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About the Educational Plan in State Primary Schools – What the Empirical Data Show

Abstract: The paper addresses questions concerning the educational plan in Slovenian state primary schools on theoretical and empirical levels. The first part reflects on theoretical questions of the educational plan and discusses the bases from which the empirical research was derived. We then present our findings on questions of whether an educational plan is necessary in schools at all, what teachers and school principals understand as being included in the educational plan of their school, and what school principals believe should be included in such a plan. The empirical data of the research demonstrate that with regard to both the question of what should be included in the educational plan and what is in fact included in the plan, most schools take fewer factors into consideration than are, in our judgement, necessary for the quality design of an educational plan. Research shows that schools need professional support in the conception of the school plan and that until now the profession has not done enough in this area. In the future, more attention should be devoted to questions of the planned consideration of the scope of the educational activity of schools, the inclusion of formal, prescribed frames of reference in the moral educational activity of a state school, and to the design of the educational plan in relation to the dimension of values.

Keywords: educational plan of the school; state school; states that are essentially by-products; results of empirical research; knowledge, knowing, skills, competencies, values; self-evaluation of the work of the school

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1 Introduction

In the paper, we proceed from the premise that a school as a whole (as an institution) must form an educational plan which it then follows in the realisation of educational goals. In spite of the fact that in Slovenia there are formal value frameworks and various normative frameworks (regulations) which determine the functioning of the state school, in no longer defining and no longer defining the 'educational doctrine' at the state level, the state allows pedagogical workers in state schools to design the complete educational plan according to their professional judgement. To the extent that the educational functioning of the state school is not completely regulated, there are demands on the school for an increased reflection on the establishment of its educational operations. In the last decade, questions concerning the design of the educational plan have arisen many times. Until now, however, we have not had empirical data concerning how these questions are viewed by those who actually participate in these processes: teachers, school leaderships, pupils and parents. In research¹ undertaken on a representative sample of compulsory schools (i.e., nine-year comprehensive primary and lower-secondary schools, hereinafter referred to as 'primary schools'), the findings of which are only presented here in part, we have gathered certain information that enables a reflection on these problematic issues.

¹ The research is entitled 'The Social Climate in School – the Educational Concept, the Prevention of Undesired Phenomena (Violence, Drugs) and the Evaluation of Preventative Programmes' (2004-2006), and was financed jointly by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovenian Research Agency.

2 The Educational Plan: An Imperative of Every School

2.1 *Instruction and its Goals*

As a starting point for a discussion of the educational plan of the state school, we take Strmčnik's definition of instruction as '... a synthetic concept which includes and designates three fundamental activities of equal value: teaching, learning and moral education, connected to the functioning of s/he who teaches and s/he who learns...' (Strmčnik 1999, p. 213). Strmčnik also establishes the main tasks through which instruction realises the educational goals as a whole. These tasks cover: 'the physical health area, the intellectual area, the social-moral area, the aesthetic-artistic area' (ibid, p. 214). The goals of the primary school, which include the tasks listed above, are defined in the Slovenian Primary School Act as: '...stimulating the harmonised cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development of the individual,' 'developing talents and equipping the individual for the experience of artistic works and for artistic expression,' 'forming and stimulating a healthy lifestyle and a responsible attitude towards the natural environment' and so on (Slovenian Primary School Act 1996, p. 109). Further, Strmčnik states that so-called formative education '... is only realisable if instruction and learning are focused on the more demanding deeper cognitive and value dimensions of the learning contents, on the fundamental structure of subjects, phenomena and processes, on basic cause-effect, intentional, functional and other logical relationships and oppositions, on techniques of generalisation, on dialectic development, problem relatedness, transferability, comparability, applicability and usability of knowledge' (Strmčnik 1999, p. 217).

In principle, we thus adopt the premise of so-called moral education instruction and the interpretation that instruction must be designed so that it influences the pupil's character (cf. Jarovnik, Šebart 1991, p. 143; Kovač Šebart 2002, pp. 51-56). As Herbart wrote, with instruction '... a great deal is necessary for even the gradual upgrading of knowledge to learning; even more difficult is to successfully strengthen the character traits of the individual on this basis... In this regard, we can, however, demonstrate how the instruction should be designed in order to maximise the possibility of achieving this kind of effect; but the degree to which we will actually come close to realising this goal is dependent on the individual' (Herbart 1991, p. 572).

Reflecting on this, we also include the thesis about moral education as 'states that are essentially by-products.' States that are essentially by-products are '... states that we necessarily fail to grasp when we posit them as the direct goal of our activity; we can only realise them as unintentional by-products of striving for some other goals' (Salecl 1991, p. 133; cf. Elster 1983). For example, it is desirable for the pupils to respect their teacher as the quality of the teacher's work depends on whether they are respected or not. But the teacher cannot gain the respect of the pupils directly, by saying to them 'respect me' or by calling on them to show respect for their own good etc. Even if the pupil says to him/herself 'yes, it is true, I have to respect the teacher in order to be successful at

school,' they will not experience the desired effects of respect. If, however, the teacher explains a subject in such a way that the pupils are surprised by the new knowledge or by the way it has been presented so that it arouses curiosity in them and a desire to know more about the subject, the teacher does something that awakens respect in them as a teacher (that effect thus produces knowledge, a skill in the way the teacher passes on the material etc.). Similarly, the teacher can earn respect if the pupils judge that their conduct is just. That is, not by simply stating that they are just or saying that they will strive to be just, but rather by behaving in a just fashion in the pupils' eyes.

However, the thesis that states that are essentially by-products cannot be achieved directly, in that we set them as direct goals of behaviour, does not (formally) mean that it is impossible to establish shared values which the teachers follow in their educational work or that it is impossible to plan education and educational goals etc.

Since the problematic issues defined in this way, as advocated by the so-called educational concept of school, were often linked to an absence of moral education or an assertion that what is at stake here is a concept of a school without moral education and values, we would like to emphasise that what is written above in no way means that moral education in school is impossible to conceive of and plan. The problem is not unambiguous: what cannot be overlooked, and what Elster's thesis about states that are essentially by-products points out, is above all the fact that in certain areas it is simply impossible to presuppose universal causal connections. However, this *does not mean* – if we focus on the area of the educational activity of the school – the rejection of reflections on conduct and the foreseen effects at the level of planning principled, systematic solutions, establishing and implementing a desirable selection of values, establishing formal frameworks for activity designed to produce the desired effects etc. It does, however, mean that it is necessary to *take into account* the thesis of moral education as an essential by-product in endeavours at the level of designing and implementing the educational plan of the school. An understanding of moral education as an essential by-product in this sense does not lead away from educational endeavours; quite the opposite, it simply establishes a basis for the planning of productive educational activity that will rely on misguided suppositions about the direct cause-effect connections between particular conduct and the effects which are supposed to be produced by this conduct. The problem is not, of course, that such conduct would not have educational effects but rather that it no doubt *does have* educational effects – only often those that we did not foresee.

We follow the interpretation that clearly states that the position the teacher (at school) should strive for '... must be manifested as a map or, wherever possible, a plan of a well-ordered city' (Herbart 1919, Part 2, pp. 19-20; summarised after: Protner 2001, pp. 38-39).

2.2 *Do Schools Have the Appropriate Professional Support for Designing the Educational Plan?*

Following the logic outlined above we can point out that even in the second half of the 1990s, when the curriculum for the nine-year primary school came into being, Kroflič wrote that '... the answer to the question as to whether school is possible without an educational concept... is unambiguous: if the concept of the school is not clearly and precisely planned this does not mean that the school as an institution does not follow its own imminent goals which take the place of the conceptual vacuum' (Kroflič 1997, pp. 278-279). The author also noted the fact that the model of school legislation that builds on goal- and process-oriented instruction plans is also a logical consequence of a particular critical period when the concept of the formal educational framework changes due to democratic social changes. It starts being based on shared values that do not exclude anyone because of their beliefs, with a clear aim of demonstrating the pluralism of values in society and establishing a tolerant attitude to that pluralism. The syllabus and instructional plans are determined and these define the general and operative goals and standards of knowledge, as well as the examples of contents through which teachers can attain these instructional goals and standards of knowledge. For today's use, however, what is important is that in the guidelines for preparing instructional plans it was also clearly stated that within these plans general educational goals are defined which concern every component of the individual's development and that the instructional plans are, in fact, composed in this way. Undoubtedly, the formative and moral educational function of the school is already established here.

It is true that in the case of the overall planning, realisation and evaluation of educational goals, the teacher's endeavours have less concrete support than with operative educational goals at the level of attainment (processes and results) which are the basis for assessing the goals attained at a particular level of knowledge (cf. Instructions for the Work of Subject and Programme Curricula Commissions, 10. 12. 1996). Textbooks and workbooks, along with accompanying materials for teachers, also play a large part in easing the planning of the attainment of these goals for teachers on the frontline.

Similarly, the question of whether schools and teachers have appropriate and sufficiently concrete support when it comes to designing the educational plan and attaining educational goals can also be placed in relation to the value context in which the state school functions in a democratic, value-plural arrangement which, nonetheless, has clearly defined shared values (for more on this, see Kovač Šebart 2002; The White Paper... 1995). Schools must locate the question of education and the educational plan in a value context that is itself not simple because built into it is an internal tension between shared values and the question of tolerance to particular values and beliefs. The fact is that each school also functions in a particular concrete environment which, with its specificities, influences the problems that the educational plan must solve. Are schools sufficiently independent when it comes to the question of how

to responsibly, and in an agreed way, include the dimension of values in the educational plan?

Here we must point out that in the empirical research of the educational plan in Slovenian state schools we have assumed that teachers and schools have (and must have) professional autonomy to be able to plan and execute the educational process in a quality way and to realise the educational goals as a whole, and that the selection of the path for their realisation is the domain of the teachers. The question we address is whether the schools and teachers have suitable professional support and whether they are professionally prepared well enough for the changes brought about by instructional plans adjusted to instructional goals.

2.3 *The Educational Plan and Need for Self-Evaluation: The Complexity of Goals, the Unavailability of Extra-School Factors*

In this regard, we believe that it is impossible to reflect upon, and plan in a quality way, the complete attainment of educational goals if the school as an institution and teachers do not establish and assure the quality of their educational activity (cf. MacBeath 1999). Such self-evaluation must represent an integral part of the establishment of the educational plan. MacBeath, an acknowledged expert on the self-evaluation of the work of schools, draws attention to the fact that the traditional 'input-output black-box approach,' as he calls it, is unsuitable for this kind of work (cf. MacBeath 2003). If we want to measure the influence that work at school has on assuring the established educational goals in their entirety (for the purposes of the analysis we connect these in the broadest sense to the pupil's knowledge, skills and values), where the influence of instructional materials, the lesson, the classroom and school climate, extra-school factors etc., are all interwoven in the realisation of these goals, it is impossible to simply measure the input and output results and calculate the added value contributed by a school. The author, therefore, suggests that in this case it is better to direct the attention and evaluation to the *process* and to the level of *doing* and thus evaluate how the school functions. He proposes that in the planning, realisation and evaluation of the educational goals that must be attained by the school it is necessary to always bear in mind several interconnected levels, namely knowing, feeling and doing. Further, these cannot be understood as discrete entities following one another and hierarchically increasing in significance.

We thus present below a scheme (summarised and adapted after MacBeath) according to which the school should plan, implement and attain goals on three levels: 1. knowing, 2. feeling 3. doing. Let us briefly examine the scheme. *Knowing*, for instance, in this matrix implies a complex notion of knowledge which includes the horizontal, the vertical and the connection of elements on both axes, and a similar logic holds for the other two dimensions, *feeling* and *doing*. Knowing thus extends from a familiarisation with facts to understanding; skills and competencies also demand knowledge, and in this regard MacBeath

draws our attention to *knowing* about how competencies are valued; familiarity with values (knowledge about values) also includes evaluation, which means knowing about which values are important, how, to whom etc. We understand the dimension of *feeling* as a caveat that the school and the teacher must try to ensure that the pupil identifies with the acquired knowledge and skills, and that values are internalised. The dimension of *doing* is where knowledge, skills and values achieve realisation and are thus acquired, and where the results are most reliably demonstrated (for instance, through the self-evaluation of the school).

	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Competencies</i>	<i>Values</i>
<i>Knowing</i>	<i>Acquiring</i> knowledge which is processed in ways that lead to understanding	<i>Knowing</i> what skills and competencies are valued in different contexts and by different people (e.g., by employers)	<i>Recognising</i> which values are important and which are less important for the welfare of self and others
<i>Feeling</i>	<i>Feeling</i> that knowledge acquired is important to you	Having <i>confidence</i> in your own skills and a belief that they can be put to use	<i>Internalising</i> values and making them your own
<i>Doing</i>	<i>Using</i> knowledge to act, to initiate, to make decisions	<i>Practising</i> and testing competencies in real-life situations	<i>Acting on</i> and <i>staying faithful</i> to values, even in challenging social situations

Scheme 1: Attaining goals at three levels: 1. knowing, 2. feeling and 3. doing. John MacBeath (2003)

According to the logic of the vertical, we now examine the acquisition of values. The pupil must understand values, and the scheme points out that the acquisition of values (also) at the level of doing is not value-neutral, as the pupil all but recognises '...which values are important and which are less important for the welfare of self and others' (see the scheme). Further, the school develops the sense of values in such a way that the pupils 'internalise' the known and value-differentiated values 'making them their own' (ibid.). And what is perhaps the most important for the planning, realisation and self-evaluation of the complete attainment of educational goals: the school must educate the pupils in the area of values through doing. The values must be actualised while, at the same time, it is through the very conduct of the pupils that it is possible to determine which of the values have been internalised, taken as their own. The level of doing suggests that the purpose of internalisation lies in the pupils actualising the values so that they '...stay faithful to values, even in challenging social situations' (ibid.).

In addition, it is necessary to take into account forces which lie beyond the classroom and beyond the school – something that is not explicitly visible in the

scheme presented here. To this end, it would be necessary to prepare two linked schemes, one of which would illustrate the goals of the school and the messages that the school conveys to the pupil, while the other would present the context beyond school (family, society, culture...), where the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values also takes place, albeit less intentionally (coincidentally, informally), interpreting, complementing, supporting or thwarting that which the pupil obtains at the state school.

The division into the knowing, feeling and doing of the individual, as shown in the scheme, draws our attention to the fact that in planning the overall realisation of the educational goals it is important to reflect on the gap that can emerge between what we say and what we do. Here we cannot bypass the placement of problematic issues in a concrete social reality. If the reality functions differently than it should according to a particular principle, goal or value, this needs to be reflected and not avoided. The view into the 'duality' of the scheme also prevents the 'ephemerality' of interpretations which totalitarian demands can direct to the school (with the demand that the school 'totally' subjugate those difficulties whose causes lie beyond the school), while at the same time pointing out that in persisting with certain values and behaviours the institution can actually produce a subversive reaction to these demands (albeit indirectly) and open the space for the establishment of the autonomous behaviour of the individual.

Following on from the above, and in an attempt at professional assistance in seeking a solution for the planning, realisation and self-evaluation of the overall realisation of educational goals, we will now deal with a framework for establishing those areas which should (conditionally speaking) be included by the educational plan of the school. We speak of a framework because schools must complete it with their own contents and because we believe that a unified educational doctrine at the state level would limit the professional autonomy of the school and teachers and lead to a situation from which we would wish to withdraw professionally. In saying this, however, we do not concur with the notion that schools do not need assistance in considering the question of what should be included in their educational plan in order to enable the overall realisation of educational goals.

2.4 *What Should the Educational Plan Include?*

We should not forget that the foundations on which the educational plan is designed are first of all of a formal nature.

What, in brief, does the *formal (prescribed) framework* of the educational operation of public schools, whose status is also defined by the fact that it is determined outside school, consist of? At the time of undertaking the empirical research mentioned above, there was a clearly determined formal framework for the direct educational conduct of pedagogical workers and the educational operation of the school, e.g., *shared values*, written in the Constitution and in school legislation (amongst other principles, those of equal opportunity, of the

absence of indoctrination in instruction, of justice, of values such as tolerance and solidarity etc.). *General goals of instruction* were written for each subject, which should assure overall personal development and thus the formative component of the instruction. The formal framework also prescribed in the regulations defining the *rights and responsibilities of pupils* in primary school and the *common process standards* in the formal process of pronouncing educational measures. Amongst other things, these enabled the *autonomous* formation of *rules of inhabitation* in the institution (house rules) and the formation of a mode of organisation of pupils that enables their *active participation* in solving common problems (class and school committees, school parliament).

In connection with this, we assume that the design of the educational plan of the school, similar to the plan of the teacher's individual instructional preparation, is divided between the directive provisions at the state level and the autonomous jurisdiction of the school and the teacher. The educational activity of teachers in the classroom is thus divided between formal (i.e., normatively prescribed) and informal pedagogical conduct. We have also assumed that the design of the educational plan (of the school and the teacher) is professionally demanding and that in some respects it is even more complicated than the individual instructional preparation, where the emphasis is on how to convey certain material to the pupils (although, of course, the two are not completely separate), and that 'it demands a familiarity with the logic of the functioning of key educational factors in the institution, as well as engagement with some crucial current problems which intrude into everyday school life (violence, truancy)' (Krofič 2002, p. 71).

Consistent with the above, as a starting point for the design of the educational plan of the school we have broadly defined its framework which, in our judgement, should include the following areas:

1. Formal rules and norms, as determined by:
 - a. shared values
 - b. principles of education
 - c. legally prescribed demands for the absence of indoctrination in the classroom, demands for criticalness, plurality and objectivity
 - d. in the code of the prescribed rights and responsibilities, rules, infringements and sanctions which concern the state school
 - e. the consequent school rules.
2. The conceptualisation of the teacher as an authority on which the following come to bear:
 - a. the power of the personality (which is not independent of knowledge, just conduct, attitude to pupils)
 - b. the instruction materials that the teacher must master
 - c. applied forms of instruction and methods of work in the classroom.²

² 'If the models of learning and the methods of instruction and teaching, as well as the methodology, are directed towards finding techniques to enable the next foothold in the wall of the subject, then these are the rights ones; if they are simply the empty favouritism of the approach for the approach's sake, then they have nothing to add and do not benefit anyone' (Gaber 2000, p. 136).

3. The school culture which indirectly establishes relationships in the classroom which influence, for example:

- a. the actualisation of the formal framework of norms and rules in the school
- b. the manner of leadership of the school
- c. happenings during breaks, lunch... at times when lessons are not in progress but the pupils are still at school etc.
- d. the range of extracurricular activities offered.

The school is, of course, not isolated. Parents and society in general also have an influence on the weight of pedagogical conduct in school.

4. Co-operation between the school and parents
5. Co-operation with the wider community
6. The hidden curriculum (the difference between the official and actual social order).

It is necessary to bear in mind that in every school we come across pupils who demand special consideration on the education level. Here are included all of the problematic issues surrounding children with special needs. In planning the educational plan, it is very important that we do not overlook such pupils. Therefore, the planning of a specific educational strategy should be viewed as an integral part of the educational plan. These pupils concern the school as a whole and are not just in the domain of the classroom, the school principal and the school counsellors. Therefore, it is impossible to overlook one more area of the plan, which we call:

7. Specific educational strategies.

Due to a lack of space, we have only presented a framework that could serve schools as a guideline for the planning, realisation and self-evaluation of the educational activities in school as a more detailed division of each of these dimensions is impossible here.

We must also emphasise that each of the areas presented requires a fundamental analysis at the school level, as well as the collective agreement of the teachers: regarding the understanding of each area, the consistent respecting of agreements as well as the conduct consequent to this. Such collective agreements on the level of the school, which include all of the teachers, can in no way be forced – neither on the part of the school leadership nor on the part of individual groups of teachers. They must be the result of fundamental and open consideration and should contain that which is able to be achieved by professional consensus. Where a large majority of teachers achieve a professional agreement regarding certain educational conduct but a particular teacher (or teachers) does not agree with the content of the agreement from a professional point of view and would like to retain their own method of pedagogical work (which they can justify professionally), they have the right to do so. Each individual teacher has professional autonomy and this must be safeguarded when the school attempts to achieve a collective agreement on educational conduct. The teacher also retains professional autonomy in the case that the school already has a particular collective agreement on educational conduct.

One of the reasons why the principle of professional autonomy is necessary is that the teacher can function efficiently educationally only in relation to that conduct which they believe is professionally appropriate. In every case, the benefit gained from suitably led professional discussion and the seeking of solutions and collective agreements which define frameworks for educational conduct that is, in the judgement of the majority, professionally sound, also lies in enabling each teacher to more deeply and reflectively think about their own educational conduct.

3 Description of the Empirical Research

Below we present and, on the basis of what has been said so far, analyse data which primarily address the following questions, as stated in the research: whether an educational plan is necessary in schools at all, what teachers and school principals understand as being included in the educational plan of their school, and what school principals believe should be included in such a plan.

3.1 The Basic Research Method and the Approach to Collecting Data

The empirical data is designed on the descriptive and causal/non-experimental method of pedagogical research.

The collection of data took place in May 2006 using the questionnaire 'the educational concept' which was sent to 92 schools. The schools were selected according to the round in which they had entered nine-year schooling, as well as on regional criteria and size. In each school, the research captured no more than four departments (teacher, pupils and parents), with two departments from the 7th grade and two from the 8th grade. The questionnaire was also completed by grade teachers of the 9th grade and the school principal.

Given that in the present article we will only present some of the results collected with the educational concept questionnaire – that is, the answers to the questions given to the teachers and principals – in the continuation we will only present in detail the abovementioned questionnaire and describe the sample of surveyed teachers and principals.

3.2 Description of the Questionnaire on the Educational Plan

The questionnaire for the principals and teachers (as well as that for the parents and pupils, who are not treated in this paper) about the educational concept is made up of two assessment scales (about factors which have an impact on the authority of the teacher and which teachers can directly influence, and assessment scales about the school climate), of scales of viewpoints of the Likert type (concerning which kinds of teacher the pupils tend to respect), and from a set of questions that address the educational plan, or the educational concept, of the school (what is included, or should be included in the educational plan of the school; who participated in

the design of the educational plan; to what extent parents, pupils and teacher are informed about the educational plan of the school; opinions about the Regulations on the Rights and Responsibilities of Students; opinions about the educational measures that are foreseen in the Regulations on the Rights and Responsibilities of Students for specific infringements). The questionnaires for the principals and the teachers differ on certain points, as well as differentiating and including certain other assessment scales or sets of questions.

3.3 Description of Samples for the 'Educational Concept' Questionnaire

The questionnaire about the educational plan was completed by 59 principals, of whom 63% were women and 37% were men. Their average age was 49.58 years (standard deviation of 7.42 years). The average period of work experience of the principals was 26.26 years (standard deviation of 7.6 years), the average length of service as a principal was 10.85 years (standard deviation of 7.43 years). More than half the principals surveyed had a university education (52.5%), and more than a quarter of them (27.1%) had completed high school education. 15.3% of the surveyed principals had completed a specialisation, master's degree or doctorate. Two principals (3.4%) had completed a professional high school and one principal (1.7%) had a secondary school education.

The questionnaire about the educational plan was completed by 175 teachers, of whom 81.7% were women and 18.3% were men. About a third of the surveyed teachers (31.7%) were, in the 2005/06 school year, grade teachers of the 7th grade, almost the same proportion of teachers (31.1%) were grade teachers of the 8th grade and more than a third of the surveyed teachers were grade teachers of the 9th grade of a primary school. The average age of the teachers surveyed was 42.45 years (standard deviation of 7.66 years) and, on average, they had 18.75 years of work experience (standard deviation of 8.73 years). Less than half of the surveyed teachers had completed high school (46.7%), and a slightly lower proportion of the teachers had a university education (41.9%). The questionnaire was returned by four respondents (2.4%) who had completed secondary school and 12 respondents (7.2%) who had completed a professional high school. Three of the surveyed teachers (1.8%) had completed a specialisation, master's degree or doctorate.

3.4 Approach to Treating the Data

The data were statistically treated in line with the purpose and predictions of the research with the aid of the SPSS statistical software package for Windows on a personal computer. The data from the questionnaires were treated at the level of descriptive and inferential statistics. Here we used the frequency distribution (f , f %) of the attributive variables, the basic descriptive statistic of numerical variables (measures of the mean, measures of the distribution), the χ^2 -test of hypothesis independence, Kullback's $2\hat{I}$ test (where the condition about the theoretical frequencies for the chi-square test was not fulfilled).

4 The Educational Plan of the School: Opinions of Teachers and Principals

4.1 *In the Opinion of Teachers and Principals, Does Each School Need Its Own Educational Plan?*

The data show that schools recognise the need to design the educational plan: 81.1% of teachers and 88.1% of principals believe that each school should have to design its own educational plan, which should then be followed by all of the pedagogical workers in the course of their work. Only 5.7% of teachers believe that this is unnecessary, while no principals at all hold this opinion. Approximately one-tenth of the teachers (9.7%) and principals (11.9%) believe that the need to design an educational plan, which should then be followed by all of the pedagogical workers, depends on the individual school.³ The large majority of teachers and principals believe that the state should draft guidelines on whose basis each school would be able to design its own educational plan: 74.1% of the teachers concur with this idea, and 71% of the principals.⁴

It is also evident from the responses that 68.6% of the teachers and 70.7% of the principals believe that their school already has an educational plan which the pedagogical workers normally follow in their educational work. 29.3% of principals and 23.1% of the teachers answered that they do not have such a plan, while 8.3% of the teachers stated that they did not know whether or not their school had a designed educational plan.

In schools, teachers and principals obviously realise that (their) school as a whole needs an educational plan and that they need professional assistance in the design of such a plan. Is it possible to interpret the high percentage of responses stating that the state should establish guidelines for the design of the educational plan as a consequence of the fact that schools desire formal protection through guidelines which would once again establish a framework for a unified educational doctrine in Slovenia? Or are the majority of the responses a consequence of the fact that schools perceiving a professional deficiency in this area want to compensate for this with professional guidelines on the state level?! Perhaps it is possible to also put forward the thesis that the second leads to the first. If the premise that teachers have too little professional support in this area is true, this could be the basis for 'professional uncertainty' and one of the ways of eliminating this uncertainty lies in the expectation of a ready-made unified doctrine at the state level. The question, however, refers to guidelines 'on the basis of which each school could design its own educational plan,' therefore a positive response to the premise offered does not mean that the expression of a need for guidelines also implies an agreement that such guidelines be set up so as to withdraw professional autonomy in the design

³ In the responses of the teachers statistically significant differences appeared ($2\hat{I} = 9.746$, $g = 3$, $p = 0.021$).

⁴ The differences between the responses of the teachers and the principals are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.799$, $g = 2$, $p = 0.671$).

of the educational plan from schools. In principle, such guidelines could be either a professional report which schools elect to observe or not, or they could be binding on the schools. The latter would, of course, further limit the professional autonomy of schools. The current formal rules, which are in the domain of the state and represent a legal framework within which the school can design its own educational plan, would be supplemented by additional binding educational guidelines.⁵

In any case, it should not be forgotten that the educational plan is something which belongs within the realm of the professional autonomy of the school and teachers and that it is necessary to give serious thought to the question of where a return to formal and state determination of the education doctrine leads. It seems that educational uniformity is not a concept that schools relate to. As the research findings (which will not be presented here) show, schools are already quite critical of the formally established rules, which represent an obstacle to what is permitted in educational endeavours. Based on these responses, it can be suggested with some degree of certainty that schools would receive a declarative intervention and prescription of educational doctrine with even more criticism, even though it sometimes seems that they are crying out just for this. Kroflič draws attention to this fact when in the colloquy 'Principals and School Autonomy' he suggested that in schools the Regulations on Rights and Responsibilities promise a kind of replacement for the state educational concept of the public school (cf. Kroflič 2002, p. 72). On a certain level, this is understandable: the tradition of work in schools was familiar with such official educational concepts (another story is the fact that the same questions that are appearing today arose around these concepts in history, although it may not seem to us that this is the case).

4.2 What Is Included in the Educational Plan of the Individual School and What Should Be Included?

With the question 'What is included in the educational plan of the individual school and what should be included?' we tried to gain insights into the opinions of teachers and principals regarding what, in their professional judgement, should be included in the educational plan and what is actually included. The question offers twelve items (presented in the table below) as well as the option of answering 'other' as we accept that with the previously described framework for the extent of the educational plan and the items included in the questionnaire on this basis something important could have been overlooked. The teachers only responded to the question of what the educational plan of their school actually includes, while the principals also first answered what, in their opinion, the educational plan in school should include. In both series of items, the respondents could circle multiple answers.

⁵ In the research, we did not ask about which institution would be the most appropriate for assistance in designing the concrete educational plan of the school. The answer to such a question would also indicate whether in the foreground is the desire of the school to have unified professional guidelines which would be prescribed by the state and would establish a unified educational doctrine, or whether it is just a case of legitimate warnings that the profession has perhaps reneged, and that schools should not be left alone in engaging with these demanding problematic issues.

	<i>Principals</i>				<i>Teachers</i>	
	what should be included?	R	what is included?	R	what is included?	R
the framework of rights and responsibilities, as well as educational measures which are prescribed by the Regulations	50.9 %	6	84.2 %	2	76.9 %	2
the school rules that are formulated at the school	68.4 %	3	94.7 %	1	99.1 %	1
the joint agreement of the teachers' board about educational operations	78.9 %	1	78.9 %	3	66.7 %	3
the agreement of the teachers board about the consistent pronouncement of educational measures	35.1 %	10	39.5 %	5.5	47.9 %	4,5
the agreement of the department teacher board about unified educational operations in an individual department	21.1 %	12	21.1 %	10.5	14.5 %	10
the agreement between the teachers and pupils about permissible behaviour in each department	40.4 %	8	31.6 %	8	24.8 %	9
areas which are particularly developed in the school and which give it its identity	22.8 %	11	21.1 %	10.5	12.8 %	11
specific educational strategies for special groups of students	38.6 %	9	28.9 %	9	27.4 %	7
the agreement about the unified educational operations between teachers and parents	47.4 %	7	18.4 %	12	9.4 %	12
the agreement about shared values that apply to all students and teachers	64.9 %	4	34.2 %	7	26.5 %	8
an emphasis on tolerance and democratic relations in school	75.4 %	2	52.6 %	4	47.9 %	4.5
agreement about measures which prevent violence, and the consistent response of teachers to violent forms of behaviour	52.6 %	5	39.5 %	5.5	41.0 %	6

Table 1: Responses of principals to the question of what should be included in the educational plan of the school and is included in the educational plan of their own school, as well as the responses of teachers to the question of what the educational plan of their school includes.

4.2.1 The Regulations Are an Important Part of the Educational Plan

More than three-quarters of the teachers (76.9%) and even more principals (84.2%) answered that the educational plan of their school includes *the framework for rights and responsibilities, as well as educational measures prescribed by the Regulations on the Rights and Responsibilities of Students*.

Given that the Regulations determine that the school creates school rules and that the establishment of school rules is an important factor in schools, it is not surprising that almost all of the teachers (99.1%) and 94.7% of the principals responded that *school rules* are part of the educational plan of their school.

Two-thirds of the teachers (66.7%) and almost four-fifths of the principals (78.9%) responded that the educational plan of their schools contains *the joint agreement of the teacher board about educational operations*. This proportion shows that in the majority of schools – according to two-thirds of the teachers and four-fifths of the principals – collective agreements about educational operation are part of the school educational plan.

However, these three items are the only ones of the stated items that at least two-thirds of the teachers and principals stated as already being included in their school's educational plan. What is more, over 50% of positive responses, and these only amongst principals, came from the item: *the educational plan of the school includes an emphasis on tolerance and democratic relations in school* (52.6% of principals and 47.9% of teachers).

In answer to the question of what *should be* included in the educational plan of the school, the principals ranked in the first three places: *the common agreement of the teachers' board about educational operations* (78.9%); *an emphasis on tolerance and democratic relations* (75.4%); and *school rules* (68.4%). Also above 50% are: *agreement about shared values which apply to pupils and teachers* (64.9%); *agreement about measures which prevent violence, and the consistent reaction of teachers to violent forms of behaviour* (52.6%); and *the framework of rights and responsibilities, as well as educational measures which are included in the Regulations on the Rights and Responsibilities of Pupils* (50.9%).

Due to the length of the questionnaires, we did not ask the teachers questions about what in their opinion should be included in the educational plan of the school, which in the interpretation of the data emerged as something of a weakness. The responses of the teachers could have shown either that the teachers agree with the principals about what should be included in the educational plan of the school, or that the teachers place more importance on some items that nonetheless are not included in the educational plan of the school – or perhaps not realised because the teachers regard them as less important than the principals.

4.2.2 Should There Be Agreements about Education in The School As A Whole And in Individual Departments?

85.5% of the teachers and 78.9% of the principals answered that the educational plan of their school does not include an *agreement of the department board about unified educational operations*. Perhaps the key to interpretation lies in a question which would be more correctly formulated: if in the place of 'unified' educational operations it was written 'common' educational operations or agreement about the educational operations of the teachers in the department. Nonetheless, 75.2% of the teachers and 68.4% of the principals answered that the educational plan of their school does not include *the agreement between teachers and pupils about acceptable behaviour in each department* and almost three-fifths of the principals (59.6%) believe that it is not necessary for the educational plan to include this, which highlights the fact that the proportion of answers to the previous item is most likely not just a consequence of how the item was formulated.

If we proceed from the premise that the common agreement on the educational operations of a school is a prerequisite for successful education, and that consistent educational behaviour and measures – including consistency in the pronouncement of sanctions for potential infringements – is the foundation of justice which also has an impact on the authority of the teachers and the institution, then the answers⁶ perhaps indicate that either there has been a lack of professional reflection on these problematic issues – which would point to the fact that this is also a path to designing an educational plan in school – or that individual teachers are simply left up to their own devices (whether in the name of professional autonomy or because such agreement is professionally demanding and tiring, and in no way 'takes hold' if it is simply commanded, or the majority of professional workers do not agree with it and therefore do not adopt it as their own way of working).

4.2.3 The Lack of Consensus in Certain Important Parts of The Educational Plan – The Profession Must Offer More.

78.9% of the principals and 87.2% of the teachers state that the educational plan of their school does not include *areas which are particularly developed in the school and which give it its identity* (e.g., foreign languages, sport, music ...). Should this be included? 77.2% of principals believe not. More than two-thirds of the respondents (71.1% of the principals and 72.6% of the teachers) answered that the educational plan of their school does not include *special educational strategies* for pupils. Only 38.6% of the principals believe that these should be

⁶ Almost two-thirds of the principals believe that common agreement about consistency in the pronouncement of measures on the school level is unnecessary, and also judge that whether or not such an agreement actually exists in school is essentially all the same both for the teachers and the principals.

included, and the majority of principals (61.4%) responded to the contrary. More than four-fifths (81.6% of the principals and 90.6% of the teachers) said that the educational plan of their school does not include an *agreement about the unified educational operation between teachers and parents*. In answer to the question on whether such an agreement between teachers and parents should be included in the educational plan, the majority of principals (52.6%) gave a negative response. 60.5% of the principals and 59% of the teachers answered that the educational plan of their school does not include an *agreement about measures which prevent violence, and about the consistent response of teachers to violent forms of behaviour*. Here only 39.5% of the principals judge that it is actually included in the educational plan of their school, whereas more than half (52.6%) of them believe that such an agreement should be included.

The fact that more than three-quarters of the principals believe that it is not necessary for the educational plan to include areas that are particularly developed in the school and which give its identity (e.g., foreign languages, sport, music) cannot be explained in the sense that schools do not realise the importance of this component of their work and that they do not provide the pupils with such an offer. In all likelihood, this shows that the additional offers of the school (foreign languages, sport, music) and the identity of the school connected with this are not connected with the conception of the educational plan.

In addition, the finding that the majority of principals⁷ and teachers do not understand the special pedagogical strategies in such a way that they would perceive them as part of the overall educational plan primarily reveals a 'theoretical lacking'. We can speculate that neither the study programmes that prepare future pedagogical workers nor the various programmes of constant professional upgrading include this component of educational operation in theory in an appropriate way in the instruction regarding how to design the educational plan of a school. Here, we have to be cautious. These answers do not in themselves state that special educational strategies are not employed in schools, but they perhaps have the status of some kind of 'exceptions' – something that is not included in the educational strategy in a planned way – and that they are understood as educational operation in special conditions, which indicates a serious problem: engagement with these strategies does not concern the school as a whole.

Perhaps a similar logic (although the proportion of inclusion in comparison to the question of specific educational strategies is somewhat higher) partly holds, in respect of responses to the statement *agreement about measures which prevent violence, and the consistent response of teachers to violent forms of behaviour*. Slightly more than half of the principals (52.6%) expressed the opinion this should be included in the education plan (as stated above, we

⁷ Amongst principals who answered the question regarding what the educational plan should contain, it is true that they do show somewhat more understanding of the fact that special educational strategies must be included in the educational plan. Nonetheless, the majority (61.4%) still answer that it is not necessary.

do not have data about the opinions of teachers). In as much as we presume that teachers would not wish to be left up to their own devices in solving this problem, it would nonetheless be possible to interpret the data about principals from the questionnaire along the lines of: if there were a firm belief in schools that it is imperative to have an agreement in connection with violent forms of behaviour and that it is necessary to respond to such behaviour consistently, the proportion of principals who believe that the established scope of the educational plan should respect or include this fact would be higher. In our opinion, there is a need for such agreement, even if in certain schools violent behaviour is currently not evident as a problem.

Of all of the responses offered, these answers best demonstrate the conceptual (theoretical) uncertainty in schools about what is and what should be part of the educational plan of the state school. Responsibility for this has to be accepted above all by the profession.

Reaching an agreement between teachers and parents about 'unified' educational operations would, for the state school, be an inappropriate goal. Therefore, it would be possible to claim that such a formulation should not have been included in the questionnaire. The state school includes all children irrespective of their backgrounds and various beliefs of their parents; parents' views on education are also diverse. Thus, the difficulty is not, as may first appear, simply in the fact that teachers do not want to reach such an agreement with parents but rather that they can derive primarily from the understanding of the term 'unified' as something that is impossible, or inadmissible, in the plan for education. Of course, the difficulty also arises from the fact that teachers most likely also realise that differences of opinion about educational approaches exist between parents and teachers – and amongst parents themselves. Nevertheless, the responses of principals, almost half (47.4%) of whom believe that the educational plan must contain an 'agreement about the unified educational operation between teachers and parents' (18.4% of the principals and 9.4% of the teachers stated that such an agreement is already included in the educational plan of their school) show that a significant number of school principals acknowledge that this is an area in which, for the sake of quality education, it is necessary to invest more, and that sooner or later it is a pressing problem that needs a great deal of specialised knowledge and energy in order to reach agreement. Perhaps in this response it is also possible to perceive a certain anxiety amongst teachers and principals that this kind of agreement could open the path to pressure from parents and impose on the professional autonomy of the teachers. The data (in spite of the abovementioned reservations and problems that they open up) nonetheless can be understood as a warning that these problems need to be approached with caution. In as much as the success of the work of teachers and the quality of the educational process is also conditional on the attitude that parents have to school, to teachers and to the work and co-operation of their children in school, this segment cannot be overlooked when planning the educational operations of the school.

4.3.4 Values as 'Pandora's box'?

65.8% of the principals and 73.5% of the teachers responded that the educational plan of their school does not include an *agreement about shared values that hold for all students and teachers*. Almost the same proportion (64.9%) of principals answered that such agreement *must* be included. 47.4% of the principals and 52.1% of the teachers said that the educational plan of their school does not include an emphasis on *tolerance and democratic relationships* in school. Somewhat more (64.9%) of the principals believe that the educational plan *must* include such an emphasis.

In the first place, these answers tell us that in their consideration of educational problems schools do not reflect the *formal (prescribed) framework* for educational operations in state schools – where, of course, *shared values* also belong – written in the Constitution and the school legislation (amongst others, the principle of equal opportunity, the principle of the absence of indoctrination in instruction, justice, values such as tolerance and solidarity etc.).

These values, which derive from the Constitution and legislative and executive acts whose contents are based upon the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (1995), are obligatory for schools and thus represent a framework for educational conduct. This is something that does not allow professional autonomy, but is rather explicitly and formally determined. Perhaps it would be possible to soften the above claim with the supposition that principals and teachers understood the question as accomplished consideration about what the broadly stated values mean in terms of the concrete conduct within the educational process, and how teachers should behave in accordance with them. Whatever the case may be, the answers demonstrate that reflection on these problematic issues is not given enough attention. Most likely, the responsibility for this has to be largely ascribed to the profession. Has the profession thus far sufficiently drawn attention to, and in an appropriate manner dealt with, this factor in seeking answers to the question of how to function educationally in school? Or, rather than engaging with the questions, has the profession offered discussion about the thesis that some advocate school without values, while others opt for values? Perhaps it is more a case of teachers in the past not having been equipped to engage with the educational issues which are necessitated by pluralism, criticalness and objectivity, and the demand for the absence of indoctrination in the state school – and that even today we have not entirely rid ourselves of that inheritance, grasped it theoretically and put it behind us. If the historical explanation can perhaps be sought in a model of school legislation that was geared towards a process and which determined both the content and the didactic execution of instruction, as well as in the long dominance of first one then another particular ideology in schools then, today, when the arrangement is again legally-formally different, the responsibility for the possible inappropriate level of engagement with the educational issues necessitated by pluralism, criticalness and objectivity, and the demand for the absence of indoctrination in the state school, as demonstrated by the analysis of the educational plan, must be attributed above all to the profession.

It seems that, at least in a certain sector of schools, there is (justifiably or not) doubt surrounding the success of the abovementioned agreement, or unease with regard to agreements concerning values (albeit shared values) which may be conditioned by an absence of a confirmed cultural tradition promoting dialogue between different thinkers and real tolerance towards difference – something the state school is unable to reverse.

The division of schools on whether or not the educational plan of the school includes an emphasis on *tolerance and democratic relationships in school* partly confirms the above explanation. These data do not, however, address the question of whether, or how, schools educate for tolerance and/or function democratically. They do show that in roughly half of the schools these value dimensions are not included in considerations of the educational plan of the school, which most likely indicates that there is no reflection on what, in concrete terms, the values of tolerance and democracy actually mean in educational situations. The area of actualising values in everyday school life is difficult especially when it comes to those values that are common or universal, and perspectives on those which, due to their particularity (in connection with a lack of pluralism, criticalness and objectivity) or conduct which is not derived from universal values, could exclude, or even unconsciously indoctrinate, someone (it is necessary to be particularly sensitive to this matter). Therefore, schools would need specialist assistance regarding how, in concrete terms, to include the educational dimension of values in their educational plan. This is particularly sensitive when it comes to content and perspectives that concern our deepest feelings and convictions. Although engagement with this problem in tertiary education programmes that educate teachers is not (due to a lack of space) given more attention in this paper (which does not mean that this is not of key importance for the conceptualisation of the problem), we believe there is a need to undertake an exhaustive analysis in a future paper.

5 School and The Educational Plan – Where to Direct Future Endeavours

In response to the question of whether the educational plan of their school includes something that we have not suggested, 97.4% of the principals and 100% of the teachers answered no. If for a large share of schools there existed another important part of their educational plans, this would perhaps have been exposed in answers to this question.

The findings of the empirical research outlined in this paper demonstrate that both in the assessment of what should be included in the educational plan of the school and in what is actually included in this plan, in the majority of schools fewer factors are considered than should, in our opinion, be considered for the quality design of the educational plan.

The data made available by the research will enable an even more detailed treatment of the problematic issues of the educational plan and the functioning

of schools which will, of course, be necessary in the future. The results of the empirical study regarding the inclusion and non-inclusion of factors in the educational plan certainly show that schools need professional support in the conceptualisation of the educational plan, and that the profession has still not done enough in this area and will need to dedicate significantly more attention to it in the future.

The reasons for the difficulties that schools and teachers are dealing with can be combined and dealt with in three different groups. In the first, we can of course see the question of the planned consideration of the scope of the educational functioning of the school, which is closely connected with the question of collective agreement and with the theory of what should be included in the educational plan of a particular school and why. In areas where the functioning of schools is reasonably independent, such as the question of including specific educational strategies and the like, the indicated state could probably be changed relatively quickly.

The second field of questions indicated by the responses is how the educational plan and the operation of schools include (or do not include) values, norms, rules, rights and responsibilities where these are (or in as much as they are) the *formal, prescribed framework* of the functioning of the state school. According to the responses of the principals and teachers, two-thirds or more of schools include in the educational plan only: the rules and responsibilities determined by the Regulations on the Rights and Responsibilities, the school rules, and the collective agreement of the teachers board about educational operations. In connection with this, our research gathered more information than we are able to present here.

The third group that the profession could extract from the data presented concerns planning the educational plan in relation to questions of values. The findings presented here show that not even in the case of values that are generally accepted by society as commonly valid is the question of whether and how to include them in the educational plan unambiguous – this is at least in part due to the fact that they are always formal or prescribed, but probably not just this. It seems that in the contemporary value framework, which is a product of a democratic, plural political arrangement, schools need more exact theoretical as well as concrete answers to the question of how to design the educational plan and include the dimension of shared values and social norms in an agreed way. As already stated, based on the findings it is possible to deduce that schools have difficulties in *planning* the inclusion of these dimensions in the educational plan.

If we ask ourselves why this is necessary at all, already in the first part of the text we indicated that one of the many arguments lies in the fact that it is impossible to imagine the quality planning, execution and self-evaluation of the educational operations if the school first, as Herbart states, does not sketch out a map that can be followed in its educational work.

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