

VIOLETA ORLOVIĆ LOVREN
JAN PEETERS
NATAŠA MATOVIĆ (Eds.)

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION:
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AND LOCAL STRATEGIES**

INSTITUTE FOR PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY
CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN THE EARLY YEARS
GHENT UNIVERSITY

QUALITY OF EDUCATION:
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND LOCAL STRATEGIES

Publishers

Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia
http://www.f.bg.ac.rs/en2/research/institute_for_pedagogy_and_andragogy
Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy
Centre for Innovation in the Early Years
Ghent University, Belgium
<https://www.ugent.be/en>

For the Publisher

Prof. Živka Krnjaja, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Editors

Prof. Violeta Orlović Lovren, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia
Jan Peeters, PhD
Ghent University, Belgium
Prof. Nataša Matović, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Reviewers

Prof. Dragana Pavlović Breneselović, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia
Prof. Katarina Popović, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia
Prof. Balázs Németh, PhD
University of Pécs, Hungary
Maja Maksimović, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Cover Design

Hana Ovesni

Design

Dosije studio, Beograd

Circulation

200 copies

ISBN 978-86-80712-14-7

Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade
Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy
Centre for Innovation in the Early Years
Ghent University

Quality of Education: Global Development Goals and Local Strategies

Violeta Orlović Lovren
Jan Peeters
Nataša Matović (Eds.)

Belgrade, 2019

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES¹

Nevena Mitranić*

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Lidija Miškeljin**

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Dragana Pavlović Breneseleović***

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

Within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, inclusive quality education is defined as one of the main sustainable development goals (SDG 4). According to the UNESCO, education has also been recognised as the main vehicle for attaining all the other SDGs. In 2017 UNESCO published a guide for educational professionals (*Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives*), identifying the key sustainability competencies to be developed by all learners of all age groups – meaning children and adults. Recognising teachers as learners as well, in this paper, we will explore the meaning of key sustainability competencies for the role of the preschool teacher and, by comparing them with *National Standards for Preschool Teachers' Competencies* and *National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care – Years of Ascent*, consider the issues and possibilities for preschool teachers' professional engagement in education for sustainable development in our national education policy.

Keywords: educational policy, preschool curriculum framework, standards for preschool teachers' competencies, sustainability competencies

1 This article is a result of the project “Models of Evaluation and Strategies for Improvement of Education Quality in Serbia”, No 179060, financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia.

* E-mail: nevena.mitranic@gmail.com

** E-mail: lidija.miskeljin@f.bg.ac.rs

*** E-mail: dbrenese@f.bg.ac.rs

Introduction

As we write these lines, cities rise and social media burn in anger for devastated rivers, increasing poverty rate and endangered values of democracy and humanity. We are witnessing global crises on many levels – issues of politics, of economy and ecology, calling not only human dignity but the very possibility of survival in question. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (as cited in Pramling, Samuelsson, 2010:183), the main reason for inequality, deprivations and devastations in modern society is that democracy is excluded from the economic sphere. Both people and the planet are in urgent need of answers and solutions which would support economic progress without compromising human rights, equality, the culture of peace and nonviolence, as well as global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity, making future sustainable and development ethical.

Global policy perspective on education for sustainable development

In 1987 the United Nations published the *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* which called for changes to thinking and behaviour patterns to meet the need for sustainable solutions and actions (Croft, 2017) and, through the years and many global summits (according to *Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform*, n.d.), struggled to set up an achievable, but comprehensive platform for policies which would enable that. The struggle was resolved in the year 2015, through 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets explained in *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015). The Agenda accentuates values of democracy and outlines bold determination for transformative steps needed to end the poverty and other deprivations, improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth while tackling climate change and working to preserve the environment (according to *Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform*, n.d.).

In that context, empowerment of all vulnerable groups, children and young people mentioned among others, (UN, 2015: paragraph 23) is set by the Agenda as an imperative. Inclusive quality education is recognised as a crucial way to do so and defined as one of the main sustainable development goals (UN, 2015: Goal 4). All learners of all age groups must have access to education which allows them to develop values, knowledge and skills needed to live and promote a sustainable lifestyle (UN, 2015: paragraph 4.7), which makes education not only a sustainable development goal, but the main vehicle for attaining all the other

goals as well (UNESCO, 2017). However, as noted in *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, published by UNESCO in 2017, not all kinds of education, be it inclusive or not, support sustainable development. For example, education focused on economic growth alone may well also lead to an increase in unsustainable consumption patterns (UNESCO, 2017:6). Education for sustainable development must not only include everyone without exception but ensure that all humans learn they are not independent of the environment and encourage them to work together and with the environment to ensure a secure world for future generations (Croft, 2017).

UNESCO has published learning objectives for education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017), focused on eight key competencies necessary for individuals to become sustainability change-makers. Key competencies include: systems thinking competency, anticipation competency, normative competency – as a competency for reflection on norms and values, strategic competency – as a competency for innovative actions, collaboration competency, critical thinking competency, self-awareness competency and integrated problem-solving competency (UNESCO, 2017:10). Recognised as crucial for understanding and constructively dealing with the complex world we live in, these competencies might offer a platform for democratic and sustainable individual and institutional practices. But the development of such educational practices might depend on the way we understand the term *competence* itself.

According to the *Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives* (UNESCO, 2017), competencies are described as “specific attributes individuals need for action and self-organization in various complex contexts and situations. They include cognitive, affective, volitional and motivational elements; hence they are an interplay of knowledge, capacities and skills, motives and affective dispositions” (p. 10). Further, it is noted that competencies cannot be taught but acquired by the learners themselves through action, on the bases of experience and reflection (UN, 2015; Weinert, 2001). The given definition partially overcomes common understanding of competence as possession of fragmented knowledge, abilities, skills or qualifications to carry out a specific task, but stays in the misleading domain of understanding competence as exclusively in the domain of individual capacity and individual responsibility. Although competence might be noticed through the actions of an individual, it is always dependent on conditions in a particular context and requirements of a particular situation or problem (European Commission, 2005:11), which makes it more of a contextual ability and systemic responsibility than individual possession (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014). For key competencies for sustainable development, this implies the need for systemic solutions which enable, provoke and promote complexity, unpredictability, collaboration and

reflective and critical thinking on each organisational level (Miškeljin, 2016) and for every actor of the educational process – children and adults as well. Key competencies for sustainable development are at the same time a personal challenge for each and every individual learner across the globe and a global challenge for the settled notions of pedagogy and education. Therefore, they must be included not just as educational outcomes or content, but as the main principles for educational practice.

Early childhood education for sustainable development

From the very beginning of endeavours towards education for sustainable development, early childhood did not feature as a significant part of resulting governmental policies (Croft, 2017). Very few studies have recognised young children as agents of change in connection with sustainability – the main focus is on the children's relationship with nature and the children's understanding of various natural phenomena while studies in which children themselves are actors are lacking (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Sandberg 2011:189)

Later research work has shown that early childhood education has enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes, skills and behaviours that support sustainable development and in supporting children to develop connections with nature and become active citizens within their communities (Pramling Samuelsson & Kraga, 2008; Croft, 2017). More important, research has shown that very young children have the ability to critically judge different options, form opinions about questions relevant to them and their communities and are able and willing to participate in actions for a sustainable society, making changes in their own lives and influencing the lives of their families (Pramling Samuelsson & Kraga, 2008; Somerville & Williams, 2015).

International workshop on the role of early childhood education for a sustainable society, held in 2007, provided policy, curriculum and pedagogical guidelines for early childhood education towards sustainable development based on the key competencies. Guidelines rely on: the notion of the child as a right holder and active participant in society, whose perspectives and meanings are listened to, considered and are shaping the content and approaches of learning; the opportunities for children and adults to engage in dialogue and concrete actions regarding sustainability, to think critically about things taken for granted and to find creative solutions; and the promotion of diversity, equality, solidarity, fairness and co-operation as the main principles in and through education (Pramling Samuelsson & Kraga, 2008). By changing the way we approach childhood, education and our own roles as adults in the educational process, these guidelines clearly require a shift from

the common notion of knowledge and education as an expertise and transmission, towards the notion of co-construction and transformation (McKeown & Hopkins, 2014), setting new standards and challenges for educational policies, but also challenges for every adult involved in educational practice (Krnjaja, 2016).

Education for sustainable development and preschool teacher's competencies

Qualified teachers are recognised as key agents of change for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Quality Education* and for establishing a broader practice of education for sustainable development, and the quality of their education and professional development is considered a key precondition for current practices advancement (UN, 2015: paragraph 4.c). Although it is noted that further research is needed on the kinds of knowledge and skills that early childhood educators need in order to provide early education for sustainability (Pramling Samuelsson & Kraga, 2008), it is expected that preschool teachers, as leaders for sustainability, promote values and beliefs grounded in connectedness with nature and other living beings, practice personal and professional ethics of engagement for making change (Ferdig, 2007), have a curious and humble approach to their own work and build their own practice on collaborative, creative and collective way with children, colleagues and families (Pramling Samuelsson & Kraga, 2008; Croft, 2017). These expectations require mobilization of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills as well as social and behavioural aspects such as attitudes, emotions, values and motivations (Rychen and Salganik, 2003). Further, these imply the understanding of the preschool teacher as a learner who, through his own actions and in particular contexts and relations, develops key competencies for sustainable development. It is important to notice that the approach to preschool teachers' competencies recognised by European Commission (2011) moves toward more relational and interactional understanding, but still dangerously focuses on responsibilities and characteristics of individual teachers. Settled as relational and interactional, competencies of a preschool teacher are practical wisdom which emerges from institutional and systemic preconditions for critical engagement, practical research, reflexion and life-long learning as creative and collaborative practice. Reorienting early childhood education and practice of preschool teachers towards this kind of pedagogy requires time, intentionality and effort on multiple levels (McKeown & Hopkins, 2014:5) and involves policy changes towards a coherent system of measures and activities which support preschool teachers' competencies (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014; Krnjaja, 2016; Miškeljin, 2016).

The current reform of preschool education in Serbia: preschool teachers' competencies for sustainable development

Working towards the achievement of sustainable development goals means setting justice, humanity and ethics – key democracy values, at the core of every political decision (Pramling Samuelsson, 2010). As per *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks, policies and measures which support key democratic values and promote sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017:6).

In 2005 and with the amendments in 2007, The Government of the Republic of Serbia published the *National Sustainable Development Strategy* (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2008). The objective of the Strategy is to establish a balance between the three key factors of sustainable development: sustainable development of the economy and technology, sustainable social development based on social balance and environmental protection accompanied by rational use of natural resources, while at the same time joining these three factors into one whole, supported by appropriate institutions. However, throughout the Strategy, the economic factor is strongly emphasized and education for sustainable development is mainly introduced in the purpose of achieving a prosperous, innovative and competitive knowledge-based economy. The strategy highlights that through education creativity, innovation, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving have to be spurred through systemic measures of sectors integration and collaboration of all interest groups (ibid:21), accessibility of education and straightening of early childhood education. But, the vision of an educational system in the Republic of Serbia relies on its concurrency, adjustment to the needs of the labour market, attractiveness and modern models of management and financing, all related to the economic factor. Education for sustainable development is seen as more than introducing contents on sustainable development into formal schooling, but as a system of education which supports a knowledge-based economy. In that context, teachers are recognised as part of the “modern staff” which would establish and enable the functioning of the system as such (ibid:38). Contradictorily, the only measure directly addressed to support teachers at all levels of the educational system in that role is the provision of adequate training for sustainable development (ibid:38). Even though creativity, innovation, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving are mentioned, said it all implies that teacher's competencies are seen as a set of knowledge and skills needed to produce what the market needs, which puts in question the autonomy and ethics of the teacher's profession and equals pedagogical work with working in the industry.

Considering the *Law on the Basis of the Education System (Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2017)* such a conclusion for the teacher's role and position might be confirmed. Strong emphasis on the economy might be noticed yet again through the vocabulary of the Law and common usage of terms such as "efficiency" and "resources". According to the Law, competencies and professional development of all practitioners working in education are regulated by the standards which serve as criteria for quality rating – set of expectations which practitioners should satisfy and means for regulating their work by external institutions and organs which have the power to order, prescribe, control and punish based on the judgment of efficiency of practitioners work in relation to economically-pragmatic goals (Radulović, 2019). The autonomy of the practitioner is reduced to the question of how to achieve prescribed expectations in the best and most efficient way (ibid.). Although the main principles of the *Law on the Basis of the Education System* promote accessibility, democracy, openness, authenticity and progressiveness, suggesting that the system is responsible for providing conditions for high-level professional ethics, competency and professional development of practitioners working in the field of education, by further elaboration and operationalisation these very principles are brought into question. Practitioners are seen as implementers of requirements set by experts, detached from their personalities and decontextualised from their practices, passive and obedient towards authority. It is obvious that this kind of positioning of the practitioner in educational settings is inconsistent with developing key competencies for sustainable development.

For preschool education in Serbia, the process of comprehensive reform is underway. New policy documents for preschool education have been brought by taking into account all relevant legislature of the Republic of Serbia but paying attention to global strategies and recommendations as well. Although reforms are not initiated by the issues of sustainability as such, by the need for a paradigm shift towards more democratic, creative, transformative and community-oriented preschool education, a resemblance of the main principles implies current reforms as supportive of sustainable development.

By analysing the new *Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent (Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent, 2018)* and the new *Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards (Standardi kompetencija za profesiju vaspitača, 2018)*, we will try to perceive if and how they support the development of preschool teachers' key sustainability competencies. Although key sustainability competencies are interrelated, so it is impossible to outline any aspect of these documents as supportive for exclusively one competence as such, and although analysed documents are written as part of the same reform movement and are based on the same educational theories, values and beliefs, for the transparency and clarity of further text we will organise the analysis in the form of a table, separating the documents and listing competencies one by one.

Table 1. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of systems thinking competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Systems thinking competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to recognize and understand relationships, to analyse complex systems, to think of how systems are embedded within different domains and different scales and to deal with uncertainty</i></p>	<p>This document is designed in consultations with practitioners and to be used by them, as a support and empowerment in their deliberation and further development of educational practice, and provide a broad, systemic understanding of the preschool teachers' role and position in the educational system.</p>	
	<p>Educational practice is understood as a complex, transformative and ethical system of dynamic relations between children and their social and physical environment.</p> <p>The curriculum is understood as emerging from the context of practice, its institutional, cultural and social background, and developed through joint participation of all actors – including family and broader local community.</p> <p>The preschool teacher is always confronted with new questions and challenges which he deals with in complex interrelation of beliefs, knowledge and aptitudes.</p>	<p>A competent preschool teacher is understood as a practitioner capable of autonomous and responsible action in line with the ethical, complex, dynamic, context-conditioned nature of the educational practice.</p> <p>The competency of a preschool teacher is based on the creative use and review of professional knowledge, aptitudes and values in an ever-changing social and educational context and it is emphasized that the development of competencies is not a process for which the preschool teacher has sole responsibility, but also requires the support of a systemic approach.</p>
	<p>The professional role of the preschool teacher is presented through four areas: direct work with children, curriculum development, professional development and professional public engagement (YA, 2018:34).</p>	<p>Competencies of the preschool teacher are presented through three areas: direct work with children, development of cooperation and learning community and development of professional practice (SKPV, 2018:2).</p>
	<p>The practice of systems thinking competency is noticeable through requirements for preschool teachers' engagements with families and the local community and through the way in which educational practice is settled in space and time of concrete educational institution.</p>	<p>Systems thinking competency is underlined in operationalisation of competencies as knowledge, aptitudes and values preschool teachers should engage, specifically focused on the holistic nature of child development, integration of nurturance, caregiving and education; preschool education as mutually conditioned with community, culture and social and economic trends in society; and ability to work in complex and changing contexts of diversity.</p>

Table 2. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of anticipatory competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Anticipatory competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to understand and evaluate multiple futures – possible, probable and desirable, to create one's own visions for the future, to apply the precautionary principle, to assess the consequences of actions and to deal with risks and changes</i></p>	<p>As preschool education is directed towards long-term aims instead of short-term outcomes, the preschool teacher is provoked to deal with unpredictability and reconstructing daily practices, create and continuously evaluate and to develop their practice in accordance with it.</p> <p>The preschool teacher should be flexible and assertive while planning the rhythm and activities of their practice, connecting with emotions, issues, provocations and inspirations children experience in kindergarten through all activities they engage in, including play and common daily rituals. This further implies the need for the preschool teacher to let go of settled beliefs, predictions and expectations and continuously rethink and anticipate a further vision based on the real experiences in the group.</p>	<p>The preschool teacher is seen as an important model of anticipatory competence for children, empowering them to cope with conflicts, stress, problems and new situations and challenges by practising the ability to cope with them themselves (SKPV, 2018:4).</p>

Table 3. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of normative competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Normative competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie one's actions and to negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals, and targets in a context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, uncertain knowledge and contradictions</i></p>	<p>The affirmation of the preschool teacher as a profession which strongly relies on ethics and reflexivity is noticeable through promoting preschool education as a transformative and ethical practice (YA, 2018:9).</p>	<p>The affirmation of the preschool teacher as a profession which strongly relies on ethics and reflexivity is noticeable through promoting preschool education as essentially value-based and reflective (SKPV, 2018:3).</p>
	<p>Both documents promote a community of learning, devoted to democracy, solidarity, activism, creativity, welfare and personal fulfilment of all participants. For preschool teachers to be key actors in moving towards such a community, a democratic and inclusive approach to preschool education that respects diversity is a necessity.</p>	
	<p>The preschool teacher is seen as someone who furthers reviews and builds values and beliefs about the child and learning and her/his personal practices. Preschool teachers should be able to develop inclusive practices that facilitate the participation and learning of children and involvement of the family, taking into account diversity, and should be sensitive to discrimination and injustice and be able to react in appropriate ways to overcome them (SKPV, 2018:8).</p>	
	<p>Preschool teachers should hold proactive attitudes in promoting and protecting the rights of the child and the family as well as the rights of their own profession. Preschool teachers are obligated to respect child rights as citizens and strive to enable their full participation in the life of the kindergarten and in the social and cultural life of the community (SKPV, 2018:5).</p>	
	<p>The preschool teacher is responsible for developing democratic relations in the kindergarten group, empowering child's potential for solidarity and activism, and has the ability to help children understand unjust behaviours and how to constructively deal with them (YA, 2018:20)</p>	<p>The preschool teacher aims toward constant change in practices and improvement of the programme quality and engage in professional associations and expert bodies, connect with relevant institutions and organizations and participate in consultations on creating educational policies, launching child and family-related campaigns and promoting and protecting the status of his own profession (SKPV, 2018:8).</p>
		<p>Environmental consciousness as integrated into daily activities and local projects which children participate in is explicitly recognised as a value and an aptitude of preschool teachers competence (SKPV, 2018:5).</p>

Table 4. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of strategic competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to collectively develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainability at the local level and further afield</i></p>	<p>As one of the goals, it is set that preschool teachers and other practitioners in preschool educational institutions have the ability to manifest their autonomy, creativity and professionalism and proactively advocate the best interest of child and family (YA, 2018:11).</p>	<p>In the area of direct work with children, the preschool teachers' autonomy and creativity are practised through project-based planning. The preschool teacher plans and implements projects and topics that are meaningful to the children, based on monitoring of children, learning through research, exchange and cooperation among children, focusing on the welfare of the child by supporting their abilities and involvement and promoting creativity as the essential human feature (SKPV, 2018:5).</p>
	<p>An important aspect of preschool teachers role is to connect children with the local community through different ways of mutual involvement (YA, 2018:34).</p>	<p>Preschool teachers implement the education programme through two-sided cooperation with the local community, keep track of activities organized by the local community, organize activities involving families and other members of the local community, involve children in local projects, events and activities and further assess the needs of families in the local community (SKPV, 2018).</p>
	<p>Preschool teachers educate for research work and critical reconsideration for continuous development of the curriculum, initiate and guide team activities and the process of developing kindergarten practices by starting joint practitioners research of issues relevant for their practice and by collaborating with other kindergartens, research institutions, institutions for initial preschool teacher education and other relevant institutions and organisations (YA, 2018:34).</p>	<p>The usage of digital technologies in planning, documenting, designing activities and materials and for information exchange amongst all relevant actors is an important aspect of strategic competency of the preschool teacher (SKPV, 2018:9).</p>

Table 5. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of collaboration competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to learn from others, to understand and respect the needs, perspectives and actions of others, to understand, relate to and be sensitive to others, to deal with conflicts in a group and to facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving</i></p>	<p>As one of the goals, it is set that kindergartens and other public institutions of a local community become commonplaces of joint learning, dialogue and mutual support (YA, 2018:11).</p> <p>The kindergarten is understood as a place of common life, the educational process as a process in which children and adults learn together by joint exploration and meaning-making, and curriculum development and evaluation as common endeavour, with <i>Preschool Curriculum Framework</i> itself, situated as an outline for dialogue between teachers, families and children (YA, 2018:3).</p>	
	<p>The very preschool teachers' profession is understood as reflexive practice, developing in the exchange and trust between all practitioners in the preschool institution. One of the main goals is for practitioners, researchers, policymakers and experts of different profiles to connect with the community which strives towards quality education through joint research and mutual support (YA, 2018:11).</p>	<p>Preschool teachers should be able to collaborate with peers from their own and others' institutions on exchanging experiences, sharing learning and research, to build a pedagogical knowledge through peer dialogue and consider differences in opinions and problems in practice as learning opportunities (SKPV, 2018:6).</p>
	<p>The key role of the family at an early age is recognised and supported through promoting partnership between families and kindergartens (YA, 2018:32).</p>	<p>The preschool teacher should stimulate open communication and interaction with families, build relationships with parents and other family members based on mutual understanding, trust and cooperation, involve parents in the decision-making process and develop pedagogical convictions and knowledge together with parents (SKPV, 2018:7).</p>
	<p>The child is promoted as a competent partner in curriculum development and the preschool teacher as sensitive to the child's needs and capacities and responsible for respecting them, adjusting and balancing all activities accordingly. Preschool teacher should be open to learning with and from children, building bonding relationships with them, developing a sense of security in the child, encouraging and supporting child's initiatives and choices and listening and supporting different forms of expression.</p>	

Table 6. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of critical thinking competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Critical thinking competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to question norms, practices and opinions, to reflect on own one's values, perceptions and actions and to take a position in the sustainability discourse</i></p>	<p>The <i>Preschool Curriculum Framework</i> is explicitly intended for preschool teachers as a starting point, a set of guidelines and a cause for re-thinking and deeper understanding of their own practice (YA, 2018:3), emphasizing the need for constant re-reading, constant questioning of one's own values and beliefs and constant transformation of one's own practice through which both understanding of theoretical conception and real curriculum are developed. This constant learning in broadening the question of what it means to be a good preschool teacher and what a good curriculum might be is seen as subtraction of preschool teachers professional development (YA, 2018:34).</p>	<p>Supporting preschool teachers in critical reflexion and transformation, <i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i> are guidelines intended for use by preschool teachers in the evaluation of their competencies, planning and monitoring their professional learning and development with the aim of developing professional practices (SKPV, 2018:2).</p>
	<p>Preschool teachers' profession is understood as dynamic and relational, immersed in complex context and deeply grounded in ethical responsibility for critical reflection on theory, practice and ones' own beliefs and presumptions through dialogue with colleagues, families and children (YA, 2018).</p>	<p>Preschool teachers critically review the culture and structure of the kindergarten, critically analyse and examine the capabilities and capacities of the preschool institution and give and accept proposals for providing various programmes and forms, critically review the compliance of the real programme with the conception of the curriculum framework and critically examine and develop their own practice through personal research and self-reflection (SKPV, 2018).</p>
	<p>Through constant re-reading of the <i>Preschool Curriculum Framework</i> and critical awareness towards their own practice, preschool teachers are encouraged to explore the ways to support child's learning and participation in curriculum development, to question implications of their own actions and strategies of organising physical and social environment in curriculum development and to re-think compatibility of real practice with theoretical conception of the curriculum framework (YA, 2018).</p>	<p>Using pedagogical documentation preschool teachers are encouraged to engage in dialogue with children, family and peers, in the joint evaluation and programme development as in gaining new insights about the child, learning and the very role of the preschool teacher (SKPV, 2018).</p>

Table 7. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of self-awareness competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Self-awareness competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The ability to reflect on one's own role in the local community and global society, to continually evaluate and further motivate one's actions, and to deal with one's feelings and desires</i></p>	<p>All settings from both documents already mentioned as support of critical thinking competency might be seen as supportive for self-awareness competency as well.</p>	
	<p>The need for self-awareness is most emphasized in direct work with children – in the need to adjust to the child, to balance with different ways in which the preschool teacher participates in different situations and activities, and in teaching through a personal example, modelling constructive approach and desirable behaviours in relations with others, in exploration, learning, in play and everyday-life routines in kindergarten (YA, 2018).</p>	<p>The child rights-based approach to preschool education and orientation towards lifelong learning of the children and adults as a professional and ethical obligation of preschool teacher should be reflected in the proactive attitude in promoting and protecting the rights of the preschool teachers' profession, the rights of the child and the family and in personal engagement in expert conferences and expert bodies, professional preschool teacher associations, in the media, through publishing professional papers and through personal actions and conduct in the daily practice (SKPV, 2018:7,8,9).</p>

Table 8. Analysis of key policy documents of preschool education reform in Serbia in support of integrated problem-solving competency

Key sustainability competencies (UNESCO, 2017:10)	<i>Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent</i>	<i>Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Integrated problem-solving competency</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The overarching ability to apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems and develop viable, inclusive and equitable solution options that promote sustainable development, integrating the above-mentioned competencies</i></p>	<p>Through all the aspects of these documents regarding their systemic approach to educational practice and curriculum development, the integrated approach to problem-solving might be noticed as necessary on all levels and through actions of all actors of the educational system – just not with the narrow focus on sustainability issues.</p>	
	<p>For the preschool teachers, integrated problem-solving competency is activated on every-day level, in many ways they support the child in different activities and situations in kindergarten – through solutions, provocations, inspirations and modelling they offer in play, through organising and negotiating time, space and relations of everyday routines, through deepening child's questions and broadening possibilities for answers in organised learning activities (YA, 2018).</p>	<p>Preschool teachers creatively use and review professional knowledge, aptitude and values, develop a curriculum relying on different sources of content (authentic children's experiences, different life situations, culture, science, arts, technology, ecology, sports...), use various planning, monitoring, documenting and evaluation procedures and techniques in developing the programme – including digital technologies, and take into account the real context of the kindergarten's educational practices (SKPV, 2018).</p>
	<p>Integrated problem-solving competency is promoted through professional development and professional public engagement of the preschool teacher. Collaborative work of the preschool teacher with other practitioners from their own and others' institutions, as well as with researchers, policymakers and experts of different profiles (YA, 2018:35), requires a flexible and constructive approach to issues of educational practice.</p>	<p>Preschool teachers should be able to take initiative and guide team activities and the process of developing kindergarten practices, to plan and guide personal and collective professional development and training on the basis of an independent and shared review of practices, and to work with various databases for keeping and reflecting on different types of records (SKPV, 2018:7,8,9).</p>

Conclusion

The risk of regarding the definition of competencies given in *Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives* (UNESCO, 2017) lies in possibility of bringing sustainability just as a set of new outcomes and new contents into old teaching and learning practices, setting new requirements for students and teachers on top of tasks and responsibilities they've already had, without the shift in the core understanding of pedagogical processes and without adequate support through conditions in which these processes emerge. The risk is evident in the publication of the *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* itself. Through this publication, each of sustainable development goals is operationalized through recommendations of teaching content and techniques, so that it can be directed through separated activities in educational settings, and learning objectives are expressed as sets of expectations from individual students and through cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural domain, compromising the very understanding of competence as an "interplay of knowledge, capacities and skills, motives and affective dispositions" (UNESCO, 2017:10).

In addition, one might ask if education for sustainable development is seen as a process in which teachers are already competent for sustainable lifestyles and in charge of students' key sustainability competencies development. In the official publication of the *Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals* (Hoffmann & Rajeswari, n.d.) by the UNESCO *Education for Sustainable Development Expert Net*, it is clearly stated that competencies cannot merely be communicated, but have to be developed by an individual or group which will irreversibly change the reality of schooling in general and the arrangement of individualized learning processes in particular (Hoffmann, & Rajeswari, n.d.:9). However, *Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals* is not a tool for teachers to help them rethink their own role, institution and actions in the context of supporting key sustainability competencies development. It is set as a tool for adjusting already existing teaching practice so that the teacher can "facilitate learning about, learning through and learning for the achievement of the SDGs" (Hoffmann & Rajeswari, n.d.:3), by suggesting sustainable development goals as final, predictable and already defined outcomes. This compromises the understanding of the contemporary world as complex and unpredictable and the need for innovation and critical reflexive engagement of every individual, and which suggests that the teacher is already an expert for both sustainability subject and educational process, compromising the need to rethink settled practices of pedagogy and education and makes us wonder, if teachers (and adults in general) are already experts on sustainability, then how come sustainability has become a global issue at all?

In the context of issues mentioned, it seems that although global agreement is achieved, policy documents established and even guidelines for development of good practices published, the question of education for sustainable development, being complex as such, remains on slippery slope and requires thorough

deliberation of our understandings not only of ecological and economic subjects, but of different ways in which power moves and might be more ethically moved through organisation and realization of educational practices themselves.

The analysis of the relevant policy documents in Serbia, the *National Strategy for Sustainable Development* and the *Law on the Basis of the Education System* shows that teachers' competencies are seen as a set of knowledge and skills needed to produce what the market needs. Strong emphasis on the economy might be recognised through the vocabulary of the *Law on the Basis of the Education System* and common usage of terms such as "efficiency" and "resources". Competencies and professional development of all practitioners working in education are regulated by the standards which serve as criteria for quality rating and means for regulating their work. Practitioners are seen as implementers of requirements set by experts, detached from their personalities and decontextualized from their practices, passive and obedient towards authority, which questions autonomy and ethics of the teachers' profession.

On the other hand, the analysis of two key documents of preschool education reform in Serbia – *Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent* and *Preschool teacher competency and professional development standards* show that both documents are based on the understanding of education as a transformative and emancipatory process and directed at, according to Capra (1998), integrative values such as cooperation, protection, partnership and quality. The profession of a preschool teacher, as a relational practice, is perceived as an ethical practice based on the responsibilities and pro-activism of the teachers. This means that education for sustainability is recognized as a matter of the process of developing a "sustainability culture", rather than reducing it to issue of contents and separated activities associated with environmental protection. The analysis of these two documents also shows compliance with the *Education for Sustainable Development* document in terms of understanding the meanings and characteristics of competencies and the compatibility of defined competencies of preschool teachers with key sustainability competencies. But for transforming educational practice and the profession of a preschool teacher accordingly, it is necessary for all policy documents to be compatible in understanding competence itself, as well as for all policy measures, including initial education and professional development of preschool teachers, to adequately support established understanding.

References

- Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E. & Sandberg, A. (2011). Sustainable development in early childhood education: in-service students' comprehension of the concept, *Environmental Education Research*, 17 (2), 187–200.
- Capra, F. (1998). *Mreža života: Novo znanstveno razumevanje živih sustava*, Zagreb: Liberata.

- Croft, A. (2017). Leading the Change toward education for sustainability in early childhood education. *He Kupu (The Word)*, 5 (1), 53–60.
- European Commission (2005). *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Commission Staff Working Paper*. Retrieved from: https://www.feani.org/sites/default/files/PDF_Documents/Statements/EQF-EN_final_version_-PDF.PDF
- European Commission Directorate – General for Education and Culture (2011). *CORE: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Retrieved from <https://download.eiie.org/Docs/WebDepot/CoReResearchDocuments2011.pdf>
- Ferdig, M. (2007). Sustainability leadership: Co-creating a sustainable future. *Journal of Change Management*, 7 (1), 25–35.
- Hoffmann, T. & Rajeswari, G. (n.d.). *Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals*. Bonn: Engagement Global.
- Krnjaja, Ž. (2016). *Gde stanuje kvalitet, knjiga 3, Razvijanje prakse dečjeg vrtića*. Beograd: Institut za pedagogiju i andragogiju Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu.
- McKeown, R. & Hopkins, C. (2014). *Teacher Education and Education for Sustainable Development: Ending the DESD and Beginning the GAP*. Toronto: UNESCO.
- Miškeljin, L. (2016). Mentorstvo kao kolaboracija praktičara – perspektiva mentora. *Nastava i vaspitanje*, 65 (2), 395–410.
- Pavlović Breneselović, D. (2014). Kompetencije ili kompetentnost: različiti diskursi profesionalizma vaspitača. *Vaspitanje i obrazovanje*, 39 (2), 57–69.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I. & Kraga, Y. (2008). *The contribution of early childhood education to a sustainable society*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2010). The foundations of ESD in early childhood education. In UNESCO: *Tomorrow Today* (183–185). Leicester: Tudor Rose.
- Preschool Curriculum Framework – Years of Ascent* (2018). Retrieved from https://zuov.gov.rs/download/osnove-programa-predskolskog-vaspitanja-i-obrazovanja_godine-uzleta/
- Radulović, L. (2019). Prosvetna politika u Srbiji: Gde je praktičar? In: D. Pavlović Breneselović, V. Spasenović & Š. Alibabić (Eds.), *Obrazovna politika i praksa: u skladu ili u raskoraku?* Belgrade: Institute of pedagogy and andragogy.
- Rychen, D. S. & Salganik, L. H. (2003). *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations*. Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/22/41529556.pdf>
- Standardi kompetencija za profesiju vaspitača* (2018). Retrieved from http://zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/standardi_kompetencija.pdf
- Somerville, M. & Williams, C. (2015). Sustainability education in early childhood: An updated review of research in the field. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 16 (2), 102–117.
- Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
- The Government of the Republic of Serbia (2008). *National Sustainable Development Strategy*. Belgrade: The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia.

- UN General Assembly (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html>
- UNESCO (2017). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>
- Weinert, F. E. (2001). Concept of competence: A conceptual clarification. In D. S. Rychen & L. H. Salganik (Eds.), *Defining and selecting key competencies* (45–65). Ashland, OH, US: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.
- Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja* (2017). Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, br. 88.