

## PRECONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION <sup>a</sup>

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### Abstract

Considering the fact that most European countries have decades of experience in the work of alternative schools, this paper presents the research that pertains to preconditions for the development of alternative education in Serbia. The instrument applied has been created for the purpose of this research, and the sample includes 441 subjects (teachers, parents, and pedagogy students). The obtained results show that the subjects are generally poorly informed about alternative pedagogical concepts. The results also show that, unlike a significant number of pedagogy students, who express a positive attitude toward the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia, the majority of teachers and parents are undecided on this issue. It is concluded that in order to improve the quality of education, it is very important to work on informing parents about alternative schools and on introducing content from the field of pedagogical and school pluralism into the curricula of teacher training faculties.

**Key words:** alternative education, democratization of society, pedagogical pluralism, school pluralism

## ПРЕТПОСТАВКЕ РАЗВОЈА АЛТЕРНАТИВНОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА У УСЛОВИМА ТРАНЗИЦИЈЕ

### Апстракт

Полазећи од чињенице да већина европских земаља има вишедеценијско искуство у деловању алтернативних школа, у раду је приказано истраживање чији се циљ односи на сагледавање претпоставки развоја алтернативног образовања у

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Републици Србији. Примењени инструмент креиран је за потребе овог истраживања, а узорком је обухваћен 441 испитаник (наставници, родитељи и студенти педагогије). Добијени резултати показују да су испитаници, генерално посматрано, у малој мери информисани о алтернативним педагошким концепцијама. Резултати такође показују да, за разлику од значајног броја студената педагогије који изражавају позитиван став према потреби повећања алтернативних школа у Србији, већина наставника и родитеља је неодлучна по овом питању. Закључује се да је у циљу унапређивања квалитета образовања веома важно радити на информисању родитеља о алтернативним школама, као и на увођењу садржаја из подручја педагошког и школског плурализма у програме наставничких факултета.

**Кључне речи:** алтернативно образовање, демократизација друштва, педагошки плурализам, школски плурализам

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, facing many social, political, economic, and environmental problems, the contemporary societies have faced the challenges of globalization, cultural pluralism, and democracy. In the new circumstances, it is generally recognized that education has a key role in responding to the challenges of global development changes. However, today there is a general dissatisfaction with the quality, performance, and achievements of the school. Namely, the traditional school system, its organization, and internal arrangements are no longer functional and efficient, because it does not manage, and cannot manage by its nature, to respond to the needs and requirements of the new society (Ridl, 2003). Therefore, the theory and practice of alternative education has been developed in many countries with developed democracy, which is perceived as competition to dominant education systems organized by the state and as a response to these circumstances.

The roots of alternative education could be found in the trends of the “reform pedagogy”, “new education”, or “progressive education”, which have developed from the 1920s in Europe and the United States. In this period, many pedagogues offered their pedagogical concepts for the improvement of the educational process and its orientation towards the needs of the child. Within the mentioned reform trends, and influenced by educational theorists and practitioners such as John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori, Helen Parkhurst, Ellen Key, Ovide Decroly, Célestin Freinet, Adolphe Ferrière, and Alexander S. Neill, the emphasis was placed on the importance of pupil-oriented teaching, education that will be closer to the nature and needs of the child, pedagogy of active learning, acquisition of useful knowledge and skills, and development of democracy both at schools and in the society. Some models of the reform pedagogical schools from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with the schools created in the 1960s and the 1970s, were found under a single name – *alternative schools* (Milutinović, 2011).

This raises the question of interpretation of the notion of *alternative schools*, which is differently defined in the literature (Milutinović, 2011; Nagata, 2006; Raywid, 1999; Sliwka, 2008; Spevak, 2001). Some authors (Ridl, 2003) stressed that the alternative school could be any school or a trend in relation to another trend or a school, depending on the aspect, access, or the criteria selected to be the determining ones. The term *alternative schools* applied to schools in a broader sense. More specifically, it always applied to schools that were marked by the term *alternative* since the 1970s, at the time of public disapproval of the content and organization of the public education system, and the establishment of schools based on the ideas of certain social groups. From that perspective, the priority criterion for the definition of the notion *alternative school* is the pedagogical specificity of a particular educational institution itself. In this context, the alternative schools are the schools characterized by education focused on a child and his/her individuality, an innovative and flexible curriculum, which is based on the pupils' needs and interests, partnership in education, active participation of pupils, parents, and stakeholders in the school life and the school development, and so on. In this framework, alternative education implies education that is different from the dominant educational trends represented by the state, which may be implemented in both public and private schools.

Most countries of the European Union have had decades of experience with a wide range of alternative forms of education. Large global networks of schools with special pedagogical orientation (e.g. Montessori and Waldorf schools) co-exist alongside new trends in alternative education and alongside many individual alternative schools, thus expanding both academic and pedagogical pluralism. The point is that, in addition to educational pluralism that involves the whole political and organizational solutions in the education system, which should contribute to changes in a democratic society, the European academic scene demonstrates pedagogical pluralism that includes activities related to the organization of education process at schools, i.e. the application of various theoretical orientations (Krbec, 1999, p. 269). It is worth mentioning that in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century even the countries in which pedagogical and school pluralism was impeded were interested in schools relying on the reform pedagogy and alternative schools (Milutinović & Zuković, 2013). Thus, it was emphasized in the literature (Klus-Stanska & Olek, 1998; Kozakiewicz, 1992; Ridl, 2003; Sliwka & Istance, 2006; Spevak, 2001) that in all the countries in transition (former communist countries), conditions for theoretical enlightenment and practical introduction of pedagogical and school pluralism became favorable only after political democratization and pluralization of society following the fall of the Berlin Wall, approximately in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this regard, in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and Croatia), educational reforms were initiated

by the process of transition, political democratization, and pluralism of society, implying the establishment of alternative schools.

#### *Alternative Education in Serbia*

In our country, however, similar conditions were created with considerable delay, practically at the very beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Law on Primary Education from 2013 (Zakon o osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju, 2013) introduced the notion “a school of special pedagogical orientation”, enabling the establishment of private schools as schools of special pedagogical orientation (Montessori, Decroly, Steiner, and similar programs), when the Ministry determined that the implementation of their program provided implementation of standards for the completion of elementary education. In addition, the Law stipulates that a private school, as a school of special pedagogical orientation, must own a certificate from an internationally recognized association of schools of the same pedagogical orientation. In this context, it could be said that the alternative education (education in schools of special pedagogical orientation), as well as the realization of different pedagogical solutions in public schools is still in its infancy in Serbia. Although the Montessori method of learning has been present in European countries for more than a hundred years, the first and the only Montessori school in Serbia, named “Montessori Elementary School” (<http://www.meda.rs/skola/>) was licensed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development on 24 September 2012, in order to perform activities of elementary education for pupils in the first, second, third, and fourth grades. The alternative pedagogical concept, according to which the public schools work, has a somewhat longer tradition of application in Serbia. It is the Step-By-Step methodology, which implements national educational programs in pre-school and elementary school education in many countries of Europe, Asia, and America. Elements of Step-By-Step methodology, as an educational practice focused on the child, have been implemented in elementary schools (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade) in Serbia since 2002/03 by the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (<http://www.cipcentar.org/>), in the framework of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and in cooperation with the Open Society Institute (OSI) and later the Open Society Foundations (OSF). In order to improve the quality of education in Serbia, the Center for Interactive Pedagogy is continuously working on the training of experts for the implementation of elements of educational practices focused on the child, as well as on empowering them for the application of the ISSA principles of a high-quality educational practice.

Regarding the Steiner pedagogy, it is important to emphasize that there are no schools that apply the principles of Steiner/Waldorf pedagogy in Serbia. However, since September 2013, the Waldorf Center for Family Support and the Waldorf kindergarten officially started to operate in

Serbia. In addition, Serbia does not have even one Freinet or Decroly school. However, similar to Croatia (Matijević, 2001), current public schools in Serbia contain some elements advocated primarily by Célestin Freinet. His ideas (e.g. worksheets, pupils working in groups, children's free style essays, school cooperatives, school self-government), were present at schools in the region in the previous period, but they were usually not distinguished as a special feature.

The general tendency, which particularly influenced the form of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was the continuous expansion of the democratization of education in terms of increasing the diversity of educational content offer, methods and forms of work, as well as the organization of possibility to choose different pathways that lead to completion of the required education (Ridl, 2003, p. 343). This tendency was imperative for the process of education reform in Serbia, which certainly imposed a need to adapt the current school system to the conditions of the new era, as well as a need to listen to views of different stakeholders towards the development of school pluralism. Starting from the standpoint that a relatively new situation in our country implies the development of civic awareness in terms of a responsible choice of school and education, hereinafter awareness of alternative pedagogical concepts and opinions about the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia will be viewed from the perspective of teachers, who are direct participants in the educational process, parents, who are direct participants in school selection, and pedagogy students, who are the future leaders and key disseminators of ideas related to the development of pedagogical and school pluralism.

## *METHOD*

### *Research Aim and Tasks*

The aim of this research pertains to the consideration of assumptions for the development of alternative education in Serbia, which is realized through two research tasks:

1. Examine how teachers, parents, and students of pedagogy evaluate their level of knowledge about different alternative pedagogical concepts.
  - 1.1 Examine whether there are statistically significant differences in the subjects' responses, depending on the measured socio-demographic characteristics.
  - 1.2 Examine whether there are statistically significant differences in the obtained responses among teachers, parents, and students of pedagogy.

2. Examine the opinion of teachers, parents, and students of pedagogy on the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia.
  - 2.1 Examine whether there are statistically significant differences in the subjects' responses, depending on the measured socio-demographic characteristics.
  - 2.2 Investigate whether there are statistically significant differences in the obtained responses among teachers, parents, and students of pedagogy.

### *Research Instrument*

In order to implement the set research tasks, we used a questionnaire designed specifically for this research<sup>1</sup>. The first part of the questionnaire consists of questions about socio-demographic characteristics of the subjects: teachers – years of service, type of teaching (class teaching / subject teaching); parents – education level and financial status of the family; students of pedagogy – year of studies (sophomores/seniors). The second part of the questionnaire pertains to questions examining the level of awareness of the subjects' self-assessment on certain alternative pedagogical concepts (Montessori pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, Decroly pedagogy, Steiner pedagogy, and Step-By-Step methodology). Self-assessment of the level of the subjects' awareness was measured with a four-point Likert scale (1 – not at all; 2 – a little; 3 – a lot; and 4 – very much). This part of the questionnaire includes a question about whether it was necessary to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia, and the subjects express their opinion on this issue by selecting one of the three offered answers (1 – no, 2 – undecided, 3 – yes). In addition to the offered multiple choice of answers, there was also an alternative option for the subjects to give their arguments for the selected answer.

### *Research Sample*

The sample consisted of 441 subjects. The total sample of the subjects consisted of three groups of sub-samples: class teachers and subject teachers (N=153), parents whose children attend an elementary school (N=189), and students of pedagogy from the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad (N=99). A detailed description of the sample structure measured by socio-demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The Instrument was designed according to the model of a similar instrument, which was applied in Croatia (Rajić, 2008), whereby certain items were modified and adapted according to the particularities of the current education context in Serbia.

Table 1. Description of research sample structure

			N	%
<i>Teachers</i>	Years of service	Less than 5 years	24	15.7
		5 to 15 years	53	34.6
		More than 15 years	76	49.7
	Type of teaching	Class teaching	70	45.8
		Subject teaching	83	54.2
			N	%
<i>Parents</i>	Parents' education level	Elementary school	8	4.2
		High school	72	38.1
		Advanced school, higher education	99	52.4
		M.A., Ph.D.	10	5.3
	Assessed financial situation of the family	Good	53	28
Average		127	67.2	
Poor		9	4.8	
			N	%
<i>Pedagogy students</i>	Year of studies	Sophomore	54	54.5
		Senior	45	45.5

#### *The course of research and statistical analysis*

The research was conducted in elementary schools in the City of Novi Sad and at the Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. The software package SPSS 12.0 was used for statistical data processing. Within the descriptive statistics, the average values (arithmetic mean) and dispersion measures of results (standard deviation) were measured. In order to analyze the statistical significance of differences, we used t-test,  $\chi^2$  test, one-way variance analysis (F test), and Post-hoc analysis (Scheffe's test).

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### *Informedness about the alternative pedagogical concepts*

Based on the analysis of the obtained answers about the level of informedness about certain alternative pedagogical concepts (Montessori pedagogy, Step-by-Step methodology, Steiner's pedagogy, Decroly's pedagogy, and Freinet's pedagogy), the average score is  $M=1.8$  with  $SD=0.8$ , observed for the whole sample. This means that the subjects are generally poorly informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts. Table 2 provides a detailed view of the average scores according to the groups of subjects.

*Table 2. Level of informedness of the subjects about alternative pedagogical concepts*

Alternative pedagogical concept	Teachers		Parents		Pedagogy students	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Montessori pedagogy	2.3	0.9	1.7	0.8	2.5	0.8
Step-by-Step	2.4	0.8	1.9	0.9	2.0	0.8
Steiner's pedagogy	1.7	0.7	1.4	0.7	1.6	0.7
Decroly's pedagogy	1.5	0.7	1.4	0.6	1.8	0.7
Freinet's pedagogy	1.5	0.7	1.4	0.6	1.9	0.9
	M=1.9 SD=0.8		M=1.6 SD=0.7		M=2.0 SD=0.8	

The results obtained on the sample of teachers show that the average value of the arithmetic mean is  $M=1.9$  with  $SD=0.8$ , which means that the surveyed teachers think that they are poorly informed about alternative pedagogical concepts. Teachers are mostly informed about Step-by-Step methodology ( $M=2.4$  with  $SD=0.8$ ) and Montessori pedagogy ( $M=2.3$  with  $SD=0.9$ ), while the average scores obtained for the remaining three alternative pedagogical concepts are significantly lower (Table 2).

Results obtained on the sample of parents show that the average value of the arithmetic mean is  $M=1.6$  with  $SD=0.7$ . Accordingly, it can be concluded that the majority of surveyed parents think that they are very poorly informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts (Table 2). Namely, the parents are very poorly informed about Step-by-Step methodology ( $M=1.9$  with  $SD=0.9$ ) and Montessori pedagogy ( $M=1.7$  with  $SD=0.8$ ), while the average scores obtained for the other three alternative pedagogical concepts show that most parents are completely uninformed about them.

The results obtained on the sample of pedagogy students show that the average value of the arithmetic mean is  $M=2.0$  with  $SD=0.8$ . Accordingly, it can be concluded that the majority of pedagogy students assess that they are little informed about the mentioned alternative pedagogical concepts (Table 2). They are informed about the Montessori pedagogy ( $M=2.5$  with  $SD=0.8$ ) and the Step-by-Step methodology ( $M=2.0$  with  $SD=0.8$ ) to somewhat greater extent, while the level of informedness about the remaining three alternative pedagogical concepts is relatively low.

*Differences in subjects' responses depending on the measured socio-demographic characteristics*

Examining the differences in the level of informedness of teachers about the alternative pedagogical concepts depending on their length of service, we found that there are significant differences only in relation to the Step-by-Step methodology ( $F(139.2)=5.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ), between teachers



with the least and the most years of service, where the higher scores are achieved by the teachers with the most years of service.

Regarding the variables related to the type of instruction, we found that there are differences in relation to informedness about the alternative pedagogical concepts, except about Steiner's pedagogy; it should be emphasized, however, that the differences concerning the informedness about Decroly's pedagogy are marginally significant (Table 3). The obtained values show that elementary school class teachers are more informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts than the subject teachers.

*Table 3. Differences in informedness of teachers about the alternative pedagogical concepts in relation to the type of instruction*

Alternative pedagogical concept	Type of instruction	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Montessori pedagogy	Class teaching	2.54	0.83	3.65	139	.000
	Subject teaching	2.03	0.83			
Step-by-Step	Class teaching	2.65	0.71	3.02	139	.003
	Subject teaching	2.24	0.88			
Steiner's pedagogy	Class teaching	1.73	0.79	1.08	137	.282
	Subject teaching	1.59	0.68			
Decroly's pedagogy	Class teaching	1.59	0.77	1.82	137	.072
	Subject teaching	1.39	0.57			
Freinet's pedagogy	Class teaching	1.70	0.85	2.28	135	.024
	Subject teaching	1.42	0.57			

Testing the differences in the parents' level of informedness in relation to their level of education, we found that there are statistically significant differences in the level of informedness about Step-by-Step methodology ( $t(174)=-2.07$ ,  $p<.05$ ), where the parents with a higher level of education ( $M=2.0$ ,  $SD=0.9$ ) are more informed than the parents with a lower level of education ( $M=1.7$ ,  $SD=0.8$ ). We also determined that there are marginally significant differences in the level of informedness about Steiner's pedagogy ( $t(171)=-1.68$ ,  $p=.09$ ) in the same direction in which the parents with a higher level of education obtain higher scores ( $M=1.5$ ,  $SD=0.7$ ) than the parents with lower levels of education ( $M=1.3$ ,  $SD=0.6$ ).

Concerning the variable related to the assessed financial status of the family, no statistically significant differences were obtained in the assessment of parents in the level of informedness about the alternative pedagogical concepts (Montessori pedagogy:  $t(173)=-.57$ ,  $p=.58$ ; Step-by-Step methodology:  $t(173)=-.28$ ,  $p=.78$ ; Steiner's pedagogy:  $t(170)=.06$ ,  $p=.96$ ; Decroly's pedagogy:  $t(172)=.26$ ,  $p=.80$ ; Freinet's pedagogy:  $t(171)=-.30$ ,  $p=.76$ ). Accordingly, it should be emphasized that the majority of the parents assess the financial status of their families as average.

As regards the sample of pedagogy students, the t-test analysis shows that there are statistically significant differences in the level of informedness of pedagogy students about the alternative pedagogical concepts in relation to the year of studies (Table 4). The obtained results show that senior pedagogy students are more informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts than sophomore pedagogy students.

*Table 4. Differences in informedness of pedagogy students about the alternative pedagogical concepts in relation to the year of studies*

Alternative pedagogical concept	Year of studies	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Montessori pedagogy	Sophomore	1.94	0.60	-10.52	91	.000
	Senior	3.18	0.53			
Step-by-Step	Sophomore	1.60	0.61	-5.37	90	.000
	Senior	2.38	0.78			
Steiner's pedagogy	Sophomore	1.33	0.48	-4.73	91	.000
	Senior	1.96	0.77			
Decroly's pedagogy	Sophomore	1.42	0.58	-6.22	91	.000
	Senior	2.22	0.67			
Freinet's pedagogy	Sophomore	1.46	0.54	-6.61	91	.000
	Senior	2.42	0.84			

*Differences in responses among parents, teachers, and pedagogy students*

The significance of differences in responses among parents, teachers, and pedagogy students was examined by means of direct variance analysis. The results presented in Table 5 show that there are statistically significant differences among the surveyed groups in relation to the assessment of informedness about all of the abovementioned alternative pedagogical concepts.

*Table 5. Differences among parents, teachers, and students in the assessment of informedness about alternative pedagogical concepts*

Alternative pedagogical concepts	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>df</i> <sub>2</sub>	<i>p</i>
Montessori pedagogy	33.03	2	409	.000
Step-by-Step	20.35	2	408	.000
Steiner's pedagogy	4.96	2	402	.007
Decroly's pedagogy	11.00	2	406	.000
Freinet's pedagogy	17.16	2	403	.000

Post-hoc Scheffe's tests have shown that in the case of informedness about Montessori pedagogy, there are statistically significant differences between parents and the other two groups of subjects ( $p < .001$ ), with the parents having lower scores than teachers and students. The difference between teachers and students is on the border of significance ( $p = .052$ ),

whereby students have slightly higher scores. Regarding informedness about Step-by-Step methodology, there are statistically significant differences among the teachers and the other two groups of subjects ( $p < .001$ ), with the teachers having higher scores than parents and pedagogy students. There are no significant differences between students and parents regarding informedness about the alternative pedagogical concepts. In the case of informedness about Steiner's pedagogy, there are significant statistical differences only between teachers and parents ( $p < .05$ ), whereby teachers have higher scores. Differences between parents and students can be seen as marginally significant ( $p = .069$ ), whereby students have slightly higher scores. As regards informedness about Decroly's and Freinet's pedagogies, we found that students have significantly higher scores than teachers and parents ( $p < .001$ ).

*Opinion of the subjects on the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia*

Based on the obtained answers regarding the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia, we been found that the average score on the total sample is  $M = 2.1$  with  $SD = 0.7$ , which means that the majority of subjects involved in this research are undecided on this matter. Answers obtained from individual groups of subjects are shown in Table 6.

*Table 6. Subjects' answers to the question about the need to increase a number of alternative schools in Serbia*

	Is it necessary to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia?									
	No		I am undecided		Yes		Missing		M	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Teachers	37	24.2	70	45.8	45	29.4	1	0.7	2.05	0.7
Parents	56	29.6	85	45	45	23.8	3	1.6	1.9	0.7
Pedagogy students	5	5.1	26	26.3	68	68.7	0	0	2.6	0.6

As regards the opinion of class teachers and subject teachers, the obtained responses fall within the findings obtained on the whole sample. The majority of surveyed teachers (45.8%) selected the option "undecided", i.e. they did not have a clearly stated opinion on whether it is necessary to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia. However, there are a significant number of teachers (30%) who believe that the number of these schools in Serbia should be increased, while about 24% of the teachers have a negative attitude towards this issue.

The results obtained on the sample of parents show that the majority of surveyed parents (45%) are undecided about the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia. However, distribution of positive

and negative responses in this group of subjects is the opposite of the teachers, since about 30% of parents think that the number of alternative schools in Serbia should not be increased, while 24% of parents express a positive attitude towards this issue.

Unlike the previous two groups of subjects, the opinion of most pedagogy students (68.7%) is that the number of alternative schools in Serbia should be increased, whereas 26.3% are undecided on the issue and only 5.1% think that the number of alternative schools in Serbia should not be increased.

*Differences in the subjects' responses depending on the measured socio-demographic characteristics*

The  $\chi^2$  test analysis has determined that there are no statistically significant differences in the teachers' responses with regard to the years of service ( $\chi^2(4)=4.60$ ,  $p=.33$ ), or with regard to the type of classes they teach – class teaching or subject teaching ( $\chi^2(2)=0.22$ ,  $p=.99$ ). Likewise, it has been determined that there are no statistically significant differences in the responses of parents with regard to their education level ( $\chi^2(2)=1.03$ ,  $p=.60$ ), or with respect to the assessed financial status of their respective families ( $\chi^2(2)=3.23$ ,  $p=.20$ ).

As regards pedagogy students, we determined that there are marginally significant differences between sophomores and senior students ( $\chi^2(2)=5.11$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Although most students agree that the number of alternative schools in Serbia should be increased, a significantly higher number of sophomore pedagogy students are undecided on the issue, while the senior pedagogy students provided a larger number of affirmative responses (Table 7).

*Table 7. Differences in answers of pedagogy students about the need to increase the number of alternative schools in relation to their year of studies*

		Is it necessary to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia?			
		No	I am undecided	Yes	Total
Year of studies	Soph.	<i>f</i> 4	18	32	54
		<i>%</i> 7.4%	33.3%	59.3%	100.0%
	Snr.	<i>f</i> 1	8	36	45
		<i>%</i> 2.2%	17.8%	80.0%	100.0%
Total		<i>f</i> 5	26	68	99
		<i>%</i> 5.1%	26.3%	68.7%	100.0%

*Differences in responses among parents, teachers, and pedagogy students*

The  $\chi^2$  test analysis has shown that there are statistically significant differences in the obtained responses among teachers, parents, and

pedagogy students ( $\chi^2(4)=63.72$ ,  $p<.001$ ). There are statistically significant differences among the pedagogy students and the other two groups of subjects, since most pedagogy students are positive about the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia, while the majority of teachers and parents are undecided on this issue (see Table 6).

### *DISCUSSION*

In an effort to review the preconditions for the development of alternative education in Serbia, this paper examined the self-assessment on the level of informedness of teachers, parents, and pedagogy students about alternative pedagogical concepts that are currently prevalent in Western European countries with developed pedagogical and school pluralism (Montessori pedagogy, Step-by-Step methodology, Steiner's pedagogy, Decroly's pedagogy, and Freinet's pedagogy). The research results showed that the subjects generally think that they are poorly informed about the five alternative pedagogical concepts, which is probably a result of the general situation of (non-)performance of alternative pedagogy in the education scene in Serbia.

The obtained results expressing the level of informedness of teachers about alternative pedagogical concepts showed that teachers think that they are best informed about Step-by-Step methodology and Montessori pedagogy. Examination of differences in the level of informedness of teachers in relation to the measured socio-demographic variables showed that there are statistically significant differences in the teachers' responses only in relation to Step-by-Step methodology, whereby higher scores were obtained by the teachers with the most years of service. The obtained values showed that the class teachers think that they are more informed about the alternative pedagogies than the subject teachers. This finding was expected, since the elements of Step-by-Step methodology, as a child-centered educational practice, have been implemented in Serbia since 2002/03, but only in lower grades. A general finding that teachers think that they are poorly informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts indicate the need to introduce the content from the field of pedagogical and school pluralism into the programs of both teacher training faculties and teacher colleges.

The results obtained on the sample of parents showed that most subjects think that they are very poorly informed about the alternative pedagogical concepts. By examining the differences in the level of informedness of parents in relation to their level of education, we found that there are statistically significant differences in relation to the assessment of informedness about Step-by-Step methodology and marginally significant differences in relation to the assessment of informedness about Steiner's

pedagogy. Parents with a higher level of education are more informed than parents with a lower level of education, which is in keeping with the results of the research conducted in the United States (Teske, Fitzpatrick & Kaplan, 2006).

In this context, it is important to note that the analysis of the situation in the Slovak Republic (Matulčíková, 2003) shows that the current problem of school choice is the lack of parents' experience with decision making and with choosing the school for their children out of the available types of schools that are often attractive, but insufficiently familiar to them. The fact is that, when faced with the possibility of choosing the type of education, the parents can help increase the quality of their children's education only if they make good and well-informed decisions.

When the results of our research pertaining to the sample of teachers and parents are compared with the results of a similar research conducted in Croatia after fifteen years of operation of alternative schools (Rajić, 2008), it is possible to identify great similarities. Namely, the research in Croatia has shown that subject teachers and class teachers, as well as parents, have little knowledge about the alternative pedagogical concepts. It is noteworthy that three alternative elementary schools (two Waldorf schools and a Montessori school) are currently operating in Croatia, and that in 2012 the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia gave consent for the implementation of alternative education based on the model of democratic schools in accordance with the regulations of the curriculum for elementary schools.

Regarding the level of informedness of pedagogy students about the alternative pedagogical concepts, we observed a somewhat more favorable picture in relation to the level of informedness of teachers and parents, whereby the senior students thought that they were more informed about the alternative pedagogies than the sophomore pedagogy students. We obtained similar results regarding the question of the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia. In fact, a significant number of pedagogy students expressed a positive attitude towards the development of alternative education, which is evident from the answers given by the senior students. Pedagogy students, especially those at a later year of studies (having studied about the field of school and educational pluralism), expect many advantages arising from the implementation of the school choice policy. Qualitative analysis of the students' answers showed that this is primarily due to the belief that alternative schools implement the child-centered educational practice to a greater extent, increase the number of alternative schools, thus raising the possibility for parents to choose a school that they think is the best for their child. In addition, pluralization of the school system creates competition among educational institutions and thus raises the quality of education.

Unlike pedagogy students, the majority of teachers and parents are undecided about the need to increase the number of alternative schools in Serbia. Qualitative analysis of the responses of teachers and parents shows that a key reason for their indecision is the lack of information on how alternative schools work. In addition, teachers and parents firmly believe that alternative schools are not available to everyone, that there is a risk of their deepening class and social inequality, and that state schools should provide an appropriate quality of education. They also express doubts about the quality of education provided by alternative schools.

Taking into consideration the fact that in the previous period the concept of state (public) education was dominant in the education policy in this region, as well as in the current political, social, and economic framework of our country, the indecision of the majority of teachers and parents regarding the need to establish more alternative schools is expected. Qualitative analysis of the responses of teachers and parents indicates that, in addition to the lack of information on the operation of alternative schools, the cause of their indecision regarding this issue is also the fear that those schools offer advantages and benefits only for the children of upper-class and wealthy parents. It seems that such attitude is not unfounded, since the Law on Elementary Education from 2013 (*Zakon o osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju, 2013*) in Serbia does not foresee budgetary subsidies for schools with special pedagogical orientation.

### *CONCLUSION*

A basic characteristic of societies based on pluralistic orientations is that an alternative exists in all areas of life, including the field of education. In this context, the transition period in Serbia demands the creation of conditions for the development of pedagogical and school pluralism, along with political pluralism (Zuković & Milutinović, 2013). This pertains to the alternative schools that can create adequate conditions in order to meet the educational needs that cannot be met by public schools. In addition, alternative schools, together with the dominant type of school, significantly extend the variability of offers in the range of educational institutions (Spevak, 2001), thus enabling the establishment of constructive competition among schools (Milutinović, 2011). We should not neglect the impact that alternative schools may have on public schools, serving as a model for a wider reconstruction of dominant educational trends. Sliwka (2008) suggests that alternative schools have already played this role to a certain extent, since many teaching strategies and assessment techniques that had been developed in alternative schools made an impact on teaching and learning in the public school systems around the world.

Taking all this into consideration, it seems that informedness about alternative pedagogy of both teachers and parents can help eliminate the marginal role of alternative education in the education system. The point is that the existence of alternative schools, or special pedagogical orientations, requires informed beneficiaries who will understand the essence and the nature of the offered pedagogical concepts in alternative schools. Within this framework, improving the conditions for responsible decision making of parents and informing the teachers about alternative pedagogies while leaving room for their creativity should form a part of the program of support to pedagogical innovations. Such programs of support to alternative pedagogies would certainly support the development of school and educational pluralism, which may play an important role in developing the education system in Serbia in general. Observed in the context of transitional changes in our country, whose goal is to build its own perspective, the experiences of other EU member countries in transition are very important, in order to avoid the recurrence of similar missteps at the beginning of the discussion about, and acceptance of, alternative education in the overall Serbian education policy.

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## ПРЕТПОСТАВКЕ РАЗВОЈА АЛТЕРНАТИВНОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА У УСЛОВИМА ТРАНЗИЦИЈЕ

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### Резиме

Општа тенденција која је нарочито утицала на облик школства у 20. веку је стално ширење демократизације образовања у смислу повећања разноврсности понуда образовних садржаја, метода и облика рада, као и организације могућности избора најразличитијих путева који воде освајању траженог образовања (Ridl, 2003, стр. 343). Оваква тенденција представља императив и за процес реформе образовања у Србији, што свакако намеће потребу прилагођавања актуелног школског система условима новог времена, али и потребу ослушкивања ставова различитих интересних група према развоју школског плурализма. Полазећи од чињенице да већина европских земаља има вишедеценијско искуство у деловању алтернативних школа, у раду је приказано истраживање чији се циљ односио на сагледавање претпоставки развоја алтернативног образовања у Републици Србији. Примењени инструмент креиран је за потребе овог истраживања, а узорком је обухваћен 441 испитаник (наставници, родитељи и студенти педагогије).

Резултати истраживања показују да испитаници, генерално посматрано, процењују да су у малој мери информисани о наведеним алтернативним педагошким концепцијама, што је вероватно резултат општег стања (не)деловања алтернативних педагогија на образовној сцени у Србији. Добијени резултати о нивоу информисаности наставника о алтернативним педагошким концепцијама показују да наставници процењују да су у највећој мери информисани о Корак по корак методологији и Монтесори педагогији. Резултати који су добијени на нивоу узорка родитеља показују да већина испитаника процењује да је веома мало информисана о алтернативним педагошким концепцијама. Када је реч о нивоу информисаности студената педагогије о алтернативним педагошким концепцијама, може се констатовати нешто повољнија слика у односу на ниво информисаности наставника и родитеља, с тим што студенти IV године процењују да су информисанији о наведеним алтернативним педагогијама у односу на студенте II године студија педагогије. Резултати такође показују да, за разлику од значајног броја студената педагогије који изражавају позитиван став према потреби повећања алтернативних школа у Србији, већина наставника и родитеља је неодлучна по овом питању. Закључује се да је у циљу унапређивања квалитета образовања веома важно радити на информисању родитеља о алтернативним школама, као и на увођењу садржаја из подручја педагошког и школског плурализма у програме наставничких факултета.