

*The 28th International Scientific Conference
“Educational Research and School Practice”*

**THE STATE
PROBLEMS
AND NEEDS
OF THE MODERN
EDUCATION
COMMUNITY**

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

Editors

Jelena STEVANOVIĆ

Dragana GUNDOGAN

Branislav RANĐELOVIĆ



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CONTENT

PLENARY

Daniel Churchill

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR EDUCATION 12

Tímea Mészáro and Vilmos Vass

THE LINKS BETWEEN A CHANGED VISION OF LEARNING
AND PROJECT-BASED TEACHING 20

Slobodanka Antić

LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: HOW TO SUPPORT
THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONAL LITERACY 29

Slavica Ševkušić

PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF FINAL GRADE PRIMARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SERBIA: A CASE STUDY 35

Jelena Stevanović

THE STATE MATRICULATION EXAM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA:
THE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE 45

MODERN APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

Dunja Anđić and Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić

HOW MUCH DO CHILDREN LOVE NATURE? VALIDATION
OF THE BIOPHILIA INTERVIEW AND A REVISED CONNECTEDNESS
TO NATURE INDEX AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN..... 58

Vladeta Milin

STRUCTURING LESSONS OR STRUCTURING KNOWLEDGE
– WHAT DOES IT TELL US ABOUT THE TEACHING PRACTICE? 65

Sanela Hudovernik and Nastja Cotič

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MATHEMATICAL ACTIVITIES
IN KINDERGARTEN 71

Dušica Malinić, Ivana Đerić and Slavica Maksić

“WE HAVE LOST THE COMPASS
OF WHAT EDUCATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE”:
STUDENT CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOLING DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC..... 78

Marija Stojanović, Branislava Popović-Čitić,

Lidija Bukvić Branković, Marina Kovačević-Lepojević

COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
IN SERBIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 84

Marica Travar and Slađana Miljenović

REFORM OF THE FIRST TRIAD IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA FROM THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE 91

Olivera J. Đokić and Neda D. Osmokrović

YOUNG PUPILS' INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING
AND STRATEGIES OF AREA MEASUREMENT 96

Milica Marušić Jablanović, Jelena Stanišić and Slađana Savić

PREDICTORS OF PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR
– THE RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY
ON ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY 106

Dunja Anđić and Karin Terzić

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE METHOD OF PRACTICAL WORK
IN TEACHING THE SUBJECT OF NATURE AND SOCIETY
– THE STATE AND CHALLENGES OF THE PRACTICE..... 114

Li Ling-E and Wang Xiao-Jun

RUSSIAN LANGUAGE EXAM AND EDUCATION IN CHINA
– A COMPARISON WITH JAPANESE 121

Irina Tivyaeva and Diana Abdulmianova

DIGITAL POLITENESS IN DISTANCE AND BLENDED LEARNING:
A CASE OF INTERPRETER TRAINING 126

Emilija Lazarević, Jelena Stevanović and Luka Mijatović

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS
OF ACHIEVEMENT IN LOWER PRIMARY EDUCATION:
CLASS TEACHERS' OPINIONS..... 131

Nataša Stanković Šošo

IMPROVING THE READING COMPETENCE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE NOVEL
HAJDUCI BY BRANISLAV NUSIĆ) 139

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETENCIES OF EDUCATIONAL WORKERS

Olga B. Mikhailova

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODERN TEACHER:
LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATIVENESS 148

Jelena Stanišić, Dušica Malinić and Ivana Đerić

THE TEACHER AS THE INITIATOR OF CHANGE:
TURNING A BORING TOPIC INTO AN ENGAGING LESSON 153

Renata Čepić

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF STRENGTHENING TEACHER
IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 161

Aleksandra Maksimović, Jelena Đurđević Nikolić and Filip Stašević

SCIENCE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT THEIR PEDAGOGICAL EDUCATION:
CASE STUDY OF THE FACULTY
OF SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC 169

Isidora Korać

TWO DISCOURSES OF UNDERSTANDING HORIZONTAL LEARNING..... 176

Zorana Matićević

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TITLE PROMOTION
AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT..... 181

Nina Sungurova and Yulija Akimkina

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC MOTIVATION
IN CONDITIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING 188

Jadranka Milošević and Svetlana Ilibašić

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS: OPINION
OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SERBIA 192

COOPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT PARTICIPANTS IN MODERN EDUCATION COMMUNITIES

Nataša Vlah, Ivana Batarelo Kokić and Smiljana Zrilić

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE
OF STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES..... 200

Snježana Kević-Zrnić, Tanja Stanković-Janković and Slaviša Jenjić

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF COOPERATION
AND COMMUNICATION IN LEARNING
AND TEACHING PROCESSES 205

Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić

CHILDREN'S ATTACHMENT PATTERNS
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS 211

Jelena Mucić and Vesna Kostić

DIFFERENCES IN COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS
AND CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BEFORE
AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 217

Marija Ratković and Jelena Medar Zlatković

COOPERATION BETWEEN PEDAGOGUES AND TEACHERS
IN THE CONTEXT OF APPLYING INTERACTIVE TEACHING METHODS..... 223

Elena Ya. Orekhova

THE EVOLUTION OF FAMILY EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE
FROM SCOLARIZATION TO FAMILIARIZATION:
A FRENCH EXPERIENCE..... 228

Iva Manić

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT FAMILY-LEVEL RISK FACTORS
FOR THE OCCURRENCE OF BULLYING AT SCHOOL 235

Dragana Bogičević

ASSESSMENT OF EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE..... 243

Vesna Živković

THE ROLE OF THE CONCEPT OF DIALOGUE IN LISTENING
TO MUSIC IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION..... 249

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE METHOD OF PRACTICAL WORK IN TEACHING THE SUBJECT OF NATURE AND SOCIETY – THE STATE AND CHALLENGES OF THE PRACTICE

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Relevance of the Research Problem

With the introduction of the new curricula for primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia (Ministry of Science and Education; 2019), active learning has been placed at the centre of the teaching process. This is particularly evident in the structure of the new curriculum for the interdisciplinary subject Nature and Society (Ministry of Science and Education; 2019), which relies on the inquiry-based learning approach or the research approach as a methodological and integrative solution for achieving the desired learning outcomes of this subject. The practical activity method includes demonstrations, experiments, and various forms of scientific procedures such as measuring, observing, comparing, and note-taking in addition to the practical activities themselves. The use of this method is closely related to the development of logical thinking and it is crucially linked to the development of pupils' scientific competences and their application in everyday life (Domazet, 2009; Dujmović, 2011; Markočić *et al.*, 2019; Andić, 2022). The results

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of previous research have shown that teachers often associate the use of this method with the development of procedural and conceptual knowledge, the development of motor skills, and the arousal of motivation and interest in pupils. Likewise, studies have revealed that teachers encounter many obstacles in the use of this method, most of which are material. Commonly reported issues pertain to the availability and quality of resources and content as well as a lack of time (Terzić, 2022, according to Sani, 2013, p. 27; Banu, 2011). The main purpose of this study was to provide an insight into the state of this practice and identify the challenges that teachers face in the application of this method.

Research Problem

The aim of the present research was to determine teachers' views on the implementation of the practical work method in the teaching of the subject of Nature and Society. Based on the fact that the new curriculum significantly relies on the frequent use of the practical work method in schools, the following tasks and hypotheses were established:

1. To determine of the measurement properties of the scales used in the survey as research instrument (validity, reliability).
 - H1. Adequate measurement properties of the scales used in the instrument were expected.
2. To determine general attitudes towards the use of the practical work method.
 - H2. Medium-high values were expected in the measurement of general attitudes towards the use of the practical work method.
3. To obtain teachers' assessments of the positive aspects of the implementation of the practical work method.
 - H3. It was expected to evaluate the positive aspects of the implementation of the practical work method on the development of students' science skills.
4. To obtain teachers' assessments of the frequency of implementation of the practical work method.

- H4. High arithmetic means were expected for teachers' assessments of the frequency of implementation of the practical work method.
5. To identify potential statistically significant correlations between teachers' general attitudes toward the implementation of the practical work method and their assessment of implementation frequency.
- H5. A statistically significant correlation was expected to be found between teachers' general attitudes toward the implementation of the practical work method and their assessment of implementation frequency.

Research Method and Data Analysis Procedures

The research sample comprised 91 classroom teachers in 15 primary schools in Primorsko-Goranska County, most of whom were female. In terms of professional experience, the sample included 2 teacher trainees, 17 teachers with 1-10 years of experience, 25 teachers with 11-20 years of experience, 16 teachers with 21-30 years of experience, and 31 teachers with 31 and more years of professional experience. A total of 21 participants were fourth-grade teachers, 20 were second-grade teachers, 19 were first-grade teachers, 16 were third grade teachers, 10 worked in a combined department, and only 5 worked in an extended department. To conduct the research, a survey was created that contained thirteen questions, i.e., three scales, two additional (ranking), and two open-ended questions. The frequency of use of the practical work method was measured by assessments on a Likert scale ranging from rarely to always (every hour). The first scale measured general attitudes and assessments of the impact of the practical work method on pupils and teaching, and the third scale measured the positive aspects of the practical work method. Participants assessed the items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 - I strongly disagree, to 5 - I strongly agree. The survey was conducted online, anonymously and voluntarily. The data were processed using the SPSS 26 software. The research presented here was based on the research conducted as a part of Karin Terzić's thesis entitled *Practical Work In Teaching the Subject of Nature and Society* (2022) at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka.

Key Findings

Validity and reliability calculations, exploratory and factor analyses, and descriptive statistical calculations were performed in search of answers to the established hypotheses. The metrical characteristics of the instrument used indicated adequate measures. Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed. The results of descriptive parameters of both scales are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The overall arithmetic mean of the scale was $M=3.87$; $SD =0.468$, which was interpreted as a medium-high value.

Table 1. *The Results of Descriptive Parameters (Means, Standard Deviations) for the General Attitudes Scale of the Practical Work Method*

Items	M	SD
6. Practical activities promote the achievement of the objectives and results of teaching.	4,53	0,663
7. Practical work is an indicator of a modern understanding of the process of contemporary teaching and education.	4,40	0,708
4. I am motivated to use the method of practical work/activities.	4,13	0,748
11. I use the method of practical work in research lessons.	4,19	0,710
5. I am motivated to participate in additional training to improve the implementation of practical activities.	4,09	0,821
3. Practical activities can be carried out in all areas of the subject of Nature and Society.	3,87	0,955
2. I teach the content of the subject of Nature and Society using the method of practical work.	3,63	0,633
8. Practical work is sufficiently represented in textbooks and workbooks.	3,37	0,841
9. The curriculum for the subject of Nature and Society contains a sufficient number of proposals for implementing practical activities.	3,37	,798
1. The method of practical work is sufficiently implemented in the classroom.	3,13	,837
10. Since the introduction of the curriculum reform, I have carried out practical activities more frequently.*	3,10	1,029

* Deleted item – was not included in the analysis

The obtained results of the arithmetic mean on the General Attitudes scale confirmed the second hypothesis about the medium-high evaluation of the implementation of the method (the means ranged from 3.13 to 4.53).

The overall arithmetic mean of the Positive Aspects of the Practical Work Method scale was $M=3.80$; $SD =0.46$, which was interpreted as a medium-high value. The third hypothesis was rejected because participants with the highest scores believed that practical work developed students' logical thinking ($M=4.57$; $SD =0.58$).

Table 2. *The Results of Descriptive Parameters (Means, Standard Deviations) for the Positive Aspects Scale of the Practical Work Method*

Items	M	SD
5. Through practical work, pupils develop logical thinking ability.	4,57	0,585
6. Through practical work, pupils acquire lasting knowledge.	4,48	0,664
8. Through practical work, pupils acquire skills to cope with everyday life independently.	4,44	0,745
2. Practical work increases pupils' interest and curiosity in the contents of the subject of Nature and Society.	4,43	0,775
7. Practical work develops pupils' critical and creative thinking.	4,42	0,641
3. Pupils develop their motor skills through practical work.	4,40	0,619
4. Pupils develop science skills/competencies through practical work.	4,38	0,597
1. Through practical work, pupils become more motivated to learn.	4,29	0,795

The fourth research task, aimed at determining the frequency of using the method of practical work, showed that 69.23% of participants used the method once or twice a month, 26.37% of participants used it once or twice a week, 3.30% used it once a semester, and only 1.10% of participants used it in every lesson. Additionally, the non-parametric Spearman test was performed. The test showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between the general attitude of teachers and the frequency of using the method of practical work in Nature and Society classes. The statistically significant rho values ranged from $\rho = 0.207^*$ to $\rho = 0.759^{**}$. Based on the obtained results, the fourth hypothesis was rejected and the fifth hypothesis was confirmed.

Conclusion With Practice Implications

In conclusion, the analysis confirmed the adequate measurement properties of the two scales. The results of this preliminary research point to the conclusion that the method of practical work is insufficiently incorporated into the daily teacher practice in Nature and Society classes. The results suggest that teachers are aware of the numerous positive aspects of this method, which raises the question of why it is not used more often. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a significant correlation between general attitudes (especially participants' motivation) and the frequency of using the method.

Based on insights into the current state of implementation of this method in practice, it is possible to identify the challenges faced by both faculties and schools. This leads us to the following practical implications. There is a need for initial and additional training of teachers on the implementation of this method through various sources that could ensure that this method is more frequently and adequately used. It is also evident that teacher motivation for more frequent use depends on numerous other factors that should definitely be considered in teacher education and professional development in general, as well as in future research. Limitations of this research certainly include sample convenience, gender inequality, and sample size. However, the metric characteristics of the instrument suggest that it can be used in future research, which is certainly more than desirable given the results obtained in this research.

Keywords: contemporary teaching, curriculum, method of practical work, the subject of Nature and Society, teachers.

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