

Uvodnik

Nova vizija razvoja vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema v Sloveniji?

Zveza društev pedagoških delavcev Slovenije je 23. marca 2023 organizirala posvet z naslovom *Potrebujemo v Sloveniji novo reformo sistema vzgoje in izobraževanja?*, da bi ponudila prostor za razpravo o obsežni prenovi vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema, ki je trenutno v teku. Na posvetu so bila odprta vprašanja o ciljih, vsebinah in pristopih k šolski reformi. Svoje razmisleke, kakšne systemske in kurikularne spremembe bi morali uveljaviti v predšolski vzgoji, osnovnošolskem in gimnazijskem izobraževanju, poklicnem, strokovnem izobraževanju in izobraževanju odraslih, so predstavili nekateri strokovnjaki s področja vzgoje in izobraževanja po celotni vertikali. Na okrogli mizi pa so mnenja soočili še predstavniki pristojnega ministrstva, šol in strokovnih organizacij s področja vzgoje in izobraževanja.

Uredništvo *Sodobne pedagogike* je želelo ta prostor za razpravo še razširiti in širši strokovni javnosti ponuditi priložnost za predstavitev razprav, spoznanj in izkušenj. Zato smo pripravili tematsko številko in k oddaji prispevkov povabili raziskovalce, odločevalce, vodstvene kadre in strokovne delavce. Odziv je bil velik, pridobili smo 15 člankov, med katerimi jih osem objavljamo v številki. Preostali bodo zaradi preobsežnosti na voljo v naslednji številki, to je v prvi številki naslednjega leta. Tam bo priložnost tudi za objavo odzivov, polemik in novih člankov.

Prispevki, ki jih objavljamo v tej tematski številki, so raznoliki, a tvorijo zanimivo celoto, ki morda ponuja celo podlago za novo vizijo razvoja vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema v naši državi. Za tematski urednici je pravzaprav fascinirano, koliko sorodnih sporočil je mogoče najti v njih. Skorajda ni prispevka, ki ne bi poudarjal pomena in različnih dimenzij pravičnosti, dostopnosti, inkluzivnosti, skupnostne naravnosti in kakovosti celotnega sistema. In ki hkrati izobraževanja ne bi razumel kot skupne dobrine, ki lahko odločilno pripomore k realizaciji človeških potencialov, okrepi vezi med ljudmi in ljudem olajša oblikovanje lastnih življenjskih ciljev in poti do njih.

Na podlagi analize člankov smo identificirati tri sklope izzivov, ki se na različne načine pojavljajo v člankih, se medsebojno prepletajo in dopolnjujejo. Te sklope smo združili v tri vprašanja, ki jih komentiramo v nadaljevanju ob predstavitvi člankov:

- Čemu reformirati?
- Postaviti strokovnega delavca v središče reforme?
- Ali potrebujemo novo definicijo nacionalnega izobrazbenega standarda?

Čemu reformirati?

V svojem razmišljanju *Kaj početi s šolo? Jo reformirati? Ne, preobraziti* **Mirjana Nastran Ule** utemeljuje, da mora izobraževanje, če naj pomaga spremeniti prihodnost, postati bolj vključujoče, pravično in skupnostno. »Najpomembnejši kriterij je vključenost,« pravi; vsi moramo imeti dostop do kakovostnega izobraževanja. Da bi to dosegli, moramo odstranjevati ovire, nad katerimi učenci (učeci se) nimajo nadzora; učni (izobrazbeni) dosežki ne smejo biti pod vplivom okoliščin, kot je premoženje, kraj rojstva ipd. Te misli se kot osrednja rdeča nit pojavljajo v večini nadaljnjih prispevkov, osvetljuječ njihove raznolike dimenzije.

Dejavnike, nadaljuje avtorica, ki »oblikujejo neenakosti in izključevanja, je treba jasno opredeliti, če naj politike in strategije podpirajo učence, zlasti tiste, ki se soočajo z rastočo prikrajšanostjo. Žal pa sodobno šolstvo v želji, da bi ustreglo zahtevam po čim boljši in učinkoviti izobrazbi mladih, pogosto zanemarja te sicer dokaj samoumevne premise dobrega izobraževanja in se pogosto omejuje na repliciranje informacij, jezikovnih in logičnih spretnosti. Ob tem tvega poslabšanje emocionalne in socialne klime v šolah, okrepitev neobvladljivih konfliktov in duševne težave med učenci.«

Kritičen do aktualnega dogajanja pri prenovi vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema v Sloveniji je tudi **Zdenko Kodelja**, ki se v prispevku *Reforma kot pot do pravičnejšega sistema vzgoje in izobraževanja* zavzema, da bi pravičnost postala eden temeljnih ciljev te prenove. Utemeljuje, da Slovenija na področju šolstva – kljub nekaterim pomembnim dosežkom – še ni dosegla ustrezne (v smislu primerjave z drugimi evropskimi državami) ravni pravičnosti, kar se kaže zlasti v neenakosti izobraževalnih možnosti. Kolikor kažejo tako uradni strateški dokumenti kot tudi kurikularna izhodišča, žal ni tako, kritično ugotavlja avtor in poziva odločevalce, da pravičnost vključijo med jedrne cilje prenove.

Raznolikost učečih se populacij je danes v izobraževanju velika, kot poudarjajo tudi drugi avtorji v tej številki. Še več, raznolikost ni le opis stanja stvari, ampak tudi vrednota: raznolikost zmožnosti, identitet, življenjskih praks, okoliščin in izkušenj, aspiracij, potreb in interesov ni nekaj, kar bi skušali preseči, odpraviti, asimilirati, kompenzirati, ampak pripoznati in spoštovati. Kot piše Nussbaum (2000), človek ni sredstvo, prek katerega drugi uresničujejo svoje cilje, ampak oseba, ki sledi svojim ciljem. Razvita, svobodna družba je po Senu (1999) družba, ki omogoča ljudem, da sledijo ciljem, ki so zanje vredni, in ki si prizadeva za spremembe, ki so zanje smiselne.

Urška Štremfel v članku *Vloga Evropske unije v reformah sistema vzgoje in izobraževanja v Sloveniji* na podlagi analize politik v kontekstu teorije evropeizacije prikaže, kakšno vlogo je EU odigrala v procesih reformiranja vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema v Sloveniji od osamosvojitve do danes. Članek ponuja razlago, zakaj je prišlo do velikega razhajanja med nosilci aktualne reforme in odločevalci na eni strani ter številnimi strokovnjaki (upali bi si trditi, da tudi strokovnimi delavci) na drugi strani. Kot v drugih postsocialističnih državah so v procesih vključevanja v EU evropske vrednote in politike postale pomembna referenčna točka za legitimiranje nacionalnih reform: ko smo si prizadevali za

vključitev v EU, smo se osredotočali na vključevanje evropske dimenzije v izobraževanje, doseganje mednarodne primerljivosti in skladnosti z evropskimi sistemi. Primerljivost, doseganje evropskih meril uspešnosti, upoštevanje mednarodnih dokumentov in diskurz nujnosti zaznamujejo posege v sistem tudi po vključitvi v EU. Ni nezanemarljivo, da so bile reforme in novosti ves čas uvajane s podporo evropskih sredstev. In podobno je zdaj: vloga EU je zaradi Načrta za okrevanje in odpornost morda še večja, saj determinira časovnico priprave reforme. Analiza dokumentov avtorici pokaže stabilno legitimizacijo reformnih procesov z dokumenti, vsebinami, vrednotami in procesi EU – utemeljeni so s sklicevanjem na njihovo avtoriteto, krepi se diskurz nujnosti. Ne moremo se *ne* strinjati z avtorico, da Slovenija vseskozi izkazuje t. i. »pasivno evropeizacijo brez zadostnih nacionalnih premislekov in širokega, čeprav dolgotrajnejšega iskanja nacionalnega konsenza«, in se skupaj z njo zavzeti za upoštevanje »nacionalnih premislekov in širokega, čeprav dolgotrajnejšega iskanja nacionalnega konsenza«.

Strokovni delavec kot središče reforme?

Pri vzpostavljanju in razvoju varnega, spodbudnega, vključujoče in pravičnega učnega okolja pa igra ključno vlogo šolska svetovalna služba. **Petra Gregorčič Mrvar in Jana Kalin** v prispevku *Vloga šolske svetovalne službe pri razvijanju oddelčne in šolske skupnosti* zato utemeljujeta potrebo po okrepitvi pedagoško-razvojne vloge šolske svetovalne službe tudi v kontekstu prenove programskih smernic svetovalnega dela. Šolski svetovalni delavec ima pri oblikovanju oddelčne in šolske skupnosti ključno vlogo, pri čemer mora dobro sodelovati z učitelji, razredniki in vodstvom. Ker strokovnjaki s področja pedagogike in šolskega svetovalnega dela že vrsto let opozarjajo na nujnost prenove programskih smernic, avtorici pozdravljata aktualne aktivnosti ministrstva na tem področju. A hkrati opozarjata, da država ne podpira celovite analize delovanja šolske svetovalne službe, kar bi omogočilo pripravo bolj kakovostnih in tudi realnejših razvojnih korakov. Svetovalni delavci so vse preveč obremenjeni s koordinacijskimi in administrativnimi nalogami, povečuje se obseg njihovega individualnega strokovnega dela z učenci z učnimi težavami, z vzgojnimi težavami, posebnimi potrebami itn. S tem se svetovalna služba odmika od sodobne ideje službe kot razvojnega središča, ki podpira širše vzgojno delovanje šole oz. vrta, sami svetovalni delavci pa izgorevajo.

Zdi se, da je delo s strokovnimi delavci, za njih in z njimi deležno zelo malo pozornosti, pa čeprav postaja kadrovska problematika na področju vzgoje in izobraževanja vedno večja. Eden najbolj perečih problemov, s katerimi se srečujemo v slovenskem izobraževanju, je pomanjkanje kadra, zlasti učiteljev. Opozorila gredo tudi v smeri njihove nezadostne usposobljenosti na posameznih področjih in njihove nepripravljenosti za spremembe in razvoj. Tudi naslednji prispevek nazorno kaže, kako nestrokovno in neučinkovito je reševanje pomanjkanja kadra z zniževanjem izobrazbenih standardov za učitelje, kot je preozka tudi stava na dvigovanje plač. Tako predhodni kot naslednji članek odpirata razmislek, ali

morda vendarle velja v središče reforme postaviti strokovnega delavca, ne samo kot tistega, ki pri snovanju reforme aktivno sodeluje, temveč tudi kot tistega, v katerega razvoj so usmerjeni ključni politični ukrepi.

Ana Bogdan Zupančič in **Marko Gavrilovski Tretjak** v obsežni analizi *Pomanjkanje učiteljev in ukrepi za zagotavljanje kadra v kontekstu reforme vzgoje in izobraževanja*, izpeljani z metodo sistematičnega pregleda literature, utemeljujeta, da je treba problem pomanjkanja učiteljev nasloviti celostno. Pomembni so ukrepi na področju zadržanja učiteljev, ki jih delita na mikro, mezo in makro raven. Avtorja med drugim poudarjata pomen aktivne udeležbe učiteljev kot avtonomnih in cenjenih strokovnjakov v procesu reforme (pri čemer, opozarjata, nenehni posegi v sistem delujejo odvrtačilno, še posebej so kritični tisti, ki krepijo neoliberalne elemente v sistemu). Na mezo ravni poudarjata pomen transformativnega vodenja šol in timov, učinkoviti ukrepi pa so tudi uvajalno obdobje za mlade učitelje, mentoriranje in coaching.

Ali potrebujemo novo definicijo nacionalnega izobrazbenega standarda?

V zadnji sklop člankov vključujemo tiste, ki obravnavajo posamezne segmente vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema: predšolsko vzgojo, srednje poklicno in strokovno izobraževanje ter izobraževanje odraslih. Žal nismo pridobili člankov s področja osnovne šole in gimnazije. Čeprav so različni, tudi zanje velja, kar smo zapisali uvodoma: družijo jih zavezanost k pravičnosti, dostopnosti, inkluzivnosti in kakovosti vzgoje in izobraževanja. Še več, članki nakazujejo še eno bistveno vprašanje: ali bi skupaj z reformo morali – da bi uresničili cilje o dostopnosti, inkluzivnosti, pravičnosti in kakovosti – oblikovati (novo) definicijo nacionalnega izobrazbenega standarda? Ali morda nismo prišli do točke, ko je jasno, da zgolj z univerzalno dostopnostjo osnovnega izobraževanja teh ciljev ne bomo dosegli? Zdi se, da je prišel čas, da razmislimo o zavezi države, da izboljša univerzalno dostopnost tudi do (dela) predšolske vzgoje in hkrati zagotovi univerzalen dostop do srednješolske izobrazbe. Opravljeno v prvi reformi se zdi premalo, v tej številki opozarja Marjanovič s soavtoricami. Sicer že široko dostopno bi zagotovljeno srednješolsko izobraževanje imelo pomen zlasti za odrasle, ki imajo od države sistemsko zagotovljen le dostop do osnovnošolskega izobraževanja, zaradi česar so na trgu dela zelo ranljivi, opozarja Mikulec (v tej številki). Posledično to lahko vodi v podaljševanje obveznosti izobraževanja, kar je tudi eden glavnih trendov v Evropi, s katero se nenehno primerjamo: devet evropskih držav (med njimi Nemčija, Finska, Francija, Belgija) pozna polno obveznost do 18. oz. 19. leta, še dve pa delno obveznost (Avstrija, Portugalska) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023).

V duhu omenjenih ciljev, vseživljenjskega učenja in izobraževanja, zagotavljanja priložnosti za razvoj potencialov in karierni razvoj državljanov (glej tudi Makovec Radovan v tej številki) se selekcijska funkcija osnovne šole (vključno s selektivnim modelom ocenjevanja) in zoževanje možnosti nadaljnega izobraževanja za absolvente poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja zdita preživeta in

kontraproduktivna. Navezujoč se na A. Gutman (2001), se zavzemamo, da bi pridobitev srednješolske izobrazbe postala nov demokratični prag sodobne družbe. Pojem demokratičnega praga se nanaša na točko v sistemu, do katere mora država poskrbeti, da ni nihče prikrajšan »za sposobnost učinkovite udeležbe v demokratičnem procesu« (prav tam, str. 130). Izobraževanje pod demokratičnim pragom mora biti zasnovano egalitarno, nad njim pa meritokratsko.

Ljubica Marjanovič in soavtorice v članku *Reforma predšolske vzgoje v vrtnu? Da, v smeri večje pravičnosti in višje kakovosti za vse malčke in otroke* predšolsko vzgojo opredelijo kot enega ključnih instrumentov zagotavljanja višje ravni pravičnosti v izobraževanju, saj ima dolgotrajna vključenost otrok v kakovostno predšolsko vzgojo ugodne učinke tako na aktualni kot dolgotrajni razvoj otrok. A to deluje le, če je vrtec dostopen vsem in če je kakovosten. Primerjalno gledano, slovenski vrtec velja za kakovostnega, tudi deleži vključenosti niso nizki. Toda nekateri problemi in izzivi se krepijo: predšolska vzgoja v sistemskem, kadrovskem in kurikularnem smislu ni prilagojena vedno izrazitejši raznolikosti populacije; deleži vključenih otrok in malčkov iz ranljivejših okolij ostajajo nizki, sistem plačil ni pravičen do vseh, tudi tu prihaja do pomanjkanja kadra itd. Še več, vseskozi nam manjka v sistemske in zakonske rešitve in v kurikulum umeščen sistem ugotavljanja in zagotavljanja kakovosti. Ob tem se zaradi mednarodnih pritiskov krepi ideja predšolske vzgoje kot valilnice človeškega kapitala, ki predšolsko vzgojo z vidika zgoraj omenjenih principov bolj šibi, kot krepi.

Danijela Makovec Radovan v članku z zgovornim naslovom *Vključujoče poklicno in strokovno izobraževanje: vizija ali iluzija?* zagovarja tezo, da k pravičnemu vzgojno-izobraževalnemu sistemu pomembno pripomore tudi srednješolsko poklicno in strokovno izobraževanje, ampak le, če deluje inkluzivno. Inkluzivnost poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja se po njenem mnenju razvija na tri načine: (1) če na sistemski, kurikularni in izvedbeni ravni deluje skladno z inkluzivnostjo kot obćim pedagoškim načelom, ki presega ozko usmerjanje na dijake s posebnimi potrebami in deficitarni pristop odzivanja na raznolikost; (2) če po vsej izobraževalni vertikali krepimo in razvijamo karierno orientacijo kot sredstvo spodbujanja učećih se k razvoju njihovih potencialov; (3) če skrbimo tudi za kakovostno izobraževanje in usposabljanje učiteljev. Izobraževanje učiteljev v poklicnem in strokovnem izobraževanju je specifično, saj v poklic vstopajo kadri z zelo raznolikimi vrstami in stopnjami izobrazbe in prehodnimi delovnimi izkušnjami, njihovo delo pa se v marsičem razlikuje od dela učiteljev v splošnem izobraževanju, na kar vplivajo tako specifične izobraževalnih programov kot tudi specifične učne populacije.

Še bolj raznoliko, a deležno malo zanimanja strokovne javnosti in politike pa je izobraževanje odraslih, čeprav lahko bistveno pripomore k vsem omenjenim ciljem in bi zato moralo biti organski del sistema in tudi reformnih posegov. To argumentirano v članku *Od projektnega k sistemskemu urejanju izobraževanja odraslih* pojasnjuje **Borut Mikulec**, ki z vidika mednarodnih in primerjalnih študij v izobraževanju odraslih analizira zakonodajne in strateške dokumente s področja izobraževanja odraslih v zadnjih treh desetletjih. Avtor pokaže, da so bili v Sloveniji sicer opravljeni nekateri pomembni koraki pri urejanju področja, a ti

še vedno niso v zadostni meri rešili sistemskega urejanja izobraževanja odraslih: upravljanja, zakonodaje, financiranja, mreže izvajalcev in izobraževalnih programov. Eden ključnih problemov je, da delovanje javne mreže ponudnikov, ponudba in razvoj izobraževanja odraslih ostajajo povsem odvisni od kratkotrajnih razpisov in projektnih sredstev Evropskega socialnega sklada. Posledice tega so zelo skrb zbujujoče: ponudba izobraževanja se oži na cilje ekonomskega razvoja družbe in s tem na nabor ozko zasnovanih kurzov, zanemarjajo pa se drugi cilji vseživljenjskega izobraževanja; javne ustanove za izobraževanje odraslih se bojujejo za obstoj in soočajo z nezmožnostjo dolgoročnega načrtovanja svojega dela, tudi uspešna izobraževanja zamirajo zaradi prekinitev financiranja; delež odraslih v izobraževanju drastično upada. Zaradi razpršene zakonodaje javna služba ne zagotavlja izvajanja vseh javnoeljavnih izobraževalnih programov za odrasle kot tudi ne podpornih dejavnosti. Kot je to značilno za druge segmente vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema, se tudi tukaj kaže kot velik izziv odsotnost sistematičnega in celostnega pristopa k zagotavljanju kakovosti.

V netematskem delu številke tokrat objavljamo dva prispevka v angleškem jeziku. **Tadeja Kodele** in **Irena Lesar** v prispevku z naslovom *Šolski svetovalni delavci o participaciji otrok z učnimi težavami* izhajata iz predpostavke, da mora biti participacija uveljavljena v vseh procesih šole, posebej pa se osredotočita na učence z učnimi težavami. S kombinirano kvantitativno-kvalitativno raziskavo na reprezentativnem vzorcu šolskih svetovalnih delavcev sta ugotovili, da je participacija učenca pri večini procesov ali dejavnosti na šoli uveljavljena le na dobrih dveh petinah šol. Hkrati pa je večina svetovalnih delavcev ocenila, da je participacija učenca pri načrtovanju in izvajanju učne pomoči zanje ključnega pomena. V kvalitativnem delu raziskave večina svetovalnih delavcev ovire za implementacijo participacije vidi predvsem pri učencih, pa tudi pri strokovnih delavcih in vodstvu šole. Ker gre za raziskovalno kompleksno področje, ga bo treba tudi v prihodnje še naprej natančno proučevati s perspektive različnih posameznikov in skupin, ki se srečujejo v vzgojno-izobraževalni sferi.

Marija Czepil, **Anna Fedorovych** in **Oresta Karpenko** v strokovnem prispevku z naslovom *Kakovost predšolske vzgoje v Ukrajini: 30 let sprememb* analizirajo zakonodajni okvir ureditve predšolske vzgoje v Ukrajini – proučujejo statistične podatke in literaturo, ki obravnava posodobitev kakovosti predšolske vzgoje. Avtorice na podlagi prikazanih strateških, institucionalnih in metodičnih usmeritev opredelijo nekatere možnosti za njeno izboljšanje. Zaključijo, da bi bilo treba predšolsko raven ustrezno posodobiti tako na državni kot tudi regionalni ravni.

Kot rečeno s članki v tematskem delu številke razprave o reformi vzgojno-izobraževalnega sistema še ne zaključujemo povsem. Upamo pa, da pričujoči prispevki dovolj jasno kažejo, da imamo v Sloveniji moč in ideje, ki segajo prek pasivne evropeizacije oz. slepega sledenja evropski izobraževalni politiki, in opozarjajo na dejanske izzive in probleme, s katerimi se soočamo, ter hkrati ponujajo tako nove vizije kot konkretne predloge za njihovo udejanjanje.

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tematski urednici*

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Editorial

A new vision for the development of the education system in Slovenia?

On 23 March 2023, the Association of Slovenian Educators organised a conference called *Do we need a new reform of the education system in Slovenia?* to provide a platform for discussion on the comprehensive overhaul of the education system that is currently underway. The conference raised questions about the objectives, content and approaches to the school reform. Experts from the field of education across the entire vertical presented their ideas on what systemic and curricular changes should be implemented in preschool education, primary and grammar-school education, vocational and technical education, and adult education. In addition, representatives of the relevant Ministry, schools and professional organisations in the field of education shared their views at a roundtable discussion.

The editorial board of the *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies* was keen to extend this space for discussion and to offer the wider professional public a further opportunity to present their thoughts, insights and experiences. We therefore decided to publish a thematic issue and invited contributions from researchers, decision-makers, managers and practitioners. The response was overwhelming, and we received fifteen articles, eight of which are published in this issue. The rest will be printed in the next issue, that is, in the first issue of 2024. That issue will also provide an opportunity to publish responses, comments and additional articles.

The contributions published in this thematic issue are diverse, but they form an interesting whole that may offer a basis for a new vision of the development of the education system in Slovenia. In fact, it is fascinating to observe how many closely related messages can be found in these articles. There is hardly a contribution that does not emphasise the importance and different dimensions of the equity, accessibility, inclusiveness, community orientation and quality of the entire system. And which does not at the same time see education as a common good that can make a decisive contribution to the realisation of human potential, strengthen bonds between people and make it easier for them to shape their life goals and pathways to reach them.

Based on the analysis of the articles, we have identified three sets of challenges that emerge in different ways in the articles, intertwining and complementing each other. We have grouped these sets into three questions, which we discuss below while presenting the articles:

- Why reform?
- Should the educator be at the heart of the reform?
- Is a new definition of the national education standard required?

Why reform?

In her article »What to do with school? Reform it? No, transform it«, **Mirjana Nastran Ule** argues that if education is to help change the future, it must become more inclusive, equitable and community-based. »Inclusion is the most important criterion,« she writes: we must all have access to quality education. To achieve this, it is essential to remove barriers that are beyond learners' control; learning (educational) achievement should not be influenced by circumstances such as wealth, place of birth, etc. These thoughts appear as a recurring theme in most of the contributions that follow, highlighting their multiple dimensions. The factors, the author continues, that »create inequalities and exclusions must be clearly identified if policies and strategies are to support learners, especially those facing growing disadvantages. Unfortunately, in its desire to meet the demands for the best and most effective education for young people, modern education often neglects these fairly self-evident premises of good education, often limiting itself to the reproduction of information, and language and logic skills. It risks worsening the emotional and social climate in schools, intensifying unmanageable conflicts and increasing mental health problems among students« (Ule, in this issue)

Zdenko Kodolja is similarly critical of the current developments regarding the reform of the education system in Slovenia, and in his article »Reform as a path to a more equitable education system,« he advocates making equity one of the fundamental goals of this reform. He argues that (if compared with other European countries) Slovenia has not yet achieved an adequate level of equity in the field of education – despite some important achievements. This is reflected in particular in the inequality of educational opportunities. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as both official strategy documents and curriculum frameworks show, the author critically observes and he calls on decision-makers to include equity as one of the core objectives of the reform.

The diversity of learning populations in education today is great, as other authors in this issue also point out. Moreover, diversity is not only a description of the state of affairs, but also a value: the diversity of abilities, identities, life practices, circumstances, experiences, aspirations, needs and interests is not something to be overcome, eliminated, assimilated, compensated for; rather, it should be recognised and respected. According to Nussbaum (2000), a human being is not a means through which others achieve their goals, but a person who pursues their own goals. Sen (1999) defines a developed, free society as one that enables people to pursue goals that are worthwhile to them and that seeks change that they find meaningful.

In her article »The role of the European Union in the reforms of the education system in Slovenia,« **Urška Štremfel** shows – on the basis of policy analyses in the context of the theory of Europeanisation – what role the EU has played in the processes of reforming the education system in Slovenia since independence. The article explains why there has been a great divergence between the current reform promoters and decision-makers on the one hand, and many experts (and,

one would dare say, educators) on the other. As in other post-socialist countries, European values and policies became an important reference point to legitimise national reforms during the EU integration processes: when working towards EU membership, the focus was on adopting the European dimension in education, achieving international comparability and compatibility with European systems. Comparability, compliance with European benchmarks, adherence to international documents and a discourse of urgency continue to characterise interventions in the system even after the country's accession to the EU. It is not negligible that reforms and innovations have always been introduced with the support of European funding. And the same applies today: the EU's role is perhaps even greater under the *Recovery and Resilience Plan*, as it determines the timing of the reform. The analysis of the documents reveals a stable legitimisation of the reform processes through EU documents, content, values and processes. They are justified by reference to their authority and the discourse of urgency is strengthened. We cannot but agree with the author that Slovenia has consistently demonstrated »passive Europeanisation without sufficient national considerations or a broad, albeit more protracted, search for a national consensus.« Together with her, we would like to advocate for »national considerations« and »a broad, albeit more protracted, search for a national consensus.«

The educator at the heart of the reform?

School counselling services play a key role in creating and developing a safe, supportive, inclusive and equitable learning environment. In their article »The role of the school counselling service in developing classroom and school communities,« **Petra Gregorčič Mrvar** and **Jana Kalin** argue for the need to strengthen the pedagogical and developmental role of the school counselling service in the context of the revised programme guidelines for counselling work. The school counsellor plays a crucial role in building classroom and school communities, collaborating well with teachers, homeroom teachers and the management team. As experts in pedagogy and school counselling have been emphasising the need for a review of the programme guidelines for many years, the authors welcome the Ministry's current activities in this area. At the same time, they note that the State has not championed a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the school counselling service, which would allow for better quality and more realistic development steps to be taken. School counsellors are overburdened with coordination and administrative tasks, and their individual professional work with students with learning difficulties, behaviour difficulties, special needs, etc., is increasing. This takes the counselling service away from the modern idea of the service as a development centre that supports the wider educational work of the (pre)school, and counsellors often suffer from burnout.

It seems that working with, and for, educators receives very little attention, even though the staffing problem in the field of education is growing. One of the most pressing problems we are facing in Slovenian education is the shortage of

qualified staff, especially teachers. There are also concerns about their lack of competence in certain areas and their unwillingness to change and develop. The following article illustrates how unprofessional and ineffective it is to address staff shortages by lowering educational standards for teachers – just as the pledge to raise salaries is too narrow-minded. Both the preceding and the following articles raise the question of whether it might be worth putting the educator at the heart of the reform, not only as the one who should actively participate in shaping the reform, but also as the one whose development should be the focus of key policy measures.

Using a systematic literature review, **Ana Bogdan Zupančič** and **Marko Gavrilovski Tretjak** argue in their comprehensive analysis »Teacher shortages and staffing measures in the context of the education reform« that the problem of teacher shortages needs to be addressed in a holistic way. Measures aimed at teacher retention are particularly important, and they are divided into micro, meso and macro levels. Among other things, the authors stress the importance of teachers' active participation as autonomous and valued professionals in the reform process (and, they point out, constant interventions in the system are discouraging, and the measures that reinforce neoliberal elements in the system are particularly problematic). At the meso level, they highlight the importance of transformative leadership of schools and teams. Among effective measures they include induction periods for young teachers, mentoring and coaching.

Is a new definition of the national education standard required?

The final group of articles includes those dealing with specific segments of the education system: preschool education, secondary vocational and technical education, and adult education. Unfortunately, we could not obtain any articles on primary and grammar-school education. Although they are different, they share what was said at the beginning of this Editorial: a commitment to equity, accessibility, inclusiveness and quality in education. Moreover, the articles suggest another fundamental question: should the reform – in order to achieve the goals of accessibility, inclusiveness, equity and quality – be accompanied by a (new) definition of the national education standard? Have we perhaps reached a point where it has become clear that universal access to primary education alone will not deliver these goals? It seems that the time has come to reflect on the State's commitment to improve universal access to (part of) preschool education and at the same time ensure universal access to secondary education. What was done in the first reform seems insufficient, Marjanovič and her co-authors write in this issue. If guaranteed, secondary education – which is already widely available – would make a difference especially to adults, who are only systematically guaranteed access to primary education by the State. This makes them particularly vulnerable in the labour market, warns Mikulec (in this issue). As a consequence, this could lead to extended compulsory education, which is one of the main trends in Europe, with which we are constantly comparing ourselves: nine European countries (including

Germany, Finland, France and Belgium) have full compulsory education up to the age of 18 or 19, and two other ones have partial compulsory education (Austria, Portugal) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2023).

In the spirit of the above-mentioned objectives, of lifelong learning and education, of providing opportunities for the development of the potential and career development of citizens (see also Makovec Radovan in this issue), the selective function of basic education (including the selective assessment model) and the narrowing of further education opportunities for vocational and technical education leavers seem outdated and counterproductive. Drawing on Gutmann (1999), we propose that the acquisition of a secondary education should become a new democratic threshold in modern society. The notion of democratic threshold refers to the point in the system at which the State must ensure that no one is deprived »of the ability to participate effectively in the democratic process« (ibid., p. 136). Education below the democratic threshold must be egalitarian and education above it meritocratic.

In their article »A reform of preschool education in preschools? Yes – towards greater equity and higher quality for all toddlers and children,« **Ljubica Marjanovič and co-authors** identify preschool education as one of the key instruments for ensuring a higher level of equity in education. Long-term participation in quality preschool education has positive effects on both the current and long-term development of children. But this only works if preschools are accessible to all and of good quality. Comparatively speaking, Slovenian preschools are considered to be of high quality, and enrolment rates are not low. But certain problems and challenges are growing: preschool education is not adapted in terms of its system, staffing and curriculum to the increasing diversity of the population; enrolment rates for children and toddlers from vulnerable backgrounds remain low; the pay system is not fair to all; there are staff shortages, etc. What is more, we have consistently been lacking a quality assessment and assurance model embedded in the system, in the legislation and in the curriculum. In addition, international pressures are reinforcing the idea of preschool education as a source of human capital, which weakens rather than strengthens preschool education in terms of the principles outlined above.

Danijela Makovec Radovan's article – tellingly titled »Inclusive vocational and technical education: Myth or vision?« – argues that secondary vocational and technical education makes an important contribution to an equitable education system, but only if it is inclusive. In her view, inclusion in vocational and technical education develops in three ways: (1) if it is consistent with inclusiveness as a general pedagogical principle at the systemic, curricular and implementation levels, going beyond a narrow focus on students with special needs and a deficient approach to responding to diversity; (2) if career guidance is strengthened and developed throughout the education vertical as a means of encouraging learners to develop their potential; and (3) if quality teacher education and training are also ensured. Teacher education and training in vocational and technical education is specific, since teachers enter the profession with a wide variety of types and levels of education and previous work experience, and their work differs in many ways

from that of teachers in general education. This is influenced both by the specific features of the educational programmes and the specific features of the student population.

Adult education is even more diverse, but it has received little attention from the professional and policy-making communities, even though it can make a significant contribution to all of the above objectives and should therefore be an organic part of the system and its reforms. **Borut Mikulec** explains this in his article »From project-based to system-based adult education,« which analyses legislative and strategic documents in adult education over the last three decades from the perspective of international and comparative studies in adult education. The author shows that while some important steps have been taken in Slovenia to regulate the field, these have not yet sufficiently addressed the systemic framework for adult education: management, legislation, funding, provider networks and educational programmes. A key problem is that the functioning of the public network of providers and the supply and development of adult education remain entirely dependent on short-term tenders and project funding from the European Social Fund. The consequences are worrying: the provision of education is narrowed down to the objectives of the economic development of society and thus to a series of narrowly designed courses, neglecting the other objectives of lifelong learning; public adult education institutions are struggling to survive and are faced with the impossibility of planning their work in the long term, even successful courses are in decline due to funding cuts; the share of adults in education is falling drastically. Due to the fragmentation of legislation, the public service does not provide all publicly funded adult education programmes or support activities. As is the case in other segments of the education system, the absence of a systematic and integrated approach to quality assurance is a major challenge.

We publish two articles in English in the non-thematic section of this issue. **Tadeja Kodele** and **Irena Lesar**'s contribution »School counsellors on participation of children with learning difficulties« starts from the premise that participation should be embedded in all school processes and focuses particularly on students with learning difficulties. Their combined quantitative and qualitative study of a representative sample of school counsellors found that student participation in most school processes and activities is established in just over two fifths of schools. At the same time, the majority of the counsellors considered student participation in the planning and implementation of the learning support to be of immense importance for them. The majority of the counsellors in the qualitative part of the study saw obstacles to the implementation of such participation mainly in the students, but also in other educators and the school management. As this is a complex area of research, it will have to be studied in detail from the perspectives of the different individuals and groups who come together in the educational sphere.

In »The quality of preschool education in Ukraine: Thirty years of change,« **Marija Czepil**, **Anna Fedorovych** and **Oresta Karpenko** analyse the legislative framework for the organisation of preschool education in Ukraine. They examine statistical data and literature on the modernisation of the quality of pre-

school education. Based on the strategic, institutional and methodical directions outlined, the authors identify some possibilities for improvement. They conclude that preschool education should be properly modernised at both national and regional levels.

As mentioned earlier, the articles in this issue's thematic section do not close the debate on the reform of the education system. We do hope, however, that these contributions indicate clearly enough that in Slovenia we have the strength and the ideas to go beyond passive Europeanisation or a blind following of European education policies. The articles address the real challenges and problems we are facing, but at the same time they offer new visions and concrete proposals for their realisation.

Thematic editors

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