



PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

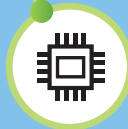
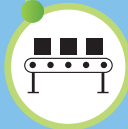


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DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS MODEL: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Developmental assets (DA) model is one of the leading framework derived from the Positive Youth Development perspective. It acknowledges the importance of addressing multiple factors in reaching positive development outcomes and the absence of different behaviour problems in children and youth, as well as the necessity of involving several social domains when designing programs and interventions, thus involving relevant subjects that affect the development of children and youth (Benson, 2003; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Shek, Sun, & Merrick, 2012). The DA model was developed at the end of 20th and the beginning of 21st century by the Search Institute research team lead by Peter Benson, and it rests on the assumption that all children and youth need quality “building blocks” in order to avoid different risks in their development and later adulthood, and to reach positive development target goals or outcomes (Benson, 1990; Benson,

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Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999; Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003; Mannes, 2006). These building blocks or assets, as identified in this model, are found in the social ecological approach to the development of individuals, taking into account the importance of the interaction between individuals with all their characteristics and the surrounding domains that affect the individual. Effects from family, school, peer and community domains are recognized and the model is focused primarily on the socialization process and the interaction of individual and these ecological factors. The model identifies key developmental assets, which, if possessed, support the individual in reaching positive developmental outcomes: absence of risk behaviors, presence of thriving behaviours and activation resilience in situations of adversity. Developmental assets are defined as significant relationships, skills, opportunities and values that help young people avoid risky behaviors, strengthen resilience, and improve their personal prosperity, and basically reflect the fundamental developmental processes of connectivity, competence, support and efficiency (Benson et al., 2003). They have cumulative effects, which means that more assets lead to more positive outcomes. On the other hand, assets, as protective factors, mitigate risk and serve as protection for individuals, leading to less exposure to risk factors or better adaptation in risk situations.

In the DA model, 40 assets are distributed along eight conceptually coherent categories, four of which are marked by external and four by internal assets. External assets reflect a developmental context consisting of a set of experiences, relationships and activities along multiple domains in which adults, as well as peers, provide young people with support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, as well as constructive use of free time. These are positive development experiences that are primarily gained through constant informal interactions with caring and principled adults, but also with peers, and then empowered through a wider network of community institutions (Benson et al., 1999; Scales & Leffert, 2004). Internal assets, as an individual construct, include a set of personal qualities, ie values, skills and self-perceptions, which develop gradually over time and help young people become effectively self-regulating in the domain of learning commitment, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. The development of internal assets is the result of the process of self-regulation, and their realization is more complex and slower than is the case

with external assets which are exclusively the result of the action of the social environment.

The DA model has been recognized as a practical, strength-oriented approach, which provides community members with a wide range of possibilities as to how they can improve their asset-building and support youth in their community to have better academic achievement, a stronger sense of belonging, of empathy for others, higher valuing of community service, and positive involvement in the life of the community. At the same time, this approach also supports a decrease in alcohol, tobacco and drug use, decrease in academic failure, increased commitment to school, and reduces the school drop-out rate (Mannes, 2006). The DA model recognizes the school domain as a very important setting and this model has been used in the educational community for transforming different levels of school functioning, such as organizational aspects (ie organization of the school day dynamics and physical space), delivery of educational content (curriculum and instructions), co-curricular programs (extra activities for students), partnership with other relevant subjects in the community (families, neighbors, organisations) and support services (formal institutions, counselling services and support staff) (Edwards, Mumford & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Scales & Taccogna, 2000). Another connection between the DA model and educational practice lies in the research focus of the connection of assets and explaining academic achievement and commitment to learning, while acknowledging the strong long-term negative effects of school drop on students' outcomes in adulthood (Benson, 2003; Mannes, 2006). Assessing the levels of developmental assets in a school community provides it with a basis for mapping positive practices, "sleeping", or inactive resources, important partners and elements of relationship with those partners that students can benefit from the most, and which can serve as a starting point of transformation of the school into a community that truly fosters positive development in youth. Basically, the goal of a community introducing the DA model, including the educational community, is to provide for "all students repeated exposure to caring relationships and challenging opportunities that will allow them to develop their talents, interests, and values in ways that help them reach personal goals and contribute to society" (Scales & Taccogna, 2000:74).

Respecting the current research body on developmental assets and their use in the educational setting, an explorative research was conducted during October

2019 with the goal of assessing developmental assets in students in a specific local community in Serbia. The purpose of the research was to serve as a basis for assessing the implications of the DA model on the educational practice in our context. The starting premisses were that the results would provide relevant data which would allow the mapping of “burning points” in the community, but also acknowledge good practice examples which could serve as a basis for any school to map their key allies in their community.

METHOD

Sample. The research was conducted on a sample of 785 older students from seven primary schools from the territory of the city of Belgrade. The average age of the participants was 13.4 years ($SD = 1.01$), and the age range from 12 to 15 years. The sample consisted of 37.5% of sixth grade students ($N = 294$), 30.5% of seventh grade students ($N = 240$) and 32.0% of eighth grade students ($N = 251$). The sample consisted of 51.3% boys ($N = 403$) and 48.7% girls ($N = 382$).

Instrument. The Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (A&B) questionnaire was used to assess developmental assets (Leffert et al., 1998), version for youth from 12 to 18. The questionnaire consists of 156 items measuring 40 developmental assets, ten patterns of risky behavior, eight indicators of thriving, and five developmental deficits. For the purposes of this research, only items related to development assets were used, namely 92 items distributed in eight scales. Four scales measure external assets: Support (17 items), Empowerment (11 items), Boundaries and expectations (16 items) and Constructive use of free time (6 items), and four are designed to measure internal development assets: Commitment to learning (10 items), Positive values (13 items), Social competence (11 items) and Positive identity (8 items). The answers to the items are given on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 2 = mostly not so, 3 = not sure, 4 = mostly so, 5 = always so). For all scales and each individual development asset, an average score ranging from 1 to 5 was calculated. A higher score indicates a higher level of presence of development assets. An achieved score of 4 and more indicates that the development asset is present to a sufficient extent to achieve positive development outcomes.

Procedure. The collection of data was realized in a period of regular classes during the first week of October 2019. The collection process was attended by the subject teacher and the researcher, who, after general remarks related to the purpose and manner of filling in the questionnaire, was available to students in terms of providing additional clarifications and eliminating any ambiguities in the wording of items, although there were no such requirements. All students in one class were examined at the same time, and it took an average of up to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data processing. Data related to the levels of developmental assets were processed by the methods of descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation). The normality of the distribution of scores was tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. For testing gender and age differences, the following tests were used: t-test for independent samples, Pearson's correlation, one-way variance analysis with post-hoc tests, and the calculations of eta squared for effect size estimation. The internal consistency of the scales was tested by Cronbach's reliability coefficient. The data were processed using the software package SPSS, version 19.

RESULTS

Checking the reliability of developmental assets scales, expressed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency, shows that all scales, except for Constructive use of free time (6 items, $\alpha = .48$), have relatively satisfactory reliability, which ranges from .65 to .83. The instrument as a whole has a high internal consistency of items ($\alpha = .93$). This also stands for the scale of external assets ($\alpha = .87$) and internal assets ($\alpha = .91$). The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test show a deviation from the normal distribution of scores on all scales, with only the scale Constructive use of time showing a positively asymmetric trend, while on all other scales there was a negatively asymmetric distribution of scores. The obtained finding indicates that most students have some internal and external developmental assets, with the exception of the assets related to free time, where most students do not use their free time in a constructive way. The results of testing the normality of the distribution and the reliability of the scales of development assets are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Testing the normality of the distribution and the reliability of the scales of development assets

Scale	Sk	Ku	K-S test		Kronbah α
			Statistic	Df	
Support	-0.59	-.13	.08***	693	.83
Empowerments	-0.38	-0.22	.10***	693	.75
Boundaries and Expectations	-0.45	-0.23	.06***	693	.73
Constuctive use of time	0.57	0.35	.10***	693	.48
Commintment to learning	-0.47	0.27	.05***	693	.65
Positive values	-0.99	1.00	.18***	693	.82
Social competences	-0.81	0.92	.10***	693	.67
Positive identity	-0.42	-0.31	.10***	693	.73

*** $p < .001$

The research results show that the developmental asset groups are present in the student population at an average level from 2.48 which refers to Constructive use of time to 4.01 in Positive values. Assets with the highest average score are, besides Positive values, Social competences and Boundaries and Expectations, following by Positive Identity and Support. Slightly lower scores are present in Commitment to learning and Empowerment, while still reaching average scores over 3.50. When it comes to the share of students in each category, results presented in Table 2 show the lowest presence of students in the category Constructive use of time, and the highest in Positive values category. Most of the assets groups are present in less than half of the sample, with only Positive values and Social competences emerging in over half of the students.

Table 2. Average levels of achieved developmental assets in the sample and the share of students with developed asset group

	M (SD)	min – max	N (%)
Support	3.80 (0.59)	1.89 – 4.94	309 (44.0)
Empowerment	3.56 (0.72)	1.56 – 4.96	243 (33.8)
Boundaries and expectations	3.94 (0.50)	2.19 – 4.94	328 (46.1)
Constuctive use of time	2.48 (0.79)	1.00 – 5.00	205 (28.2)
Commintment to learning	3.69 (0.66)	1.65 – 4.97	220 (30.9)
Positive values	4.01 (0.61)	1.92 – 5.00	476 (61.5)
Social competences	3.98 (0.56)	2.00 – 5.00	412 (54.5)
Positive identity	3.85 (0.69)	1.50 – 5.00	369 (48.0)

Regarding external assets, the results presented in Table 3 show that 3 assets from the Support group have an average score above 4: Caring neighborhood, Family support, Positive family communication. Over 60% of students report having these three assets, with three quarters of students having a Caring neighborhood asset. Two assets in this category are present in less than 50% of the sample: Caring school climate and Other adult relationships. Parent involvement in schooling has an average score below 4, but is still present in over 50% of students from the sample. In the Empowerment assets group, none of the assets reach the targeted 4 average score for the whole sample level. Lowest average scores are present in Services to others and the highest in Youth as resources. The only asset present in over 50% of the student sample is Safety. In the group Boundaries and expectations, Adult role models and Positive peer influences are the two assets that are present in the total sample with an average score of over 4. The lowest score is shown in reports on Family boundaries. This is also the only asset which less than 50% of students have developed. The highest percentage of students have the asset Positive peer influences. In Constructive use of time, the lowest percentage of students are engaged in Creative activities – less than one in five students, following with the lowest average score in the group. None of the assets in this group have an average score over 4 and the percentage of the students with developed asset over 50%. The highest score and percentage of students are present in Youth programs, which incorporate different sports activities and other available youth programs in the community.

Table 3. Average levels of achieved external developmental assets and the share of students with developed assets

	Asset	M (SD)	min – max	N (%)
Support	Family support	4.01 (0.61)	1.00 – 5.00	467 (60.3)
	Positive family communication	4.00 (0.90)	1.25 – 5.00	446 (62.2)
	Other adult relationships	3.58 (1.06)	1.00 – 5.00	313 (42.9)
	Caring neighborhood	4.12 (1.13)	1.00 – 5.00	583 (74.3)
	Caring school climate	3.38 (0.83)	1.00 – 5.00	254 (32.8)
	Parent involvement in schooling	3.84 (0.76)	1.50 – 5.00	412 (53.2)

	Asset	M (SD)	min – max	N (%)
Empowerment	Community values youth	3.65 (0.77)	1.00 – 5.00	329 (42.2)
	Youth as resources	3.66 (0.83)	1.00 – 5.00	320 (41.1)
	Service to others	3.23 (1.50)	1.00 – 5.00	315 (43.3)
	Safety	3.56 (1.34)	1.00 – 5.00	436 (56.3)
Boundaries and expectations	Family boundaries	3.68 (0.81)	1.00 – 5.00	323 (41.7)
	School boundaries	3.87 (0.94)	1.00 – 5.00	438 (56.2)
	Neighborhood boundaries	3.94 (1.18)	1.00 – 5.00	519 (66.4)
	Adult role models	4.01 (0.74)	1.00 – 5.00	460 (63.4)
	Positive peer influence	4.12 (0.64)	1.25 – 5.00	554 (74.9)
	High expectations	3.91 (0.85)	1.00 – 5.00	467 (60.3)
Constructive use of time	Creative activities	1.86 (1.03)	1.00 – 5.00	132 (18.2)
	Youth programs	3.35 (1.16)	1.00 – 5.00	379 (48.6)
	Religious community	2.22 (1.30)	1.00 – 5.00	189 (22.9)
	Time at home	3.20 (1.05)	1.00 – 5.00	327 (44.3)

Regarding internal assets, presented in Table 4, group Commitment to learning has two assets with high average scores: Achievement motivation and School engagement. The asset with the lowest score and the lowest percentage of students is Reading for pleasure. From half to three quarters of the students have developed the other four assets from the Commitment to learning asset group, with the highest percentage present in School engagement. In the Positive values group, all assets have high ratings in students. Four out of six assets have average scores over 4: Integrity, Honesty, Equality and social justice, and Responsibility, but scores close to 4 are also present in Caring and Restraint. None of the assets is represented with less than 50% of students, and Honesty has the highest students share. In the Social competences asset group, Planning and decision-making, as well as Resistance skills have the highest average scores, followed by Peaceful conflict resolution and Interpersonal competence. The lowest score is present in Cultural competence, which includes absence of feelings of discomfort in contact with persons of different cultural, racial or ethnic origin and possession of knowledge about these persons. All of the assets in this category have a relatively high percentage of students (60% and more). In the Positive identity assets group, only Positive view of personal future has an average score of over 4, with a very high share of students with this asset. The lowest

score is present in Sense of purpose, while gathering over 60% of students. Self-esteem is present in the lowest percentage of students, slightly below 50%.

Table 4. Average levels of achieved internal developmental assets and the share of students with developed assets

	Asset	M (SD)	min – max	N (%)
Commitment to learning	Achievement motivation	4.14 (0.74)	2.00 – 5.00	539 (69.9)
	School engagement	4.19 (0.45)	3.00 – 5.00	581 (78.6)
	Homework	3.89 (1.30)	1.00 – 5.00	495 (64.0)
	Bonding to school	3.46 (1.38)	1.00 – 5.00	438 (56.0)
	Reading for pleasure	2.74 (1.43)	1.00 – 5.00	223 (30.7)
Positive values	Caring	3.90 (0.74)	1.00 – 5.00	484 (61.7)
	Equality and social justice	4.08 (0.80)	1.00 – 5.00	521 (66.4)
	Integrity	4.21 (0.86)	1.00 – 5.00	580 (73.9)
	Honesty	4.11 (1.03)	1.00 – 5.00	597 (76.1)
	Responsibility	4.01 (0.92)	1.00 – 5.00	530 (67.5)
Social competences	Restraint	3.83 (1.25)	1.00 – 5.00	460 (59.4)
	Planning and decision-making	4.10 (0.79)	1.00 – 5.00	554 (72.9)
	Interpersonal competence	3.86 (0.82)	1.00 – 5.00	456 (60.0)
	Cultural competence	3.67 (1.37)	1.25 – 5.00	496 (65.6)
	Resistance skills	4.04 (0.87)	1.00 – 5.00	541 (69.9)
Positive identity	Peaceful conflict resolution	3.97 (0.98)	1.00 – 5.00	482 (64.8)
	Personal power	3.77 (0.91)	1.00 – 5.00	398 (51.3)
	Self-esteem	3.84 (0.82)	1.50 – 5.00	373 (48.2)
	Sense of purpose	3.72 (1.39)	1.00 – 5.00	476 (60.9)
	Positive view of personal future	4.22 (0.94)	1.00 – 5.00	617 (79.2)

When it comes to the total number of developmental assets in students, the research results show that the average student has over half of all assets, and that none of the students have less than six or more than 37 developmental assets. Regarding gender differences, girls have on average 2.4 assets more than boys, with the difference being statistically significant, but with low effect size. In addition, the results, presented in Table 5, show that there are no girls with less than 8 developmental assets.

Table 5. Average levels of achieved developmental assets within the Social competences asset group and the share of students with developed assets

	Number of developmental assets			Gender differences		
	<i>M (SD)</i>	min – max	<i>N (%)</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>DF</i>	η^2
All students	22.45 (7.04)	6 – 37	785 (100)			
Male	21.65 (7.13)	6 – 37	403 (51.3)	-3.02**	1	0.01
Female	23.26 (6.87)	8 – 37	382 (48.7)			

*** $p < .01$

Research results show that there is a moderate negative correlation between the age of the participants and the number of developmental assets ($r = -.432$, $p < .001$). Table 6 presents the results of ANOVA analysis regarding the number of developmental assets in students of different grades, confirming the steady trend of lowering the number of assets with reaching higher school grades and coming closer to the end of elementary school. The differences are statistically significant between all tested groups, with a high effect size.

Table 6. Results of one-way ANOVA for connection between the number of developmental assets and the students' school level

Grade	Number of developmental assets		Differences between grade groups		
	<i>M (SD)</i>	min – max	<i>F</i>	<i>DFB, DFW</i>	η^2
6 th	26.00 (6.12)1,2	10 – 37			
7 th	22.03 (6.32)1,3	11 – 36	79.67***	2, 690	0.23
8 th	18.68 (6.67)2,3	6 – 34			

In the next step of the analysis, the distribution of students in four quartiles regarding the number of assets they have was tested. The following categories were recognized (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011): low-asset youth with up to 10 assets developed, average-assets group with 11 to 20 assets, above-average group with 21 to 30 assets and a high-assets youth group with the number of assets developed from 31 to 40. The results show that in our sample 5.1% ($N = 58$) of youth fall under the category of low-asset youth. 35.6% ($N = 270$) have between 11 and 20 developmental assets, and 44% ($N = 328$) have over half of all assets, but still lower than 31. Only 15.3% ($N = 129$) of youth have a number of developmental assets between 31 and 40.

Collecting all the data regarding the share of students that have each developmental asset brings us to the categorization of developmental assets in our sample, shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Representation of assets in a descending order

Most represented assets (79.2% - 67.5%)	More frequent represented assets (66.4% - 60.3%)	Less frequent represented assets (60.3% - 48.2%)	Least represented assets (44.3% - 18.2%)
Positive view of personal future	Equality and social Justice	Family support	Time at home
School engagement	Neighborhood boundaries	Interpersonal competence	Services to others
Honesty	Cultural competence	Restraint	Other adult relationships
Positive peer influence	Peaceful conflict resolution	Safety	Community values youth
Caring neighborhood	Homework	School boundaries	Family boundaries
Integrity	Adult role models	Bonding to school	Youth as resorses
Planning and decision-making	Positive family communication	Parent involvement in schooling	Caring school climate
Achievement motivation	Caring	Personal power	Reading for pleasure
Resistance skills	Sense of purpose	Youth programs	Religious community
Responsibility	High expectations	Self-esteem	Creative activities

DISCUSSION

The reliability of the measuring instrument used and the associated scales for assessing the constructs of developmental assets range within an acceptable internal consistency (from .65 to .83), which is in line with the results of previous studies (eg Benson, 2003; Popović-Čitić & Bukvić, 2018; Scales, 1999; Scales et al., 2005) and justifies the use of the results obtained by this research for the purpose of drawing conclusions about the developmental assets of students. The exception is one scale of external development assets, Constructive use of

time, where the values of the reliability coefficient are assessed as insufficiently acceptable ($\alpha = .48$), so the results related to this scale should be taken with reserve. The reason for the absence of internal consent of this scale, also reported in other research regarding DA (Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Shramko, 2016), can be sought in the very nature and character of leisure activities provided by the items of the scale. These are activities that, apart from the common denominator of being carried out in free time, are basically so diverse (from participation in sports and creative activities, through engaging in activities in religious institutions, to going out at night) that it is not necessary to expect that the preference for practicing one activity (eg. playing sports) is interrelated with greater or lesser participation in activities of another character (eg. singing in a church choir). Therefore, it is not surprising that this group of developmental assets is not metrically seen as a unique construct, and in the re-application of this scale the modification of its items would be suggested.

In terms of the normality of the distribution of assets within the sample of students, the obtained results are in line with expectations. The absence of a normal distribution in the direction of negative asymmetry of developmental assets fully corresponds to the findings of previous research studies (eg Benson, Leffert, Peter, & Blyth, 2012; Popović-Ćitić & Bukvić, 2018; Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, & van Dulmen, 2006). The only development asset that is positively asymmetric is the Constructive use of time, which would imply that a larger number of students do not use their free time in a way that can be assessed as adequate and sufficiently stimulating for development. However, in the interpretation of the findings, one should keep in mind the low reliability of this scale, ie the nature of leisure activities that are included in the development asset itself, which was previously discussed.

The main research results show that, based on our sample, the community in which the students grow up does not have enough developmental assets active to support them with various resources, since of 40 developmental assets only 14 have an average score over 4 in the total sample. On the level of group assets, only one is present with an average score of over 4: Positive values. This whole group is highly rated within the student population, implying that our students have high internal values that can support and guide their decision making and help them in different challenging situations.

Of 14 assets, 5 are based in external assets groups: Family support, Positive family communication, and Caring neighborhood from the assets group Support, and Adult role models and Positive peer influences from the group Boundaries and expectations. None of the assets from the Empowerment group or Constructive use of time is present in the community at a level which can guarantee positive influences on youth. Especially low average scores can be found in most of the assets in the Constructive use of time category in Religious community and Creative activities, thus showing that our students do not engage in these activities at a level which would provide them with asset benefits. The results tell us that our students mostly develop in families where they feel loved and free to seek for advice and comfort from their parents or guardians, that they have quality relations with their neighbors, have available positive adult role models, and are encouraged to be the best they can be by their parents and teachers. Also, the results tell us that our students do not find themselves valued by their community in general, do not have enough participation and responsibilities in the community, and do not feel very safe or useful in their community. On top of that, they do not feel that clear rules and boundaries are present in family, school, or neighborhood. Additionally, as a whole, they are not engaged enough in constructive activities in their free time.

Internal assets are more developed in our students, having at least one asset from every category. Analysis of the developed assets tell us that our students have high achievement motivation and are engaged in school activities, that they highly value equality and social justice, integrity, honesty and responsibility, and they try to act according to these values, so they stand up to what they believe, they tell the truth, and accept personal responsibility. They have planning and decision making skills, and are skilled at resisting peer pressure. In addition, our students in general have a positive view of their personal future. On the other hand, they do not engage in homework activities on a regular basis, do not care a great deal about their school, and spend minimal time reading for pleasure. They do not believe that restraining from sexual activity is something very important, and do not place helping others in top place in their values scale. When it comes to skills, they need support in empowering their interpersonal and cultural competences, as well as supporting their efforts in peaceful conflict resolution. Their personal identity has slightly lower self-esteem, a feeling that they do not control what happens to them, and they do not have a clear sense of purpose. Research data

(Mannes, 2006) indicate that adolescents who grow up in communities rich in developmental assets evidence six times fewer risk behaviours than those who have less stimulating communities. The importance of the development of assets on the community level lies in the need for simultaneous reinforcing of positive experiences of youth in different domains of their social-ecological system, allowing them to feel safe, supported and capable.

When we look at the share of students in developmental assets, their involvement ranges from 18.2% in creative activities on a regular basis to 79.2% of students who have a positive view of their personal future. When it comes to school success as an especially important thriving behaviour from the educational community perspective, existing research body shows that 9 assets are consistently linked to thriving indicators such as attendance, academic self-confidence, effort, sense of belonging to school, grades, and test scores (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011). These assets are: Achievement motivation, School engagement, Bonding to school, Reading for pleasure (4 out of 5 assets from the internal assets group Commitment to learning), Caring school climate, Parent involvement in schooling, Service to others, High expectations and Youth programs. In our sample, these assets range from highly present (up to 78.6% for School engagement) with an average score in the whole sample of over 4 (School engagement and Achievement motivation), through a 60% presence in students for High expectations, lower than average presence of around half of the students for Parent involvement in schooling and Youth programs, to a low presence in Service to others and Caring school climate, even involving the asset with the lowest score in the whole sample ($M = 2.74$), Reading for pleasure. Gained data can be used to create priorities for the education community, which would be addressing the school climate, engaging students in different supporting activities in the community, and raising their motivation for reading.

Twenty-eight (28) developmental assets are active in over 50% of the students and higher, while 12 are present in less than half of the sample. On the other hand, the individual number of assets present for every student is on average 22.5, showing that they have in general over 50% of all developmental assets. Compared to other research our students have slightly more developmental assets. For example, in the USA, where continuous exploration of developmental assets levels is followed and measured, results of the aggregated sample from 2012 – 2015 show that the average student has 20.6 assets (Roehlkepartain & Blyth,

2020). The age structure in the Serbian sample may be a reason for such results, considering that most of the comparative data include adolescents from 12 to 18, and there is a recognized pattern of reporting less assets in older youth (Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Shramko, 2016). One of the factors that could also influence the result of the number of developmental assets is that the whole research sample was from the territory of Belgrade, where urbanistic organisation provides many more different opportunities than in other parts of our country. On the other hand, different research examining developmental assets in more- and less-urbanized communities show that there is no significant difference in the results; that is, different demographic factors including the geographical residence and socioeconomic background do sometimes affect the absolute number of assets, but the effect sizes of those differences are usually quite small (Benson, 2003; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Roehlkepartain & Blyth, 2020). This can be explained by the level of connectedness that is present in smaller communities that can, in the developmental assets framework, compensate for the lack of opportunities that big cities provide.

Even though we have a slightly above average number of assets developed in our youth, this number is still far away from the goal of reaching the high-asset group for most of the students. This is confirmed with having only 15% of students in the category of 31 – 40 developmental assets, and 40% of students in the categories of half developmental assets and less. Early Search Institute aggregated data show that over 60% of American adolescents are in the two categories under 20 developed assets, with 20% of students having a total number of assets under 10, and only 8% with above 30 assets (Benson, 2003; Scales, 1999). More recent research data show the presence of 13% of American adolescents in the category of low-asset youth, and 11% in the asset-rich category, with a balanced distribution between the middle two categories, with 38% of adolescents in each (Search Institute, 2012). Our findings show that we have a quite low percentage of low-asset youth (5.1%), which is a positive finding in comparison with the American sample. The research body consistently shows that adolescents with higher levels of assets report that they were more likely to succeed when it comes to school achievement, overcoming adversity, having a healthy lifestyle, helping others, and demonstrating leadership (Benson, 2003; Benson, Scales & Syvertsen, 2011; Roehlkepartain & Blyth, 2020; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), but also feeling greater life satisfaction (Soares,

Pais-Ribeiro, & Silva, 2019). A special focus for the educational community is the connection between developmental assets and academic achievement. Research data consistently shows strong connections between asset levels and school achievement, showing that the low-assets group of youth are up to 8 times less likely to gain high grades than their peers with more assets (Benson, 2003).

Low-assets youth are at much higher risk of different risk behaviours (Benson, 2003; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011), as well as difficulties in their social and emotional functioning (Popović-Ćitić & Bukvić, 2018). Research conducted in Serbia in 2017 shows that students with different emotional and social difficulties have significantly less developmental assets than their peers (Popović-Ćitić & Bukvić, 2018). Literature findings tell us that the number of risk behaviour patterns is directly connected with the category of assets developed. Search Institute (2012) data show that low-asset youth (with 0 – 10 assets) report 8.7 high-risk behaviour patterns, followed by 4.8 risk patterns in youth with 11 – 20 assets, and the number keeps going down, thus young people with 21 – 30 assets report 2.0 high-risk behaviour pattern, while asset-rich youth (with 31 – 40 assets) report 0.6 risk patterns. Percentages of low-asset youth with no anti-social or violent behaviour are 53% and 39% (respectively), compared to 78% and 62% in the average-assets group, 93% and 82% of above-average group and 99 and 94% of the high-assets group (Benson & Scales, 2009). The authors point out that the same patterns are confirmed in different subcultures and different ethnic groups, as well as data that the number of developmental assets tends to be a stronger predictor, explaining larger portions of the variance both in risk behaviours and in thriving behaviours compared to different demographic variables, but also from often used predictors such as school dropout, living in poverty or being from a single-parent family (Benson, 2003; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Mannes, 2006; Scales et al, 2000).

The research finding also confirm the trend of small but statistically significant differences between boys and girls, showing that girls have a slight advantage in achieving more developmental assets than boys. The continuous research results on US students (Roehlkepartain & Blyth, 2020) show that girls have 21.3 and boys 19.9 assets, which is a smaller difference than in our sample for 1 developmental asset. Gender differences show their tendency to persist, but with a small effect size. When it comes to age differences, research results confirm a steady trend for the developmental stage of questioned students,

showing that with age the number of developmental assets lowers, and showing that there is an average 7 assets drop from 6th to 8th grade. The drop in the number of developmental assets with age concurs with other research findings (eg Roehlkepartain & Blyth, 2020; Search Institute, 2012), but the differences are larger in our sample. In the latest aggregation results from the US sample, from 6th grade (11 – 12 years) to 12th grade (17 – 18 years) there is a drop of 4 assets in total (Roehlkepartain & Blyth, 2020). In our sample, the drop is 7 assets over 2 years. The results can be elaborated with the specifics of our educational system combined with the active adolescence phase and its characteristics, where one of the expected developmental transitions happens in the transfer from elementary to high school. Also, these results support the presumption that the number of assets is changeable over time.

CONCLUSION

There are various implications from the assessments based on the DA model that can support the improvement of educational practice. A wide field for improvement of the level of developmental assets in the community is present, including the school community, since of 40 assets only 14 are developed at a level that provides positive effects on youth in the community. These 14 assets can be used as a good practice example and can serve as a guideline for community members. Applying the DA model and accessing the community can be used to prioritize assets that are underdeveloped in a specific geographic locality. The research results show that the assets in the groups Empowerment and Constructive use of time should be prioritized, emphasizing the need for positively involving youth in a variety of constructive programs and activities and giving them an important role in the life and development of the community. When it comes to the school environment, the priority should be addressing directly the school climate and fostering positive adult-youth relationships. In addition to this, further activities that support bonding to school as well as clear boundaries are areas for improvement when it comes to educational practice. Considering the extensive research on connections between assets number and risk behaviours, the instrument can also serve as a survey identifying youth at risk, mapping average-assets youth as students in moderate risk and low-asset student group as students in high risk. The application of the

DA model also provides an opportunity for mapping various community resources that can contribute to the positive development outcomes of young people. It can serve as a basis for the creation of a network of providers, so some providers (such as parents and school) can actually be unburdened and the responsibility for fostering the development of children and youth can be distributed within different relevant supportive subjects active in the community. Every school can, following assessment results in its community, map these stakeholders and activate them in supporting their students, which will bring multiple benefits for students, schools, and the whole community where those young people live and grow up.

Even though the transformation of a community's mindset to an asset-building one is not an easy task and includes the involvement of multiple sectors in the asset-building process (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011; Lorion & Sokoloff, 2003), the DA model offers many advantages and practical opportunities for empowerment of the educational community and is often recognized in this setting. The DA model provides educational practice with the opportunity to implement the strength-oriented approach into their practice and support the transformation of the school paradigm by reaching not only good school achievement in students but supporting the development of successful, thriving, and problem-free individuals. The model can serve as a support in bringing in a strength-oriented approach to the prevention, identification, and even treatment of different emotional and social difficulties in students, and provide the school with valuable information of the resources from the community it can exploit in order to support the positive development of all its students, bringing the school into the community and the community into the school.

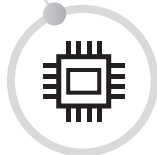
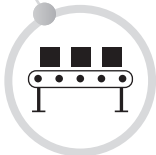
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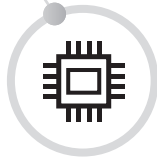
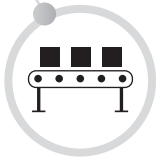
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AUTHORS' INDEX



A

Abazi - 354, 357, 362
Abbott - 375
Abd-el-Khalick - 362
Abel - 339
Aczél - 77
Adams - 142
Agnew - 376
Agyeman - 346
Aizer - 375
Ajzen - 339, 346
Akerson - 38
Aleahmad - 175
Alexander - 375
Alexandrova - 261
Alkaff - 353
Allen - 49
Allman - 174
Almeida - 65
Almendarez - 27
Ames - 297
Ananiev - 319, 321, 325
Anderson D.M. - 389
Anderson J. - 236
Anderson W.L. - 203
Andryukhina - 259
Antić - 36, 37, 48, 53
Antonio - 176
Arabatzi - 361
Arba'at - 360
Archer - 297
Arnold - 135
Arnon - 343
Arthur - 396
Ash - 119

Astratova - 259, 262
Atman - 354
Avalos - 63
Avramović Z.- 95
Avramović I.- 135
Ax - 64
Ayas - 38

B

Baggaley - 238
Bahar - 355, 373
Bain - 201
Bajaj - 299
Bakken - 77
Bales - 380
Ball - 210
Ballantyne - 343
Banarjee - 277
Bandura - 274, 287
Banzragch - 238
Banjari - 203
Barcelona - 108
Barke - 361
Barman - 36
Barnett - 54, 55
Barnhart - 213
Barraza - 353, 362
Barron - 64, 65
Barrows - 56
Barthes - 74
Bartlett - 210
Bašić - 375
Batinca - 212, 222
Baumann - 119
Bazić - 10

- Beara - 142, 151
Beavers - 174
Beers - 131
Beijaard - 64
Belacchi - 119
Belawati - 238
Beletzan - 78
Benelli - 119, 120, 122, 129, 135
Benson - 396, 397, 398, 405, 406, 407,
409, 410, 411, 413
Beręsewicz - 213
Berg - 352
Bergdahl - 211, 212, 236, 237, 243
Berger - 65
Berglund - 396
Berk - 380
Berman - 131
Bernadette - 143
Betzer - 57
Biesta - 75, 92
Biggs - 296, 311
Binder - 119
Bishop A. - 119
Bishop K. - 352
Bizzell - 76
Bjerk - 377
Black - 65
Blagdanić - 36, 48, 49, 53
Blaikie - 361
Blake - 346
Blazar - 160
Blieck - 361
Blomberg - 380, 389
Blommaert - 212
Bloom - 131
Blumenfeld - 56, 57, 62, 65, 297
Blyth - 407, 409, 410, 411, 412
Bodenhorn - 353
Bodur - 173, 174, 175, 176, 177
Boekaerts - 274
Boeve - 361
Bogan - 352
Bogner - 343, 353
Boisvert - 297
Bolam - 141, 142
Bond - 211, 237
Bonsignore - 175
Booth - 74
Bordeleau - 297
Borisov - 320, 323
Borko - 64, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177
Borkowski - 273, 274
Bornstein - 131
Borzzone - 131
Bostrom - 361
Bouffard - 297
Bouillet - 386
Boujaoude - 362
Bowen - 54
Box - 54
Boyes - 38
Bracken - 353
Bracy - 377, 380
Bradshaw - 387
Braten - 310
Braun A. - 210
Braun V. - 145
Bredl - 212
Breit - 173
Bridgstock - 289

- Brinkworth - 388
 Bromley - 109
 Brow - 260
 Brown - 203, 327
 Brownell - 119
 Browning - 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29
 Bruce - 57
 Buchanan - 57
 Bukvić - 124, 406, 407, 411
 Bulatović - 275
 Bullis - 389
 Bulunuz - 38
 Burke - 76
 Burns - 110
 Bushina - 338
 Bushway - 374, 375, 380
 Buško - 275, 286, 288
 Butenko - 338
 Butler - 274
 Butterworth - 95
 Buttran - 142, 154
- C, Č**
- Caena - 196
 Cafaro - 342
 Cain - 119
 Calvert - 299
 Cancino - 121
 Carlson - 119
 Carmi - 343
 Carpenter - 175, 177, 212
 Carr - 352, 375
 Casotti - 54
 Castro - 38, 40, 47
 Catalano - 375, 396
- Celinska - 377
 Cestnik - 81
 Chalikias - 361
 Chan - 298, 299, 362
 Chen - 174
 Cheng - 56
 Cherdakli - 253
 Chia - 55, 66
 Chin - 55, 66
 Choy - 56
 Christensen - 135
 Chu - 353
 Churchill - 173
 Clark - 61
 Clarke - 145, 387
 Coates - 203
 Cochran-Smith - 200
 Code - 274
 Cohen - 26
 Consiglio - 213
 Conzemius - 32
 Copas - 175
 Coppola - 352
 Crouse - 297, 299
 Culen - 353
 Cunningham - 289, 352
 Cutri - 174
 Cvetek - 200, 201, 202
 Czerniak - 65
 Čekić-Marković - 390
 Čolić - 122
- D, Đ, Dž**
- Dainville - 76
 Danisch - 76

Darling-Hammond - 63, 64, 65
 Daudi - 352
 Day - 25, 375
 De Brabander - 297
 Deci - 259
 Dede - 173, 174, 176
 De Houwer - 131
 de Jong - 211
 De Laet - 387
 De La Paz - 57
 De Lisi - 135
 DeLisi - 377
 Delserieys - 38
 Denicolo - 159
 Denny - 387
 Dent - 274, 275, 276
 De Temple - 121
 Dewey - 29, 52
 Dickson - 197
 Dierkhising - 389
 Dietz - 336, 339, 340
 Dignath - 274
 Dijkstra - 141, 142, 143
 Dimitrijević - 97
 Dimitriou - 344
 Dimopoulos - 353
 Dochy - 56
 Dong - 212
 Dowler - 274
 Doyle - 375
 Draganić-Gajić - 376
 Dragičević - 97, 108, 109
 Driscoll - 297
 DuBois - 174, 175, 176, 177
 Dubovicki - 203

Dubrovina - 259, 267
 Duell - 297, 299
 Dülmer - 339
 Duncan - 278, 279
 Dutcher - 342, 347
 Dweck - 169, 287, 296, 297
 Dziubani - 203
 Dzobelova - 259
 Đerić - 58, 59, 63, 64, 143, 151
 Đermanov - 143
 Đević - 64, 164
 Đorđev - 107
 Đorđević - 106
 Đukić - 143
 Džinović - 63, 64, 141, 160, 164

E

Easter - 298
 Eccles - 259, 388
 Edwards S.I. - 57
 Edwards O.W. - 398
 Efremov - 252
 Elliot - 290
 Elliott - 375, 377
 Enger - 352
 English - 64, 99, 122
 Entwisle - 375
 Entwistle - 295, 311
 Erdogan - 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 360,
 361, 363, 373
 Erickson - 174
 Erylmaz - 40, 47

F

Fagan - 377

- Faherty - 237
Farley - 387
Farley Ripple - 142, 154
Farrington - 375, 388
Fauning - 132
Feather - 336
Fenning - 375
Fernandez-Ramirez - 203
Ferry - 76
Fien - 343
Filippatou - 57
Finley - 342
Fischer - 175, 176
Fishbein - 339, 346
Fishman - 69, 174, 175
Fitzgerald - 336
Fontanieu - 361
Forde - 197
Fors - 237
Fox B. - 173
Fox R.A. - 296
Fragkiadaki - 38
Fraser - 55
Freelon - 222
Friedman - 134
Fullan - 67, 160
Furlong - 387
- G**
- Gabler - 78
Galichin - 321, 323
Galyardt - 175
Gao - 296
Garb - 343, 353
Garcia - 274, 275, 288
Gariglietti - 299
Garrison - 353
Geier - 57
Gelman - 95
Gendenjamts - 238
Georgopoulos - 344
Geyer - 203
Ghazali - 339
Gijbels - 55, 56
Gillis - 131
Gini - 119
Given - 142
Glassett - 175
Gojkov - 53
Goldkind - 389
Goldman - 353
Goldstein - 168
Golinkoff - 190
Golley - 353
Golub - 262
Gonzales - 174
Gonzalez - 121
Gonzalez Cabanah - 296, 297
Gorard - 110
Gordeeva - 261, 262, 264, 265
Gottfredson - 375, 377, 388, 389
Gouveia - 78
Govaris - 57
Govekar Okoliš - 204
Grant - 61, 160
Green - 160
Greenhalgh - 177
Gregory - 259
Greiml-Fuhrmann - 203
Grey - 342

Grigorovitch - 38
 Griller Clark - 389
 Gromkova - 318, 325
 Groot - 375
 Gruber - 203
 Grue - 77
 Guagnano - 339
 Gudmundsdottir - 211, 212
 Gunstone - 48
 Gunter - 387
 Guskey - 160, 163

H

Hadwin - 274
 Hakes - 119
 Halverson - 154
 Hansen - 175
 Hansson - 38
 Hargadon - 175
 Hargreaves - 61, 67
 Harlan - 57
 Harlen - 54, 55
 Harlow - 380
 Harris J.M. - 62
 Harris P.R. - 361
 Hart - 361
 Hartman - 203
 Harvey - 61, 63, 260
 Hasani - 357, 360
 Hathaway - 211, 212
 Hattie - 311
 Havel - 389
 Hawkins - 375, 396
 Hebib - 177
 Heckhausen H. - 324
 Heckhausen J. - 261, 323
 Hee - 353
 Henny - 31
 Henriksen - 126, 134
 Hernandez-Ramos - 57
 Herriman - 119
 Hershberger - 43
 Herz - 389
 Herzberg - 76
 Hewitt - 377
 Hill - 203
 Hillman - 212
 Hines - 354, 361, 362, 363
 Hirsch - 389
 Hirschfield - 377, 391
 Hirschi - 323
 Hirsh-Pasek - 190
 Hjalmarsson - 375
 Hodges - 211, 212, 237
 Hofer - 297, 298
 Hoff - 120
 Hoffman - 143
 Hofman - 141, 142
 Hofstede - 338
 Hogan - 160
 Holmberg - 237
 Holmes-Henderson - 77
 Holzer - 362
 Hord - 141, 142
 Horsey - 375
 Houle - 54
 Howe - 143
 Hoyle - 297
 Hsu - 38, 353
 Hu - 174

Huberman - 160, 163
 Huddleston - 175
 Huei-Min - 352
 Hugenford - 343
 Huizinga - 377
 Hungerford - 353, 354, 361, 362, 363
 Hunniger - 212
 Hunt - 28
 Hutter - 297, 299

I

Idrizi - 357
 Iermakov - 237
 Igbokwe - 353
 Ilić M. - 36
 Ilić P. - 104
 Ilić Z. - 375, 376
 Ilyin - 322, 323, 325
 Impedovo - 38
 Inglehart - 338, 339, 345
 Inhelder - 127
 Ipek - 38
 Ismaili - 354, 357, 358, 362
 Ivanov - 237
 Ivić - 53, 124
 Ivković - 97

J

Jack - 387
 Jackson L.W. - 27, 28
 Jackson M. - 202, 206
 Jacobs - 173, 174, 175, 176, 177
 Jagaiah - 131
 Jahng - 176
 Jakšić M. - 289

Jakšić I. - 298
 Jamieson-Noel - 274
 Jank - 84
 Jansen - 274
 Janjić - 97
 Jass Ketelhut - 173
 Javornik Krečič - 205
 Jenkins - 119
 Jenlink - 63
 Jensen - 56, 212
 Jenson - 387, 388
 Jerotijević - 390
 Jianping - 335
 Joaguin - 325
 Johansson - 382
 John - 30, 37, 40, 43, 46, 138
 Johnson - 174, 342
 Johnston - 323
 Jokić - 54, 55, 65, 308
 Joksimović - 289
 Jones - 134
 Jonuzi - 357
 Jošić - 143
 Jovanović - 143, 390
 Joyce - 161, 170

K

Kaldahl - 76
 Kaldi - 57
 Kalof - 339
 Kaltakci - 40, 47
 Kame'enui - 119
 Kampeza - 38
 Kandil Ingeç - 37
 Kanfer - 324

- Kanselaar - 297
Karabenick - 274
Karaçalli - 57
Karimzadegan - 353
Karlberg - 213
Karyanto - 360, 361
Kašić - 119, 131
Kayalvizhi - 66
Kearns - 131
Keles - 353
Kelly - 71, 176
Kett - 380
Khawaja - 362
Khoshaba - 260
Kilpatrick - 53
Kim - 135
Kimmons - 174, 212
King - 32, 173, 203
Kinnucan-Welsch - 63
Kirby - 296
Kiseleva - 262
Kitsantas - 64, 290
Kızılaslan - 356, 373
Kjeldsen - 77
Klafki - 84
Knabb - 54
Knaflič - 97
Knoll - 52, 62
Knutsson - 237
Kock - 76
Kocsis - 353
Kodžopeljić - 122, 136
Koehler - 177
Koellner - 173, 174, 175, 176, 177
Koenka - 274, 275, 276
Kokhan - 237
Kokotsaki - 65
Kollmuss - 346
Kolodner - 53
Kolokoltsev - 237
Konstantinović-Vilić - 377
Kooij - 324
Kopnina - 342
Korać - 142, 143, 152, 153, 154, 155
Korolkov - 254
Korshunova - 259
Kortenkamp - 361
Korthagen - 160
Korur - 57
Kosanović - 142, 143, 155
Kostić - 130
Kostova - 353
Kostović - 142, 143, 155
Kovačević - 108, 112, 131
Kövecses - 108
Kraft - 160
Kraig - 318, 320
Krajcik - 56, 61, 63, 65
Krajcik - 67
Kranželić-Tavra - 375
Kranjčec - 204
Krasny - 174, 175, 177
Kraynik - 237
Krishnakumari - 361
Kristal - 108, 111
Krnjaja - 53, 143, 151, 152
Kromrey - 352
Kruger - 35, 40
Krutka - 175, 177, 212
Kub - 142

- Kubek - 375, 389, 391
Kubitskey - 174
Kudinov - 261, 323
Kuhlemeier - 360, 361, 363
Kumar - 277
Kundačina - 362
Kurland - 120, 121, 128, 129
Kutu - 356
Kuzmanović - 143, 286
Kwan - 57
Kyndt - 142
Kyriakopoulos - 361
- L**
- Ladewski - 61
Lagerweij - 360, 361, 363
Lagutkina - 236
Lai - 343
Lajović - 160
Lam - 56
Lammers - 203
Lang - 382
Lantz-Andersson - 212
Larina - 236
Larouche - 297
Larrabee - 36
Lasen - 142
Laurie - 203
Lavrič - 200, 202
Law - 298, 299
Lawy - 75, 92
Lay - 174, 176
Lazarević - 116, 118, 119, 122, 134
Lebedeva - 338
Lečić-Toševski - 376
Lee - 325, 353
LeeKeenan - 142
Leeming - 353
Le Fevre - 63
Leffert - 397, 399, 407, 410
Le Hebel - 361
Lehtonen - 213
Leontiev - 260, 261, 262
Levinson - 210
Lewis - 55
Li - 119
Liang J.C. - 38
Liang S.W. - 343
Lim - 380
Lin - 296
Lindstrand - 38
Lithoxidou - 344, 345
Liu - 174, 175, 177
Lochner - 375, 389
Lockee - 211, 237
Lodewijks - 297
Loeber - 374
Lonczak - 396
Lončarić - 286
Longobardi - 131
Lopatina - 252
Lorion - 413
Losch - 160
Louws - 174, 176, 177
Loyens - 56, 57
Lozanov-Crvenković - 173
Lu - 260
Lubovsky - 259, 267
Lucangeli - 119
Luloff - 342

Lundin - 212
Ljung-Djarf - 38

M

MacGregor - 203
MacLachlan - 353
Maddi - 260, 262, 263, 265, 266
Magajna - 205
Maguin - 374
Maguire - 210
Makki - 362
Maksić - 106, 110
Malinić - 63, 64, 386
Mancl - 352
Mancosu - 213
Mann - 380
Mannes - 397, 398, 409, 411
Marcer - 143
Marcinkowski - 353
Marcinkowskim - 352
Mardell - 142
Marentič Požarnik - 200, 202, 205
Marinellie - 122
Marin Jerez - 261, 323
Markova - 320, 325
Marković - 98
Martin - 32
Marton - 295, 298, 311
Marušić - 153
Marušić Jablanović - 36, 48, 49, 342,
343
Marx - 62
Maslova - 236
Maslow - 324
Mason - 110
Mates - 325
Matijević - 53, 57
Matović - 144
McBeth - 353
McCall - 174
McCloskey - 173
McGhee-Bidlack - 126, 129
McGinnis - 168
McGregor - 134, 290
McKeachie - 275, 278
McLaughlin - 63
Mc Mahon - 197
McMahon - 141
McManus - 296
Meece - 297
Mee Hee - 353
Meiboudia - 353
Meirink - 174
Memeti - 357, 358, 360
Menard - 377
Menyuk - 119
Menzies - 65
Meredith - 142
Mergendoller - 56
Merrick - 396
Messer - 37, 40, 43, 46
Metioui - 35, 37, 40, 43, 47
Meyer - 53, 84
Meyers - 353
Micić - 96
Mikeseii - 325
Mikhailova - 261, 321, 323
Milin - 143, 151
Milinković - 124
Milkus - 238

Miller - 75, 76, 176, 352
Milošević - 102, 113
Minigan - 66
Miočinović - 122, 127
Mioduser - 57
Mire - 31
Mirkov - 275, 287, 295, 296, 297, 298,
299, 300, 309, 311, 312
Mirzaahmedov - 259
Miščević - 48
Mitchell - 48
Moallem - 56
Močnik - 76
Mohd Zaid - 360
Molle - 63
Montpied - 361
Mony - 353
Moore - 211, 237, 361
Moretti - 389
Morgan - 380
Morrone - 352
Mortensen - 76
Moskal - 203
Moskovljević Popović - 120, 122
Moust - 56
Mrše - 390
Muis - 298, 312
Mujagić - 275, 286, 288
Mukaržovski - 96
Mumford - 398
Murati-Sherifi - 357
Muratović - 37
Murphy - 76, 203
Murray - 197, 198
Mutum - 339

Myers - 54

N

Nagy - 109, 119, 131, 323
Najaka - 375
Nastić-Stojanović - 375
Negev - 343, 353, 360, 361, 363
Nelson - 387
Nesbit - 274
Newman - 134
Newmann - 343
Ng - 287, 352
Nguyen - 339
Nikolić-Ristanović - 377
Nippold - 121, 132
Nissen - 126, 134
Noonan - 174
Norton - 342
Nouri - 211, 212, 236, 237, 243
Novak - 50, 63
Ntanos - 361
Nussbaum - 75

O

Obadović - 173
O'Brennan - 387
O'Brien - 360, 361
O'Connor - 361
O'Donnell - 375
O'Dwyer - 353
Ogunbode - 361
O'Keefe - 297
Olinghouse - 131
Olson - 121
Olsson - 38

- Olympia - 387
 Opačić - 114, 298, 300
 Oparnica - 275, 286
 Orion - 343
 Osborne - 66
 Oshkina - 237
 Osin - 261, 262, 264, 265
 O'sullivan - 237
 Ovesni - 173, 175, 177
- P**
- Pabon - 377
 Packer - 142, 343
 Pahl - 361
 Pais-Ribeiro - 411
 Pajares - 289
 Palmer - 353, 362
 Panadero - 273, 274, 276, 289
 Pantic - 353
 Parakevopoulos - 353
 Paris - 274
 Park - 174, 175, 176, 177
 Parker - 25, 175, 177
 Paternoster - 374, 375, 380
 Patrick - 289
 Pavlin - 76
 Pavlović J. - 159, 160, 161, 162, 163,
 297, 299
 Pavlović V. - 375
 Pavlović Breneselović - 53, 141, 143, 152
 Payne - 388
 Pecore - 56, 62
 Pe'er - 353
 Peguero - 377, 380
 Pejatović - 153
 Pejović-Milovančević - 376
 Peng - 274
 Perels - 274
 Perry - 274, 297
 Persico - 260
 Pešec Zadavec - 76
 Pešikan - 36, 48, 53, 124
 Peter - 396, 407
 Petrovački - 97, 111
 Petrović - 98, 143
 Phan - 298, 299, 309
 Philipsen - 175, 176, 177
 Phillips - 274
 Piatelli-Palmarini - 118
 Piccolo - 342
 Piirto - 382
 Pijaže - 36, 127
 Pine - 37, 40, 43, 46, 55
 Pintrich - 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 288,
 289, 295
 Piquero - 380
 Pirc - 79
 Plazinić - 300, 308
 Plucker - 338
 Poldrugač - 375, 387
 Pollard R. - 54
 Pollard J.A. - 396
 Pollozhani - 358
 Polshina - 325
 Ponmozhi - 361
 Ponte - 64
 Pope - 159
 Popović - 96
 Popović-Čitić - 375, 406, 407, 411
 Popović-Deušić - 376

- Postholm - 274
 Powell - 173, 174, 176, 177
 Pozo-Munoz - 203
 Pratt - 119
 Primack - 342
 Prince - 213
 Prtljaga - 52, 53, 54, 58, 60
 Psacharopoulos - 27
 Puckett - 30, 31
 Pugachev - 237
 Pulkkinen - 273, 274
 Purdie - 311
 Putnam - 64
 Putnick - 131
 Puustinen - 273, 274
- Q**
 Quintilian - 77, 78, 83, 90
- R**
 Radden - 108
 Radić - 131
 Radlović-Čubrilo - 173
 Radović - 173, 175, 177
 Radulović - 152, 155, 275
 Ramli - 360, 361
 Rasskazova - 260, 261, 262
 Rasulić - 108
 Raven - 352
 Reboloso-Pacheco - 203
 Redditt - 142
 Reed - 375
 Rees - 110
 Regoli - 377
 Reilly - 134
 Reis - 213
 Reyes-Garcia - 353
 Rhodes - 297, 299
 Richardson V. - 63
 Richardson J.T.E. - 295, 298, 373
 Rickinson - 343
 Rieser-Danner - 54
 Rihn - 296
 Rikers - 56, 57
 Ristanović - 58, 60
 Roberts - 353
 Robinson - 238
 Robottom - 361
 Roccas - 336
 Rocco - 142
 Rockcastle - 352
 Rodriguez - 38, 40, 47
 Roehlkepartain - 397, 407, 409, 410, 411, 412
 Roglić - 375
 Rolston - 342
 Romanova - 237
 Romashko - 322
 Rosandić - 108
 Rosenfeld - 61
 Rosenthal - 288
 Ross - 142
 Rossi-Arnaud - 131
 Roth - 352, 354
 Rothstein - 66
 Rovira - 353
 Rud - 375
 Ruggiero - 353
 Ruiz-Mallen - 353
 Rumberger - 380

- Rumble - 237
 Rusljakova - 262
 Russ - 174, 175, 177
 Rutar - 204, 205
 Rutten - 75, 76
 Rutter - 361, 388
 Ryabukhina - 320, 323
 Ryan - 259, 289, 396
 Rynsaardt - 160
 Ryung - 353
- S**
- Sachs - 296, 298, 299
 Sadovnikova - 259
 Sagiv - 336
 Sagy - 343, 353
 Şahin - 38
 Saigo - 352
 Saizmaa - 238
 Sakashita - 238
 Salisbury - 110
 Salzberg - 343, 353
 Saljo - 295, 298, 311
 Sanchez Abchi - 131
 Sander - 203
 Sans - 76
 Santana - 66
 Savanović - 308
 Savery - 55
 Savić - 111
 Scales - 397, 398, 405, 406, 407, 409,
 410, 411, 413
 Schahn - 362
 Schaie - 319
 Schleicher - 95
 Schley - 121
 Schmidt - 56
 Schmitz - 274
 Schnase - 259
 Schoenebeck - 175
 Schommer - 297, 299, 300
 Schommer-Aikins - 297, 298, 299
 Schon - 159
 Schugurensky - 174
 Schultz - 336, 340, 341, 347, 361
 Schulz - 261, 323
 Schumann - 325, 327
 Schunk - 274, 290
 Schwartz - 336, 337, 338, 345
 Scott - 109, 119, 363
 Seegers - 297
 Segedinac - 173
 Segers - 56
 Seifert - 297
 Semenova - 259
 Senechal - 120
 Serra-Roldan - 398
 Sesma - 407
 Shaha - 175
 Shek - 396
 Shevyakova - 254
 Shiang-Yao - 352
 Shin-Cheng - 352
 Shih-Wu - 352, 360, 361
 Shillingford - 398
 Shoreman-Ouimet - 342
 Shores - 387
 Short - 161
 Showers - 161, 170
 Shramko - 407, 410

- Shriberg - 121
Shwom - 336
Sicurella - 375
Silberberg - 375
Silva - 119, 131, 411
Simić R. - 96, 104
Simić N. - 153, 308
Simmons - 352
Simoncini - 142
Sinclair - 389
Skaalvik - 297
Skordoulis - 361
Sladoje Bošnjak - 300
Smith C. -119
Smith D. -275, 278
Smith K. -199
Smolleck - 43
Snow - 120, 121, 128, 129
Soares - 410
Soćanin - 375
Soetaert - 75, 76
Sofroniou - 29
Sokoloff - 413
Soldatović - 143
Somuncuogly - 297
Sözbilir - 356, 373
Spataro - 131
Spiroska - 360
Srbinovski - 353, 354, 355, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363
Srećković-Stanković - 160
Stables - 352
Stahl - 109, 119
Stančić - 111, 275
Stanisstreet - 38
Stanišić - 342, 343, 359, 361
Stanković - 59, 63, 143, 151, 160, 163
Stanojčić - 96
Stanojević - 173, 175, 177
Starkova - 325
Starostina - 237
Stein - 36
Stepanova - 320, 321, 322, 325
Stern - 339, 340
Stevanović - 95, 96, 97, 102, 106, 107, 110, 112, 113, 119, 134
Stevenson - 203
Stoeger - 298
Stojanović - 53
Stojnov - 63, 160, 163
Stoll - 141
Stromso - 310
Suarez Riveiro - 296
Suhre - 274
Sujo de Montes - 174
Sun - 396
Sutton - 210
Sweeten - 374, 375, 380, 389
Swennen - 197, 200
Sychev - 261, 262, 264
Symanyuk - 320, 323
Syvertsen - 405, 409, 410, 411, 413
Szechy - 353
Szerenyi - 353
Šefer - 58, 63, 64, 66, 119
Ševa - 59
Ševkušić - 143
Šipka - 98
Štefanc - 84

T

Taccogna - 398
 Tager-Flusberg - 119
 Tal - 343, 353
 Tamim - 61
 Taneva - 236
 Tanner - 343
 Taraban - 54
 Taşkın - 37
 Taylor - 93, 135, 342
 Tenjović - 106, 110
 Teodorović - 59
 Thomas J.W. - 56, 61, 62, 67
 Thomas S. - 141
 Tighe - 119, 120
 Tindall-Biggins - 375
 To - 119
 Todd - 361
 Tolchinsky - 131
 Tomasello - 131
 Tomera - 354, 361, 362, 363
 Tomlinson - 288
 Tondeur - 175, 176, 177
 Torenbeek - 274
 Torphy - 174, 176, 177
 Tošović - 106
 Treleaven - 212, 222
 Tretyakova - 237
 Trikaliti - 344
 Trivić - 95
 Trudel - 35, 37, 40, 43, 47
 Trust - 211, 212, 237
 Tsai - 38
 Tulman - 380
 Tunmer - 119

Turaga - 361
 Türkmen - 37
 Turner - 215
 Tuul - 238
 Twombly - 142

U

Ültay - 37
 Unruh - 389
 Uşak - 355, 373
 Usta - 37
 Utkina - 259
 Uyanga - 238
 Uzelac - 386
 Uzun - 353

V

Valenčič Zuljan - 205
 Valle Arias - 296
 Van Berkel - 56
 Van Den Bergh - 360, 361, 363
 Van den Bossche - 56
 Van Den Brink - 375
 Van der Klink - 197
 Van der Linden - 297
 Van De Vijver - 338
 Van Driel - 174
 Van Dulmen - 407
 Vangrieken - 142
 Van Klaveren - 375
 Van Petegem - 361
 Van Putten - 297
 Van Tulder - 161
 Van Veen - 174
 Varis - 212

Varisli - 360
 Vasić - 97, 122, 124, 129, 130, 133
 Vath - 174
 Vavrus - 210
 Veenman - 161
 Vegetti - 213
 Vermunt - 297
 Vescio - 142
 Veselinov - 58, 60
 Veselinović - 390
 Vesić - 289
 Vezeau - 297
 Vigotski - 36, 109
 Villadsen - 76
 Vilotijević - 53, 101
 Vizek-Vidović - 289
 Vladislavljević - 130
 Voeten - 161
 Vogrinc - 205
 Volk - 343, 353
 Voss R. - 203
 Voss H. L. - 375
 Voyer - 110
 Vučetić - 286
 Vujačić - 59, 64, 289
 Vuković - 122, 135
 Vušurović - 390

W

Waintrup - 389
 Walford - 362
 Wallace - 141
 Walsh-Daneshmandi - 353
 Wang B. - 175, 177
 Wang M.T. - 388

Ward - 375
 Wardani - 360, 361
 Ward-Lonegran - 132
 Washington - 342
 Waterston - 295
 Watson - 121
 Wehlage - 343
 Wehren - 135
 Wei - 63
 Wei-Ta - 352
 Welsh - 388
 Weltzel - 339
 Welzel - 338, 339, 345
 Weston - 342
 Whalen - 211, 212
 Whitehouse - 173
 Wierstra - 297
 Wierzbicka - 108
 Wigfield - 259
 Wiggins - 65
 Wiliam - 65
 Willet - 177
 Williams - 360, 375
 Willits - 363
 Willott - 238
 Wilson - 375
 Winder - 296
 Winne - 274
 Winstead - 210
 Wolf - 55
 Wolfgang - 380
 Wolters - 274, 275, 288
 Wong - 296
 Wood - 259
 Woodhall - 27

Wrosch - 261, 323

Wubbels - 64

X

Xenitidou - 344

Y

Yablochnikov - 259

Yap - 339

Yaşar - 356

Yavetz - 353

Yildirim - 297

Yilmaz - 38

Yopp - 119

Yovanoff - 389

Yu - 275, 352

Z

Zabukovec - 205

Zeer - 320, 323

Zener - 237

Zeng - 352

Zenki - 357

Zhu - 175, 176, 177

Zidar Gale - 79

Zimmerman - 273, 274, 290

Zlatic - 106

Zmееv - 323

Zmeyov - 318

Zobenica - 275, 286

Zsoka - 353

Zubrick - 135

Ž

Žagar - 76, 79, 80

Žmavc - 76, 78, 79, 80

Žunić-Pavlović - 375

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FROM REVIEWS

Main aim of the monograph titled *Problems and perspectives of contemporary education*, is to thorough explore, critically analyze and elaborate complex, dynamic, multilayers and reciprocal relationship between significant changes in educational social environment and readiness, of educational system to anticipate, recognize, understand and adequately respond to those challenges. All contributing authors enthusiastically embraced the notion that education presents an important and proactive agent of social changes and consequently accepted all challenges as an opportunity for improvement and development of both society and educational system.

Professor Emeritus Djuradj Stakic
Pennsylvania State University, USA

The monograph is dedicated to looking into extremely significant and current concerns within educational policy and educational practice. The selected topic is viewed from the perspectives of contemporary theoretical approaches, but it is also empirically researched. A very large and relevant literature was used both for explaining the selected research subject and discussing the obtained results. A diverse, contemporary methodology was applied in researches, and the authors of works, starting from the existing results, analysed issues at a deeper level and illuminated some aspects that had not been studied thus far.

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Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia

The main topics covered by the monograph can be classified as traditional to some extent — related to approaches to learning, language culture etc., and modern — connected with the andragogical view, coaching in teacher training, also the problem of distance learning during the covid pandemic, and models for preventing problem behaviors...The main leitmotif that permeates the content of all presented articles is the topic of the development of key skills, attitudes, experience, creativity — by both subjects in the educational process, and it gives semantic integrity to the monograph.... In view of the new social realities, a reasonable emphasis is placed on the continuing education and development of the teachers themselves, dictated by the accelerated pace of social change.

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