

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL- CROATIAN CONTEXT

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Summary:

Children participation in contemporary times has become important topic which relatively often stands out as the norm in various legislative and policy documents as well as procedures. Despite the fact many papers and studies on the topic exist, the concept and practice of 'participation' can include a breadth of different understandings and experiences. Involving children is a complex process and the research appears to indicate that despite legislative and policy drivers their participation continues to be limited, and is dependent on institutional mechanisms, values as well as skills of the adults. Approaches and paradigms of education in the so-called post-conventional time conceive a child as an active being who can and should participate in his/her own education and take responsibility for his/her behaviour (Koller-Trbovic and Žižak, 2005; Pećnik, 2008; Markovinović, 2010; Kušević, 2010). Although the idea of children's participation in a meaningful manner and the presence of children perspective in all matters concerning them is relatively well represented through Croatian professional and scientific papers and discussions, one can note the discrepancy between the idea of participation and its actual application in practice. Furthermore, the study on opinions and attitudes of children and young people in Croatia showed that a major problem in relation to the participatory rights of children is the lack of satisfactory institutional mechanisms aimed at the involvement of children in decision-making (Miharija and Kuridža, 2011). In addition, overview of relevant literature has shown a shortage of methodological indicators about children's participation in school in all the segments, from theoretical models and research to models of good practice. Shortage of data draws attention to necessity for further promotion of children's participation in school through scientific and professional work, participatory research projects and interactive demonstration of children's participation models.

Considering all the above, this study started from the premise that participation is basic assumption of citizenship education, modern approach, and paradigm of children education as evidenced by numerous EU and Croatian documents. The purpose of the study was gaining insight in relation to the respect and active participation (engagement) of students in decision making processes in schools in Croatia (adapted according to Hart, 1992, and John-Akinola & Nic-Gabhainn, 2014). Thus, the main goal of the study was to give students, as main stakeholders of school participation, an opportunity to reflect on current practices and situation in schools regarding their participation but also to hear their thoughts and ideas on the need and effectiveness of such an approach. In other words, the main goal of the study is to investigate experiences as well as possibilities of achieving participatory rights of students. The reason for such study (beside clear guidelines, acts and documents) lies down in ignorance as well as neglect of this topic in Croatian society.

Therefore, as part of the project „Students participation in schools“ at the beginning of 2017 an on line survey was conducted on the sample of 137 high school pupils in Croatia.

This pilot-study contributed to the knowledge development on possibilities and ways of student's participation in school from students' perspective and its results and conclusions will contribute to the second project phase- the main study which will include students', teachers' and professional associates' in school perspectives on this topic on representative sample.

Keywords: *participation, school, children, Croatia*