

GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA: AN OVERVIEW OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The theoretical framework of this paper presents the characteristics and specifics of extracurricular activities with the previous terminological definition of the National Curriculum Framework, school curriculum, and an overview of the educational activities of gender-differentiated schools in Croatia. The aim of the research was to study the school curriculum documentation of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021 and to find out about the extracurricular activities in different educational areas of their curriculum. Extracurricular activities of gender-differentiated schools intended for 1st - 8th-grade students were analyzed in the paper. The results show that the most represented educational area in both schools regarding the number of extracurricular activities is the area of art. The results of Ružičnjak school curriculum analysis indicate that the area of art is followed by social and humanities, technical, language-communication, and physical and health education areas. On the other hand, Lotrščak school curriculum analysis shows that the artistic activities are followed by the extracurricular activities in physical and health, language-communication, natural sciences, technical and informatics areas. Among the offered extracurricular activities in Ružičnjak Primary Schools, there is no single extracurricular activity within the mathematical and natural sciences areas, while Lotrščak Primary School does not plan any extracurricular activities within the mathematical educational area.

Keywords: extracurricular activities, gender-differentiated schools, National Curriculum, school curriculum

Sažetak

U teorijskom polazištu rad donosi značajke i specifičnosti izvannastavnih aktivnosti uz prethodno terminološko određenje Nacionalnog okvirnog kurikulumu, školskog kurikulumu te prikaza odgojno-obrazovnog djelovanja diferenciranih škola u Hrvatskoj. Cilj istraživanja bio je studijem dokumentacije školskih kurikulumu za školsku godinu 2020./2021. Osnovne škole „Ružičnjak“ i Osnovne škole „Lotrščak“ spoznati raznolikost ponude izvannastavnih aktivnosti različitih odgojno-obrazovnih područja kuri-

kuluma. Analizirale su se izvannastavne aktivnosti diferenciranih škola namijenjene učenicima 1. – 8. razreda. Dobiveni rezultati pokazuju kako je najzastupljenije odgojno-obrazovno područje u objema školama prema brojnosti ponude izvannastavnih aktivnosti umjetničko područje. Rezultati analize školskog kurikuluma Osnovne škole „Ružičnjak“ ukazuju kako potom slijedi društveno-humanističko odgojno-obrazovno područje, tehničko, jezično te tjelesno i zdravstveno odgojno-obrazovno područje. Uvid u školski kurikulum Osnovne škole „Lotrščak“ ukazuje da potom slijede izvannastavne aktivnosti tjelesnog i zdravstvenog odgojno-obrazovnog područja, jezičnog, prirodoslovnog te tehničkog i informatičkog odgojno-obrazovnog područja. Struktura ponude izvannastavnih aktivnosti Osnovne škole „Ružičnjak“ ukazuje da ne postoji ni jedna izvannastavna aktivnost matematičkog i prirodoslovnog područja dok Osnovna škola „Lotrščak“ školskim kurikulumom ne planira ni jednu izvannastavnu aktivnost matematičkog odgojno-obrazovnog područja.

Ključne riječi: diferencirane škole, izvannastavne aktivnosti, Nacionalni kurikulum, školski kurikulum

INTRODUCTION

The school as an educational institution aims to develop and improve students' basic life competencies and prepare them for everyday life situations. Primary education, as one of the primary phenomena of wider socialization, occupies a significant place in the lives of all family members and directly affects them. As they are primarily responsible for their children's upbringing and education, parents are nowadays showing increasing dissatisfaction with the existing education system and are becoming aware of the possibility of choosing appropriate schooling for their child. When choosing the appropriate school for their child, parents increasingly recognize the school curriculum as an indicator of the efficacy of the school's educational activities. The aim of this paper is to analyze the offer of extracurricular activities for 1st - 8th-grade students by studying the school curriculum documentation of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021. Schools chosen for the study are gender-differentiated (single-sex) schools founded by parents. Extracurricular activities are a form of direct educational work with students, and their organization and implementation are planned through the school curriculum. The school curriculum is a document that, at the school level, prescribes all educational activities, organization of learning and teaching, working methods, and evaluation of the learning process for the current school year. The main feature of extracurricular activities relates to students' freedom of choice depending on the area of their interest. The theoretical part of the paper presents the terminological definition of the curriculum, the National Curriculum Framework, and the school curriculum, analyses previous recent research on single-sex (gender-differentiated) education and explains the importance of extracurricular activities in shaping student interests. The second part of the paper presents and analyses the offer of extracurricular activities planned in the school curriculum of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021.

TERMINOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF CURRICULUM

It is impossible to unambiguously define the term curriculum. If we consider the definition of the term curriculum throughout history, we notice significant changes, but also a multifaceted understanding of the term itself. The curriculum implies a course of constant changes that take into account lasting values, but on which interdisciplinary achievements are systematically upgraded. Author Petrović-Sočo (2009) notes that the curriculum does not place emphasis only on learning content, but on the holistic and flexible achievement of educational outcomes in which the emphasis is on the value of social relations, stimulating environment for acquiring teaching content, the time dimension of the educational process and pace and learning styles. There are three main types of curriculum in educational theory and practice: closed, open, and mixed. The closed curriculum corresponds to the traditional approach to upbringing and education, in which all teaching aids and teaching progress are determined, prescribed, and programmed in advance, and teachers must strictly adhere to it. This stifles the creativity, spontaneity, and personality of both teachers and students (Cindrić, Miljković, and Strugar, 2010). In contrast to the closed one, the open curriculum is flexible, i.e., it allows changes in the methodologies of development of the content and methods of work. The open curriculum values innovation and initiative of students and teachers, as well as spontaneity in the teaching process (Previšić, 2007). The mixed curriculum combines the two extremes, the rigidity of the closed curriculum and the emphasized freedom of the open curriculum (Cindrić, Miljković, Strugar, 2010). The mixed curriculum implies a core, a reference for educational content that the teachers will turn into different teaching materials in interaction with their students (Previšić, 2007). The Republic of Croatia is characterized by a centralized education and curriculum system and it is possible to note a more intensive introduction of a modern curriculum approach oriented towards learning outcomes and the development of student competencies needed for everyday functioning in modern society (Baranović, 2015). Accordingly, an insight into the theoretical definition of the national and school curriculum is necessary.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The National Framework Curriculum for Pre-School Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education (2011) is a developmental document that includes the values, principles, contents, and goals of educational areas, evaluation of student achievement, but also evaluation and self-evaluation of realization of the national curriculum (NCF, 2011). As such, it is a source document for planning school curriculum activities (Sučević, Sakač, and Bulačević, 2013). One of the most significant features of the National Framework Curriculum is its susceptibility to changes and systematic innovations, as well as the planned focus on student competencies and learning outcomes (Mlinarević and Zrilić, 2015). The content of the National Curriculum Framework emphasizes the holistic development of student competencies, which

is achieved through seven curriculum areas: language-communication, mathematical, natural sciences, technical and informatics, social and humanities, art, and physical and health area. The language-communication area implies the acquisition of knowledge and skills of language culture related to oral and written communication. Within the mathematical field, the student acquires mathematical competencies such as: estimating, calculating, and analyzing spatial relationships. The field of natural sciences refers to the acquisition of knowledge in Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geology, and Geography with the analysis of the animate and inanimate world. The technical and informatics area is based on content that enables students to properly use information and communication technology in everyday life situations. The social and humanities area is based on teaching political, cultural, economic, and religious issues that a man faces on a daily basis. The art field refers to the development of student skills needed to understand different types of art. The physical and health area is based on developing habits that promote a healthy lifestyle. Within each curriculum area, there are also the following cross-curricular topics: personal and social development, health, sustainable development, learning to learn, entrepreneurship, use of ICT, and civil education (NCF, 2011).

SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The contents of the educational areas of the National Curriculum Framework represent the starting point for the design of the school curriculum. Jurić (2007) points out that the school curriculum is a much broader concept than the syllabus and that it implies the overall activity of a school. It is a document that includes methods and ways to achieve pre-planned educational goals. Furthermore, he points out that the planned activities of the school curriculum should have the ultimate goal of developing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and achieving learning and teaching outcomes. The theoretical definition of the school curriculum can be understood narrowly or broadly. The narrower definition of the school curriculum refers to the school curriculum as a supplement to the compulsory national curriculum, while the broader definition of the school curriculum implies the process of planning, implementing, and monitoring students' learning processes and meeting students' needs and interests, but also the interests of the local community, the national curriculum, and human, financial and material resources of the school (Baranović, 2015). Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) point out that the school curriculum enriches the initial goals and contents of the national curriculum and makes the contents of learning and teaching more interesting for students. They also note that the school curriculum is based on the students' developmental and interest needs and as such can serve as a means to improve the academic performance of weaker students.

Authors Buljubašić Kuzmanović and Blažević (2015) emphasize that the school curriculum with its educational activities seeks to encourage individual, social and emotional development of students, nurture skills and adaptive abilities that contribute to establishing successful relationships with the environment in which students spend their time, namely family, school and

community. The school curriculum design primarily starts with the headteacher as a responsible person whose goal is to systematically improve the overall school atmosphere. Baranović (2015) notes that schools are best in recognizing the developmental needs of their students and as such, they have autonomy when developing the school curriculum. Puzić (2015) emphasizes the importance of cooperative action of all school employees, parents, and the local community when designing educational activities of the school curriculum. Topolovčan (2011) emphasizes that the school curriculum represents a synergy of actions of students, teachers, parents, school management, and the local community in order to create recognizability and identity of the school. Along with the headteacher, who coordinates the planning of the school curriculum.

RUŽIČNJAK PRIMARY SCHOOL, LOTRŠČAK PRIMARY SCHOOL - GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED (SINGLE-SEX) SCHOOLS IN CROATIA

Ružičnjak Primary School is the only primary school for girls in the Republic of Croatia. It started to achieve its goal and vision as a Catholic school at the beginning of the school year 2015/2016 in the city of Zagreb. The founder of the school is RINO - Parents' Institute for Upbringing and Education. RINO is a non-profit institution whose goal is to help parents in the most difficult job of the modern age - raising children. In the school year, 2016/2017 RINO founded another Catholic school - Lotrščak Primary School. Lotrščak Primary School is only for boys. Primary schools founded by RINO provide parents with a personalized education for their children, the realization of students' full intellectual and human potential, and growth in virtues. The analyzed schools are oriented towards a holistic approach to learning and their educational activities are focused on all dimensions of a person: intellectual, spiritual, mental, and physical. The educational model of RINO schools is based on gender-differentiated (single-sex) education in which the emphasis is on the equality of boys and girls in terms of rights, obligations, and dignity. With a personalized approach to each student and a differentiated education, a special feature of RINO schools is the partnership with parents. Taken from the website: Lotrščak Primary School, <http://os-lotrscak.hr/>, Ružičnjak Primary School, <http://os-ruzicnjak.hr/>.

The partnership between family and school improves the overall school atmosphere, but it also develops parenting skills. Such a relationship between family and school indicates the quality of the school and requires systematic training of all members of the educational process (Brajša – Žganec, Lopižić and Penezić, 2014). The school's website states that the school as an educational environment can in no way replace the family because it plays a primary role in the formation of basic life values. Taken from the website: Lotrščak Primary School, <http://os-lotrscak.hr/>, Ružičnjak Primary School, <http://os-ruzicnjak.hr/>.

One of the pioneering studies on the effects of gender-differentiated education on learning outcomes was conducted by Dale in 1969, 1971, and 1974 in the UK with students from 1st to 8th grade. The research indicated the poorer academic performance of girls in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics compared to boys. Recent research in England suggests somewhat different results. By analyzing the effect of gender-differentiated education in English schools, Spielhofer, Benton, and Schagen (2004) conclude that the academic success of boys attending single-sex schools does not differ from boys from mixed schools while girls from single-sex schools showed better academic success in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics than mixed school students. We can conclude that the effect of gender-differentiated education (learning outcomes) differs significantly between countries, depending on research methods, educational policy, and evaluation processes.

The main goals of all educational activities of these schools are aimed at the development of critical and divergent thinking and various skills and abilities. Taken from the website: Lotrščak Primary School, <http://os-lotrscak.hr/>, Ružičnjak Primary School, <http://os-ruzicnjak.hr/>.

School as an educational environment should develop students' desire for systematic improvement of skills and competencies, meet student interests, and this is the primary goal of various extracurricular activities, the importance of which will be presented below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Extracurricular activities refer to activities that students engage in outside of regular classes and are based on the principles of free choice. Authors Pejić Papak and Vidulin (2016) talk about extracurricular activities as strategically designed activities that make students want to learn, discover and build their own identity. Extracurricular activities can prevent unacceptable forms of behavior but can also encourage the development of self-actualization and experiential learning (Martinčević, 2010). The contents and goals of extracurricular activities provide affirmation of the student's personality, dignity, and enable teachers to upgrade and expand the educational impact (Previšić, 1987, as cited in Zrilić and Košta, 2009). Durlak and Weissberg's research (2007) on 73 extracurricular programs aimed at developing children's social skills found that children involved in extracurricular activities showed significantly better results in expressing and recognizing emotions, easier and faster adaptation to new situations, and better school success. The purpose of extracurricular activities, following students' interests, is to encourage them to improve their skills and abilities, acquire knowledge and realize their full potential. Today there are many classifications of extracurricular activities in different areas. The National Curriculum Framework (2011) classifies extracurricular programs into the following areas: language-communication, mathematical, natural sciences, technical and informatics, social and humanities, art, and physical and health area. As initiators of the extra-

curricular program, teachers are expected to systematically emphasize students' strengths to develop them during the implementation of extracurricular activities. The teacher has the role of a moderator, an advisor who directs students towards research learning, experimentation, and the achievement of educational outcomes (Svalina, Bistrović, and Peko, 2016). Children involved in extracurricular activities programs develop skills and competencies necessary for their life and independent lifelong learning (Šiljković, Rajić and Bertić, 2007).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to get to know the diversity of extracurricular activities in different educational areas of the curriculum by applying a qualitative research approach and studying school curriculum documentation of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021.

In line with the stated goal, the following research questions were asked:

1. According to the National Curriculum Framework (2011), which is the most represented educational area among planned extracurricular activities?
2. Does the offer of extracurricular activities cover all educational areas from the National Curriculum Framework (2011)?

The research was conducted in November 2020 by studying the school curriculum documentation of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The school curricula for the school year 2020/2021 have been downloaded from the websites of the Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School. Then came the analysis of key data needed to achieve the research goal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RUŽIČNJAK PRIMARY SCHOOL

The structure of the offer of extracurricular activities within the respective educational areas

The analysis of the school curriculum of Ružičnjak Primary School showed that there were sixteen different extracurricular activities (Table 1). Six extracurricular programs are intended for lower primary school students (1st - 4th grade), and those are Skillful hands, Creative Workshop, Little Creatives, Drama-recitation Group, Biblical Creativity, and Micro-bits in Education.

Nine different extracurricular activities are planned for higher primary school students (5th - 8th grade). Those are the following extracurricular activities: Christian Media Culture, Journalism Group, Music Creatives, Art Creative Workshop, Young Historians, Young Technicians, Web Designers, Housekeeping for Little Girls, and With Sports to Health. One extracurricular activity called Young Liturgists is intended for students in both lower and higher primary classes (4th - 8th grade). The most represented educational area regarding the number of extracurricular activities is the area of art. That area includes the following six extracurricular activities: Skillful Hands, Creative Workshop, Little Creatives, Christian Media Culture, Music Creatives, and Art Creative Workshop. It is followed by the social and humanities area with four extracurricular activities, namely: Biblical Creativity, Young Liturgists, Young Historians, and Housekeeping for Little Girls. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that three different extracurricular activities belong to the technical and informatics educational area. Those are Young Technicians, Web Designers, and Micro-bits in Education. Within the language area, there are two extracurricular programs: Drama-recitation Group and Journalism Group. Within the physical and health educational area, the students of Ružičnjak Primary School can choose only one extracurricular activity, and that is the extracurricular activity called With Sports to Health. Relying on the National Curriculum Framework (2011) which emphasizes the development of students' competencies through seven different educational areas, Table 1 shows that there is no single extracurricular activity within the mathematical and natural sciences education area.

Table 1 Names of extracurricular activities with the corresponding educational areas and the target group of students of Ružičnjak Primary School

Name of extracurricular activity	Name of educational area	Target group
Skillful Hands	art	1 st grade
Creative Workshop	art	2 nd grade
Little Creatives	art	3 rd grade
Drama-recitation Group	language-communication	4 th grade
Biblical Creativity	social and humanities	4 th grade
Young Liturgists	social and humanities	4 th – 8 th grade
Christian Media Culture	art	5 th – 8 th grade
Journalism Group	language-communication	5 th – 8 th grade
Music Creatives	art	5 th – 8 th grade
Art Creative Workshop	art	5 th – 8 th grade
Young Historians	social and humanities	5 th and 6 th grade
Young Technicians	technical and informatics	5 th and 6 th grade
Web Designers	technical and informatics	7 th grade
Micro-bits in education	technical and informatics	3 rd grade
Housekeeping for Little Girls	social and humanities	5 th – 8 th grade
With Sports to Health	physical and health	6 th grade

The findings of this research can lean on the Perla research (2020), which aimed to study the documentation of school curricula of primary schools in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County to get to know the diversity of extracurricular activities in different educational areas of the curriculum. The research covered 56 primary schools. It showed that extracurricular activities within the area of art were represented 100%, namely in all analyzed schools. It is clear that the designers of extracurricular activities of Ružičnjak Primary School recognized the importance of achieving educational outcomes within the art area, and considering the number of extracurricular activities, the art area is the most represented.

Furthermore, we can freely say that the offer of extracurricular activities of Ružičnjak Primary School is strategically designed to encourage students to have good quality and organized use of free time in the form of extracurricular activities. Namely, Šiljković, Rajić, and Bertić's research (2007) on a sample of 1411 students from 1st to 4th grade (694 male and 717 female students) showed that 45% of 1st and 3rd-grade girls most often take part in extracurricular activities such as puppet group, modelers... which is within the artistic field. Further analysis of the offer of extracurricular activities indicates a fact that deserves to be considered more closely. Namely, among extracurricular activities planned by the school curriculum, there is not a single activity within the area of the natural sciences, which does not support the holistic development of female students. The National Curriculum for Science (2017) points out that scientific literacy is a competency necessary for all members of society and that learning and teaching science enables the acquisition of knowledge needed to successfully continue schooling and start a professional career.

LOTRŠČAK PRIMARY SCHOOL

The structure of the offer of extracurricular activities within the respective educational areas

Table 2 shows that Lotrščak Primary School offered students ten extracurricular activities in the school curriculum. Five extracurricular programs are intended for lower primary school students (1st - 4th grade), namely: Tennis, Croatian Sign Language, Ecology Group, Table Tennis, and Art Group. Four extracurricular activities were offered to higher primary school students (5th - 8th grade). Those are History Group, Bible Group, Filme Auf Deutsch, and Young Computer Scientists. One extracurricular activity called Music Creatives is intended for both lower and higher primary school students (4th - 8th grade). The most represented educational area regarding the number of extracurricular activities is the area of art. That area includes the following three extracurricular activities: Music Creatives, Filme Auf Deutsch, and Art Group. Further analysis of extracurricular activities showed that there were two extracurricular activities within the physical and health area: Tennis and Table Tennis, as well as within the social and humanities area: History Group and Bible Group. Students of Lotrščak Primary School were offered one extracurricular activity called Croatian Sign Language within the language-com-

munication area. Also, there was one extracurricular activity called Ecology Group within the area of natural sciences, and one extracurricular activity called Young Computer Scientists within the technical and informatics area. The structure of the offer of extracurricular activities shows that there is no extracurricular activity within the mathematical educational area.

Table 2 Names of extracurricular activities with the corresponding educational areas and the target group of students of Lotrščak Primary School

Name of extracurricular activity	Name of educational area	Target group
Tennis	physical and health	1 st grade
Croatian Sign Language	language-communication	1 st grade
Ecology Group	natural sciences	1 st grade
Table tennis	physical and health	4 th grade
Music Creatives	art	4 th – 8 th grade
History Group	social and humanities	5 th – 8 th grade
Bible Group	social and humanities	5 th – 8 th grade
Filme auf Deutsch	art	5 th grade
Young Computer Scientists	technical and informatics	5 th – 8 th grade
Art Group	art	4 th grade

The results of the analysis of the Lotrščak Primary School curriculum are slightly concerning because there is no extracurricular activity within the mathematical area. This result can be identified with the Perla research (2020), which points to the finding that the mathematical area is the least represented in the offer of extracurricular activities with only 4%. Marendić (2009) points out that it is necessary to provide a stimulating environment and create a motivating learning context and various educational activities through which the child will get to know and discover the importance of mathematics and mathematical thinking in everyday life situations. What is important to notice and point out as a positive pedagogical step forward is the realization that the designers of extracurricular activities were attentive to (and perhaps even foresaw) the needs of students and so the second most represented extracurricular activities are within the physical and health (along with the social and humanities) area. This pedagogical step forward can be based on Šiljković, Rajić, and Bertić'a research (2007), which tells us that as many as 45% of boys out of the total number of respondents opt for extracurricular activities within the physical and health area.

CONCLUSION

The research achieved its goal and answered all research questions. The importance of extracurricular activities in shaping students' interests has been insufficiently researched, especially in differentiated schools in Croatia. The aim of this research was to study the school curriculum documentation of Ružičnjak Primary School and Lotrščak Primary School for the school year 2020/2021 and get to know the diversity of extracurricular activities in different educational areas of the curriculum. The results show that the most represented educational area in both schools regarding the number of extracurricular activities is the area of art. Ružičnjak Primary School thus offers six different extracurricular activities within the art area, while in the school curriculum of Lotrščak Primary School there are three such planned extracurricular activities. The results of the analysis of the school curriculum of Ružičnjak Primary School indicate that the art area is followed by a social and humanities educational area with four extracurricular activities, while Lotrščak Primary School has a noticeable physical and health area and social and humanities educational area with two extracurricular programs. Furthermore, the research shows that Ružičnjak Primary School offers three extracurricular activities within the technical educational area, while Lotrščak Primary School has one extracurricular activity within the language-communication, natural sciences and technology, and informatics educational area. The analysis of the offer of extracurricular activities of Ružičnjak Primary School indicates that what follows is the language-communication educational area with two extracurricular programs and one extracurricular activity within the physical and health area. We can conclude that Ružičnjak Primary School does not offer extracurricular activities within mathematical and natural sciences areas while Lotrščak Primary School does not plan any extracurricular activities within the mathematical educational curriculum. This research is one of the few that analyzes gender-differentiated education in the Republic of Croatia from a theoretical point of view and can certainly serve as a kind of basis for further research into the educational activities of differentiated schools. The presented research results will contribute, in scientific terms, to a better understanding of the importance of children's quality leisure time. It is extremely important to observe students' preferences and areas of interest in order to realize their full potential by creating appropriate extracurricular activities, but also to bring the school environment closer to the student, parents, and the entire local community.

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