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CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL COMPETENCES – NECESSARY PRACTICE FROM THE TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVE

***Summary:** Teachers’ competences in the contemporary school are significantly different from those necessary in the traditional learning manner. The earlier transfer of knowledge was directed to teaching where the pupil had to be a passive listener. Today the teacher’s competence is directed to the social and emotional development of the pupil. In the context of the diversity that enriches our schools, the teacher must be ready for an individual approach to each pupil, develop special and customized procedures, cooperation and partnership with parents, teamwork. A teacher’s competence is acquired through studies and is developed within the professional field of experience. Further lifelong learning has become inevitable. The paper outlines what competences a teacher in a contemporary school should have. The practical work covers the research on the development of a teacher’s competences from their own perspective. The research results indicate that teachers are competent to work in a modern school but, at the same time, show that they strive for continuous improvement and lifelong learning.*

***Key words:** teacher’s competences in a contemporary school, cooperation with parents, work with children with special needs²⁰*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, when information flow is extremely fast, it is not just necessary for the teacher to teach and the pupils to listen, take down notes, and later at oral and written examinations reproduce what they wrote or read in text books. The teacher needs to be the *soul* of all changes and the bearer of innovations we meet in our school system. The role of the teacher as a lecturer advocated by traditional teaching has changed in contemporary schools into the role of an organizer, leader, mentor and associate. The aims a contemporary teacher is confronted with are: “a pupil customized school”; relief from the removal of needless educational content; a modern way of teaching; research teaching, less frontal, more extracurricular and field work; increase in pupils’ independent work; strengthen the upbringing function of the school; teach and empower pupils to live according to individual and collective rights and responsibilities, civic morality, general cultural and civilizational values, fundamental human

²⁰ Special needs do not include only difficulties but also giftedness making the questions in the questionnaire not only about recognizing difficulties but also recognizing and identifying gifted pupils and the possibilities of working with them

and children's rights, freedom of moral reasoning and freedom of thought, consciousness and conscience by respecting the principles of respect for diversity and intercultural understanding. The characteristics to strive for in upbringing and education: independence, initiative, communication capacity, honesty, righteousness, self-confidence, respect for others and care for others, tolerance and understanding, peacefulness, feeling of equality of all people, solidarity... Permanent and regular cooperation with other teachers and parents is indispensable.

The realization of these elementary but complex aims requires teacher developed competences that cover the following: professional didactic-methodological, psychological, pedagogical, social, intercultural competences in working with children with special needs, creativity, character and temperament competences, lifelong learning, organization capacity of leisure time, extracurricular activities.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS

Present day teachers are trying to abandon traditional ways of learning and teaching in order to better prepare students for life and the world, as well as for lifelong learning. Due to the remarkable differences between the two teaching methods, higher education curricula, in which courses aimed at developing social competences of teachers prevail, need to be modified to have more quality interaction with students and other participants in the upbringing and educational process (professional associates, principals, parents, other teachers, teaching assistants). Traditional teaching is predominantly based on teacher lectures as the primary means of transferring knowledge. The traditional school identifies with the past, saying that: "... in the past, the school was designed to provide information to pupils who considered themselves beneficiaries. This created a structure of power that kept the teacher as a person spreading wisdom and knowledge, and pupils as helpless recipients. The pupil with such a role was passive, an empty vessel that needed filling" (Jensen, 2003). In such teaching where the teaching role of the teacher prevails, it is not possible to interact between the teacher and the pupil, and there is not enough time for independent pupil activities that would help in achieving an increasingly better adoption of the teaching contents (Bognar, Matijević, 2002).

Contemporary teaching that places pupils at the heart of the teaching process "... is reflected in the fact that it should be organized in order to influence the development of the pupil's cognitive and general intellectual abilities. One of the key tasks of contemporary school is to discover and adopt knowledge that makes up a complete logical and consistent system. Introducing a pupil to the wholeness of the world is the task of the contemporary school." (Tot, 2010). In contemporary teaching, pupils acquire practical and conceptual knowledge, that is, the quality of learning and teaching in contemporary school encourages pupils' systematic and active learning. In doing so, they develop the ability to observe, think critically, make judgments, and reason logically.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AS CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL ASSUMPTION

Teachers who teach contemporary, or pupil-centered, teaching should work on their own professional development to better prepare their pupils for the adult world. The need to develop additional competences derives from the fact that the traditional school is static and as such cannot respond to the complex demands of modern upbringing and education. One of the fundamental characteristics of the modern teacher is the change from an ordinary teacher into an initiator teacher, which promotes learning. The teacher, as such, takes care of his/her personal and professional development. Teachers are confronted with numerous obligations, performing a complex and responsible job in often inadequate working conditions. Continuous demands for improving the quality of teaching and teaching pupils are increasingly emphasizing the needs for work professionalism. Such requirements are, in fact, support for the extension and improvement of initial teacher education and his/her continuing professional development. The teacher thus becomes a practitioner who plans activities to help him/her achieve his/her professional development and advancement whereby the continuous professional development of teachers becomes an increasingly important factor in their professional development. The aim of continuous professional development of teachers is also directed towards the effects of their behavior in performing various professional roles in the teaching profession (Tot, Klapan, 2008). Participants in the educational process are expected to organize and encourage such a learning and teaching process that will create pupils who think independently, who successfully cooperate with others, and are ready to plan and build on their own. "The teacher must know how to motivate his/her pupils to study independently, which is an essential assumption for their future personal and professional development" (Tot, 2013).

FIELDS OF COMPETENCE

A more serious progress and development of the school in terms of upbringing and education of pupils is based, above all, on the competence of the teacher. Without sufficient self-awareness of one's own competences, the teacher often views and realizes his or her practice as a routine, which is far from a professional-scientific understanding of the practice to be regarded as competent. Competent teacher action should be approached as something that is being built across these five fields²¹:

1. Teacher competences in the field of curriculum methodology

By giving the teacher the role of co-creator of the curriculum, we approach the determinations by which the teacher assumes the role of a reflexive practitioner, one who is constantly consciously exploring his/her practice and its effectiveness aimed at improvement. It is necessary to create a need for the teacher to constantly ask what

²¹ These fields have been taken from various sources mentioned in the paper and we consider them as most important for a teacher's successful performance in the upbringing and education practice.

can be done better, more modern and more acceptable in order to keep him/ her away from routine tasks in the upbringing and educational system.

2. Teacher competencies in the field of organization and management of the educational process

In terms of quality in the organization and management of teaching, it is important for each lesson to have clearly structured teaching phases that can be divided into three parts: agreement, processing and results. Here the teacher rejects the authoritarian leadership style because he/she knows that with such a style he/she cannot take into account the student's opinion and interests. That is why the teacher uses the democratic leadership style, guides and advises students, researches, experiments, chooses skills and methods that advance his/her pedagogical, didactic and methodical activity in the process of upbringing and education. In a democratic leadership style, certain situations come together. This leadership style suggests the idea that the teacher, together with the pupils, is co-responsible for quality in learning and teaching, but the teacher has the ultimate responsibility for the pupil's learning (Jurcic, 2012). Teachers need to identify and isolate the often very complex problems they face, test the assumptions of their solutions, and change their actions accordingly (Mlinarević, Borić (2007).

3. Teacher competences in the field of determining student achievement in school

“The monitoring and evaluation of students must take place along with pedagogical situations at the level of good understanding of the theoretical settings of didactics and school doymology” (Jurčić, 2012). Evaluation is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the pupil's learning, so that each form of monitoring and evaluation does not necessarily end in a numerical evaluation, but can also be expressed in a descriptive evaluation. Besides knowledge, the evaluation must also take into account a number of elements such as: pupils' work habits, learning conditions, commitment, capacities, motivation.

4. Teacher competences in the field of shaping the classroom atmosphere

“The classroom atmosphere is an integral part of the learning process, so it affects every teacher and pupil” (March, 1994). In almost every classroom, pupils have their own specific behaviors, manner of communication, attitude towards learning, participation in teaching activities, and social interaction with teachers. What makes up their classroom atmosphere is the totality of life and their work. A well-organized lesson in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding minimizes pupil disobedience (Kyriacou, 199

5. Teacher competences in the field of upbringing partnership with parents

In the school and family co-realtionship many superficial and simplified approaches to cooperation can be observed today based on the model of formal cooperation, without clearly stated goals, tasks and content of cooperation, so the parents' general picture of the school is often uninteresting and unclear (Juric, 2004).

A contemporary parent is considered to be a parent who perceives himself/herself as a person who has control over his/her parenting and relationship with the child and feels good as a parent (Ljubetic, 2007). The contemporary parent faces many demands and expectations of the immediate and wider social environment and family. Besides parent meetings, the teacher can organize various forms of collaboration, and pedagogically-led workshops should have current topics. Parent interest in such forms of collaboration depends on the competence of the teacher. Parents should be seen as active participants, authors and promoters in the institution, not as passive recipients and executors of the teacher's instructions (Ljubetic, 2014).

The aforementioned fields of teacher competence do not exist individually and separately from one another. All fields are interconnected and one conditions and complements the other when planning, leading, organizing and evaluating upbringing and educational activities with pupils and cooperating with parents. By understanding, assessing and controlling one's own process for acquiring a particular competence, the teacher is directed towards the process of acquiring knowledge, developing abilities and values that serve as the basis for a particular competence.

Through creative and innovative activities in the upbringing and educational process, supplemented by advice, coordination and guidance of pupils, the teacher can detach from traditional teaching and learning, and be assisted by different didactic approaches to teaching, application of modern methods, networked social forms of work, implementation of information and communication technologies that make it easier to bring the teaching content closer to students. These are the starting points from which the teacher can focus his/her professional activity on active and creative learning and training of pupils for life, and thus a detachment from everything that has been overcome and unnecessary in school upbringing and education. When a teacher is recognized and acknowledged by pupils, parents and the school as a whole, it confirms his or her ability to act in each separate but networked field of work (Jurčić, 2012).

Besides the mentioned fields of competence, the empirical part of the paper explored the extent to which teachers are competent to work with pupils with special needs. The particularity of the field points out the need to know the causes of impairment, the methodology of working in the classroom, the use of a number of specific aids, in addition to professional, developed and social competences to prevent the possible emotional and social difficulties of children and pupils with special needs."(Zrilić, 2013).

EMPIRICAL PART OF THE RESEARCH²²

HYPOTHESES AND AIM OF RESEARCH

The aim of the present research is to look into which are the contemporary competences of the teachers and considering formal knowledge, which competences are lacking.

²² The research was performed for the needs of the thesis of Kristina Marin, a student of the Teacher Study of Zadar defended in 2016

Based on that aim, the following research hypotheses are defined:

H1: Teachers influence the positive atmosphere and realize a good cooperation with parents.

H2: Teachers aspire to their professional development in the social development of pupils.

H3: Teachers are competent to work with children with special needs.

The examinee sample in the present research consists of 31 classroom teachers employed in Zadar schools.

A survey questionnaire was created for the purpose of this research consisting of 48 questions grouped into 5 subscales asking examinees to rate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale with the stated statements related to: school climate, school-parent cooperation, professional development of teachers, social development, and working with children with special needs.

ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The first subscale contains statements related to the school environment, the teacher’s actions and responsibilities that are recognized as supporting and motivating pupils.

Table 1. Teacher responses – result display of the school environment subscale (SE)

Varijabla	N	M	SD
ŠO 1	31	4,419355	0,719916
ŠO 2	31	4,806452	0,401610
ŠO 3	31	4,774194	0,425024
ŠO 4	31	4,838710	0,373878
ŠO 5	31	4,322581	0,475191
ŠO 6	31	3,903226	0,650889
ŠO 7	31	3,774194	0,844972
ŠO 8	31	3,967742	0,657463
ŠO 9	31	3,935484	0,813858
ŠO 10	31	4,225806	0,560338
ŠO 11	31	3,870968	0,846244

Teachers’ responses to the statements of participation in the creation of a positive school environment suggest that they agree with all of these statements, which they

consider to be part of their teaching work. According to the teachers' self-assessment, they mostly agree on the fourth statement: "I motivate and encourage pupils to work, cooperate and engage" ($M = 4.84$; $SD = 0.37$), and at least about the seventh statement: "Pupils participate in decision-making about school life and work" ($M = 3.77$; $SD = 0.84$).

Table 2. Teacher responses – result display of school and parents cooperation (PC)

Varijabla			
	N	M	SD
SŠR 1	31	4,612903	0,615219
SŠR 2	31	4,193548	0,792437
SŠR 3	31	4,612903	0,495138
SŠR 4	31	4,806452	0,401610
SŠR 5	31	4,935484	0,249731
SŠR 6	31	4,741935	0,444803
SŠR 7	31	4,935484	0,249731
SŠR 8	31	4,193548	0,654184
SŠR 9	31	4,322581	0,791079

From the teachers' answers to the questions regarding school-parent cooperation, they agreed mostly on the fifth statement: "I have a defined time for receiving parents for information" ($M = 4.93$; $SD = 0.24$) and the seventh statement: "I try to have a good cooperation with parents" ($M = 4.93$; $SD = 0.24$). For the second statement: "Parents are involved in school activities" ($M = 4.19$; $SD = 0.79$) and the eighth statement: "I participate in parental teacher education" ($M = 4.19$; $SD = 0.65$) were the least agreeable, as can be seen from the arithmetic mean and standard deviation where the deviations were highest.

The H1 hypothesis assumes that teachers influence the positive environment and make efforts to realize a good relationship with parents. It is evident from the data analysis of Table 1 that almost all the examinees agree with the statements on their contribution in making the school environment positive. Table 2 shows us how teachers respect the opinion of parents and take the trouble to realize a good relationship with them. It is furthermore clear that parent cooperation is important for teachers represent a "bridge" between the school and parents, and it is very important for teachers to regularly and successfully communicate with parents. This hypothesis was confirmed after the processing of data.

Table 3. Teacher responses – result display of subscale on teacher professional development (TPD)

Varijabla			
	N	M	SD
PRU 1	31	4,483871	0,676805
PRU 2	31	4,774194	0,425024
PRU 3	31	4,354839	0,797847
PRU 4	31	4,290323	0,824360
PRU 5	31	4,516129	0,676805
PRU 6	31	3,935484	0,997847
PRU 7	31	4,580645	0,501610
PRU 8	31	4,645161	0,608188
PRU 9	31	4,741935	0,444803

According to the self-assessment of the teachers, Table 3 shows that teachers are satisfied with their professional development. They mostly agree on the second statement that tells us that the school they work for supports their professional development ($M = 4.77$; $SD = 0.42$). However, they disagree less about the sixth statement: “I consider that I need further training” ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 0.99$).

Table 4. Teacher responses – result display of social development subscale (SD)

Varijabla			
	N	M	SD
SR 1	31	2,838710	1,416493
SR 2	31	4,935484	0,249731
SR 3	31	4,838710	0,373878
SR 4	31	4,838710	0,373878
SR 5	31	4,935484	0,249731
SR 6	31	4,645161	0,550659
SR 7	31	4,774194	0,497305

Teachers' responses show that they encourage social development in pupils. They mostly agree with the fifth statement: “I encourage the development of self-esteem in pupils” ($M = 4.93$; $SD = 0.24$), and least with the first statement: “I address most pupils only when I ask a question” ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 1.41$). Their opinion diverges mostly in this statement, which can be seen from the standard deviation.

According to the H2 hypothesis, we assume that teachers strive for their professional development and pupils' social development. Table 3 shows us that teachers are contradictory, because in their answers to the statements they stated that they attend professional seminars, that they are motivated for further training, actively participate in professional development, but still do not agree that the additional training is required. Table 4 shows that teachers encourage the development of pupils' personal and social skills, encourage pupils to believe in their own knowledge and skills, and provide them with ongoing support and motivation, and we can conclude that this hypothesis is also confirmed.

Table 5. Teacher responses – result display of subscale on work with children with special needs (CSN)

Varijabla			
	N	M	SD
DPP 1	31	3,741935	0,773207
DPP 2	31	4,193548	0,792437
DPP 3	31	3,193548	0,945845
DPP 4	31	3,580645	0,992445
DPP 5	31	2,935484	1,152837
DPP 6	31	3,483871	0,926318
DPP 7	31	4,516129	0,569852
DPP 8	31	4,516129	0,769024
DPP 9	31	4,483871	0,625618
DPP 10	31	4,774194	0,425024
DPP 11	31	4,612903	0,558416

In this subscale, teachers mostly agree with the tenth statement: "I recognize a gifted child" ($M = 4.77$; $SD = 0.42$), and they are also very consistent with the eleventh statement, which tells us that teachers allow a gifted child access to sources of knowledge and additional literature. However, they least agree with the fifth statement: "The school is sufficiently equipped with didactic materials for inclusive teaching", which is evident from the table showing that biggest the difference in opinion is with this statement ($M = 2.93$; $N = 1.15$).

This subscale is made up of 11 statements concerning the work of children with special needs. The first statement that states "I consider myself competent to work with children with special needs" was fully agreed by 4 teachers, 17 of them mostly agreed, 8 teachers remained neutral and neither agreed nor disagreed, while 2 teachers disagreed with that statement.

Even though it is here clear that teachers mainly agree that they are sufficiently competent for such work, the following statement: “I need additional training in working with children with special needs” teachers answered as follows: 13 of them agreed completely, 11 agreed mainly while 7 teachers neither agreed nor disagreed. In the third statement: “I have the necessary knowledge on all difficulties” we see how opinions diverge, and 2 teachers said that they completely agreed with that statement, 10 mainly agreed while 12 were neutral and neither agreed nor disagreed, 3 teachers mainly disagreed and 1 teacher disagreed completely. In the eighth statement: “I cooperate with expert associates” 20 teachers said that they agreed completely, 8 mainly agreed, 2 were neutral and 1 teacher mainly disagreed. In the tenth statement: “We recognize a gifted child” teachers were mainly agreeing and 24 of them agreed completely with the statement while the remaining 7 mainly agreed. We can conclude from the acquired results that teachers consider themselves competent in working with children with special needs and they aspire to further training and supplementary education..

Table 6. Display of teachers’ responses to single questions from the subscale on working with children with special needs expressed in percentages

Question no.	1 – disagree	2 – mainly disagree	3 – neither agree nor disagree	4 – mainly agree	5 –agree completely	M	SD
1.	0	2 (6.45%)	8 (25.80%)	17 (54.83%)	4 (12.90%)	3.74	0.77
2.	0	0	7 (22.58%)	11 (35.48%)	13 (41.93%)	4.19	0.79
3.	1 (3.22%)	6 (19.35%)	12 (38.70%)	10 (32.25%)	2 (6.45%)	3.19	0.94
4.	1 (3.22%)	3 (9.67%)	9 (29.03%)	13 (41.93%)	5 (16.12%)	3.58	0.99
5.	5 (16.13%)	3 (9.67%)	15 (48.38%)	5 (16.13%)	3 (9.67%)	2.93	1.15
6.	2 (6.45%)	0	13 (41.93%)	13 (41.93%)	3 (9.67%)	3.48	0.92
7.	0	0	1 (3.22%)	11 (35.48%)	19 (61.29%)	4.51	0.56
8.	0	1 (3.22%)	2 (6.45%)	8 (25.80%)	20 (64.51%)	4.51	0.76
9.	0	0	0	10 (32.25%)	21 (67.74%)	4.48	0.62
10.	0	0	0	7 (22.58%)	24 (77.41%)	4.77	0.42
11.	0	0	1 (3.22%)	10 (32.25%)	20 (64.51%)	4.61	0.55

The third hypothesis that teachers are competent to work with children with special needs was confirmed. The processing of the data in Table 6 shows that 45.16% of the examinees completely agreed with the statement: “I consider myself competent to work with children with special needs”, while 33.48% mainly agreed with the stated statement. Continuous improvement and application of new knowledge and skills is required in order to work successfully with children with special needs. As many as 77.41% of the examinees agreed. One of the most common forms of teacher training is attending professional seminars.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Today's teachers are trying to detach from the traditional way of studying and teaching in order to prepare pupils better for life and the world as well as for lifelong learning. Due to exceptional differences between these two ways of teaching, it is necessary to make changes and make future teachers aware of the need for changes in the manner of learning and teaching, making it thus possible for their pupils to have a better and more quality education. Unlike traditional teaching, contemporary teaching tries to create the conditions aimed at preparing pupils for an active life and activity in society. In choosing contemporary didactic strategies in realizing the aims of upbringing, various possibilities appear to the teacher in achieving quality teaching and increasing interest and motivation in children. Creative and innovative activities in the upbringing and educational process, supplemented with advices, coordination and pupil direction, enable the teacher to detach from traditional teaching and learning. The teacher's role is undergoing essential change with the communication paradigm. It is observed in the context of cooperation and partnership and connects with procedures and interactions in the complex and demanding school environment. Contemporary school is characterized by multidimensionality, simultaneity, immediacy, openness, limitless possibilities of creativity beyond the limits of stereotypes and rigid programs. When pupils, parents and the school as a whole acknowledge and recognize the teacher as competent, this confirms his/her ability to act in every field of work.

In the empiric part of the paper at the beginning of the research, the assumption was that the results of the research would show that teachers are competent primarily to cooperate with parents and to work with children with special needs. Besides the aforesaid assumptions, research was also performed on how much teachers strive for professional development, how much they care for pupil social development and how big an influence their behavior has on the positive school environment. Based on the results acquired from the teacher self-assessment, we can conclude how teachers are competent in the abovementioned fields, as well as how they strive for continuous training and lifelong learning.

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