of professional development enables teachers to further improve and strengthen their competences needed for effective teaching which must respond to the individual needs of all students.

### ***Professional Teacher Development System in Serbia***

At the crossroads of the political, social and economic turmoil in the Western Balkans, during the period of transition and economic crisis, Serbia has left the teaching profession behind, on the margins of the society, as a profession which is not particularly valued and in which no one has systematically invested for a long time. Since the 90s Serbia has demonstrated evident efforts to reconcile our educational system with the contemporary trends in order to improve the learning outcomes of students, through the various reform initiatives such as School Development Planning (2002), School without Violence (2005), Inclusive Education (2009) and by taking part in the international assessment programs (PISA 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012; TIMS 2003, 2007, 2011; and TALIS 2013). In Serbia, teacher education faculties are unable to change the curriculum and make it more dynamic so that it responds to

the innovations imposed by the modern teaching process. Such rigid programs (or curricula) cannot train teachers for lifelong learning. Introducing teachers to the teaching practice is an important part of teachers' PD and the essential part of it is the in-service training which can ensure the quality of teachers from the very beginning of their teaching career and which can bridge the gap between initial teacher education and practice.

The conceptual framework of establishing in-service trainings in Serbia involves at least three levels of PD management:

- National (relevant ministries and institutions at the national and regional level which are responsible for the professional development of teachers, i.e. teacher training)
  - The school level or The institutional level
  - Personal level
- (Sijakovic, 2006).

In terms of institutional authority at the national level, it is the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development (further: MoESTD) that manages, plans, coordinates and organizes programs of continuous professional development (i.e. in-service trainings) of teachers, school principals, school pedagogues and psychologists (The Government of RS, 2009, 2013). In order to develop, secure and improve the quality of education, the Institute for the Improvement of Education (further: IIE) participates in the preparation of regulations within the jurisdiction of MoESTD, the National Education Council, Council for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education. The IIE established the Center for Professional Development (further: CPD) for the purpose of developing the standards of competences for teachers and school principals, for the improvement of the system for continuous PD (for the educators in preschool, primary and secondary institutions), for the preparation of the program of induction and license examination program, and similar activities. CPD has two departments within it and these are: the Department for the internship, induction (mentoring) and leadership (dealing with issues of improving the work of interns, mentors and principals) and the Department for Professional Development and Advancement ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013).

In Serbia, the concept of teacher PD is defined at the national level by the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* (article 129) and by the *Rulebook on continuous professional development and career advancement of teachers* (further: The Rulebook). Thus, the professional development of teachers is mandatory and the accountability of teachers in terms of fulfilling or not fulfilling their legal obligations, accountabilities of institutions and funding are regulated by the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* as well. The *Rulebook* defines in more detail the concept of professional development which is obligatory for all teachers and it requires teachers to attain 120 hours during the period of 5 years by attending various PD programs such as seminars, conferences, round tables etc. The operationalization of this educational policy is

represented in the *Catalogue of the programs of professional development of teachers*, which the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in cooperation with the CPD publishes every second year.

Besides the institutions at the national level, there are also regional institutions that are engaged in the PD of teachers. These are regional School Authorities (within the jurisdiction of MoESTD) responsible for school supervision and the evaluation of the performance of teachers and school (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013).

Apart from the School Authorities at the regional level, as a support for the decentralization of the PD system, Regional Centers for Professional Development of Educators (further: Regional Centers) were established according to the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System*, by the local governments which have the obligation to provide funds for in-service training of educators. Twelve Regional Centers have been established so far in twelve regions across Serbia forming the Network of Regional Centers for Professional Development of Educators of Serbia (further: the Network). These Regional Centers coordinate professional development which provides the needed support to schools and educators to improve their skills and knowledge in those areas they feel they need additional training. As mentioned above, Regional Centers operate at the regional or local level and conduct their activities in accordance with the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System*. Regional Centers plan and organize PD programs according to the needs of teachers, giving priority to those programs which can ensure improvement and attainment of the general standards of achievements ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 12/2009). With professional development being institutionalized at the regional level, a significant shift was made in that it increased the availability and harmonization of the PD process in accordance with the regional, local and school needs.

Managing PD at the school level entails an obligation to develop a professional development plan for all the employees (teachers, school psychologists, school pedagogues and school principals...) and to incorporate it into the annual School Action Plan in accordance with the school objectives and School Development Plan. The Professional development plan should contain the information on the type of programs teachers need, based on which teachers further choose which accredited programs from the Catalogue they will attend, or they can organize and implement other different professional development programs within the school such as the presentation of the accredited PD program they attended, model classes, workshops, participation in various research studies and projects related to education, etc.

Personal professional development management primarily refers to the fulfillment of the legal obligation set by the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* (2009) according to which "...a preschool, primary and secondary school teacher, school pedagogue/psychologist, with or without the license, is obliged to continuously professionally develop in order to successfully implement and improve educational work

and to acquire competences necessary for the teaching practice...”. PD provides teachers with the possibility for career advancement and strengthens the self-awareness of teachers as professionals who are responsible for the progress of the future generations.

### ***Mentoring the Program of Teachers in Serbia***

Following the graduation and during the first two years of working, a teacher who is at the beginning of the teaching career awaits introduction to the profession (i.e. induction) which consists of the internship program and license examination. This period in the teaching profession is regulated by the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013) which proclaims that an intern is a person who is employed for the first time for a fixed or indefinite period of time, with a full or part-time working norm and who is being trained to be able to work independently. These trainings include the induction program and training for the license examination (“Law on the Foundations of the Education System”, 2013, p. 109).

The internship may last for two years at the most, starting from the date of employment. The teacher induction program lasts for one year and an intern has an additional year to pass the exam and obtain their license. During the internship program, in order to master the program of induction, an intern teacher is assigned a licensed mentor by the school. If the school does not have a suitable candidate for a mentor, it is obliged to engage mentor teachers from the corresponding field from other schools (“Law on the Foundations of the Education System”, 2013, p. 109).

In the first three months of the internship, an intern works under the direct supervision of the mentor and is not allowed to assess the students (“Law on the Foundations of the Education System”, 2013, p. 109). During the induction period an intern is required to observe his/her mentor’s lessons and thus gain some teaching experience. After this, the mentor also attends the intern’s classes and gives feedback and advises the intern directing him/her in his/her further work. When the mentor estimates that the intern is ready, the intern holds a public lesson in front of a committee composed of the school principal, the school pedagogue or the psychologist and an expert in the field which he/she teaches at school. The mentor is also present at this public lesson but only as an observer. The committee evaluates the intern’s work and makes a decision on whether the intern has passed the induction program. If the evaluation is positive, the school is required to notify the Ministry of Education that the intern is ready to take the license exam. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development organizes and summons the intern to take the license exam, and if the intern does not pass the exam within two years from the date of employment, his/her employment shall be terminated (“Law on the Foundations of the Education System”, 2013, p. 110).

Even though the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* clearly defines and regulates the induction program of teachers, in practice this is quite different. Despite

the fact that there is a training program for mentors, conducted by the trained educators and professionals, so far not a single training program has been implemented; therefore, mentors in schools are not able to provide appropriate support to the interns. Apart from this, in secondary schools (both general and vocational) it is often the case that schools lack trained mentors in all subject areas, especially when it comes to vocational subjects and thus the school is obliged to hire a mentor from another school; the process is further complicated because it is often impossible to reconcile schedules of an intern and mentor which makes it difficult to observe each other's classes.

On the other hand, the *Law on the Foundations of the Education System* ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013) forbids an intern to assess students for the first three months of his/her work, which is almost the entire semester, while in *The Rulebook on Assessing Pupils in Primary Education* ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 67/2013) it is stated that a student cannot be given the final grade without having at least four grades in the first semester, or two grades in the case of a subject taught one class a week ("The Rulebook on Assessing Pupils in Primary Education", 2013, p. 6). If the intern complies with both of the given demands, he/she will have only three weeks to assess all the students in the class (up to thirty five students), in order to assign them the final grades, which is a mission impossible.

Even if school management succeeds in overcoming these obstacles and even if an intern is ready for the license exam, the school faces another obstacle – waiting for more than five or eight years for the Ministry of Education to invite the candidate to take the license exam. This means that teachers, especially those teaching vocational subjects (who did not receive knowledge and skills in pedagogy, psychology, or methodology of teaching and learning in the course of their initial teacher education), teach for decades in schools without the license or approval and confirmation of the Ministry of Education that the candidate (i.e. an intern) is prepared for the teaching position.

#### The Analysis of the Established System of the PD Program Offer and the Need for In-Service Training

By analyzing all relevant documents, one can notice that even though there is a solid regulative framework for PD which assigns duties, rights and penalties related to the professional development of teachers, the funding and the institutions dealing with PD, there are many problems in practice concerning the implementation of PD. Between the PD program offer, the need for those PD programs and the implementation itself, one can identify a number of obstacles starting from the concept of creating PD programs for the Catalogue and the content of programs to the inaccessibility of participation in those programs.

The Catalogue of the accredited PD programs actually presents the current offer of in-service trainings for teachers. These programs within the Catalogue were proposed by the university professors, teachers and other professionals who participated in

the competition for the accreditation of the professional development programs (i.e. seminars). Even though these programs were created by professors and teachers, they are often criticized. It is not only the programs that are criticized but the entire concept of the accreditation as well as the Catalogue itself. It is often said that this Catalogue does not provide any directives on how to develop a personal PD plan nor does it specify how to choose a specific program (seminar) because the programs are not the result of the needs assessment but are rather gathered through the competition for the accreditation process and are then sorted into general categories in the Catalogue (Pešikan et al., 2011).

The number of the accredited seminars (in the Catalogue) rises each year. There are almost 45% more seminars in the current Catalogue than there were in the previous one for the school year 2011/2012. Of course, this cannot ensure the quality of professional development and it makes the process of evaluation and monitoring of the implemented programs difficult and ineffective.

### *What Exactly Does the Catalogue Offer to Teachers?*

Many authors create PD programs without assessing the needs of teachers first. Very often, those programs are not in accordance with the working position of the target group, career period and knowledge in the areas which need to be improved for better student achievement.

If we analyze this conception of the PD offer in terms of identifying the target group which the accredited program was designed for, we can reach the conclusion that the level of education of the working position of the teacher is taken into account: classroom teaching, vocational teaching, vocational secondary schools, grammar schools; moreover, the criterion of the type of the job being done can be taken into consideration: associate, director, teaching assistant, etc. Although it is extremely important to take into account the current career stage the teacher is in because of their cognitive orientation, learning strategies and decision-making (Vizek Vidović & Štetić Vlahović, 2007), in the current Catalogue for the school year 2012/13/14 this is not the case.

Out of 1002 current programs offered in the Catalogue, there is only one seminar concerning the question of internship and the beginning teachers as a target group. This being considered, we cannot help but wonder in what way the actual offer of PD programs can meet the needs of the teachers who are confronted with the reality of the teaching practice in their initial career phase.

The RC & CSU Network of Serbia, alongside the organization and implementation of PD programs, has the possibility to create and apply for the PD program accreditation competition with IIE which is conducted every two years. By analyzing the offer of the current Catalogue, the members of the Network have identified the need for such a program which would target the teachers with up to five years of teaching experience. The Network staff searched for the best way to improve the system of

creating professional development programs and it started from the needs assessment of beginning teachers (up to five years of teaching experience) which was conducted in all twelve Centers. In the course of one of the regular meetings of the Network, all Centers presented the results of the surveys and the idea of joining results appeared. It took almost three months to analyze and join the results in one report. After the publication of the joint results, the staff of the Centers gathered and developed an idea of creating a PD program for beginning teachers, according to the findings of the joint survey, i.e. according to the needs of the mentioned target group. This program was created and accredited for the school years 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. More about the program and the results shall be said later on.

## **Methods**

### *Hypothesis, Sample and Techniques of Gathering Survey Data*

By analyzing initial teacher education and induction process (i.e. mentoring program of the interns) we came to the conclusion that beginning teachers are not acquainted enough with the laws and by-laws which regulate education and which determine the rights, obligations and responsibilities of pupils and teachers, nor do they know where to find the necessary information. The lack of knowledge in basic legal provisions makes teachers feel uncertain of their actions and most of the time they do not know what is expected from them, what authority they have or how they should react in certain situations.

Apart from the lack of knowledge in legislation, we believe that subject teachers also lack knowledge in pedagogy and psychology and thus they need support in this field as well. Given the fact that during their initial teacher education the focus was on the subject area, these teachers lack skills in the pedagogy and psychology of teaching and learning, which are extremely important for the teaching profession. These teachers had methodology courses during their initial teacher education which enables them to successfully transfer subject knowledge to the pupils, unlike the vocational subject teachers who apart from teaching pedagogy and psychology also lack knowledge in teaching methodology, which makes the situation even worse.

Apart from these competences, we believe that beginning teachers generally lack parent-teacher communication skills. When they start working in schools they encounter parents of various character traits for the first time, so the knowledge of parent-teacher communication skill is of great importance for their personal professional growth. However, no matter how important these competences are, they are not developed throughout the initial teacher education.

For the purpose of verifying our hypothesis, questionnaires were passed to schools and the school management was asked to deliver the survey to teachers who had up to five years of service. The research included 72 elementary schools, 48 secondary schools and 12 Schools for children with special educational needs (SEN Schools) in Kikinda, Šabac, Kragujevac, Užice, Kruševac, Čačak, Leskovac, and Smederevo. The

questionnaire consisted of five parts. The first part included the general information of the respondents such as gender, age, years of working experience and teaching position (lower-primary school teacher, subject teacher, general subject teacher, and vocational subject teacher). The second part of the questionnaire referred to the teacher *competences for the teaching area, subject and teaching methods*. The third part comprised questions concerning teacher *competences for teaching and learning*. The fourth part referred to the *competences for providing support to students' development*, while the fifth part questions were focused on teacher *communication and cooperation competences*. In the questionnaire we have used both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was completed by 638 teachers who had up to 5 years of experience in teaching, out of which 120 teachers had 1 year of service, 144 teachers had 2 years, 156 had 3 years, 73 teachers had 4 years, and 145 had 5 or more years of experience in teaching. The sample included four teachers who had more than 5 years of work experience, as follows: one teacher had 6, one 7 and two teachers had 8 years of experience in education. The gender of the respondents reflected the gender structure of the employees in education, so 65.51% were female and 34.48% were male. Half of the respondents were aged between 24 and 30 years, 31.50% were between 31 and 35 years, those aged between 36 and 40 years made up for 12.85% of the sample, while 36 respondents were between 41 and 50 years of age and accounted for 5.64%. As far as the professional focus of our respondents was concerned, most were subject teachers working in primary schools (46.24%), followed by teachers of general education courses in schools for vocational education and training (VET school) (20.38%), after whom came teachers of vocational subjects in VET schools (14.89%), followed by class teachers (9.25%), teachers at the SEN school (5.48%), and finally there were 24 subject teachers working in Grammar Schools (Figure1).

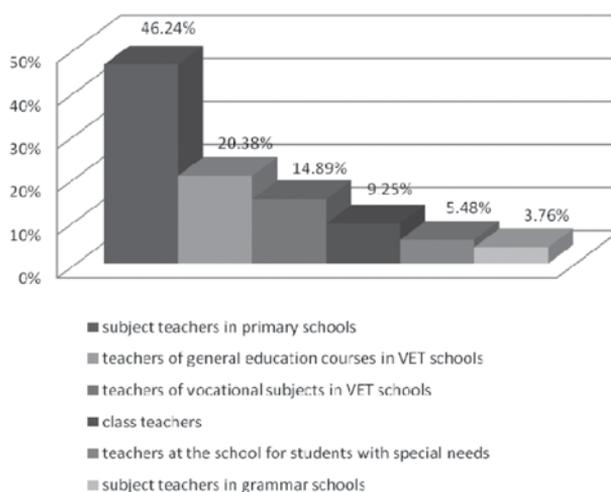


Figure 1. Respondents by workplace

In Kanjiža and Niš focus groups were held. In Kanjiža 27 interviewees took part in the focus group. Among them there were 2 pedagogues, 3 psychologists, 4 school principals and 18 teachers who had up to 5 years of work experience. In Niš, out of 34 respondents, 5 were pedagogues, 7 were psychologists and 22 of them were teachers who had up to 5 years of work experience. The topics of the conversation followed the structure of the questionnaire.

Since the questionnaire was focused on teacher competences, we managed to get a clear picture of the type of support the beginning teachers need the most. A detailed review of the results obtained in this survey will be presented in the next section.

## Results

### *Survey Findings - Needs Assessment of the Beginning Teachers*

In order to get a realistic picture of the needs of the teachers, we examined what knowledge they had gained during their studies. The majority of the teachers acquired knowledge exclusively related to a particular scientific discipline (36.36%), 36.05% of the participating teachers acquired comprehensive knowledge of methodology, psychology and pedagogy, while 23.67% of the respondents indicated that they had acquired some knowledge in methodology. Taking these data into account, it becomes evident that 60.03% of our respondents did not possess the necessary knowledge in the fields of teaching methodology, pedagogy and psychology, which are necessary to maintain the quality of the teaching and to transmit knowledge to students (Figure2).

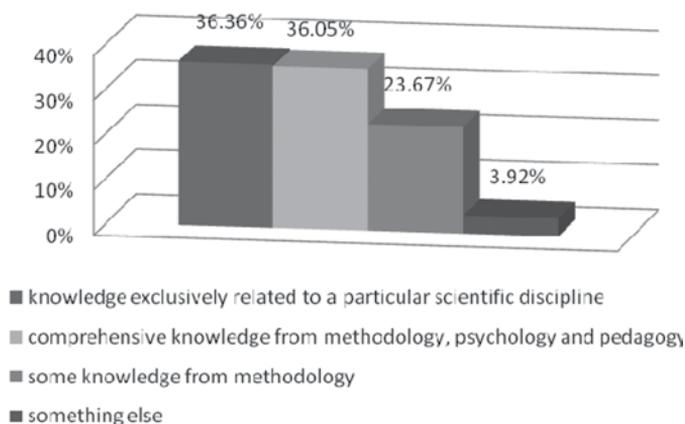


Figure 2. Type of knowledge gained at university

When asked what problems they had in planning their lessons, most of the respondents answered that they did not know how to take into account the individual differences of students. 17.71% highlighted the problem of bringing the content closer to the students in order for it to be more interesting and easier to adopt, 12.70% of the respondents stressed the problem of using modern methods in teaching, 10.19%

pointed out the use of new technologies, and 8.78% stressed the correlation of different subjects as a problem (Figure 3).

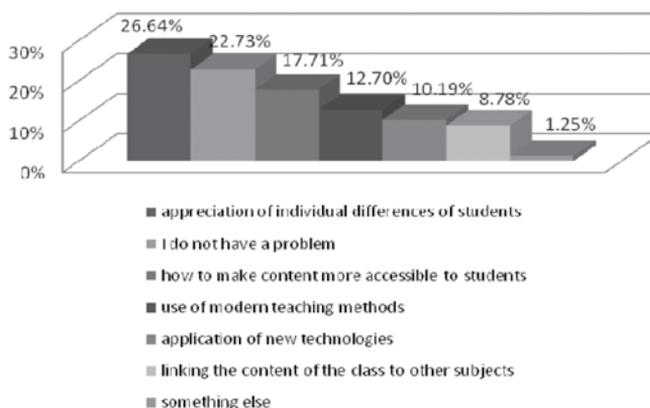


Figure3. The problems that teachers have during lesson planning

If the answer to this question is analyzed in relation to the length of work experience in education, we can notice that with increasing experience, we get more answers “I have no problem” (Figure 4).

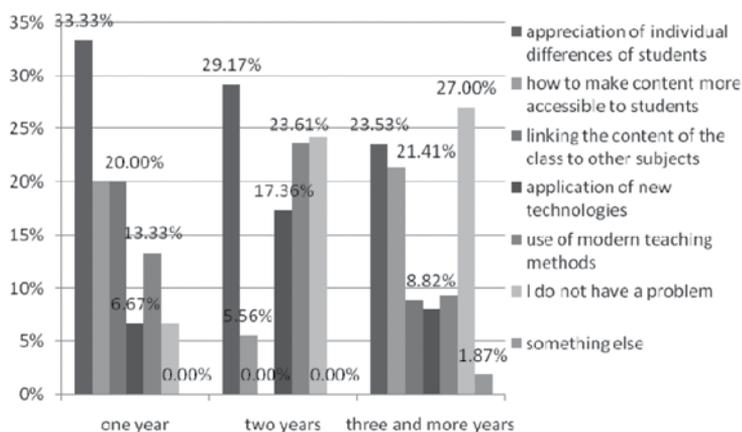


Figure 4. The problems that teachers have during lesson planning in relation to the years of experience

When data were considered in terms of the workplace of the participants, we came to the conclusion that teachers of vocational subjects in VET schools need support when it comes to taking individual differences of students into account and the use of modern, interactive and different methods, techniques and forms of work. Teachers in SEN school need support in terms of bringing the content closer to the students and when it comes to the correlation of different subjects. Classroom teachers need support in the usage of new technologies, while most subject teachers in VET schools do not have any problems during lesson planning (Figure 5).

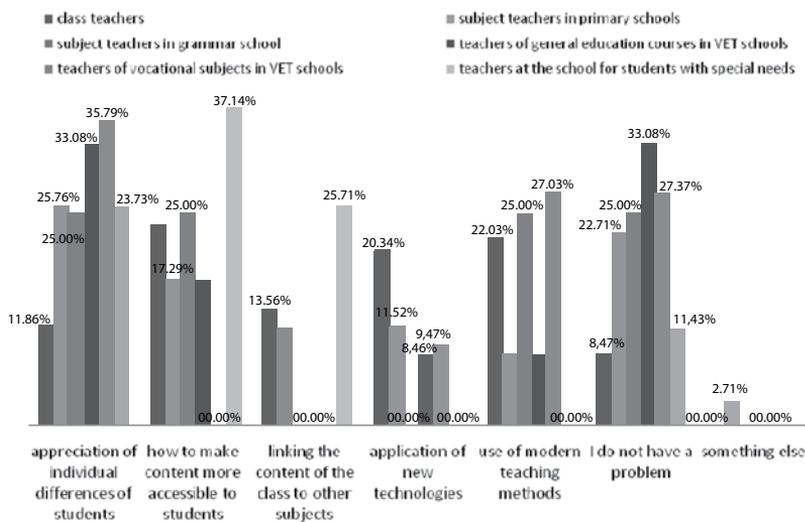


Figure 5. The problems teachers have during lesson planning in accordance with the workplace

Although 60% of the respondents did not acquire the necessary knowledge from methodology, psychology and pedagogy at the university, only 41.22% of them stated that they needed additional skills in overcoming certain situations in the classroom which arise due to the behavior of individual students. It is interesting that those teachers with two years of teaching experience need most support (Figure 6), and when analyzing the responses in accordance with the participants' occupation, we can see that the support in this field is required by 74.74% of vocational subject teachers in VET schools, 59.32% of classroom teachers and 54.17% of subject teachers in grammar schools (Figure 7). It is important to note that this type of support was pointed out as needed by the majority of teachers who had acquired some knowledge of the teaching methods at the university (60.54%), and only 45% of those who had acquired knowledge only in a particular scientific discipline.

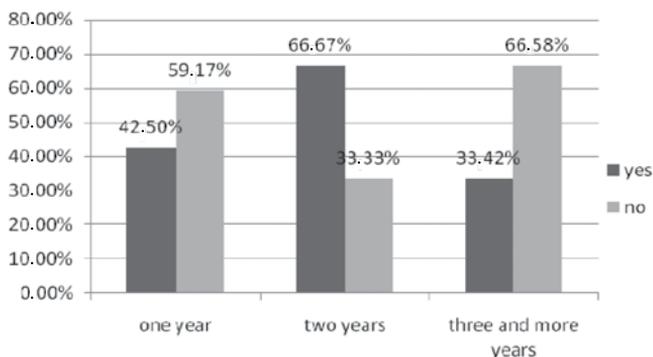


Figure 6. The need for additional support in overcoming certain situations in the classroom which arise due to the behavior of individual students, in accordance with the years of service

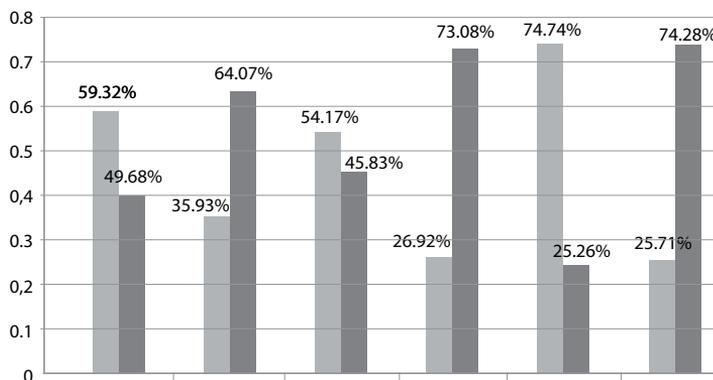


Figure 7. The need for additional support in overcoming certain situations in the classroom which arise due to the behavior of individual students, in accordance with the teachers' occupation

Considering the type of acquired knowledge at the university, the information related to student assessment is also interesting: 69.12% of the respondents stated that they had no problems in assessing the students, 10.97% of the respondents stated they did not know how to evaluate/assess student achievement according to their individual abilities, and 7.21% of the respondents stated either that they did not know how to determine the necessary amount of knowledge for grades 2 (D), 3 (C) and 4 (B), or how to evaluate class activities (Figure 8).

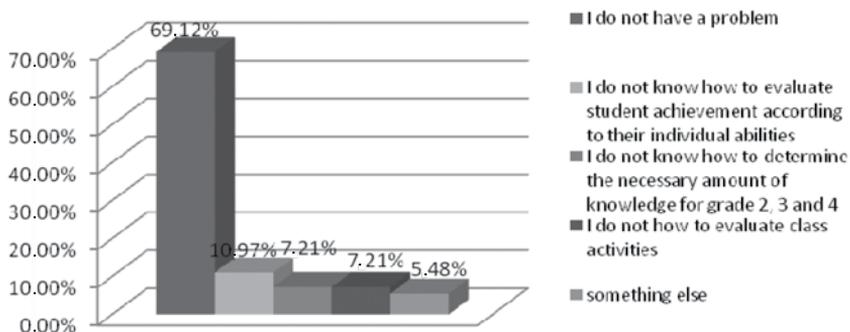


Figure 8. Concerns of teachers about grading

By analyzing the respondents' answers to this question and by taking into account the years of working experience, we can see that concerns disappear with more years of service. Among the teachers who had worked in education for one year, the most common problem was determining the amount of knowledge necessary for grades 2 (D), 3(C) and 4 (B) (29.16%); 19.17% of the teachers indicated that they did not know how to evaluate student activities in the classroom, while 10.83% of the teachers reported difficulties in evaluating/assessing student achievement in accordance with the individual abilities of students. Interestingly, for the teachers with 2, 3 or more years of service the greatest challenge was how to evaluate/assess student achievement in accordance with the individual abilities of students (Figure 9).

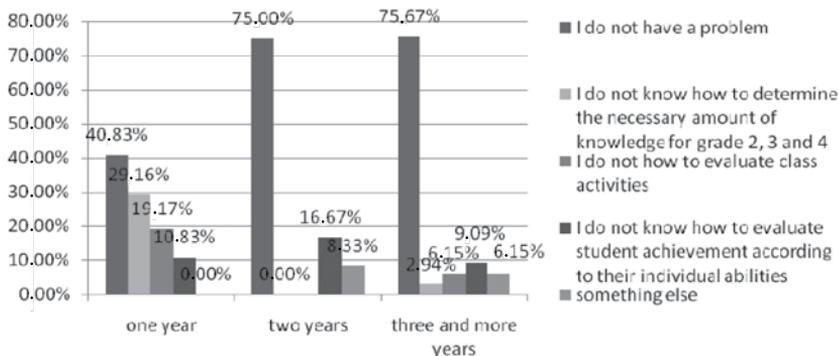


Figure 9. Concerns of teachers in assessing students (in accordance with the years of teaching experience)

Given that 83 out of 95 teachers who teach vocational subjects in VET schools acquired only knowledge related to the certain discipline at the university, it is an interesting fact that 87.36% of them have no problems in assessing the students (Figure 10).

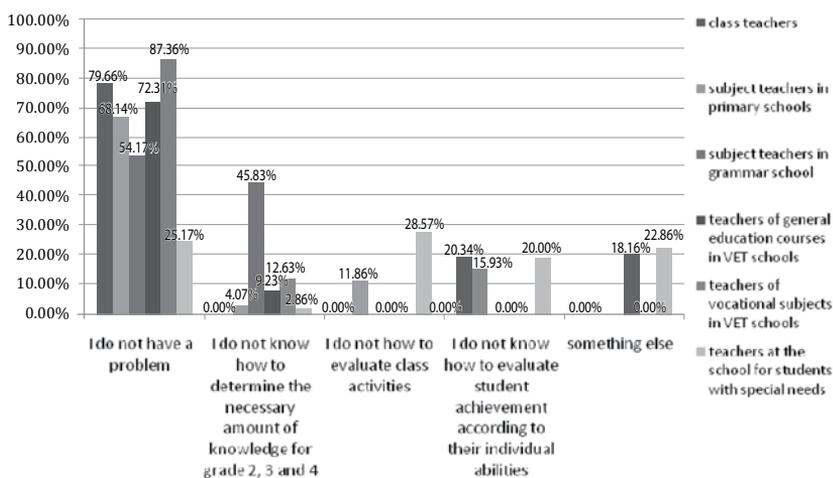


Figure 10. Concerns of teachers in assessing students (in accordance with the teachers' workplace/position)

The respondents were asked whether they needed support related to competences for teaching and learning and competences to support the development of students. On the basis of the data presented in Figure 11, the majority of respondents need support for developing competences for strengthening students' development: 55.48% of the teachers need additional support on how to provide support to students from vulnerable groups, 46.24% need skills in the psychological, emotional and social development of students, while 38.87% want to know how to recognize and encourage the development of the capacities of all students taking into account their individual needs. Within the competence for teaching and learning, support related to the

cognitive development of students is required by 33.38% of the teachers, concerning the nature of learning, different learning styles and learning strategies support is required by 31.50% of the respondents, and regarding the nature of thought and the formation of scientific concepts, 24.14% teachers need some form of help.

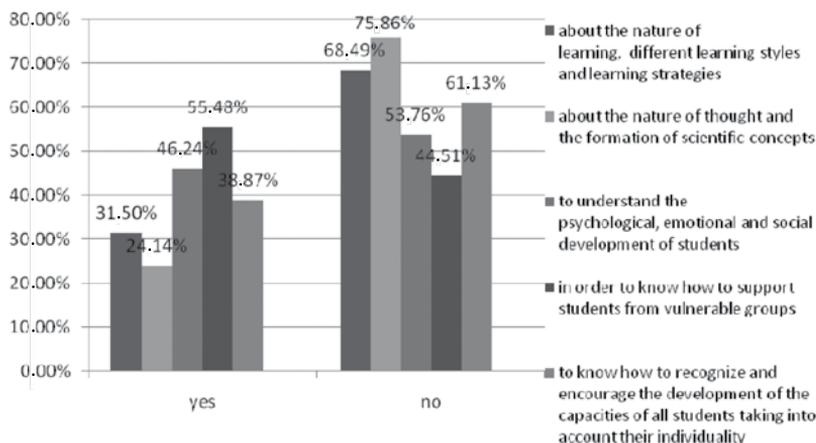


Figure 11. Necessary support for teachers

As far as co-operation with parents is concerned, 53.76% of the teachers said that they had a partnership relationship with parents, 22.26% stated that they communicated with parents just in case of bad grades, while 14.73% said that they had no contact with parents (Figure 12). Teachers of vocational subjects in secondary vocational schools (37.89%) had the least contact with the parents, and the best cooperation was reported to take place between parents and primary school teachers (79.66%), which is quite common.

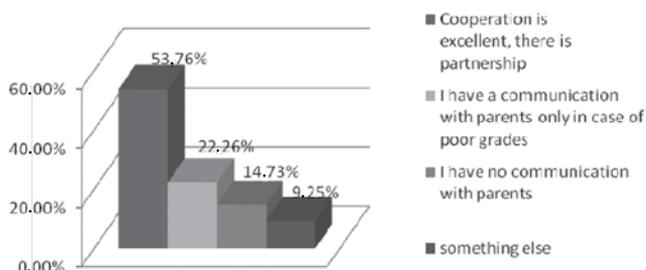


Figure 12. Co-operation with parents

According to the respondents, they need the most support in order to maintain a positive and encouraging atmosphere in the classroom (29.47%), followed by the modern ways of working/teaching (28.21%), assessment and evaluation of student work (14.11%), perfect communication with stakeholders in the school (11.60%), while 11.60% of the respondents reported that they did not need any kind of support.

5.01% of respondents stated that they needed support regarding inclusive education (Figure 13).

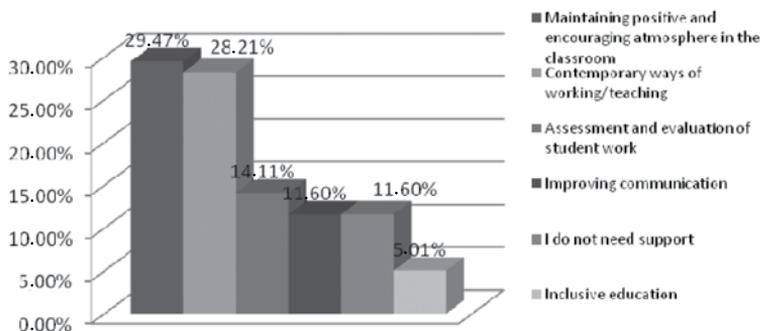


Figure 13. Support needed

When the data are considered in terms of the duration of employment, we can see that the needs of teachers are slightly different. Teachers who have one year of service seek most support in order to maintain an encouraging classroom atmosphere. This type of a need is also emphasized by those teachers who have 3 or more years of teaching experience, while those who have worked in education for two years, mostly require support in relation to the contemporary methods of teaching (Figure 14).

Support regarding the modern methods of teaching is needed by most subject teachers in primary schools (34.24%) and teachers of general subjects in VET schools (33.08%). Strengthening the field of assessment and evaluation of student work, as well as improving communication is stressed as most needed by the subject teachers in grammar schools (25.00%) and teachers at SEN schools (20.00%). Teachers of general subjects/education courses (41.54%), teachers of vocational subjects (37.89%) in VET schools and classroom teachers need additional support in the area of maintaining an encouraging and positive atmosphere in the classroom.

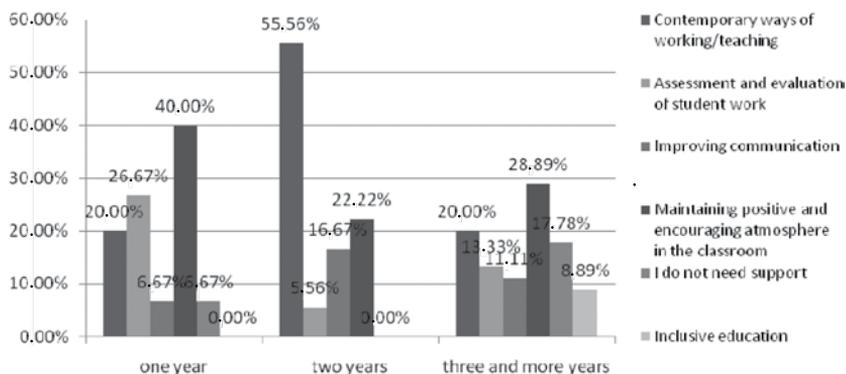


Figure 14. Required support in accordance with the years of service

The answers we obtained through the focus groups only confirmed the findings we obtained by means of questionnaires. When inquired about the areas of

their professional development, most interviewees expressed interest in classroom management, cognitive development of students, innovative methods and techniques of working with students, students' motivation, developmental and learning pedagogy and psychology. When inquired about the knowledge of education laws and by-laws, beginning teachers reported dissatisfaction with their knowledge, or rather their familiarization with the Education Laws. A large number of interviewees singled out the following elements as issues in lesson planning: individual differences of students, approaching the subject content that is understandable and interesting to all students, developing the capacity of all students, maintaining positive atmosphere in the classroom, differentiation in the classroom, working with students from vulnerable groups, interaction, mediation, active participation of all students in the learning process.

After analyzing these results, the staff of the Regional Centers decided to create a program that would correspond to the needs of beginning teachers. This program covers the most needed areas and it will provide the beginning teachers with the necessary help in finding models for a more effective work and classroom management.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last decade Serbia has been trying to improve the education system and to reconcile its laws and by-laws with the legislation and standards of the European Union. Looking back, it seems that, despite the will and desire to modernize education, neither has there been a clearly defined strategy nor an action plan for achieving such a plan. Having found their place in the laws, most of the innovations have been implemented with great difficulty in practice, with a scant capacity of schools and insufficiently developed teacher competences, who were supposed to be the carriers of those changes.

The results of this research show that beginning teachers need additional support for developing three out of four competences, namely: the competence for supporting students' development, the competence for teaching and learning and the competence for the taught subject and methods of teaching. The results also show that the least support is needed when it comes to the communication and collaboration competences. The most vital needs of the beginning teachers reside within the competence for supporting students' development: 55.48% of the participating teachers need additional support in order to learn how to provide appropriate support to the students from vulnerable groups, 46.24% need skills in the psychological, emotional and social students' development, while 38.87% want to learn how to recognize and encourage the capacity development of all students taking into account their individual needs. Within the competence for teaching and learning, support related to the cognitive development of students is required by 33.38% of the teachers; the development of skills concerning the nature of learning, different learning styles and learning strategies are required by 31.50% of the respondents, and 24.14% of the participating teachers state that they need some form of support for developing skills regarding the nature of thinking and scientific concept formation.

The gap between the initial education, induction, and professional teacher development, which was further deepened by rushing with the reforms without a

well established plan, can be bridged if the professional development programs match the needs of the teachers. The Network has proven this point exactly by assessing the needs of the beginning teachers and by developing the appropriate in-service training (seminar). Taking the whole educational system into account, with all the demands set before the teachers, with all the deficiencies and the possibilities offered to the teachers with the aim to develop their competences, this in-service training provides the beginning teachers with a scope of elementary skills from key areas necessary for them to start working in schools. Not only does this program provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills, it also enables them for a further quest for information from the right sources, thereby enabling and directing them towards lifelong learning, without which the educational system is inconceivable.

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# Programi profesionalnog razvoja podrške učiteljima na početku njihove karijere

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## **Sažetak**

*U Srbiji su učitelji početnici pod stalnim pritiskom jer su obvezni pratiti i implementirati sve zakone o odgoju i obrazovanju, kao i lokalne propise kojima se utvrđuje odgovornost sudionika obrazovnog sustava, usprkos tome što se tijekom svojega početnog obrazovanja ne susreću sa spomenutim dokumentima. Od učitelja početnika također se očekuje da se koriste različitim metodama poučavanja i da uvjete u razredu i svoju poduku prilagode individualnim potrebama svojih učenika, što im često predstavlja poteškoće. Osim toga, školama često nedostaje kapaciteta da osiguraju dovoljno podrške za učitelje početnike, a postojeći akreditirani programi profesionalnoga razvoja ne obuhvaćaju potrebne sadržaje. Jedan način za premošćivanje jaza između početnog obrazovanja učitelja i postojeće ponude programa profesionalnog razvoja jest identificirati vrste podrške potrebne učiteljima početnicima i posebno za njih izraditi programe profesionalnog razvoja. Na temelju te zamisli Regionalni centri za profesionalni razvoj zaposlenih u obrazovanju u Srbiji proveli su istraživanje među učiteljima koji su imali do 5 godina radnoga staža u obrazovanju sa svrhom izrade programa koji bi bio u potpunosti usklađen s njihovim potrebama. Rezultati toga istraživanja bit će prezentirani u ovome radu.*

**Ključne riječi:** početno obrazovanje učitelja; pripravnički staž učitelja; potrebe učitelja početnika.