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## **THE ROLE OF COMPARATIVE PEDAGOGY IN THE TRAINING OF PEDAGOGUES IN SERBIA AND SLOVENIA**

### **Abstract**

This paper considers three issues arising from the study of the development and the current state of Comparative Pedagogy in Serbia and Slovenia. First, the development of Comparative Pedagogy as a distinctive discipline in Serbia and Slovenia is discussed. Second, the role and the content of Comparative Pedagogy courses in university programmes covering the training of pedagogues in Serbia and Slovenia are presented. Third, special attention is given to the discussion on the role of Comparative Pedagogy in the university education of pedagogues. Comparative Pedagogy has a more enduring development and stronger position in Slovenia than in Serbia. The favourable effects of Comparative Pedagogy on the professional engagement of pedagogues, especially in the process of the modernisation and improvement of education, are discussed as well.

*Keywords:* comparative pedagogy, comparative education, pedagogy, university education of pedagogues

### **Introduction**

The development of comparative education/pedagogy in both Serbia and Slovenia went through two main phases. Initially, there was a need for comparative pedagogy to be recognised and accepted as a new and separate research area by the scientific community. Only then it obtained its place at the university level, giving it the possibility for more intense development.

In Serbia, comparative pedagogy<sup>1</sup> was recognised as a field of inquiry at the beginning of the XX century. However, it had to wait until the beginning of the XXI century to be accepted as an independent academic discipline (Spasenović & Vujisić-Živković, in press). In Slovenia, comparative pedagogy was introduced earlier. It was taught as part of the subject of Comparative Pedagogy and the History of Education in the mid-1980s. In 1992, it became a separate academic discipline (Skubic Ermenc, in press). At least two reasons account for the differences in comparative pedagogy in these two periods. In the 1980s, the academic communities of both countries held different views, whereas in the 1990s, different socio-political conditions existed in these two countries. Until the early 1990s, Slovenia and Serbia were two of the six federal units within the socialist Yugoslavia. In 1991, they became separate countries, giving rise to their discrepancies. Slovenia became a member of the European Union and continued its social and economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term *comparative pedagogy* instead of *comparative education* because it is suitable to the meaning of the concept. That is, it is in accordance with the notion of pedagogy as a fundamental science that deals with issues of upbringing and education. Consequently, Comparative Pedagogy is one of the educational disciplines.

Serbia, on the contrary, faced a major social, economic and political crisis. It became involved in a war, struggled with the lack of democratic political atmosphere, suffered external sanctions and became overwhelmed by inner political and economic deterioration. Caused by these socio-political differences, scientific development in Slovenia and Serbia in the 1990s completely diverged, including the field of education. As small country, Slovenia has always designed its pedagogical ideas and school system in accordance with the different European ideas and practices. After their separation, both countries felt the increased need for wider communication as well as for a critical response to global trends in education. Serbia faced stagnation, both in educational practice and pedagogy as a scientific discipline. Comparative pedagogy gained more importance in Slovenia, whereas in Serbia, educationalists concentrated on solving internal and existential problems.

At the beginning of the XXI century, Serbia found a way to solve some of its problems. A new government was elected, democratic institutions were established, and major economic, political and social reforms were initiated, creating the necessary conditions for the re-inclusion of Serbian scientists to the international research community. New trends in society, as well as in education, finally led to the acknowledgment of comparative education as a separate course in Serbian universities.

### **Pedagogy as a discipline and profession: a historical and contemporary view**

The development of pedagogy as a scientific discipline in Slovenia and Serbia has apparent similarities. The most obvious one is that the founders of Slovenian and Serbian pedagogy were educated in Germany and Austria. German pedagogy was the most influential in the XIX century, and it had great influence on the development of pedagogy in the Balkan countries in the first half of the XX century. After the First World War, Slovenia and Serbia became part of a unique country, that is, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This integration strengthened the cooperation between academic circles. Moreover, the predominance of the term 'pedagogy' during the interwar period (1918–1941) in the Serbian and the Slovenian language was one of the consequences of the influence of German pedagogy, with the theory of education as the core concern (Vujisić-Živković & Spasenović, 2010).

The Second World War caused the division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the great devastation of schools. After the war, Yugoslavia was re-united as a federation, and it witnessed a new economic, political and ideological order, which was largely imported from the Soviet Union. Consequently, the influence of Russian pedagogy became very powerful. The established use of the term 'pedagogy' remained, as it was common in the Russian language. Russian pedagogy was less influential in Slovenia, as one of the most influential after-war pedagogues, Vlado Schmidt, distanced himself from it because of its statist traits. He defended the importance of pedagogy based on the principles of a self-managing society (Schmidt, 1982). Pedagogy is considered a fundamental science, both reflexive and applied, which develops generally valid theories and explains general laws in the area of education (Skubic Ermenc, in press).

Throughout the XX century, professional profile of pedagogues emerged and developed in both countries. The education of Serbian pedagogues started in 1900 at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade. Before that time, pedagogy as an academic subject was taught only for the training of secondary school teachers. The first professor with a Ph.D. in pedagogy, Vojislav Bakić, was appointed in 1892. The first Serbian pedagogues, those educated in the period of 1900–1941, worked either as school supervisors appointed by the Ministry of Education, with the task of monitoring and evaluating teachers and giving expert advice on teaching, or professors of pedagogy in teachers' colleges (Tešić, 1992).

Pedagogy has been an academic subject in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana since its establishment in 1919. The Faculty of Arts educated the gymnasium teachers (lower and higher gymnasium). Each teacher had to take a pedagogy course (which then included Philosophy of Education<sup>2</sup> and History of Schooling and Pedagogy). Since 1920, pedagogy has been studied as a major subject at the undergraduate level as well as at the doctorate level. In that year Karel Ozvald, a representative of cultural pedagogy, was appointed the first professor of pedagogy. In 1930, he was joined by Stanko Gogala, who was also a representative of cultural pedagogy. Eight years later, a chair of pedagogy was established, including the subjects Theoretical Pedagogy, Practical Pedagogy, History of Pedagogy, Psychology and Didactics, among others. Majority of the graduates worked as gymnasium professors, and some were employed in different government bodies. After the Second World War, the development of Slovenian pedagogy became strongly influenced by Vlado Schmidt (Vidmar, 2009, p. 19, 20, cf. also Skubic Ermenc, in press).

The possibilities for the professional engagement of pedagogues became greater during the second half of the XX century. Beginning in the late 1950s, pedagogues began to be employed as regular members of the school staff in both Serbia and Slovenia, with obligations different from the previous ones. The main role of school pedagogues is to encourage students' personal and academic development and to contribute to the improvement of the education process in school settings (Trnavac, 1996; Resman, 2000).

Nowadays, prospective pedagogues in Serbia are educated in the Faculty of Philosophy (Department for Pedagogy) of the Universities of Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad. The studies of pedagogy in Slovenia are offered in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor. In accordance with the Bologna reforms, the faculties/universities of Serbia and Slovenia introduced changes in the organisation of studies as well as in their curricula. In Serbia, the pedagogy study programmes cover four years of basic study (eight semesters) with 240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (bachelor's diploma) and one year of master study. Alternatively, Slovenian Departments of Pedagogy and Andragogy opted for the 3+2 model of study (180+120 ECTS). Unlike Serbian pedagogy, Slovenian pedagogy can be studied as a single-subject study or a double-subject study, combining pedagogy with any other subject in social sciences or arts. Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> When we refer to philosophy or theory of education, two meanings of education related to the German tradition are implied: *Erziehung* and *Bildung*.

those who study it gain double qualification: that of a teacher and that of a pedagogue (school counsellor) (University of Ljubljana, 2012).

Currently, the two countries have several similarities in pedagogy study programmes as a consequence of their common educational tradition, especially during the most part of the XX century. The discipline-based approach in designing study programmes, which has existed in both countries for many decades, remains, especially at the lower study levels. However, it is now combined with thematic or problem-based courses, particularly at the higher study levels. Some of the compulsory subjects (not always under the same title) covered by all study programmes in pedagogy are as follows: General Pedagogy, History of Pedagogy, Methodology of Pedagogy Research, Didactics, Pre-School Pedagogy, School Pedagogy, Educational Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Andragogy and so on.

Pedagogy study programmes in both countries are oriented towards acquiring knowledge and skills in the fields of theory and practice of education. Students should develop competencies necessary for the planning, performance, analysis and evaluation of an educational process; performing consulting activities; dealing with issues related to the organisation and management of educational institutions; organising and carrying out different forms of education and training activities; recognising constructive solutions for improving existing educational practice; conducting research projects and so on.

Today, most of the graduates in both countries work in schools as experts within the school pedagogical–psychological service. Their main duties cover different areas of activities: counselling students on their academic, personal and career development; monitoring the teaching process and students' attainment and progress; supporting teachers in organising and teaching; and cooperation with parents or caregivers as well as with relevant out-of-school services and so on. Pedagogues also work as experts and researchers in national or local governing bodies, institutes and centres responsible for evaluation and improvement in education, research institutes, social service institutions, youth centres, nongovernment organisations dealing with education and so on.

### **Comparative education as an academic discipline and its relevance to the education of pedagogues**

Although Comparative Pedagogy has not been a stand-alone course in the university study programmes in Serbia until the Bologna reforms in 2005, key themes and issues from the field of Comparative Pedagogy have been included in other subjects, such as General Pedagogy, History of Pedagogy and School Pedagogy, among others. Students have been trained to understand the basic characteristics of the school and school system development. They acquire knowledge about the structure and organisation of the school systems in foreign countries (i.e. levels and cycles of education, goals, curricula, administration and management, financing and teacher training) and learn about the basic trends in the development of the European education systems. However, they lack broader knowledge and deeper understanding of the global and specific problems, the trends in the development of modern education systems and the scientific tools needed for conducting comparative educational research.

Thus, during the university reform based on the Bologna principles and because of the changes in the university study programmes, the need for prospective pedagogues to acquire knowledge and skills thoroughly in Comparative Pedagogy was recognised. In the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, two courses, namely, Comparative Pedagogy I and II, have been introduced as compulsory for all first-level pedagogy students (University of Novi Sad, 2008a; University of Novi Sad, 2008b). The basic study programme in pedagogy in the University of Belgrade covers only an elective course, namely, History of Modern European Education, and Comparative Pedagogy is offered at the master's level as an elective course. At the Ph.D. level, students can choose between the courses of Developmental Trends of Education Systems and Theoretical, Historical and Comparative Research in Education (University of Belgrade, 2009). University of Niš has no Comparative Pedagogy at all. A comparison of syllabi points to some differences in the programme conceptualisation. Thus, the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad emphasises more on the theoretical-methodological issues and problems of Comparative Pedagogy as a scientific discipline, whereas that in Belgrade focuses on topics related to international experiences in education and European tendencies and developmental goals in school systems.

Comparative Pedagogy in Slovenia was already established as one of the fundamental pedagogical disciplines before the end of the XX century. In the University of Ljubljana, Comparative Pedagogy course is mandatory for all students of Pedagogy and Andragogy at the basic study level<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, students have to choose between courses on Education Systems and Comparative Andragogy. At higher study levels, the courses Education Development Strategy (master's level) and Globalisation in Education and Intercultural Pedagogy (Ph.D. level) are offered (University of Ljubljana, 2011). Thus, throughout their studies, students learn about the structure of education systems, with special attention devoted to the issues on education transition, organisation of school counselling and guidance, examinations in secondary schools and enrolment in post-secondary education. Education systems are discussed in terms of the concepts of equity of the system, lifelong learning and school differentiation. Moreover, students are trained to analyse global trends in education, such as the issue of qualifications frameworks, European processes in education and educational tools, modern concepts of literacy, goal-oriented, standardised and process-based curriculum planning, interculturality in pedagogy, autonomy of schools and teachers, quality and evaluation in education and so on. (Skubic-Ermenc, in press). In the University of Maribor, Comparative Pedagogy is taught as an obligatory subject for all first-cycle third-year pedagogy students and is offered as a postgraduate course as well. Both courses follow concepts and approaches similar to those in the University of Ljubljana (University of Maribor, 2009).

Finally, the question remains as to why Comparative Pedagogy is important in the university education of pedagogues. Considering their professional roles and duties, pedagogues should be leaders in the process of the modernisation and

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<sup>3</sup> In the University of Ljubljana, the Pedagogy study program is delivered jointly with the Andragogy program at the basic level study, whereas it is offered separately at the higher study levels.

improvement of education, either at the institutional or at the national level. In both Serbia and Slovenia, pedagogues actually have had an active role in planning and implementing the education reform in the last period.

As policy makers and researchers in the Ministry of Education, national councils, agencies, and institutes, pedagogues should be qualified in understanding the education policies and practices in foreign countries, assessing their advantages and disadvantages based on evidence, and drawing implications for developmental changes in the national context. In the main internationalisation and globalisation trends in education, they need to understand policies of international actors in education and their influence on national policy, as well as critically explore the possibilities and limitations of the educational-borrowing approach.

As members of the pedagogical–psychological services in schools, pedagogues are expected to effectively tackle issues and problems concerning school development, which means to understand the organisation and functioning of educational institutions, as well as the forces and factors influencing them. No less important is the understanding of the determinants and trends of shaping educational reforms at the international, national and institutional levels.

## Conclusions

The development of pedagogy as a science in Serbia and Slovenia has many similarities because of their coexistence within the same state during most of the last century. Moreover, there have been no substantial differences in the conception and basic characteristics of pedagogy studies at the university level. The theory of education has been a cornerstone in studying pedagogy, and it is largely retained until today. Naturally, the differences in study programmes exist, and one of them is related to Comparative Pedagogy, which has a more enduring development and stronger position in Slovenia than in Serbia.

A comparison of the status, scope and development level of Comparative Pedagogy as an academic discipline in the pedagogy study programmes of the Universities of Belgrade and Ljubljana points to an apparently better situation in Slovenia. In the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Philosophy, Comparative Pedagogy has just begun its development as a self-contained discipline, and its intense development is still ongoing. Considering that comprehensive social and, consequently, educational reforms in Serbia lag behind those of developed European countries and that Serbia intends to be included in European trends, we significantly recognise that pedagogues, as experts in the area of education, should be enabled to approach the current school reforms in Serbia critically in the context of such reforms in other countries. Under the current trends in the internationalisation of educational policy, observing the tendency to empower Serbian pedagogues to overcome its ethnocentric position in educational theory and practice is also encouraging. In this respect, the experiences of Slovenian professionals may be useful to their Serbian colleagues. Professional contacts and cooperation in the field of Comparative Pedagogy between Slovenian and Serbian pedagogues, which have been intensified in recent years, contribute to the exchange of ideas and fruitful discussion on global and nationally specific pedagogical and educational issues.

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