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**In Search for Difference: Gender versus the  
Economic Transformation of Education<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

In this paper, the role of education in the intellectual, creative and moral development of the child will be confronted with those aspects of the educational system challenging that role. With the emphasis on the difficulties educational systems have in observing children's capacities and potentials independently of their gender, certain aspects of the educational reproduction of gender difference will be addressed, whereby in the very focus of our interest will be holders of educational processes in institutions of early and preschool education. The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part the ambiguous role of education in contemporary European and Croatian society will be discussed, the ambiguity stemming from the social inability to reconcile the emancipatory aspects of education with its pragmatic role in the economic production of goods. In the second part economic and gender aspects of the teaching profession in Croatia will be emphasized, building upon the understanding of said profession as a paradigmatic example of the inadequacies of solving gender inequality with short-term market interventions instead with substantial changes in social and economic relations. In the third part research results on early childhood and preschool education students' attitudes toward sex role stereotyping will be presented. It is concluded that students in that field are in most cases egalitarian, but that some of them still have a traditional understanding of gender relations. Finally, future educators' egalitarian views are confronted with the reality of their feminized, underpaid and marginalized profession.

**Keywords**

education, gender equality, teaching profession, early childhood and preschool education

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<sup>1</sup> We will draw our conclusions from the results of a research conducted in 2017/2018 at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, as part of the project *Presence of Bioethical Content in Teaching of Teacher and Educational Studies*, funded by the University of Zagreb and led by principal investigator Professor Tomislav Krznar, PhD.

## Introduction

Early childhood education is understood as crucial for the development of society. Not only does it enable the formation of relationships between different social actors, but it is, in its ultimate purpose, in the service of developing each individual person and reaching the full potential of his or her participation in the future society. This commitment to build free and self-reliant individuals who use their unlimited potentials for good and just purposes within the educational system is expected not only directly through educational content, but also indirectly, through the equal availability of educational resources and infrastructure, and fair treatment of all children, regardless of their differences. In other words, it is expected that the educational system will respect every child regardless of his/her class, race, gender or religion, moreover, which, by virtue of its transformative nature, will be able to neutralize the negative, hierarchy-laden and differentiating aspects of social positioning.

Such orientation of the majority of European educational systems is also recognized in the Croatian one as well and is evident in the major national educational documents. Thus, in the *National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education* (NCF) (*Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum za predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje te opće obvezno i srednjoškolsko obrazovanje*, 2010), democratic values are mentioned among the most important educational values, of which special emphasis is given to knowledge, identity, solidarity (understood as a sensitivity to others) and responsibility. Thus, the accompanying educational goal, according to the NCF, becomes education “in accordance with general cultural and civilizational values, human rights and children’s rights and obligations” while enabling children “to live in a multicultural world, to respect diversity and tolerance and to actively and responsibly participate in the democratic development of society” (p. 15).

*National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education* emphasizes the importance of values “that, from the perspective of history, culture, contemporary events and projections of the future, should enhance the intellectual, social, moral, spiritual and motor development of children” (*Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje*, 2014: 19). The values in question are knowledge, identity, humanism and tolerance, responsibility, autonomy and creativity. It is particularly emphasized that “it is necessary to abandon unified and uniform standards for all children in the kindergarten in favour of respecting and accepting the children’s diversity. [...] Kindergarten should enable the affirmation of the idea of exercising children’s right to equal opportunities, that is, to exercise equal rights for all. [...] All children have the right to an education that accepts and supports identity differences of each child and his or her family. This involves deviating from stereotypes and prejudices of any kind, and accepting the individual characteristics of each child and ensuring individual access to each child” (ibidem, p. 20–21).

Unfortunately, the educational values mentioned above are often under threat, with the threat stemming from the deficiencies in the ways of their realization or from their convenient oblivion. It is difficult to ignore the ways many contemporary institutionalized educational systems participate in the creation of social mechanisms favouring dubious, primarily partial, effects. One example of the above is market-oriented education leading to the design of producers of goods and services (and consumers of the same) which society needs in a certain moment. In these circumstances, the freedom of the child becomes secondary to the economic well-being of society, the development of its potentials retreats before the construction of a wheel in the labour market mechanism, solidarity becomes marginal to competitiveness and selfishness, and diversity a nuisance in comparison to the proclaimed uniformity. The consequence of this is the inability/unwillingness of the educational system to provide children with all the necessary prerequisites for the realization of everything they could become,

regardless of the existing conditions in which they currently live. Instead it often serves to reinforce these existing conditions, with all their limitations and injustices.

In this paper we will focus on the aforementioned discrepancy while emphasizing problems stemming from the educational failure to look at the child's capacities and potentials independently of their gender. In other words, we will address some aspects of the educational reproduction of gender difference, whereby in the very focus of our interest will be the holders of educational processes in institutions of early and preschool education. Our paper is divided into three parts. In the first part we will discuss in more detail the ambiguous role of education in contemporary society, the ambiguity stemming from the inability to reconcile the emancipatory aspects of education with its pragmatic role in the economic production of goods. We will concentrate on the views of the philosopher of education Milan Polić, who warned about the traditional manipulative aspects of education, which today still resist attempts to establish other forms and purposes of it. We will continue by contrasting neoliberal values present in modern education systems with values of gender equality, arguing that their collision leads to a reduction or even negation of the latter.

In the second part we will concentrate on the economic<sup>2</sup> and gender aspects of the teaching profession building upon Polić's controversial understanding of said profession as a paradigmatic example showing the inadequacies of solving gender inequality with market interventions without real changes in social and economic relations. He claimed that dominance of women in this profession, while showing their entry into the labour market, at the same time supports their patriarchal positioning in the roles of carers and mothers. The question we are obliged to ask is if female educators, as those who have voluntarily accepted the market version of a woman's patriarchal role, can be the carriers of emancipation and gender equality.

In the third part we will test Polić's hypothesis through our own research on early childhood and preschool education students' attitudes to sex role stereotyping in education and toward teaching profession.

## **1. The role of education in (modern) society**

When asked what it means to educate, Milan Polić answered:

"To educate means to develop another as different, which holds to one's personality, but which also holds to the personality of other people (...) In other words, education takes place where and when another and different person, in need of another and different person, has the greatest need, and he is himself a man who helps another to be another and different man. Education is a creation in search of possible human differences, not a routine that repeats one's human persistence to multiply into many. Therefore, it is at the core of education that it is pluralistic, both in intention and in mode (as opposed to manipulation which does not have to be). In other words, education truly, and not only apparently, always occurs as an education for pluralism, but also as pluralism in education." (Polić, 1993: 119)

For the purposes of our discussion, several important determinations of this Polić's quote should be noted. First, education is the development of the personality of each individual being, a nonequalizing social mechanism by which one wants to achieve a certain purpose. Second, at the centre of its definition is the human being, not social need or common/communitarian interest. And third, education is by definition an activity of pluralism, since a multitude of people needs a multitude of approaches. Here, we have understood the

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<sup>2</sup> We primarily understand the construction of economics as a set of questions about the production, distribution and consumption of tangible goods, the creation of material gains, and the distribution of surplus value. However, the economic issue is also that of personal income as a reward for one's own work.

phenomenon of pluralism as two-fold, in the meaning of value and of agency. In spite of the above, Polić himself acknowledged that the educational activity easily slips into manipulation, especially when the individual is viewed in the context of a society with its specific needs and interests, and warns:

“[...] a human cannot be shaped [by others]. Only a non-human can be shaped [by others], a human creature, without a human essence, unfree and without opportunity for the other and the different. A human, as a free being, can be shaped again and again only by himself, through communication with other people, with the world, and indirectly with himself. If educators do not allow children to develop humanly with them, then they will develop against them, or humanly will not develop at all.” (Polić, 1993: 128–129.)

We will stop here and, based on what has been said, state a few things. First, the essence of early childhood education is the relationship, specifically, the relationship between two human individuals. And like any human relationship, this one is authentic and unique. The production or reproduction of “human situations” that would be concealed under the heading of early childhood education would really be nothing more than manipulation. But, in addition to education being a relationship, it is also a *relationship* essentially characterized by that of the personal, the one that acts, that is, by the participation in acting “with oneself”. That way, we can understand Polić’s words about a development that would go against the human.

Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss shed additional light on the educational system’s neglect of the interests of the individual in favour of those of the society having manipulation as its direct consequence. Under the term “institutionalization of childhood” they problematize, evoking some of Foucault’s ideas, contemporary discourse of education as an instrument of achieving social regulation and economic success. In doing so, the child presents himself as a redeemer *in spe*, who can and should be programmed to become a future solution to current problems. Dahlberg and Moss define this discourse as instrumental in its rationality and technical in its actions, realizing its greatest achievements in trying to find the answer to the question: what works? At first glance, this discourse may seem utopian to the extent that it goes back to the old idea that children are actually brought up to be what we want them to be, for the world we want it to be, with the Enlightenment doctrine of linear history as the path to the creation of a better world, a better society and a better man as our guiding principle. And although it is easy to believe in utopian moments of the contemporary educational programs, especially when affectionate words, such as dignity, freedom, equality, justice, patriotism, dialogue and tolerance, etc. are listed in them, what the discourse of contemporary education excludes from the realm of the utopian and places it in the realm of the ideological is its uncritical, moreover, enthusiastic acceptance of the current state characterized by economic and political liberalism with all its latent and manifest pitfalls. Educational systems, in accordance with the prevailing *mantra* that there are no significant alternatives to existing political and economic systems, do not direct social processes but only reflect them, which means that their natural role is reactive rather than creative (Domazet, Doolan, 2013).

Additionally, although the educational intent of nurturing the aforementioned democratic and humanistic values is not in dispute, the problem arises when these values accidentally or intentionally embark on neoliberal values, which are sometimes directly and without any doubt opposed to them. Democratic and humanistic values are then either negated or, more often than not, their content changes in such a way as to conform to the dominant ideological model. Zygmunt Bauman points to the same using an example of responsibility, and says that in the consumerist culture, responsibility has become the sole responsibility to oneself (“because I’m worth it” mantra), thereby displacing ethically fundamental responsibility towards the other living and non-living creatures. In other words, “the collateral

victim of consumer-mediated values is the *Other* as an object of ethical responsibility and moral concern” (Bauman, 2007: 92).

The negation of responsibility towards others directly affects the relativization of another value, which refers to equality and gender equality as a narrower term. Gender equality is declaratively present in many contemporary Western educational systems and is embodied in the formulations of which the most common is “gender sensitive education”. Gender-sensitive education is one taking gender into account when it matters and ignoring it when it is not (Scantlebury, 1998), while covering various procedures such as removing gender stereotypes, using gender-neutral materials, respecting children’s needs and interests irrespective of their sex, treating children in an equal manner, etc. Unfortunately, gender-sensitive education often suffers from the same maladies that gender-sensitive policies suffer from, which is that it lacks the transformative energy or openness to significant changes in the existing society for the purpose of achieving equality. Without a transformative intention, it is only “social engineering and a bureaucratic means of integrating equality through the mediation of technical tools and methods” (Borić, 2007). This can, of course, be interpreted as a primarily clumsy, albeit well-intentioned attempt by the state to ensure gender equality, since the state is the main proponent and mediator of the introduction of gender-sensitive education. Unfortunately, such an interpretation is naive, since it is the function of the same state to deal with and manage capital that is rather gender insensitive (Kašić, 2014). The consequences are evident in the futility of a system that does not question the epistemological assumptions of inequality, traditionally established gender structures and their historical, cultural and civilizational foundations, but often reduces the whole story of gender equality to preparing boys and girls for the labour market<sup>3</sup>. Such a system is often supported by certain *pop-feminism*, which, in the words of Nancy Fraser, instead of earlier criticism of careerism, now urges women to indulge in it, instead of solidarity encourages women’s entrepreneurship, instead of care and interdependence now advocates individual progress and meritocracy (Fraser, 2013). In this way, equality between women and men becomes secondary to economic progress and is treated more as a means of achieving economic goals than a true purpose in itself. This also means that the idea of equality no longer serves a human but the interests of capital and as such becomes declarative. All the educational benevolence can hardly change that.

Of course, there is no doubt that society is a structure that produces material goods, distributes them and participates in their consumption. Also, there is no doubt that these processes are largely governed by economic laws and must in many respects fulfil some social purpose. It is possible that in the very process of education, there may be some elements that have these phenomena before their eyes. But the problem of the economic takes on a whole new dimension in understanding the phenomenon of labour, and more, in the material valorisation of that labour. In this matter, a hierarchically shaped social mechanism, as it is at work in all (or almost all) social forms in the history of mankind, is maximally reductive and selectively aimed at favouring some forms of social production and marginalizing others. The mechanism of reduction of a social event according to the model of gender relations is a fundamental determination of all production capacities in human societies. The outcome is simple, the dominance of one form, one conception, one determination and one way – the male one. As we can see, in real social constructions, education receives exactly the opposite role from that which is essential to it. Instead of liberation, these mechanisms focus on the enslavement of people, on multiple levels, cultural as well as economic. This is a particularly

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<sup>3</sup> In other words, education serves to build the capacity of men and women to position themselves as successfully as possible in the labour market, with efforts to equalize men and women primarily to maximize their economic efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, most of the energy is invested in the equal availability of educational infrastructure as well as in such forms of vocational guidance that will prevent nowadays the very present gender segregation of occupations.

problematic event when we reflect on the phenomena of education, because they, paradoxically, are the most involved in shaping undesirable social structures (Krznar et al., 2017).

## **2. Teaching profession**

Classical understanding of education emerged during the period of industrial development of society. It defined education as a tool or means of raising social status, since at that time it offered the knowledge and skills needed to reach more profitable and better paid jobs. At the same time, jobs in the education system itself had a significantly lower financial and thus status rank. We believe that the area of early and pre-school education is a clear example of this. At the same time, it is rare for a profession to undergo, in a relatively short time, such intense and profound changes as the teaching profession has undergone (Mendeš, 2018). The increasing emphasis on the needs of early and pre-school education as an important social function, as well as the increasing amount of knowledge in the “daily” circulation in society, make the need to reflect on different aspects of education as a whole phenomenon more important.

In the context of teaching profession, the role of gender in shaping social mechanisms, having as a consequence the sexual division of occupations, is particularly interesting. Teaching profession is often regarded as the female profession. Its femaleness is determined by the fact that women make up the majority of employees and that educational activity is traditionally considered more appropriate for women, the latter being grounded in the assumptions about female nature. The consequences of the sexual division of occupations, which is exemplified precisely in the teaching profession, are twofold, since they affect both those who engage in it and those who are directly or indirectly affected by the particular profession. In the case of the teaching profession, the feminization of it has equally negative consequences for educators as well as for children and society as a whole.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Polić (Polić, 1993) spoke about the feminization of the teaching profession, warning that it was not based on women’s emancipation achieved by the long-awaited entry into the labour market, but on the contrary, on the patriarchal worldview, to which the above mentioned entry was only marginally tolerable. As a result, women were allowed to enter strictly gender-defined occupations, which primarily relied on historical, prejudiced assumptions about women’s nature and women’s role in family and society. This role was primarily understood as reproductive, then maternal/parental and then, by further extrapolation, one that concerns the care of others – young, old and/or sick. Statistics support this understanding of social reality, and for Croatia they show that 78.4% of people working in education are women (CBS, 2019). Looking at the narrower areas of education, the younger the beneficiaries, the more significant the data in favour of women. As many as 86% of women are employed in primary schools (ibidem). When it comes to the early childhood and preschool teachers, 95% of them are women (CBS, 2018). If we look at the gender distribution of undergraduate students, there is no reason for optimism, since women make up 90% of the population of future educators. One of the most obvious consequences of feminization of occupations is economic in nature, since occupations in which women dominate are traditionally underpaid, disabling women’s financial independence and exercising other freedoms. The consequences of underpayment are evident not only outside the work environment, but also on its own, since it is difficult to talk about motivation and commitment to work in the conditions of potential existential insecurity and feelings of social injustice. In our view, this economic injustice is not only a consequence of the feminization of the profession, which is almost always accompanied by a fall in wages, but also of the fact that

viewed as a natural supplement to a female role at home, especially in cases of early childhood and preschool education, is often considered less of a profession than the others.

Polić (2003) further sharpens this debate by referring to the responsibility that educators themselves have in perpetuating social injustices through their own educational practices. Moreover, for him the very entry of women into this profession suggests their lack of capacity and willingness to change their social position. In his own words:

“In a society where preschool and elementary education – at a time when children are not yet capable of deeper critical judgments, and when they are shaping their basic values of life and cognitively active attitudes – is almost completely feminized, immediate “educational” authority from which the child must emancipate is one whose holders are women. Admittedly, they are themselves victims of an authoritarian system that puts girls far beyond boys and imposes on them a much more restrictive pattern of behaviour, but it is no longer a new realization that the main transmitters of authoritarian behaviour are, above all, those who, as children, were its biggest victims. Even the very understanding of the need for the development of one’s personality can be difficult for one whose personality development is hampered, and the one whose personality is underdeveloped can certainly not encourage and support the development of one’s personality, since freedom can only be supported by freedom, and not by non-freedom, and only creative skill is able to find ways to recognize and to satisfy child’s exceptional needs.” (Polić, 2003: 64)

Guided by his arguments, we ask the following questions: by allegedly accepting the imposed role of mothers and carers, can female educators in their work avoid the similar imposition of gender roles on children? Can they and do they want to teach children a world of different opportunities and choices? Can they accept choices and inclinations deviating from the traditional ones? Research shows that very often they cannot do that. Educators have significant roles in children’s gender socialization experiences (Chen and Rao, 2011; Fromberg, 2005) and discriminative differences in their behaviour towards children based on their gender lead to different stereotypical behaviours of the children themselves (Blaise and Andrew, 2005; Martin, 1998; Thorne, 1993; Fagot et al., 1985). Also, research shows that women educators not only stereotype children but also their own profession, having difficulties accepting men in it (Farquhar et al., 2006; Sumsion, 2000).

### **3. An example of students of early childhood and preschool education**

Educators are often confronted with an ungrateful task, which is to act and think in a way that is different from/contrary to dominant values and worldviews in order to achieve an ideal goal. The idea that men and women are equal and that this equality implies some concrete social assumptions is still unpopular, or even abstract, in many parts of the world, facing still numerous opponents in Croatia. Often, it is in direct contrast to the traditional and patriarchal cultural and religious settings on which particular societies and states function, that are, unfortunately, also being reflected in education systems. Keeping this in mind, occasional pandering of the holders of the educational process to the dominant and familiar values should not be surprising. Despite gender equality as a democratic and constitutional value, it still painfully slowly ascends the ladder of both national and international educational priorities, often facing stiff resistance.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is expected that the younger generations of

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<sup>4</sup> In Croatia, both primary and secondary schools’ civic and health education curricula have been abolished (both of which have integrated gender-related content) and are now functioning through cross-curricular implementation (*Građanski odgoj i obrazovanje u Hrvatskoj: pregled i preporuke*, 2017), while in pre-school curricula gender equality is not mentioned at all.



educators and future educators will exhibit a higher level of gender sensitivity and, as a consequence, the climate in future kindergartens should also be expected to move towards gender equality.

Wanting to test Polić's hypothesis, we conducted our own research on early childhood and preschool education students' attitudes to sex role stereotyping. If Polić is right that women enter teaching profession in order to simultaneously meet both patriarchal and market demands, it is to be expected that their attitudes towards gender-desirable behaviours will also be traditional. It is also to be expected that future educators will be inclined to encourage gender stereotypical behaviours of children and gender stereotypical educational practices, and their views on the profession itself will be consistent with the belief that it is more appropriate for one gender than the other.

### **3.1. Method**

All respondents were undergraduate and graduate students of Early and Preschool Education at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. Due to their small share in the population of education students, the original sample consisted of only 6 male and 238 female respondents, but in further analyses male respondents were excluded. The research covered 65% of the total number of early and preschool education students at the University of Zagreb. The age of the study participants ranged between 20 and 31 years, with an average of 22 years.

A slightly modified questionnaire developed by Massey and Christensen (1990) was used. It presented a variety of commonly held stereotypes of role-appropriate female and male behaviour to which students responded on a five point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree). The items described attitudes to a variety of domains including adult social, domestic and professional gender roles (*Table 1*) and children's educational gender roles (*Table 2*). Also, we have developed a questionnaire introducing items related to attitudes to teaching profession and gender sensitive education (*Table 3*). The questionnaire was administered in the academic year 2016/2017. Descriptive statistics for all variables in the questionnaire were calculated.

### **3. 2. Results**

Frequency of response across each item was calculated and the percentage giving each response is presented in *Table 1*, *Table 2* and *Table 3*. For the purpose of analysis, the five-point scale was collapsed into three categories – disagree (strong disagreement and disagreement), neither agree nor disagree, and agree (strong agreement or agreement with a statement). Such a division allowed the attitudes to be determined as traditional, ambivalent or egalitarian.

The results show that on most items the majority of respondents displayed an egalitarian point of view. One of the explanations for such a result is that all of the respondents were highly educated women who, research shows, usually express more egalitarian attitudes than men. Other explanation is that respondents were providing socially desirable responses. Aware of their social responsibility, it is possible that they chose the responses they knew to be politically correct. Their responses brought to our attention the shortcomings of our existing methodology, also suggesting the necessity of conducting further studies in which egalitarianism would be verified in a more indirect way. Nevertheless, these results call into question Milan Polić's view on the failure of the teaching profession to break away from traditional gender roles. Moreover, young women in this research show a high degree of acceptance of the value of gender equality as well as a relatively high degree of understanding of what it all means.

The analysis of students' attitudes to adult social, domestic and professional gender roles (*Table 1*) shows that the highest degree of egalitarianism was expressed regarding equal opportunities of men and women at work: 97% of respondents agreed that men and women should have equal opportunities at work and promotion. Respondents also dominantly supported equality of men and women in childcare (97% agreed that both parents should be equally responsible for childcare and 93% disagreed with the attitude that men are not naturally suited to bringing up children). These results are not surprising because access to jobs and the accompanying change in the dynamics of household chores and childcare (95% disagrees with the old patriarchal idea that a woman's place is in the home) represent some of the major demands of the feminist movement and are at the basis of contemporary gender mainstreaming politics and projects. It is clear to young women that employment is an existential necessity and the basis of financial independence and freedom, and that the unequal distribution of childcare is one of the major obstacles to their full participation in the labor market.

There are certain items where the egalitarian attitudes were a little less prominent. For almost 11% of respondents, for example, it was unacceptable for a woman to earn more than her husband, while 10% of them disagreed with girls sharing the cost of dates with their boyfriends. Support for these views suggests that small part of the respondents still have a stereotypical view that the man is a breadwinner, or that he is the only one responsible for the finances in the relationship. 21% of respondents thought that it is worse when a woman swears than when a man does, while 12% believed that it is worse when a woman is drunk than when a man is. These attitudes rely on the cultural ideal of "femininity" which under acceptable female behaviour implies submissiveness, decorum and meekness. Aggressive language that includes swearing and alcohol-related behaviour are understood to be the traits of men and, although considered inappropriate, men are more easily forgiven for displaying them.

A column giving data on the percentage of those who neither agree nor disagree with the proposed attitudes is a little bit more interesting, as this indecisiveness is potentially hiding a gender bias. 30% was indecisive whether there should be more women in the engineering professions and 54% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that more men should be employed as secretaries. Also, 11% did not agree or disagree with the statement that men are better decision makers than women and 12% were unsure whether men are more suitable for responsible jobs than women. 11% responded to the statement that women should worry less about equality and more about being good wives and mothers with indecision. Although any inference about such responses would potentially lead to the wrong track, it is impossible not to see a relatively high percentage of those who have doubts about the statements that, from the perspective of gender advocacy and knowledge of gender issues, should not raise doubts.

Table 1: Students' attitudes to adult social, domestic and professional gender roles (%)

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Men and women should have equal opportunities in work and promotion.	1,8	1,2	97
Men are more suitable for responsible jobs than women.	84	12,2	3,8
It is acceptable for a woman to earn more than her husband.	10,7	15,8	73,5
The father should have the final say in family matters.	86,9	8,8	4,3
Men are not naturally suited to bringing up children.	93,2	3,4	3,4
Women should worry less about equality and more about being good wives and mothers.	84,5	10,5	5
More men should be employed as secretaries.	28,3	54	17,7
Both parents should be equally responsible for the childcare.	0,4	2,5	97,1
It's worse when a woman is drunk than when it's a man.	67,3	20,8	11,9
Girls should share the cost of dates with their boyfriend.	10,1	27,3	62,6
It would be hard for me to work for a female boss.	87,8	8,8	3,4
A woman's place is in the home.	95	3,8	1,2
There should be more women in the engineering professions.	2,9	29,8	67,3
It is worse when a woman swears than when a man does.	60,5	18,9	20,6
Men are better decision makers than women.	86,1	10,9	3
Children should not go to kindergarten if their mother is a homemaker.	82,5	9,8	7,7

Responding to the statements regarding children's educational gender roles (*Table 2*) most egalitarian attitudes were expressed regarding the importance of education for women. 96% of respondents disagreed with the statement that it is more important for boys to excel in school than for girls, 96% that it is more important for boys to attend college than for girls and 93% that a good knowledge of mathematics is more important for boys than for girls.

Not surprisingly, in a sample composed of highly educated women, most of them advocated for the right to (tertiary) education for women and their equal inclusion in all aspects of social life, such as sports and play. Interestingly, although respondents overwhelmingly advocated abandoning some traditional gender roles for women (except in the cases of physical activities where as many as 25% of respondents agreed that boys are more appropriate than girls to do physical tasks in the classroom), they are not equally inclined to support the same for men. 29% of respondents agreed that it is inappropriate for boys to wear makeup and play with dolls

and 11% believed that boys should not dress in pink. These attitudes not only retain men within patriarchal gender roles but also women, demonstrating the difficulties of moving beyond traditional femininity and masculinity and the assumptions of what is natural and what is not. Thus, playing with dolls in girls is still considered a positive introduction exclusively to future motherhood, while the same practices in boys are determined inappropriate for their future roles, among which there is clearly no room for engaged parenting. Traditionally and patriarchally male identity was created in stark contrast to the makeup and pink-colored female one, while the idea of the necessity of doing physical work for men is, again, not only unfair to men but to women as well, because it relies on the traditional understanding of the female body as weak, fragile and incapacitated.

*Table 2: Students' attitudes to children's educational gender roles (%)*

	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>
Boys are better class leaders than girls.	76	16,8	7,2
Boys should be expected to do the same amount of housework as girls.	4,3	9,2	86,5
It is more important for boys to attend college than for girls.	96,2	1,3	2,5
It is more important for boys to excel in school than for girls.	95,8	2,1	2,1
Boys are more appropriate than girls to do physical tasks in the classroom, such as opening windows or carrying a projector.	57,4	17,7	24,9
A good knowledge of mathematics is more important for boys than for girls.	93,3	5,5	1,2
Boys are naturally better than girls in logical reasoning.	59,7	26,5	13,8
Boys are naturally more talented for using computers.	67,2	17,6	15,2
Girls should not play with toy cars.	95,3	2,1	2,6
It is inappropriate for boys to wear makeup and play with dolls.	50,6	20,7	28,7
Girls should be allowed, together with boys, to participate in all sports (e.g. football, basketball, etc.).	2,9	3,3	93,8
Boys should not dress in pink.	77,4	11,5	11,1

Also, although they did not support the idea that knowledge of mathematics was more important for boys than for girls, it is worrying that 14% of respondents believed that boys are naturally better than girls in logical reasoning and 15% expressed the attitude that boys are naturally more talented for using computers. This data is of particular concern given the fact that respondents are future educators whose influence on children's interests and choices will be of great importance.

Analysis of students' attitudes to their profession and gender sensitive education (*Table 3*) showed that although most of the respondents disagreed with the statement that early childhood education is not a male occupation (94%), 11% agreed that it is a more appropriate profession for women because they are by nature more caring and compassionate, while 9% agreed that female early childhood educators are more caring and gentler than male educators. This data suggests that although most of the respondents did not exclude men from working in kindergartens, they justified and encouraged a disproportion between the number of men and women employed in the profession.

Respondents advocated gender-based educational practices in insufficiently high percentage – 60% agreed that books and picture books for children should have the equal number of female and male main characters, while 65% thought that it is important for teachers, when using occupation names, to use their variants in female and male gender. These data call into question whether some of the respondents understand the concept of gender sensitive education, making it doubtful whether they will consider it in their future work.

*Table 3: Students' attitudes to teaching profession and gender sensitive education*

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Teachers should use male and female examples during the class.	5,5	19,4	75,1
Men are better school or kindergarten principals than women.	88,1	10,6	1,3
It is important for teachers, when using occupation names, to use their variants in female and male gender.	9,4	25,5	65,1
Books and picture books for children should have the equal number of female and male main characters.	20	20,4	59,6
Teachers should be more lenient to the mischiefs of boys than to those of girls.	94,1	4,7	1,2
Early childhood education is not a male occupation.	94,1	3,4	2,5
Early childhood education is a more appropriate profession for women because they are by nature more caring and compassionate.	76,2	13,2	10,6
Female early childhood educators are more caring and gentler than male educators.	75,3	15,3	9,4

In kindergarten there should be separate toys for boys and for girls.	95,3	3	1,7
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## Conclusion

In this paper we have put together several perspectives of the same problem. Early childhood and preschool education is analysed through the philosophical lens approaching the phenomenon of education in the context of the manipulation/liberation of the individual, through the feminist lens that understands education as a vehicle towards gender just society and warns against the pitfalls of the marginalization of social transformation in favour of market-economic well-being, and, in connection with the latter, through economic lens emphasizing numerous difficulties of a profession that fails to stand up for a fair economic evaluation of its work.

Generally speaking, when it comes to the first aspect of our topic – a philosophical understanding of the problem of education, we can say that this is an understanding of education as a mechanism for building the independent and creative personality of each individual. When it comes to the gender aspect, especially the understanding of the phenomenon of gender equality, we see a significant social imbalance. Despite all the mechanisms of equalization, either through educational interventions or through social measures, there is a strong stratification that does not support women in choosing their role in society. The third aspect, the economic one, leads us to the conclusion that right to participation does not lead to equal valorisation, meaning that there is a strong demand for the revaluation of the teaching profession, but also for the revaluation of the role from which it is allegedly derived. In both cases the problem lies in the exploitation and marginalisation of women's work.

Taking all this into consideration, we believe that this research has shed light on the fundamental problems related to the perception of education as a profession in society, as well as to the gender relations within that profession. The fact that this can be viewed from an economic angle tells us that shifts in the understanding of social relations are only part of the constructed structure of (gender) equality. We can conclude that the debate on equality is the most important part of every education, especially the one within the socially most important professions such as the educational one.

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**ANA MASKALAN, TOMISLAV KRZNAR, SINIŠA OPIĆ**

### **U potrazi za različitošću: rodna vs. ekonomska transformacija obrazovanja**

#### **Sažetak**

U ovom će se radu uloga obrazovanja u intelektualnom, kreativnom i moralnom razvoju djeteta suprotstaviti onim aspektima obrazovnog sustava koji tu ulogu dovode u pitanje. Uz naglasak na poteškoće obrazovnih sustava u promatranju dječjih kapaciteta i potencijala neovisno o njihovom rodu, bit će obrađeni određeni aspekti obrazovne reprodukcije rodne razlike, pri čemu će u samom fokusu našeg interesa biti nositelji obrazovnih procesa u ustanovama ranog i predškolskog obrazovanja. Rad je podijeljen na tri dijela. U prvom dijelu raspravljat će se o dvoznačnoj ulozi obrazovanja u suvremenom europskom i hrvatskom društvu, pri čemu dvoznačnost proizlazi iz društvene nemogućnosti usklađivanja emancipacijskih aspekata obrazovanja s njegovom pragmatičnom ulogom u ekonomskoj proizvodnji dobara. U drugom će se dijelu naglasak staviti na ekonomske i rodne aspekte obrazovne profesije u Hrvatskoj, polazeći od razumijevanja te profesije kao paradigmatičnog primjera neadekvatnosti rješavanja rodne nejednakosti kratkoročnim tržišnim intervencijama bez stvarnih promjena u društvenim i ekonomskim odnosima. U trećem dijelu bit će predstavljeni rezultati istraživanja o stavovima studenata ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja o stereotipizaciji rodni uloga. Zaključeno je da su studentice ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja u većini slučajeva egalitarne, ali da neke od njih i dalje posjeduju tradicionalno razumijevanje rodni odnosa. Konačno, egalitarni pogledi budućih odgojiteljica suprotstavljeni su stvarnosti njihove feminizirane, potplaćene i marginalizirane profesije.

#### **Ključne riječi**

obrazovanje, rodna ravnopravnost, obrazovna profesija, rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje