

WHAT KIND OF A TEACHER DOES EDUCATIONAL POLICY WANT: AN ANALYSIS OF ONE EUROPEAN DOCUMENT

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Abstract: In order to develop culture of kindergarten, as well as to design initial teacher education and to develop education policy, we need landmarks. Taking into account globalization trends and process of European integration, we are aware that educational policy of European Union has a significant impact on development of education field in countries that want to be a part of this community, such as Serbia. That is why we tried to discover what landmarks can be found in document of European Commission about teachers and their competences. The aim of our research was to discover how educational policy sees teachers in document *Supporting teachers competence development (for better learning outcomes)*. We analyzed the content of document by categorizing analysis units according to the matrix by crossing two dimensions: *autonomy of teachers* (from technician to reflective practitioner) and *value orientation in education* (from economic and pragmatic to humanistic and critical). Categorisation was done two times. Analysis units were relevant terms and entire paragraphs. The results show that we have two dominant ideas about teachers, described as: 1. teacher as technician serving given economic values and the market and 2. teacher as critical, reflective practitioner who contributes to institutional and social change. The existence of two images of a teacher, which are not only different but contradictory, means that the document sends contradictory messages, and that, by itself, it can not be a clear orientation to understanding the practice and

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deciding on it. On the other hand, dialogue between teachers about different ways of understanding this and similar documents, its values and consequences, can lead them to understanding their own ideologies, profession and ways of developing culture of kindergarten. It is important to note that in this paper, teacher is understood in the broadest sense: pre-school teacher, school teacher, educator.

Keywords: (pre)school teacher, teacher autonomy, value orientations in education

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of a research undertaken within the *Teacher Education Approaches* course offered at doctoral studies in pedagogy. The research was conceived and carried out by six researchers – five students and a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. The aim of our research was to discover how the profession of the teacher is perceived in a European educational policy document, where the term relates to all teacher categories – educators, and the primary and secondary school teachers. The reasons for carrying out this kind of research will be given below.

The relationship between the national and the global discourse in educational policy has been rather complex, which is why it merits the question of whether, and to what extent the global approaches are reflected in the national educational strategies (Despotović, Popović, 2014). Discussing the issue, many authors talk about the *Europeanization of education*. It involves” processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.” (Radaelli, 2004: 3). Taking into consideration that the European Commission, as the executive body of the European Union, largely dictates the creation of a European Education Area (Popović, 2014), its documents are particularly relevant not only for the EU education policy, but also for the educational trends in other countries, and particularly in those which are candidates for the accession to the EU.

The foregoing partially answers the question of why it is important to research these documents: they provide information on the European trends and tendencies which are also relevant for education in Serbia. Being familiar with the European policy documents is even more important if we keep in mind that the embedded policy process leads to a change in perception of the phenomena relevant to upbringing and education in Serbia (Hudson, Zgaga, Åstrand, 2010; Ozga & Jones, 2006). Therefore, whatever our attitude to the globalization trends and the European education policy may be, it is necessary to be aware of the solutions such policy offers. More specifically, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of those documents, and to find out what is the message they send, and in which way.

We decided to analyze the European Commission document entitled *Supporting Teacher Competence Development: For Better Learning Outcomes* (2013), as a typical document of the European education policy, relevant to the issues of teacher position, roles and competences.

The starting point in our analysis of how the teacher is perceived in the document, were the following findings. There is a number of perceptions of the teaching profession. On the one hand, the teacher is viewed and spoken of as a reflective practitioner, researcher, leader and hero (Radulović, 2016). Such views place an emphasis on teacher competence and the importance of teacher autonomy (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014; Radulović, 2016). On the other hand, there are views that education should respond to the needs of the social and economic development, where a teacher is perceived as a service provider reaching the given learning outcomes (Trifunović, 2013), and a standardization of teacher competences as the right course of action in order to enable the teacher to play that role. Such views essentially deny teacher autonomy. According to D. Pavlović Breneselović, the question of competencies and competence may be considered through the discourse of either a technocratic or a systemic approach to the issues of upbringing and education. While the former is characterized by the input-output approach to practice, the latter emphasizes a transformative nature of practice, participation, ethical and democratic behavior, multiperspectivity, reflectivity and scrutiny (Pavlović

Breneselović, 2014). This creates a need to consider the profession of the teacher in the context of different goals and values. Under the terms of a neo-liberal strategy of social development “education is required to accept the economic organization criteria – rationalization and effectiveness..., to equalize learning outcomes within a common education area...” and to accept the logic of standardization (Trifunović, 2013: 105). Meanwhile, the neo-liberal values and market-oriented education have been criticized by theorists of a humanistic or critical orientation. They see education as the road to social transformation and individual emancipation (in particular, of members of marginalized groups), and not as the means of economic growth in favor of the ruling social classes. Starting from the foregoing premise, a teacher will also have a significant role in deconstructing the inequitable distribution of social power, and in emancipatory processes (Apple, 2014; Freire, 2005).

METHOD

The research we carried out is a quantitative analysis of contents of the document entitled *Supporting Teachers Competence Development...* The aim of the analysis was to understand and interpret the ways in which the profession of the teacher is perceived in this document. The aim was operationalized by the two following research questions: What is the attitude towards teacher autonomy? Which educational values create a context in which the profession of the teacher is understood, or which values paint the picture of a teacher?

To analyze the document, we used a two-dimensional matrix. The first, horizontal dimension represents **ideology / value orientation in education**, with the economic and pragmatic, and the idealistic and critical values found at the extremes of the dimension. The second, vertical dimension represents **the identity of the teacher** whose values range from a technician to a reflective practitioner.¹² By crossing the

¹² Based on a similar two-dimensional matrix, Snoek *et al.* have developed four different scenarios for the purpose of their research into the role of the teacher in different social contexts. In their research, one dimension represented a continuum from individualism to social coherence, while the other represented a continuum from

two dimensions, we created four hypothetical constructs: reflective pragmatic, critical and reflective practitioner, pragmatic technician and technical facilitator of a critical paradigm. **Reflective pragmatic** uses reflection as a process. In this case, reflection is linked to the classroom activities through which he/she achieves the values of the economic and pragmatic ideology. **Critical and reflective practitioner** is a teacher to whom critical reflection is a characteristic of a professional attitude, his/her habitus. He/she reexamines and critically reconsiders its practice which he/she perceives as a social practice, and calls into question the underlying values. **Pragmatic technician** is a teacher who satisfies the requirements and values of the economic and pragmatic paradigm, without ever problematizing them. To him/her, requirements are there to be satisfied, not questioned. **Technical facilitator of a critical paradigm** relies in on humanistic values of the critical paradigm his/her practice, without ever reconsidering the values of the system or initiating changes; he/she becomes involved in the projects guided by such ideology. Technical facilitator is an achiever, not a creator.

We analyzed the contents of the document at two levels: **the level of terms or syntagmas** (the smallest meaningful units), and **the level of paragraph**. Terms or paragraphs are placed in the appropriate quadrant, i.e. the appropriate category relative to their meanings. As terms may take on different meanings depending on whether they are considered in the context of a paragraph or independently, there were certain differences in the results of the two analyses.

RESULTS

Results of the analysis through the categorization of terms and syntagmas show that most of the terms belong to one of the two following categories: **critical reflective practitioner** (for example: reflective practitioners who reflect upon their own practices; professional identity – attitudes, expectations, leadership; teaching as

pragmatism to idealism (Snoek *et al.*, 2003). Although our research was inspired by this matrix, its dimensions, method and objectives are different.

praxis...) or **pragmatic technician** (for example: society expectations, high standards of teaching, high quality teachers, users of teacher competence framework...). As shown in the Figure 1. below, a small number of terms may be placed in the category of a reflective practitioner, and it relates to the teachers reflecting on issues at a microlevel, but within an ideology colored by the pragmatic and economic values.

Figure 1. Results of the term/ syntagm analysis

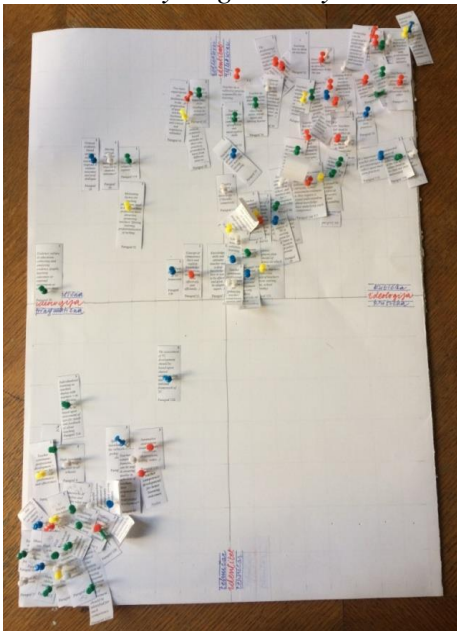
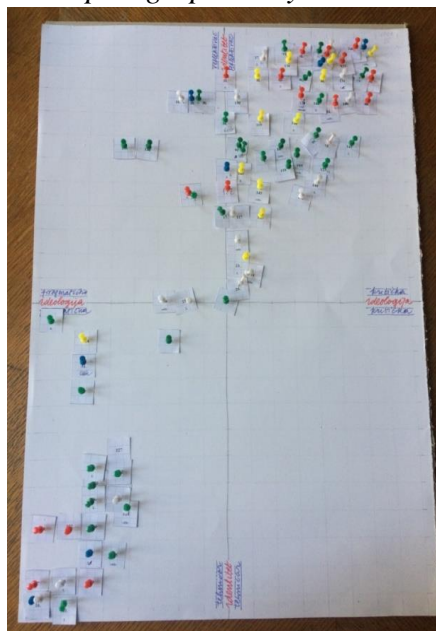


Figure 2. Results of the paragraph analysis



When categorizing terms at the level of paragraph (placing isolating terms into a context) it becomes even more apparent that they fall into one of the two following categories: **critical reflective practitioner** or **pragmatic technician**. As shown in the Figures 1 and 2 above, these categories are not only different but are diametrically opposed to each other. While a pragmatic technician is a teacher who implements the requirements of an educational policy without any critical reexamination of the meaning and consequences of such requirements, and is thus serves the given economic values and markets, a critical reflective practitioner is a teacher who, along with other stakeholders, examines and critically reconsiders practice,

reconstructs the existing distribution of power and introduces changes which contribute to the humanistic values. The difference, therefore, is also in the extent of a teacher's autonomy, and in the values and society to which his/her action contributes.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results show that the images of a teacher, as promoted by the analyzed document, are not different but also opposing and contradictory. The reasons for this may lie in an attempt of authors of the document to take into consideration the demands and information coming from different sources – from the scientific community (and the authors following different scientific paradigms), and the political community and social layers having economic power. Those demands are premised on different values, and have opposing objectives, so it is not odd that the document is not sending a consistent message as to what should teachers be like. Analyzing the document, we even had the impression that different parts of the text were written by different authors.

CONCLUSION

What are the implications of such essentially different perceptions of a teacher within one and the same document? They could, at the very least, bring confusion among both the practitioners and the national decision makers, and leave their course of action without guidance.

On the other hand, such contradiction may be understood as an opportunity to discuss the different values and perceptions of the profession, and to share and reexamine own ideologies and views of the profession and kindergarten culture. This would require a dialogue among all education stakeholders on the meaning and messages of the educational policy documents, on how they are understood, what are their underlying values and whose interests they serve, how they relate to our beliefs and practice, what significance and consequences they may have in the operative context, what should be the priorities when reconsidering and changing our own course of action, etc. Such dialogue would enable us not only to share our understanding of the import of the document, but also to become aware of our own beliefs,

understand our own practice and construct common meanings to guide us in our further course of action. It would also enable teachers to participate in the creation of educational policy, and to develop as reflective practitioners.

Provided that we are willing to advocate the perception of a teacher as a reflective practitioner, the education policy would need to make room for teachers to critically reexamine and create educational solutions and develop teacher competencies necessary to take such action.

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KAKVOG NASTAVNIKA U OBRAZOVANJU ŽELI OBRAZOVNA POLITIKA: ANALIZA JEDNOG EVROPSKOG DOKUMENTA

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Rezime: Za razvijanje kulture vrtića, kao i za osmišljavanje inicijalnog obrazovanja vaspitača i razvijanje obrazovne politike potrebni su nam orijentiri. Imajući u vidu globalizacijske trendove i proces evropske integracije, svesni smo da obrazovna politika EU značajno utiče na

kretanja u polju obrazovanja i u zemljama koje žele da se priključe ovoj zajednici, dakle i u Srbiji. Zato smo pokušali da otkrijemo koje orijentire možemo pronaći u jednom dokumentu Evropske komisije koji se odnosi na nastavnike i njihove kompetencije i kao cilj istraživanja postavili sagledavanje kakvo se viđenje praktičara - vaspitača i nastavnika zagovara dokumentom Supporting teacher competence development (for better learning outcomes). Analizu sadržaja dokumenta vršili smo kategorizacijom jedinica analize prema matrici nastaloj ukrštanjem dve dimenzije: autonomija nastavnika (koja se kreće na kontinuumu od tehničara do refleksinog praktičara) i vrednosne orijentacije u obrazovanju (koja se kreće od ekonomskih i pragmatičnih do humanističkih i kritičkih). Kategorizacija je vršena dva puta, pri čemu su jedinice analize bile relevantni pojmovi i paragrafi u celini. Rezultati pokazuju da u dokumentu dominiraju dva viđenja praktičara, koja bismo ukratko mogli opisati kao: 1. nastavnik kao tehničar u službi zadatih ekonomskih vrednosti i tržišta i 2. nastavnik kao kritički refleksivni praktičar koji doprinosi institucionalnoj i društvenoj promeni. Postojanje dve slike o nastavniku, koje nisu samo različite već i suprotstavljene, znači da dokument šalje protivrečne poruke, te da sam po sebi ne može biti jasan orijentir za razumevanje prakse i odlučivanje o njoj. S druge strane, dijalog među nastavnicima o tome kako razumeju ovaj i slične dokumente, vrednosti na koje se oslanjaju i posledice za koje ostavljaju prostor, može biti način za razumevanje sopstvenih ideologija, viđenja profesije i kulture vrtića kakvu želimo da razvijamo. Važno je napomenuti da se u radu pod nastavnikom, podrazumeva nastavnik u najširem smislu: vaspitač, učitelj, nastavnik predmetne nastave.

Ključne reči: nastavnik, autonomija nastavnika, vrednosne orijentacije u obrazovanju