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## TRADITIONAL PARADIGM AND PROGRESSIVISM OF CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM IN EARLY AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

**Abstract:** *Historical changes in pedagogical ideas and orientations that underpin them show that pedagogy orientates towards the general course of social development. Each historical period creates an interpretative framework for children upbringing. Interpretations of educational concepts depend on the political-economic context of community life, general philosophy advocated by society, and the characteristics of development of various scientific disciplines. Taking into account the social context, pedagogical paradigm is conceptualized by creating authentic scientific knowledge and accepting the knowledge of complementary sciences. This paper discusses similarities and differences between traditional and contemporary pedagogical paradigms in relation to the context of early and preschool education. It also highlights scientific assumptions, starting points and studies of the disciplines with which the contemporary educational paradigm shares the same subject of interest, and through which it conceives and underpins its educational approach. It also problematizes introduction of contemporary educational concepts into practice of early and preschool education. The aforementioned allows focusing on the way in which contemporary pedagogical concept represents its authentic approach, how its principles depart, and in what way they continue on pre-established pedagogical practices.*

**Keywords:** *contemporary pedagogical paradigm, traditional pedagogical paradigm, early and preschool education*

### INTRODUCTION

Education in its historical course and pedagogy, as the official science in its temporal continuity, have found various truths based on the vision of the upbringing that a child needs. The issue of upbringing is being refocused most often with every social change. As society finds new forms of living in economic and political aspects, so does pedagogy devise appropriate forms of education. In contrast,

paradigm shifts in natural sciences have a different focus. In natural sciences, research within a paradigm is an effective way to change it. A discovery in natural science begins with the question of irregularity, with the realization that nature is in some way deviating from the expectations set by the ruling paradigm. The area of irregularity is then explored, and the default paradigm is adjusted so that what is considered irregularity becomes what is expected (Kuhn, 2002). The character of pedagogical science, in relation to the above, is more reactive. The dominant pedagogical paradigm usually follows the tendencies of social development and adapts its goals accordingly. This is understandable if we take into account the social nature of human beings and the value character of upbringing - it is necessary for a child to acquire his social identity, as part of his human determination, in a community of certain characteristics, through upbringing. Education shapes his affective and cognitive structures, by which an individual perceives and assesses his or her social reality (Williams, 1973, according to Dale, 1986). The relationship communicated through educational process reflects the fundamental values of society - patriarchal societies thus advocate for the child's development through an authoritarian type of relationship, while democratic societies advocate for an authoritative educational relationship (Polić, 2005). More specifically, the relationship between educators and children varies with the status of the school, depending on what type of social care the child needs to be raised for. Thus, for example, education in secondary schools that educate worker- employees is oriented towards establishment of immediate supervision, while internalization of norms and absence of constant supervision are characteristics of a university (Mickelson, 1980, according to Giroux, 1986). Education explains to individuals the criterion of prosperity in society. In this sense, the modern community needs creatively capable individuals (Polić, 2005), and it is more important to educate inventors than mere technology managers (EU Commission, 1996, according to Račić, 2013).

Considering the historical change in ideas about education, it is evident that they have always clung to dominant social expectations. In the old era, the Spartans educated warriors needed for the planned conquests, while Athenian upbringing, in harmony with society, was a synthesis and infusion of physical and aesthetic with intellectual and moral. In feudal times of the early Middle Ages, when Catholic Church was the dominant ideological pillar, upbringing and education were of religious character. In the new century, it is necessary to popularize science and thus overcome limitations imposed by feudalism, so empiricist philosophy is developing and becoming a starting point for designing educational approach to children (Zaninović, 1988). Even in particularly dark periods, such as the period of fascism, pedagogy, affirmed as a science, was subordinated to society by adapting its discourse. In 1939, the Italian education system was completely politicized and the children were raised according to the official ideal, while in Germany the content of teaching was formed according to interests of racism and Nazism. If in certain

periods of development of pedagogic philosophy there are ideas inappropriate for social actuality, they are annulled, either materially (for example, the burning of Rousseau's book *Emile*, or *On education*) (Zaninović, 1988) or spiritually - by denying certain authors (e.g., the forced retirement of Paul Vuk Pavlović, reducing the publication of works by Stjepan Pataki in the Independent Republic of Croatia) (Radeka, 2010).

The contemporary pedagogical approach in its social accommodation follows the principle of all educational paradigms that precede it; it arises as a consequence and result of social circumstances and promotes the dominant desires of the community. In a capitalist society, the educational system serves the production of competitive workforce. From the philosophy of the capitalist point of view that the wealth of a nation stems from the efforts of each of its individuals to pursue personal gain (Smith, 1776, according to Mesarić, 2006), contemporary pedagogy nourishes competence and competitiveness of each individual. By encouraging successful individuals through upbringing, we strive for a competitive community. In a globalized society of competing countries, this has been highlighted as the primary task of education. Although pedagogy of contemporary paradigm intensely emphasizes its diversity in relation to traditionalism, especially in relation to the pedagogical concept that immediately precedes it, it turns out to be noticeably related to it in some aspects.

### PEDOCENTRISM OF MODERN PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGM

Child's well-being stands out as the aspiration of all social endeavors in each historical moment. Every educational undertaking is argued for the child's well-being and every pedagogical concept justifies it. The modern pedagogical paradigm occupies the so-called pedocentric orientation by placing the child in the center of upbringing by respecting his nature, preferences, interests, desires. Rousseau's claim defined as education from child is being rehabilitated. In the 17th century, he emphasized the importance of respecting natural development that the educator supports by creating situations in which the child gains experience independently. He says that human education should arrange actual education so that it is in line with natural education (Žarnić, 2001). It is important for the child to develop gradually, and that he receives guidance, by taking into account his real needs (Golubović, 2014). In the beginning of 20th century, the aforementioned attitudes were re-actualized by representing the need to influence the child, not in the light of what we would like the child to be, but on the basis of the impression who he really is (Key, 2000). It is explained that a child's soul should be treated carefully and humbly, because even the slightest rudeness and distrust or a superficial mockery can leave lifelong wounds, while unexpected kindness leaves an indelible mark (Key, 2000). End of the 20th century is characterized by popularization of literature (Gray, 2001) which promotes a child as born good (although

such Rousseau's view is controversial) and the role of an educator is interpreted through recognizing, respecting and nurturing unique and natural development. Contemporary pedagogical thought is affirmed as the one which, in accordance with previous interpretation, derives from the child and is based on his or her needs and rights. The child is presented as a central social value.

Contrary to the foregoing, sociocentrism, current since ancient times, promotes a completely opposite view. Sociocentrism gives priority to the community, rather than an individual. Therefore, it is not justified to think that any citizen belongs to himself; everyone belongs to the state, because everyone is a part of it. In ancient sense, education is an activity aimed at a goal set outside the child. Education is basically external shaping of the child, managing its development, instrumental action, manipulation (Polić, 2005). Sociocentrism implies the upbringing of valid citizens and its primary aim is to educate individuals for the needs of the state (Bognar, 2000). This is the so-called childless pedagogy. In recent history, such an understanding has been particularly actualized in the fascist and Stalinist orientations, when man was denied as a basic value and importance was given to a nation, state, class, race (Bognar, 2000). Giving importance to collectivity is a feature of socialist pedagogy. The period of socialist Yugoslavia is considered to be a period of externally managed upbringing in which the emphasis is on adult authority and conformism of obedient children (Babić and Irović, 1999), thereby supporting the development of a population subject to a particular regime.

Goals of the contemporary pedagogical paradigm are formally directed, as stated, towards the individual. Observed at preschool level, the focus is on an individual as holder of his rights, abilities, and interests. It is emphasized that according to modern paradigm a child truly becomes a subject of the learning process, that his natural course of development is respected, and the right to the uniqueness of his person is valued (Petrović-Sočo, 2009). However, from a broader point of view, and on a motivational level, it seems that while advocating for the child being the center of all endeavors, the contemporary pedagogical paradigm does not leave out, but actually intensely emphasizes the importance of an individual to the community. It is noted that contemporary social environment needs workforce that supports economic growth. Throughout history, economic profits were improved by a horsetail or mill, but now such a role is being replaced by abilities of an individual. Therefore, the goal written in the *Strategy for Education, Science and Technology (Strategija obrazovanja, znanosti i tehnologije, 2014)* is to build a system which thoughtfully discovers, nurtures and stimulates individual potentials and abilities. For this reason, it is necessary to organize a coherent system for recognizing, supporting, counseling and developing special abilities and talents, consisted of educational staff, employment bureaus, clubs, associations, foundations and financial institutions. Society, at European level, recognizes human capital, which is determined by knowledge, traits, skills and competences that facilitate

creation of personal, social and economic well-being (Keeley, 2009). Education should enable a country to move up the development ladder and move from production of simpler products to more complex ones (Bejaković, 2005). It is considered important that scientists from the existing and emerging sciences select, shape and disseminate to the general public the knowledge that they consider crucial for progress (*Važnost znanja i primjene znanja za izlazak iz krize i razvoj Hrvatske, 2011*). At the European Union level, it is consensually accepted that it is important to orient education to the third scientific and technological revolution and to give greater focus to fundamental, natural- science-mathematical foundations of modern information- technology development (*Prilozi za raspravu o kurikularnoj reformi – kritike i vizije, 2017*). In the context of the Republic of Croatia, it is emphasized that a country should use knowledge to improve technological development and prevent the deepening of technological backwardness (*Deklaracija o znanju – Hrvatska temeljena na znanju, 2004*). By doing so, it is noticeable that educational system of the contemporary paradigm obeys the dictates and demands of labor market.

Thus, even though it does start from a child, contemporary pedagogical in fact intensely advocates and prioritizes preservation and economic well-being of the community. Referring to children's rights, needs, recognition of individuality, freedom and choice, contemporary pedagogical thought propagates the approach of viewing a child as socially applicable, usable, useful and profitable capital. Great respect for the child as a unique being and a specific member of the community, which is the center of every pedagogical interest, translates into an educational system ideally based on the demands of production and labour. In its entirety, instead of community-based value, a child is instrumentalized and reduced to potentially competitive capital directed at a competitive market.

## TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM IN RELATION TO SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Pedagogical paradigms devise their specific approach based on characteristics of the society in which they are realized. The modern educational concept emphasizes how it prepares a child for the changing world of unknown progress. This implies that from early education a child should develop skills and qualities that will help him overcome tomorrow and enable him to discover new possibilities, prepare him for constant change, uncertainty and unpredictability of modern life, multidimensionality and complexity of reality (Slunjski, 2009). Traditional paradigm also calls for compliance with contemporaneity of its reality, stating, for example, that a child needs to be trained for social life without which it is impossible to imagine a modern society (*Program odgojno – obrazovnog rada u dječjem vrtiću, 1979*). Taking into account the social context, pedagogical paradigms point to scientific knowledge and, like the contemporary, the traditional paradigm

emphasizes its scientific basis - notes that it is based on scientific evidence, which indicates that in the preschool period there are great possibilities for developing child's abilities, because at that age human nervous structure develops the fastest so children learn easily and are accessible to educational influences of adults and the environment which they live in (*Program odgojno – obrazovnog rada u dječjem vrtiću, 1979*). Such knowledge is practically operationalized in traditional paradigm, respecting the philosophy of determinism and behavioral psychological theory (Petrović-Sočo, 2009). Furthermore, wellbeing of a child and joy of participating in the educational process is a commitment of both contemporary and traditional approaches. The traditional paradigm glorifies child's play as a basic form of work, in which the child is motivated and his initiative maximized. Furthermore, it emphasizes that all demands placed on children and rules they adhere to must be in accordance with their needs and capabilities, in order to make children feel comfortable in the nursery (*Program odgojno – obrazovnog rada u dječjem vrtiću, 1979*).

Emphasizing alignment of educational approach with current social needs, basing on scientific assumptions and focusing on well-being of a child who gladly participates in educational process, even though implemented differently, are related principles of the traditional and contemporary educational paradigm. In such a curriculum, children are objects of teaching (Petrović-Sočo, 2009). In contrast, contemporary paradigm notes that it is in harmony with true nature of a child and an adult (Slunjski, 2009). This is explained by the fact that modern educational approach is viewed as an open system that is flexible, able to carry out internal reorganization, overcome imbalance and re-establish a new, more efficient organization at a higher level (Marjanović, 1987, according to Slunjski, 2009).

The above statement observed in isolation - education in harmony with the nature of a child and an adult - is interesting to look at from two perspectives. We can think of this as obvious insofar as man is a being of culture, a being whose nature is to a considerable extent also the culture in which he grows up and grows with, which defines him. The child's development is thus determined naturally, culturally. Education is a social thing that exposes man, as a culturally educated creature, to values that are in harmony with social characteristics. But what is important is the chosen approach to human nature which is advocated by dominant social philosophy. Thus, according to Hobbes, man is a free and selfish individual whose individualism is radicalized to egocentrism, so by social contract he creates state power in order to end the state of constant conflict (Mesarić, 2006). It is precisely this human nature that is being exploited by capitalism for market gain, taking into account how personal interest, market freedom and free entrepreneurship possess great innovative, motivational and dynamic power (Mesarić, 2006). Even in the educational system of such a society, the primary emphasis is placed on individual rights, needs and freedoms. Contemporary pedagogical texts raise

rhetorical questions: “Do we want to develop obedience or initiative in children?” and “Do we teach a child to give up his rights and needs for others to love him?” (Maleš et al., 2003, according to Slunjski, 2011). As it emphasizes the need for child emancipation, from the perspective of contemporary paradigm, it is stated that traditional upbringing encouraged care for others and pleasing others, and discouraged independence in taking care of oneself and standing up for oneself (Milanović et al., 2014). However, when the question of aligning educational process with human nature is viewed from the traditional point of view, there are claims understood equally as in the contemporary paradigm—the traditional paradigm also claims to be in harmony with human nature, but understands it differently. The traditional pedagogical paradigm, developed during the socialist period of life in the Republic of Croatia, advocates a man whose nature is focused on society. Even the terminological point of view itself (*socius* - society, *communis* - common) already points to the idea that calls for abolition of exploitative relations between people, which will be established through shared social ownership (Erceg, 2003). It is interpreted that man will return to his nature when man becomes purpose to man (Erceg, 2003). Educational context of early and preschool education in such a social system emphasizes forming a child’s moral character by cultivating love for family, developing sense of friendship, mutual cooperation and assistance and getting used to aligning one’s own interests with interests of others (*Program odgojno-obrazovnog rada u dječjem vrtiću, 1979*). At the same time, the pivotal value of the traditional pedagogical paradigm is conventionality in terms of respecting social norms and tradition (Babić and Irović, 1999). The plurality of ideas about *true* human nature prevents any concept from appropriating it exclusively and using it to legitimize its chosen views.

## CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGM IN SCIENTIFIC DETERMINATION AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Pedagogy, as a science, is associated with many scientific disciplines, and is said to depend largely on a philosophy that sets the goal of upbringing and psychology to find means and identify obstacles (Matess and Heinze, 2003, according to Paklečić, 2010). Although Herbart emphasized that pedagogy as an autonomous science should be entitled to its original theories, in order to better understand the views of pedagogical paradigms, it is important to look at starting points of the scientific disciplines that pedagogical science relies on and on the basis of which it bases its assumptions. The reasonableness of self-presentation of the current pedagogical paradigm as the best educational concept and justification of its criticality to the prevailing educational concepts can be explained by looking at the modern pedagogical concept in the scientific and social context.

The starting point of pedagogical paradigms, including the contemporary, is largely based on the general philosophical discipline that deals with theory of cognition - epistemology. Exploration of cognition possibilities, evaluation and assessment of cognitive sources and assumptions with which to enter into consideration of the problem, discussion of limits, scope and objectivity of cognition, have a special place in the overall philosophical matter. An approach to cognition that takes into account the age of a child and the level of competence appropriate to that age is a task of pedagogy. Epistemology plays a big role in pedagogy in both scientific-theoretical and practical terms (Šaban, 2010). Advocating for an empiricist or rationalist approach to cognition, as well as attempts to reconcile them, determines the process of acquiring knowledge and the result of that process. Thus, epistemology determines the best learning modality, which is further elaborated by appropriate psychological theory.

The contemporary paradigm actualizes Kant's approach to cognition, as a synthesis and reconciliation of the rationalist and empiricist view of modes and possibilities of cognition. Kant moves away from the idea of an empiricist attempt to understand the real by senses as elemental particles of cognition at the level of a kind of psychic mechanics (Žarnić, 2001). He also criticizes the notion that the world can be perceived a priori through analysis of ideas and derivations through logic, and establishes his own critical philosophy (Šaban, 2010).

While respecting Kant's views but addressing cognitive development of children in the context of developmental psychology, Piaget reveals the order and genesis of particular cognitive forms by talking about their individual evolution (Žarnić, 2001). He explains cognition as an adaptive reaction that removes the state of imbalance; a process of mental reorganization. A child acquires knowledge through interaction of his biological predispositions and experience. An individual constructs his understanding of the world through his or her own experiences, and their character is strongly influenced by our cognitive lenses. Constructivism is derived from Piaget's theory of cognition, as a theory of learning. Constructivism is based on interpretation that knowledge is not a reflection of reality, its image, but a subjective construct, dependent on the observer. Accordingly, learning is understood as an active, self-organized and biographically determined process (Gojkov, 2009). It is a process of forming conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction (Glaserfeld, 1995, according to Babić, 2007). An individual actively constructs knowledge by seeking coherence and meaning in the world. The contemporary pedagogical paradigm accepts constructivism, the psychological theory of learning, as its theory of teaching and education (Babić, 2007, according to Jukić, 2013), so that said participatory epistemology has caused important changes in didactics (Gojkov, 2009). Piaget's theory suggests that learning should be performed in natural, everyday conditions through active experimentation (Wood et al., 2001). Active learning is supported as an important methodological form of the



constructivist educational process. Active learning strategies include independent research, structuring and restructuring of knowledge, orientation to problem-solving, critical approach and evaluation (Niemi, 2002). In active learning, children gain knowledge by multimedia, in practice, through discovery, divergently, independently, using knowledge sources or in smaller groups (Suzić, 1999, according to Omerović and Džaferagić-Franca, 2011). But, acquisition of knowledge in the context of constructivist theory is occasionally simplified and insufficient in its complexity. It is understood that a child learns in a self-regulated way by constructing his knowledge, with the indirect presence of a teacher. However, a child does not learn by simply integrating the newly perceived elements into existing knowledge, because child tends to ignore experiences opposite to those. If data which is important for learning does not agree with the existing structures of child's thoughts, it will be difficult to integrate it because it is necessary to deconstruct concepts to which the child is cognitively and emotionally attached. This is why there are didactic instructions, developed to stimulate cognitive abilities, such as classification, information control, error analysis, encouraging flexible approaches, formulating explanations, returning to given information, analyzing significant moments, assessing abilities to reach a goal, reviewing previously used patterns and strategies, further rethinking of relationships and situations (Gojkov, 2010). In addition, research in cognitive psychology shows that constructivist "enabling didactics", as opposed to "teaching didactics," does not develop in all students into active, constructive, self-organized learning processes. The above depends largely on the content and goals of learning, so authors propose "moderate constructivism", that is, coexistence of construction and instruction (Gojkov, 2009).

Constructivism as a theory and active learning as an educational method are particularly conducive to the content of knowledge in STEM fields. And it is precisely the STEM area of knowledge that has been highlighted as a priority of the educational process in various contemporary documents concerning the pedagogical field. Thus, the *Declaration of Knowledge* (2004) and the *Importance of Knowledge and Application of Knowledge to Croatia's Emerging from Crisis* (2011) highlight the STEM scientific domain, by emphasizing its necessity, together with information and communication technology, for the economic development of society. The *Strategy for Education, Science and Technology* (2014) emphasizes that from an early age it is necessary to acquire transversal and basic knowledge and skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, since this knowledge is crucial in a technology-dependent society. *Appendices for Discussion on Educational and Curricular Reform – Critiques and Visions (Prilozi za raspravu o kurikularnoj reformi – kritike i vizije, 2017)* recall that school classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology are the foundation of engineering, medical, biotechnical, mathematical, natural sciences and other professions. Still, it is important to

emphasize that there are, especially in the US, possible consequences of neglecting the post-STEM area. It is argued that humanistic-artistic-social realm should not be seen as second-rate, since it provides a different way of seeing and understanding phenomena, which is significant in an individual's development of creativity and humanity in general (Bermanec et al., 2018). As there is discussion about prevalence of the entropic paradigm of cynical and nihilistic relation of man to natural and social environment in the contemporary context, knowledge of post-STEM area for society certainly becomes necessary (Novalić, 2003, according to Jukić, 2013). Given that the emergence of existing, for example, environmental problems is related to individual or collective egoism, their solution does not lie solely in application of technical or natural science knowledge (Jukić, 2013). That is why in the constructivist educational process the methodical solution in the form of active learning must be equally represented in all fields of knowledge.

Acquired knowledge is an important constituent element of competences that are considered the basic outcome of the educational process. Competences are defined as the sum of knowledge and its application; these are the skills, attitudes and responsibilities by which an individual is empowered to perform a particular job (Račić, 2013). At the European Union level, eight key competences stand out, with digital being one of the specificities of the contemporary paradigm. It is interpreted that automation of work, robotization of production, scientific and technological revolution requires a digitally literate population, which is an important factor in strengthening corporate power (Mesarić, 2006). In the educational process, it is believed that training in use of digital media should move from early school to preschool age. Information and communication technology is reported to go well with active learning, as it stimulates development of creative and divergent thinking, new skills, a better understanding of the immediate environment, observing, researching and developing the ability to discuss, and allows children to develop confidence, motivation and consistency in mastering tasks (Bruce, 2004, according to Lešin, 2017). At the same time, opposing viewpoints are based on research that challenges effectiveness of the use of digital media in early education (Spitzer, 2018). It is stated that there is no evidence that modern information technology enhances learning. Moreover, it has been suggested that it leads to superficial thinking, impaired attention, and that it reduces a child's cognitive potential (Spitzer, 2018). By contrast, proponents of digital technology in early education are problematizing whether the digitally outdated and non-digital population can encourage the development of a younger social stratum with different thinking characteristics. Digital natives, unlike digital newcomers, are accustomed to receiving information rapidly, processing it, and often doing several jobs at one time, and tend to take a random approach (hypertext) (Prensky, 2001). While some authors dispute the importance of digital technology in education, others advocate that educational content should be taught from an early age in a language understood by digital natives. These contradictory theses are an important contemporary pedagogical challenge.

Specifically, some authors point out that pedagogical taking on diverse research, without critically questioning their theoretical and methodological starting points, reinforces the inconsistency of the pedagogical structure of the contemporary period (Radeka, 2011). It is further stated that the current state of pedagogy is characterized by insufficient distinctiveness of pedagogical research in relation to other sciences, insufficiently specified relation to other disciplines regarding the common subject of research (Paklečić, 1998, according to Paklečić, 2010). Like constructivism, which psychologists critically discuss, and pedagogy proclaims it a new paradigm (Jukić, 2003), in the sphere of digital competence it is expected that the modern educational concept advocates autonomous scientifically argued attitudes based on their own theoretical reasoning and empirical validations.

While the approach to cognition is determined by Kant's empiricist-rationalist concept and the assumptions of Piaget's theory of cognition, the learning theory of constructivism, the dominant methodical form of the process of active learning, and the basic outcome of the educational process of competence, the meaning of the acquired knowledge within the contemporary educational paradigm is described by the philosophical backbone of modern capitalist age – materialism, utilitarianism, pragmatism (Mesarić, 2006). The modern paradigm seeks useful, usable knowledge, knowledge in practical function. At terminological level, a modern pedagogical concept uses economic vocabulary, referring to management or balance of knowledge. It is argued that the cost of acquiring capital through education, from an individual's point of view, should be cost-effective relative to price of labor that will be achieved in the market (Keeley, 2009). In this way, the acquisition of knowledge for the individual should be market-based. The contemporary paradigm shifts from coherent but senseless knowledge, which is why some authors point out that education is transformed into training in order to be something instead of being someone (Liessmann, 2008). It is claimed that this approach distorts the enlightenment sense of knowledge (Krivak, 2014). There is talk of modern commodification of knowledge and its transformation into commodity (Rupčić, 2015). From such settings, some authors conclude that the meaning of knowledge in a knowledge society owes much less to the idea of education, than to political and economic interests (Liessmann, 2006, according to Krivak, 2014).

## ESTABLISHMENT OF MODERN PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGM IN THE PRACTICE OF EARLY AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Changes in pedagogical paradigms are socially provoked. Political milestones condition pedagogical changes. If we consider the above in the context of traditional and contemporary paradigm of early and preschool education in the Republic of Croatia, we can see the following course – between 1945 and 1956 the current

document is the *Instruction for Organization, Social-health and Educational Work of Kindergarten for Preschool Children*, with one of its tasks being social education and versatile development in the spirit of national liberation fight; between 1956 and 1965, *Kindergarten Law* was drafted, which changed its formulations from the previous one, as society switched from state government to social self-government; the period between 1965 and 1980 was marked by the *Kindergarten Education Program*, and the document was driven by social and economic reform, orientation towards market economy, but within the framework of social ownership and worker self-management; the period between 1980 and 1990 is characterized by the *Law on Education*, which was created in the context of the need to re-affirm socialist self-government which was then in crisis (Babić and Irović, 1999). With the establishment of the independent Republic of Croatia and the associated character of society, preschool education is democratized with the document *Program Prientation of Preschool Education* (1991). Croatia's aspirations for accession to the European Union created a need to adapt the Croatian education system to the European one in the form of curricular reform. Legislative provisions are found that systematically support certain political intentions. Although changes over time can easily be categorized by looking at legal provisions, what is very important to consider are paradigm shifts in educational practice itself.

The contemporary paradigm proposes its research as a method of its development in practice. The above is based on the view that educational practice is governed by personal conceptions of educators, their private theories, implicit pedagogy, based on their personal beliefs, and independent of the official concept that is socially propagated (Slunjski, 2011). Thus, with the establishment of modern educational paradigm in Croatia, in the early 1990s, a pedagogical exploration of practice began. It is not meant to be a test of new educational methods in practice in terms of systematically monitoring their impact on a child's development, but rather examining the educator's educational concepts and their availability to adopt a new concept. The atmosphere and character of the research is best illustrated by an example from practice - while observing the educational process, the researcher (educator) removed the educator from the scene because she used the traditional approach to practice in relation to children (Miljak, 1996). It is stated that it is important for educators to become aware of their mistakes in practice, to truly embrace new goals and objectives, to become aware of the need to change their way of working and to develop the need to improve their own practice (Miljak, 1996). The above approach reflects a couple of problems. First of all, the assumption that educational practice in kindergartens is based on educator's personal, private, own, untested, undeveloped concepts points to the problem of educator's education. If the educator operates outside the framework of the scientific paradigm which he is socially educated for, the question arises of the importance of the education for educational staff itself. However, since educators are after all

pedagogically literate with their education, it is presumed that they base their actions on scientific starting points, theoretical ideas and empirical research. However, some authors problematize this. Thus, the role of educators is to contribute, by virtue of their professionalism, to preparing future citizens of a united Europe, to developing and enhancing their human capabilities in order to respond to challenges of the knowledge society (Education and Training 2010 The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms, according to Vujičić et al., 2012), and in doing so the educator should develop his practice whereby he should be allowed not only to be a practitioner but also to theorize about his practice (Niemi, 2007, according to Vujičić et al., 2012).

Understanding scientific and theoretical origins of pedagogical practice should be seen as the basis of educational activity, not something that educators should ask permission for. The question is also whether the ultimate goal of educational process should be conceptualized in terms of developing European citizens.

Furthermore, during the study of contemporary educational practice, it has been noticed that it is difficult to change and full of traditionalisms, even despite sufficient amount of time in which it had to be put into practice, which shows that legislation itself makes it unchangeable (Slunjski, 2009). This is understandable for a number of reasons. Specifically, changing educational conception requires that practitioners have available science assumptions which validate their work. On this basis, and in the process of changing practice, they are free to question and methodologically examine the effectiveness of new didactic assumptions, and this should in fact be the goal of democratically conducted pedagogical research.

It is also important to emphasize that changing educational conception does not just require educators' adaptation. As educators operate in social institutions, it is important to focus attention on the whole institution, which, with its contextual and material conditions and organizational and procedural circumstances, should monitor the change which is socially required. From the broadest perspective, it is desirable to understand the general social context which educational institutions are an integral part of. This context is immeasurably important because it promotes certain social values that should be mediated through institutional upbringing. An educator acts in the framework of these values and, by living them, authentically reflects them to the child. For example, it is not negligible to emphasize that the above-mentioned research into the change of practice took place in the early 1990s, when Croatia was characterized by a general institutional crisis. The period from 1989 to 1992 was characterized by an institutional vacuum that promoted omnipresent corruption, unproductive entrepreneurship, non-transparent enrichment (Franičević, 2002). Democratic deficit is also a characteristic of tycoon capitalism, especially between 1993 and 1997. Throughout the decade, the entire state had to morally legitimize its political and economic profile. By understanding the timing, we can also contextualize difficulties of the system and various institutions,

including educational ones. Difficulties in communicating certain values cannot therefore be unilaterally, tentatively, incompletely and fragmentedly proclaimed as educators' mistake. The contemporary paradigm, however, characterized by calling those who do not automatically accept and problematize its features non-progressive and outdated, is partly identified with the traditional one, which is claimed to have sought unconditional consistency in achieving its socially proclaimed unique educational goal. The only difference is that comprehensive development of a socialist personality is a characteristic of the traditional educational paradigm, and the overall development of an enterprising and initiative capitalist personality is a characteristic of the contemporary concept.

## CONCLUSION

It is stated that there is only one proper way of upbringing – growing up in a world worth living in (Goodman, 1956, according to Hentig, 1997). Each society is then presenting itself superlatively, each community strives for actual approval and recognition that it is precisely the optimal context for living. It is the same with pedagogical educational paradigms. A document governing educational practice of the traditional paradigm from 1945 states that kindergarten goals should be achieved by methods and means, the best of which are joy - joy in professions, joy in play, joy in learning. It also notes that a caregiver should always be fair, consistent, kind and strict, and never malicious or overbearing (Babić and Irović, 1999). The modern *National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje*, 2014) regards a child as a personality who needs to be understood and respected. Each document, as a blueprint for the pursuit of practice of certain characteristics emphasizes, regardless of whether it belongs to traditional or contemporary paradigm, the child's versatile development, holistic progress, comprehensive cooperation of various educational factors. Regardless of the principle agreement, differences in interpreting methods and communicating certain values depend on the specific social context in which the child needs to develop his social identity. The question is whether we should talk about right or wrong pedagogical approaches, or simply different ones. It is a fact that the contemporary paradigm, in explaining its principles, often critically refers to the traditional, challenging its adequacy, while neglecting that the same concept cannot be valid if viewed from different social contexts that create different frames of pedagogical interpretation. Talking about importance of overcoming traditionalisms in practice, the contemporary paradigm omits to detail the ambiguities of its practice. The current criticism is that the learning society should be seen as a constant complement to human capital for economic progress. It is emphasized that learning and knowledge should not become an instrument of politics and economics because it deprives them of dignity and independence (Gojkov and Stojanović, 2015). Furthermore, the development of methodological

models from constructivist learning theory is a challenge to contemporary pedagogy. Developing an approach to the meaning of knowledge in the capitalist age and, with STEM, emphasizing knowledge of the post-STEM field is the task of the current paradigm. Issues of needs and rights of a child from a psychological and sociological perspective seek the development of an authentic pedagogical approach (Polić, 2015). Pedagogical research is also necessary for the development of educational practice, so it is important for the modern pedagogical concept to develop a methodology appropriate to the subject of interest. It is important to reconcile the opposing research paradigms, qualitative and quantitative, which should form the basis for the development of 21st century pedagogy (Sekulić-Majurec, 2007). If we accept pedagogy as a science, not just a skill, developing an approach to researching the practice is essential. The importance of elaborating the concept of implicit theory in the context of work of educated educational staff is also emphasized. If the contemporary paradigm is striving for its development, it is of utmost importance that it self-critically re-examines its current set-ups in the light of previous ideas, which, although quite different in design, are intrinsically and very related to it.

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