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# EDUCATION PHILOSOPHIES – THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF TEACHER'S BELIEFS IN EDUCATION PRACTICE

**Abstract:** *The contemporary paradigm in pedagogy is focused on a holistic development of an individual through a curricular approach, accentuating the results of learning and teaching. The important and active role of a student in class is emphasized, but also the importance of teacher's role as the person who shapes the learning environment and who organizes the teaching process. The teacher's educational philosophy and their beliefs in the background have a great impact on their teaching practice and their actions during class. But there are still discrepancies in definition, identification and classification of educational philosophies. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the educational philosophy literature, to contribute to the construct definition, to point out the importance of educational philosophy research within pedagogy and to point out the connection between the teacher's educational philosophy and the different aspects of their educational impact.*

**Keywords:** *contemporary educational philosophies, lectures, traditional educational philosophies*

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers are, alongside students, the main subject of the education process. Their role, one of many, is to bring the curriculum to life in a classroom. Especially today, with the new subject curricula in Croatia (Ministry of science and education, 2019) that focus on the learning goals to be achieved, and teachers have the freedom to construct classes that will lead them towards achieving those goals. There are different types of approach that can be used as a guideline in planning and the realization of the teaching process in order to achieve what we want. But what is it that affects the approach to teaching of each individual teacher? The official documents created under the influence of education politics? Teacher's knowledge?

Attitudes? Competences? Experience? All of the above? Or is it something deeper, invisible to the naked eye and more difficult to grasp?

We are currently more focussed on the tangible and the visual in our research, on measuring the learning outcomes, competence levels, usage of teaching methods and strategies while slightly disregarding the things that cannot be seen that give meaning to the tangible things; beliefs and values, the elements of the hidden curriculum, that have a great impact on the practice itself. But this subject, while still not thoroughly researched, is essential for pedagogy because the beliefs and the Education philosophies of the teacher have a great impact on classes and any attempt to change or an education reform will fail if we are not truly aware of this fact. Teachers refuse to implement things they do not believe in or things they disagree with in their classes, although it may seem sometimes 'on paper' that they are doing everything that is asked of them by the educational politics and the official documents. Therefore, it is necessary to go back to studying beliefs and the teachers' educational philosophies and their impact on the education practice in order to truly come to complete understanding of their connection and to figure out how to synchronize them with any attempt at reform in order to render it successful. This thesis, through literature of the selected field, will attempt to provide answers to the questions listed above about what impacts the teacher's approach to teaching. The aim of the thesis is therefore, to provide an overview of the teacher's educational philosophy literature, to contribute to the construct definition, to accentuate the importance of the construct research within the pedagogy and to connect the educational philosophy of the teachers with their actions in the education practice.

## DETERMINATION OF THE BASIC CONSTRUCTS

### A) EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

The word philosophy is constructed by two Greek words, *philo* (love) and *sophos* (wisdom), so it can be translated literally as 'love for philosophy'. It deals with many questions, among others with questions of the nature of human knowledge: what knowledge is, and how we acquire it, questions of value etc. Followers of different philosophical approaches will provide different answers to these questions, as well as teachers. As a result of those differences, there are different educational philosophies with different ideas about teacher role, student role, goals and points of education, the nature of curriculum... Educational philosophies[1] are based on certain beliefs about the forementioned questions.

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[1] Term educational philosophies differ from the term philosophy of education, which is frequently used in pedagogical theory. Philosophy of education refers to a discipline within philosophy that deals with the study of upbringing and education from the aspect of philosophy, while the term educational philosophy refers to the beliefs of teachers on issues related to upbringing and education.

Authors have different approaches in defining educational philosophies. Also, there are a large number of papers that do not offer an explicit definition but write about the construct of educational philosophies as if it is already known and understood what it refers to. What many authors agree on is that teachers' beliefs about upbringing and education are shaped by the educational philosophies they accept (Gezer, 2018; Ilhan et al., 2014; Pajares, 1992). Beatty et al. (2009: 100) state: 'Educational philosophy is a narrative description of an individual's concept of teaching, including the explanation of teaching method choice'. Cetinić (2005) points out that educational philosophies are based on beliefs about values, learning and teaching, teacher efficiency and epistemological beliefs of teachers - about the nature of knowledge and learning. They are personal and depict the identity reflexion of each teacher, but they also consist of divided foundations, and since they are not mentioned often in everyday practice, they are divided implicitly (Beatty et al., 2009; Watson & Coso Strong, 2013; Williams, 1996). Individuals are often not aware of their educational philosophies and most likely could not name them because they are often manifested on the implicit level. In addition, educational philosophies are important when determining educational goals and in shaping the whole educational perspective for both individual and for education politics and curriculum and they provide the teachers with a foundation and a certain structure for the organization of the teaching process (Baş, 2015; Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018). Cetinić (2005) agrees with this and notes that teacher's educational philosophies condition their beliefs, and all the phases of their teaching actions – from preparation, planning, realization and evaluation are under influence of their educational philosophies.

We note that educational philosophies are a broader concept than beliefs, they combine the metaphysical, epistemological and axiological beliefs of teachers that together form a certain educational philosophy that we can name. Following the above, it is possible to offer a definition of the construct - educational philosophies represent teachers' notions[2] of issues that are closely related to education and upbringing and are based on their metaphysical, epistemological and axiological beliefs.

Beatty et al. (2009) also note that teachers are faced with questions about the nature of knowledge, education, teaching and methods for successful teaching and they are trying to provide answers to these questions; the answers are based on their beliefs and those beliefs are metaphysical, epistemological and axiological. *Metaphysics* questions the nature of reality and tries to find an answer to the question; 'What is real?'. The answer to that question can be that the reality is objective or subjective and socially constructed. According to the philosophies of pragmatism,

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[2] Term notion is defined as "spiritual activity which reflects on the essence of a real or imagined object, see understanding." (Association for the Promotion of Philosophy Filozofija.org, https://www.filozofija.org/rjecnik-filozofskih-pojmova/)

existentialism and critical theory, reality is subjective while according to meta-physics of realism and idealism it is objective (Beatty et al. 2009). *Epistemology* on the other hand, seeks the answer to the question; 'How do we know the things we know?', and Beatty et al. (2009), while referring to Hessong and Weeks (1991) present different answers to that question; a) revelation from God, b) expert aut-hority, c) individual judgement, d) individual sensory perception and e) individual intuition. Beliefs on the nature of knowledge impact significantly the teacher's approach to teaching, the work methods they choose, the way they test student's knowledge etc. *Axiology* tries to answer the question: 'What is valuable as crite-ria for judgement?', it deals with questions of values which can be found on two opposite poles – one side refers to rationality, universal criterion and individual's autonomy, while the other side refers to non-universality and relationality. All of the mentioned beliefs are closely connected to the educational philosophies and consequentially to approaches to teaching of each teacher. Beatty et al. (2009) identify 5 different approaches in philosophy that have a significant impact on edu-cational philosophies: a) idealism, b) realism, c) pragmatism, d) existentialism and d) critical theory. Metaphysical, epistemological and axiological beliefs that are in the background of these approaches in philosophy can be found in the background of education philosophies as well.

## B) BELIEFS IN EDUCATION

All actions of an individual in every aspect of their life is heavily impacted by their beliefs on different questions and facets of life, so they also have an influen-ce on teachers' actions. Initial teacher's beliefs research mainly focussed on the psychology and the education fields, on the natural sciences, mother tongue and history (Skott, 2015). Today, the teacher's beliefs are researched through pedagogy as well, starting with the beliefs of the pre-school teachers all the way up to the beliefs research of the teachers in the andragogy field.

Beliefs are a construct that is difficult to grasp because there is no consensus of a universally accepted definition. That is the very reason why there are method problems when including this construct in research (Skott, 2015). Pratt et al. (2016) define beliefs as the most abstract, the least available and least flexible aspect that has an impact on teacher's teaching. The reason being the fact that each teacher implicitly has certain beliefs about learning, knowledge, teaching and teacher's role, but very few of them deliberately think about them or name them, they are often not even fully aware of them. Taylor et al. (2001) define beliefs as declarative claims about what one holds to be true, right or correct with regards to learning and teaching. They point out that the beliefs are said with certainty and often used as a means to justify basic knowledge or informal teaching theory. Similarly, Dunkin (2002, pp. 42) points out that they refer to 'their estimate on successfulness of te-aching as an intervention, their estimate on personal impact on a pupil's/student's

learning, their beliefs about the level of their own teaching competence, as well as the criteria used to evaluate their teaching and themselves as teachers.'.

We uphold the beliefs with different levels of clarity, reliability and centrality; some are insufficiently clear (hazy) and implicit, others are completely clear and easy to explain, some are marginal to an individual, others are central or dominant (Pratt et al., 2016). Richardson (according to Skott, 2015) agrees and adds that dominant beliefs are very difficult to change, while marginal beliefs are more likely to change over time.

Beliefs on knowledge, that is an individual's personal epistemology are closely related to teaching. There are two diametrically opposed views of knowledge – objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism is observing knowledge as something that exists outside the one who learns and what is based on logic of discovery, and subjectivism deems the knowledge as something personal, social and contextual, constructed by the person who is learning, and based on logic of interpretation. These two views are best to observe in continuum because no one accepts purely objective or purely subjective beliefs on knowledge (Pratt et al., 2016).

During the 1980s the beliefs in the education field came into focus because the increasing number of research concentrated on understanding the act of teaching from the teacher's perspective, and in order to achieve that, we need to understand the beliefs they use to define their actions first (Nespor, 1987). We are starting to see that we cannot completely understand the act of teaching if we are focussed solely on the visible – learning and teaching strategies, the teaching methods being used etc. Through this visible aspect of teaching, we cannot completely understand what impacted individual choices during its preparation, organization and execution, we cannot completely understand the mere act of teaching and everything that impacts it until we grasp the 'invisible' part, teacher's beliefs about different aspects of education.

Rissanen et al. (2016) are referencing Dweck in their thesis and the theory about thinking methods that are interested in the implicit beliefs that a person has towards basic human qualities. According to this theory there are two implicit beliefs that a person can have: 1) incremental (developmental) theory – individuals believe that intelligence, personality and abilities are something that can be developed and can be impacted; and 2) entity theory (fundamental) - basic qualities are static and impossible to change, it is simply something we are born with. The same authors (2016) came to conclusion through method of case study that teacher's implicit theories can impact their pedagogical thinking and they have described possible mechanisms used in connection of the teacher's way of thinking with their pedagogy practice. Their beliefs have impacted the understanding of learning, teaching, studying and the motivation itself. A person with a dominantly incremental theory was more focussed on process and on teaching according to student's capabilities and the fair evaluation of their accomplishments. This person

believes that emotional processes and learning strategies are the largest predictors of learning and accomplishment, therefore their teaching intentions were to provide emotional support and to help students to find adequate methods of learning. The classroom atmosphere was oriented towards success, while learning and progress are constantly accentuated. Lack of motivation could be observed in student's previous failures, bad learning techniques and in the lack of effort. A person with a dominant entity theory was more focussed towards personal, unchangeable characteristics of the students that were often described through their accomplishments or talents; this person measured their success through student progress, but in terms of helping them to earn the grades that correspond to their qualities. This person explains the lack of motivation with insufficient student abilities, and the classroom atmosphere is oriented towards execution, evaluation and achievement goals – grades are discussed often. Authors (2016) came to a conclusion that individuals have a strong need to prove their implicit theory – a teacher that represented the entity theory enjoyed more and tried while working with successful students, while the teacher that represented the incremental theory enjoyed more and tried while working with less successful students.

The connection between teacher's beliefs and actions i.e., teaching practice, is observed and written about by multiple authors (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Pratt et al., 2016; Rissanen et al., 2016; Skott, 2015). By analysing previous research and scientific theses, Pajares (1992) notices a connection between the beliefs an individual has and his or her behaviour and he points out that the beliefs the individuals have are good indicators for decisions they make in their lives. Specifically, teacher's beliefs impact their perception, decisions and judgements that impact their behaviour in class. Hativa and Goodyear (2002) point out that teacher's theories about teaching, learning and students/pupils strongly impact their teaching goals and their behaviour in class. Through analysis of available literature, they state that all the research up to that point have shown a connection between: a) teacher's opinion, beliefs and knowledge, b) teacher's teaching practice and c) pupil's and student's learning. Therefore, they warn that a greater attention should be given to the research of the connection between the behaviour and the belief of a teacher.

Skott (2015) states that the teacher's beliefs are viewed as the practice explaining principles. The success of one's actions cannot be judged solely on the basis of what can be seen, the individual's intentions (what they wish to accomplish) and the reasons why they see it as important and useful i.e., their beliefs need to be understood as well. Without doing so, we will not be able to fully understand the basic act of teaching. The same author (2015) noticed through review of education belief literature that a great number of early researches of teacher's beliefs was based on the expected one-dimensional connection between teacher's behaviour and students' learning while the focus of the research shifted from visible behaviour to

purposeful and planned action and expected causes of action in terms of teacher's beliefs. Beliefs were thought to be the main determinant of teacher's actions and, by consequence, students' learning. Other teacher's beliefs researches pointed out the importance of studying the teacher's thought process, but this thought process was primarily seen as an obstacle that needs to be changed because the teacher's beliefs are often not in accordance with the background beliefs of the dominant education politics; therefore, any attempt at reform fails because the teachers refuse to accept it. Author states that great number of research and authors highlight the importance of teacher's beliefs in regards to the education reforms because beliefs, if not in accord with values represented by the reform, can seriously undermine its success. Even when teachers introduce changes in their work in order to meet the initiative proposed by the reform, they can do this superficially through methods and work forms now deemed 'appropriate' but their true purpose is not realized because the teacher is still using those, perhaps different methods and work forms in order to reach their own goals that are in accordance to the beliefs represented by the teacher (Spillane et al., 2002, according to Skott, 2015).

In order for any education reform or any type of change to be successful, the beliefs in the background of educational philosophies of the forementioned reforms need to correspond to the educational philosophies of teachers and professors. It can be achieved, or at least can come close to it if within professional development organized for teachers in order to introduce changes according to reform, we organize, among other things, classes and workshops with the goal of bringing awareness to the teacher's educational philosophy, as well as beliefs that are in the background of the educational philosophy chosen for the reform initiative.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES AND TEACHERS' ACTIONS

The educational philosophies are the key to understanding teachers' actions and to understanding the role of beliefs in educational practise. They allow the teachers to overview and connect education theories and practice through holistic perspective (Erden, 1998, according to Ilhan et al., 2014), they impact the implementation of different learning and teaching activities in the classroom as well as the classroom interaction (Baş, 2015) and readiness to accept reforms (Trigwell et al., 1996, according to Gezer, 2018).

Through educational philosophies teachers grasp the education process in a more comprehensive way and define themselves as teachers. Şahan and Terzi (2015) see teacher's primary role in shaping the individual and the society, which can be achieved through educational philosophy frame they represent and the

approach to learning and teaching[3] that corresponds to their educational philosophies. The premise that teachers shape the individual and the society can be questioned because, from a contemporary pedagogical perspective, teachers have neither the power nor the task to shape individuals. They should support them in their overall development (cognitive, affective and psychomotor), rely on their dispositions, design stimulating classes and lead them to achieve learning outcomes, and the way they achieve this is influenced by their educational philosophies.

Numerous authors notice that teacher's actions are heavily influenced by their educational philosophies (Cetinić, 2005; Gezer, 2018; Ilhan et al., 2014; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Şahan & Terzi, 2015; Watson & Coso Strong, 2013; Williams, 1996) and that they are the key element for introducing changes in education (Baş, 2015; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018). Terzi and Uyangör (2017) also note that each education system, alongside education politics and documents vital to education, are under the influence of some educational philosophy or philosophies although this is never explicitly pointed out. That is how different approaches in pedagogy and pedagogy conceptions rely and have relied on certain philosophical ideas and directions and the understanding humans and the world that each of those ideas entails. Beatty et al. (2009) bring out the conclusions of many authors - what we believe in, our beliefs about students, teaching materials and everything else that is important for teaching process impact significantly our actions in classroom, regardless of the content we teach and our way of teaching. Educational philosophies can reveal deeper structures and values that give meaning and justification to each individual's approach to teaching. Understanding teacher's educational philosophies allows us to place teaching practices of an individual into the context of a broader teacher community and thus gain more insight into the phenomenon.

Furthermore, they can also be seen as a tool for teacher's personal improvement, where the process of reflection is important because that way one raises the level of self-awareness. Mcalpine and Weston (2002) and Entwistle and Walker (2002) think that the improvement of teaching is a developmental process that includes the change of beliefs and concepts about teaching, learning and students and reflection and self-reflection helps with that.

Williams (1996) points out that most often the teachers are not aware of their own beliefs and educational philosophies as well as their impact on teaching practice and only when they become aware of their own beliefs, are they able to

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[3] Approaches to teaching can be observed from two points of view – a) they reflect the behaviour during teaching that is most acceptable to teachers which makes them closely connected to teacher's conceptions of teaching (Kember & Kwan, 2000, according to Norton et al., 2005), while others consider that b) approaches to teaching reflect behaviour that teacher is forced to accept due to curriculum, institution or students. In this case, the notion is more connected to teacher's perception of their teaching surroundings than their conceptions of teaching in classroom (Martin et al. 2000, according to Norton et al., 2005). Numerous authors (Akerlind, 2004, 2008; Martin et al., 2002; Norton et al., 2005) point out that the two dimensions found in teacher's conceptions and approaches to teaching and learning are always noticeable: teacher-oriented and student-oriented.

question and change them. Successful and efficient teachers have their educational philosophies in accord with their practice (Clarkson, 1983; Clandinin, 1986; Hart, 1990, according to Williams, 1996). Through process of reflection on our educational philosophy we become aware of our beliefs. By (explicit) understanding of educational philosophies i.e., becoming aware of the beliefs in the background, it is possible to identify parts of teaching practice that are not in accordance with them, and then establish through reflection whether is it necessary to change parts of teaching practice or your educational philosophy; then that becomes a tool for creating and maintaining a clear and authentic teacher identity (Beatty et al., 2009). The same authors, note that the process of reflection and public speech on educational philosophies are important because they enable the identification of similarities among teachers, but also differences between colleagues, so the discussion about educational philosophies has to be open to new experiences and different points of view; it has to be respectful towards differences and not to criticize because they are important, if not fundamental for a teacher and their identity and critique will cause the person to shut down and refuse to discuss the topic further.

By working on ourselves and raising awareness of our educational philosophies, we will be able to better understand and to change the elements of our teaching, be more willing to re-examine theories, spot contradictions in them and understand the assumptions and concepts underlying educational theories (Tupas & Pendon, 2016 ). Only when we become aware of our educational philosophy and the reasons why we act in a certain way in teaching, we can make a real self-reflection about ourselves as a teacher and about our teaching. Then, if we notice some inconsistencies between our educational philosophies, the beliefs behind them, and our teaching practices, we can begin to think more about how to align them and improve ourselves as teachers, and thus our teaching.

## CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Since there is no uniformity in defining educational philosophies, at the same time there is no agreement between the identification and classification of educational philosophies. As a consequence, Sadker and Zittleman (2016) and Watson and Coso Strong (2013) identify 5 educational philosophies along a continuum starting from those that are more directed at a teacher: essentialism and perennialism; to those that are more directed at a student: progressivism, social reconstructivism and existentialism. The one thing that all educational philosophies directed at the teacher have in common is the fact that they emphasize the transfer of knowledge and skills from the older (and wiser ones) to the younger ones. The teacher is the one whose task is to achieve this outcome and the one to have the authority to succeed in it. What educational philosophies that are directed at the student have in common is the fact that the student is in the centre of the education process, they rely on their autonomy and the experiences they bring to school, while the role

of the teacher is to support the student's development. Tupas and Pendon (2016) add behaviourism to the aforementioned philosophies. Referencing Kohlberg and Mayer (1972), Silvernail (1992) divides them in: philosophy of traditionalism, progressivism and romanticism.

Still, there are 4 educational philosophies on which the majority of scientists in this area agrees (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sahan & Terzi, 2015) and they are: (1) perennialism, (2) essentialism, (3) progressivism and (4) reconstructivism, i.e. social reconstructivism. Perennialism and essentialism are considered to be traditional (Aybek & Aslan, 2017; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sahan & Terzi, 2015), i.e. modern (Gezer, 2018) educational philosophies, while progressivism and (social) reconstructivism are considered to be contemporary (Aybek & Aslan, 2017; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sahan & Terzi, 2015), i.e. postmodern educational philosophies (Gezer, 2018).

Each of them has its root in one or more philosophical approaches and in their metaphysical, epistemological and axiological beliefs. Perennial educational philosophy relies on realism, essentialism on idealism and realism, progressivism and (social) reconstructivism on pragmatism, while (social) reconstructivism relies to certain extent on existentialism (Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018).

## a) TRADITIONAL/MODERN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES – ESSENTIALISM AND PERENNIALISM

Educational philosophy of essentialism is based on the philosophy of idealism and realism (Ornstein and Hunhins, 2018). "The goal of essentialism is the education of a useful and competent person, training of an individual for the development of a community, its democratic values and social stability, and the basic education is focused on reading, writing and calculating." (Cetinić, 2005, pp. 30).

Essentialism claims that a person is born as tabula rasa and is then developed through education (Aybek & Aslan, 2017; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017), and the accent in the education is put on memorizing the accumulated knowledge of our generation through traditional academic disciplines and subjects – Mathematics, sciences, mother tongue and a foreign language and literature and they are being referred to as core curriculum (Sadker & Zittleman, 2016). Teachers who accept this educational philosophy have the goal to transfer to students the basic knowledge in academic disciplines, that is knowledges and skills that have shown to be useful in the past: patriotism, the values of a culture and building a strong character (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015). Characteristic for the teachers who accept this educational philosophy is that they have the belief that they should educate every child, the focus is on the student's intellectual development and the cognitive developmental area, while the teaching process is oriented more on the content that is being taught and not on the students (Tupas & Pendon, 2016). Also, besides the content, the teaching

process is focused on the teachers, not on the students since it is believed that the teacher should be an intellectual and moral role model for the students. The teacher (as a specialist in the academic discipline within which the subject is taught) is the one who determines what will be learnt and in which way, and during the planning process they do not rely on the students' interests and the students' development is assessed through their test results (Sadker & Zittleman, 2016). By reviewing the literature, Gezer (2018) points out that in educational philosophy of essentialism accent is on the students' education, in accordance with the dominant values of culture so that they could fit in the society. The teachers who accept this educational philosophy consider themselves to be the representative and model of the society, have the authority, perform a dominant and active rule during the teaching and learning process, rely exclusively on teaching the knowledge presented in the textbooks, teach the students the correct answers and punish them when necessary. They consider that the role of a student is to be a passive participant in the teaching and learning process, to memorise what they are studying since they are of opinion that the students' capacities are best developed when studying from the textbooks and they are convinced that the students ought to put a lot of effort into it and overcome the challenges because it is in the basis of studying.

The other traditional, that is modern educational philosophy is perennialism which is based on the philosophy of realism (Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Terzi & Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). For perennialists, the goal of education is the development of a rational thought and the discipline of the mind since they consider it to be one's greatest strength (Cetinić, 2005; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Terzi &Terzi & Uyangör, 2017), and this can only be accomplished through educational facilities (Cetinić, 2005). This is the reason why the teachers who accept this educational philosophy focus their attention on "big" books, ideas and concepts which could stand the tooth of time, while they find fault with the essentialist is the fact that they are mostly focused on students' memorizing a vast amount of factual information (Sadker & Zittleman, 2016). These teachers believe that there are universal and absolute truths, and education should be in accordance with them; therefore, the aim of education should be to educate people into becoming persons with a strong and the appropriate character and work on the intellectual development of an individual since the basic and essential part of the human nature is a man's mind (Aybek & Aslan, 2017; Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015). Nevertheless, education is observed as a sorting mechanism of individuals since in an institutional context intellectually gifted people can and should be recognized and it necessary to prepare them for leading roles, while the others should be directed into pursuing vocational education/studies (Sadker & Zittleman, 2016). Gezer (2018) summarises the main characteristics of perennialism: while teaching, the focus is on the inalterable and universal knowledge and values, teaching and examining the classics, teachers give real-life

examples during the teaching process, while the most important is one's intellectual development. Teachers believe that they should have the central role in the teaching process, use the methods of deduction like experiment, observation and Socratic dialogue, and the students should listen to their teachers and assume responsibility for their learning. Through education the students are prepared for life and this is the reason why it is necessary to transmit the characteristics of a culture to younger generations through schools (Ilhan et al., 2014).

The one thing that the educational philosophies of perennialism and essentialism have in common is the fact that they are directed at the content and the teacher whose role is to transfer the knowledge and cultural values to the students, while less attention is paid to the learning process and to the students themselves who have a passive role in the learning process (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Watson & Coso Strong, 2013). The beliefs behind these educational philosophies are mostly already overcome in contemporary pedagogical thought, although this does not mean that they are completely overcome in contemporary educational practice.

## b) CONTEMPORARY/POSTMODERN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES – PROGRESSIVISM AND (SOCIAL) RECONSTRUCTIVISM

Progressivism represents the transition from educational philosophies directed at the teacher and the content to those directed at the student and to the learning process. It is based on the philosophy of pragmatism (Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018) and the idea that the change is the one thing that never changes (Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). Teachers who accept this educational philosophy think that prior knowledge and experience will help the students with acquiring new knowledge (Tupas & Pendon, 2016), that the students have the central role in the education process and that their needs and interests should be in the centre of teaching, and that the role of the teacher is to direct the students and motivate them to learn through real-life situations (Tupas & Pendon, 2016). For those teachers, the aim of education is the development of an individual who will contemplate on everything, develop their attitude and contribute to the society in that way (Cetinić, 2005).

Teachers who represent the educational philosophy of progressivism, in the teaching and learning process, put the accent on students, they encourage them to express their opinion and to a dialogue, they are focused on a student's individual work or on work in smaller groups, while the students are expected to participate in coming up with class rules… (Williams, 1996). Education, withing this educational philosophy, does not refer to knowledge transfer and preparation for life, but it is life itself and it should be directed at interests and needs of particular students, while the focus in learning ought to be on problem solving, connecting and application of the learnt in real life, that is on active learning and practical

and applicable knowledge (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). Besides, Gezer (2018) points out that teachers who accept this educational philosophy organize the learning process in a way that the students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, while the teacher's role is to lead the students, plan the teaching and learning process relying on the students' interests and needs, face the situations which also arise in real life, create democratic learning environment, encourages collaborative learning and uses problem-solving methods in teaching.

The other contemporary/postmodern educational philosophy is (social) re-constructivism, and it is based on the philosophy of pragmatism and partly on the philosophy of existentialism (Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018). The focus is on an individual's reflection, development of critical thinking skills and activity in the society and for the society and the aim is to build a new, better and more just society (Aybek & Aslan, 2017). Teachers who accept this educational philosophy are convinced that education is the means to balance a society out and secure an ideal social and implement social changes (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). In the teaching and learning process both teacher and students have an active role, they reflect on the real life and the problems that the society is facing, in a narrow and broad area, notice and think of practical actions which can be conducted in order to implement the changes, they are actively involved in the society and they consider it the biggest value of education. Aspiring to create a new and better society, they are led by democratic principles, just like the pragmatists (Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). Referencing the relevant literature, Gezer (2018) points out that teachers who accept this educational philoophy devise plans for realizing social reforms and they want to implement changes in a society. The teacher creates a democratic atmosphere in a classroom, they are the representatives of the changes; the accent is put on the practice, they do not use punishment, they raise students awareness of the problems that the humankind is facing, they raise their awareness of various injustices and inequality present in a society and they use project-based learning. Besides the content planned in the curriculum, teachers focus on the current topics and social problems such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, racism, sexism, migration, etc. to raise the students' awareness of the problems that endanger the human kind and people's dignity. Teachers consider that the students should be active participants in the teaching and learning process, to come to the conclusions by discussing different ideas and theses, to create beliefs about the necessary changes in the society and act accordingly. In this educational philosophy the teacher has the role of a mentor to the students in the attempts of impacting the social changes and their task is to take into consideration students' academic and personal goals and connect it with a social problem and, in that way, involve them in socially beneficial activities. Tupas and Pendon (2016) note that teachers who

accept this educational philosophy often use group work activities, they cooperate with the local community and believe that the experience of group learning must be authentic, have an inner value for the students and demand social actions. They also note that the teacher who represents this philosophy often engages in dialogues with students, helps them identify the problems, creates hypotheses, finds the information, draws conclusions and plans the actions and they are focused on conducting action research.

What these two philosophies have in common is the fact that the student is the centre of the teaching and learning process, the students are encouraged to take an active part in the learning process and to think critically, while the teacher is the person who leads the students on their path to cognition (Gezer, 2018; Ornstein & Hunhins, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2016; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017). The contemporary pedagogical paradigm is heavily influenced by the beliefs behind these educational philosophies.

## RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Research on education philosophies was mostly based on identifying the representation of certain educational philosophies on the sample of primary and secondary school teachers or students of educational study programmes and on exploring their relationship with different aspects of activities. In this way, they have explored the connection of educational philosophies with: approaches to teaching (Watson & Coso Strong, 2013); approaches to learning and teaching (Sahan & Terzi, 2015), conceptions of learning and teaching[4] (Aslan, 2018; Baş, 2015), development of dispositions of critical thinking (Aybek & Aslan, 2017), and of the teachers' beliefs of self-efficiency (Oğuz Er, 2020), attitudes to student-focused teaching (Williams, 1996) and attitudes to multicultural education (Gezer, 2018).

Cetinić (2015) conducted a research with teachers in primary and secondary schools in Croatia. The results of the research showed that the teachers are most favourable to the educational philosophy of progressivism, after which follow behaviourism and perennialism, while they are least prone to adopt the educational philosophies of essentialism and existentialism. It can be noted that, even though the participants were most favourable to progressivism, there was still a large number of participants who indicated the agreement with the traditional educational philosophies. In the study by Tupas and Pendon (2016), on a pattern of students of educational study programmes, the results showed that they were most prone

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[4] Conceptions of learning and teaching refer to the activities, methods and teaching paradigms used by teachers when organizing the learning environment (Chan and Elliot, 2004, according to Asan, 2008), and today there are two dominant conceptions, a traditional and a constructivist one (Baş, 2015). Similarly, Kember and Kwan (2002) recognize two broader conceptions with two subcategories: a) teaching as knowledge transmission – teaching as information transfer and teaching as facilitating the understanding for the students; b) teaching as support of learning – teaching as satisfying the students' learning needs and teaching as encouraging students to become independent in the learning process.

to adopting contemporary educational philosophies: progressivism, existentialism and reconstructivism, and were less inclined to adopting traditional educational philosophies. Silvernail (1992) had similar results in the research of the educational philosophies of secondary school teachers. The results showed that they were most in favour of educational philosophy of progressivism, while they were least favourable to the philosophy of romanticism although the participants in the research were generally in favour of all three educational philosophies and none of them dominated.

Sahan and Terzi (2015) conducted/carried out a research with the future teachers to examine the connection between their educational philosophies and their approach to learning and teaching. The participants were most in favour of the educational philosophy of progressivism, followed by reconstructivism, perennialism and finally, essentialism; and when it comes to approach to learning and teaching, the participants are far more in favour of constructivism than of a traditional approach. The research showed a positive correlation in accepting perennialism and essentialism with traditional approaches to learning and teaching and accepting progressivism and reconstructivism with constructivist approach to learning and teaching.

The educational philosophies of progressivism, reconstructivism and existentialism are statistically significantly connected with contemporary constructivist conception of learning and teaching, while the educational philosophies of perennialism and essentialism are statistically significantly connected with traditional conception of learning and teaching (Baş, 2015). The author concludes that the educational philosophy that is dominant in a teacher has a significant, if not even crucial, role in developing their conception of learning and teaching and points out that the curriculum in Turkey is constructivist-oriented, but the teachers are still more favourable of perennial and essentialist beliefs and their actions are more in accordance with the traditional conception of learning and teaching.

Williams (1996) examined the connection between the teachers' educational philosophies and the attitudes to student-oriented teaching. The results showed a statistically significant, but weak positive correlation between educational philosophy of progressivism and their attitudes to student-oriented teaching, but it also showed a weak positive correlation between a traditional educational philosophy and their attitudes to student-oriented teaching. The author concludes that the teachers who participated in the said research generally have positive attitudes to student-oriented teaching and that they are equally favourable of both educational philosophies. The author points out that it is possible that the results are like that because the participants are generally more prone to the middle categories on the assessment scales, but in this research they were not offered this category so it may have been expressed in this way. The recommendation for the educational practice she gives is exploration and teaching educational philosophies and their

influence on the teaching practice within the educational study programmes at universities, but also on the development of teacher training programmes in the area for the teachers who are already employed. In these teacher training programmes, she suggests that we should focus on self-assessment techniques and recognizing, reflecting and talking about the possible reasons of the difference between their beliefs and practice.

Gezer (2018) examined the connection between future teachers' educational philosophies with their attitudes to multicultural education. Modern educational philosophies (essentialism and perennialism) were statistically significant, but negatively connected with the attitudes to multicultural education, while postmodern educational philosophies (progressivism and reconstructivism) were statistically significantly connected with the attitudes to multicultural education. She recommends that the future research could focus on qualitative methodology in order to get a broader and more comprehensive insight into the research problem.

In the research on the connection of educational philosophies of university students of educational study programmes with the developed critical thinking skills (Aybek & Aslan, 2017) the results showed that the development of critical thinking skills moderately connected with the contemporary educational philosophies, progressivism and reconstructivism, but it is not connected to the traditional educational philosophies, perennialism and essentialism.

In a research conducted with the university students of educational study programmes Watson and Coso Strong (2013) reached the conclusion that the educational philosophies of essentialism and progressivism are nearly equally represented. They also examined which educational philosophies are most represented in the lessons they attend and the results showed that these lessons are mostly traditional, with some characteristics of essentialist and perennial educational philosophies and that it reflects on the educational philosophies adopted by the students. They conclude that the subjects that prepare the students to work at schools should have topics on educational philosophies and their implications on learning and studying have implemented in them.

By examining the research on educational philosophies, it can be noticed that they are influenced by the following sociodemographic variables: the teacher's area of expertise (Cetinić, 2005; Oğuz Er, 2020; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Silvernail, 1992; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017; Watson & Coso Strong, 2013), sex (Oğuz Er, 2020; Sahan & Terzi, 2015; Silvernail, 1992; Terzi & Uyangör, 2017), working experience (Cetinić, 2005), previous experience (Watson & Coso Strong, 2013), the type of school they are employed at – a primary school, a gymnasium or a vocational school (Cetinić, 2005), level of education (Cetinić, 2005) and basic training for the teacher profession (Watson & Coso Strong, 2013).

Given the previous research it is possible to conclude that the participants of the research were mostly in favour of educational philosophy of progressivism,

which should come as no surprise because even the contemporary paradigms in pedagogy have a lot of characteristics of this educational philosophy which today represents the dominant discourse in education. However, some research have showed the accordance with the educational philosophies that are classified as traditional/modern, which is explained with their experience they had or still have as university students. They have stressed the importance of implementing the topics on educational philosophies within the subjects on educational study programmes and speaking up on this important and somewhat neglected topic so that the primary and secondary school teachers could become aware of the beliefs that are underlying their opinion on pedagogical issues, and which also influence their actions and most often on a unconscious and implicit level. Therefore it is necessary to become aware of them, think about them, discuss about them and reflect on our own work so that we can truly work on improving the teaching process.

## CONCLUSION

The teachers are the basis of the quality of every educational system. Successful educational system depends on dedicated and motivated teachers who reflect on their work and strive for improving themselves. Even though the teachers are usually unaware of their educational philosophies, there are still a significant factor of influence on the educational activities of teachers in the teaching process, and they, most often, implicitly reflect on their educational practice. That is why it is necessary to write and talk more about educational philosophies and work with teachers to raise their awareness.

Although a lot has been written about educational philosophies at the international level, in the national literature it is a rather neglected topic, with the exception of one master's thesis (Cetinić, 2005) which examined the educational philosophies of teachers in the Republic of Croatia. This paper therefore sought to contribute to the consideration of this construct in the national context. Interestingly, although there is a lot of literature on educational philosophies and they have been intensively written about since the 1980s, many articles lack an explicit definition of the construct. The aim of this paper was to review the literature on educational philosophies of teachers, to contribute to the definition of this construct and to point out the importance of its research within pedagogy and to connect educational philosophies of teachers with their work in educational practice. Therefore, after a review of the available literature, this paper presents a definition of educational philosophies, which is - educational philosophies represent teachers' notions of issues that are closely related to education and upbringing and are based on their metaphysical, epistemological and axiological beliefs. Given the differences in these beliefs, it is possible to identify several educational philosophies. Although not all authors agree with identifying the educational philosophies, it is possible to conclude that today there are four dominant philosophies, and there is a consensus

on them, and they are perennialism and essentialism, being the traditional/modern educational philosophies and progressivism and (social) reconstructivism as contemporary/postmodern educational philosophies. The level of adopting certain educational philosophy is influenced by the teacher's various sociodemographic characteristics, and the research have confirmed that there is a connection between the educational philosophies and different aspects of teachers' actions. This insight accentuates the importance of the further examination and exploration of this construct, and the need of continual teachers' training in this area. The aim of the teacher training programmes would be to raise the awareness of the existence of educational philosophies, to raise the awareness of having personal beliefs which stem from them, and reflection on teaching practice and the possibilities of improving it. The recommendations for the further research in this area is to, through quantitative and qualitative methods, get a better insight into the construct of educational philosophies, and into their connection with the aspect of teachers' actions that are still unexplored.

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