

## SPECIFICITIES OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND GENERAL GYMNASIUMS, THE ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS AND OF THE ROUND TABLE

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**Abstract.** *This paper discusses the specifics of philosophy teaching in secondary schools and gymnasiums in the municipality of Niš (Serbia). In this paper, we focus on the analysis of data collected as part of an internal project conducted by the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš. We examine the results obtained from two segments of the research. In the first part of the paper, we present and interpret the results of a survey completed by philosophy teachers in secondary schools and gymnasiums in the municipality of Niš, while in the second part, we set forth and analyze their responses provided during the round table discussion. Then, based on the stated positions and observations, we gain a comprehensive insight and draw conclusions.*

**Key words:** *philosophy, logic, textbook, teaching, curriculum.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the results of research conducted as part of an internal project of the Philosophy Department at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, titled “Philosophy Teaching in Secondary and Higher Education: Practical and Theoretical Issues” carried out in April 2021. We present the responses obtained from the two segments of the research. The first part of the paper studies and interprets the results of the survey. The second part outlines and analyses the answers collected during a debate organized to allow philosophy teachers in general gymnasiums and secondary schools to voice their opinions on

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teaching-related topics.<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned that the research was conducted during the period of COVID restrictions, consequently, classes were held under specific conditions, namely, online.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, the views expressed are the result of the respondents' entire teaching experience.

## 2. THE ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Within the project organized by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, at the Department of Philosophy in 2021, titled "Specificities of Teaching Philosophy in Secondary Schools and General Gymnasiums", a questionnaire was prepared for teachers of philosophy and related disciplines, working in general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools. At the Department of Philosophy, we decided to draw up a questionnaire together in order to inquire into the teachers' views regarding the classes they teach. After exchanging ideas and harmonizing proposals of all staff members of the Philosophy Department, concerning the phrasing of the questions, 31 questions were formulated.<sup>3</sup>

Three types of questions, each requiring a specific form of response. For the first type, possible answers were provided, from which the respondents were to choose the one that best reflected their opinion. The second type included a scale of possible answers, where the respondents were to indicate their level of agreement with a given statement by selecting one of the following responses: *strongly disagree*, *mostly disagree*, *no opinion / neutral*, *mostly agree* or *strongly agree*.<sup>4</sup> The third type of question included blank spaces allowing respondents to provide answers in their own words, expressing their personal experiences and opinions.<sup>5</sup> This questionnaire was designed to provide a more systematic insight into the views of philosophy teachers on relevant issues and challenges in teaching philosophical subjects.<sup>6</sup> It was completed by eleven teachers with several years of professional experience in general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools in the Niš District.

### 2.1. Basic Information on the Respondents

The questions are divided into four basic groups. The first group consists of questions aimed at gathering basic information about the respondents. These questions pertain to their years of service, the type of school where they work or have worked, their current

<sup>1</sup> The text also takes into account previous similar research by this Department of Philosophy: (Blagojević, 2021), (Dimić, 2021), (Dimić, Ristić Gorgiev, Jovanović, 2021), (Jovanović, 2021), (Milenković, 2021), (Milić, Ristić Gorgiev, 2021), (Radovanović, Ružić, 2021), (Ristić Gorgiev, Blagojević, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> The book *Research Methods for Education in the Digital Age* provides guidance to educational researchers who wish to explore the digital domain (see: Savin-Baden, Tombs, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> For information on how to create a questionnaire, how to select, group and order questions, we consulted the book (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018: 469-505).

<sup>4</sup> The way we measured the attitudes of the survey participants is based on the Rensis Likert study *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes* on the quantitative aspects of studying social attitudes (see Likert, 1932).

<sup>5</sup> For the advantages of combined methods used in the study see (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018: 31-50).

<sup>6</sup> In his book *Quantity and quality in social research*, Bryman discusses, among other things, the possibility of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. He notes that it is difficult to find research in which both research methods play an approximately equal role. Most often, one approach prevails as the method of data collection. Which method will be used depends on the suitability of the method in relation to the subject under study, although the choice may also be influenced by the personal preferences and competence of the researcher, although this will also affect the choice of problem (Bryman, 1988: 126-154).

teaching load, as well as the philosophical subjects (philosophy, logic, medical ethics, logic with ethics) they teach.

In response to the first question, “how long have you worked as a teacher of philosophy”, 4 respondents (36.4%) answered “five years or less”, 4 respondents (36.4%) answered “from six to ten years”, 2 respondents (18.2 %) answered “from 11 to 15 years”, and one (9.1%) answered “16 or more”. The second question concerned the type of school in which the teachers had worked up to that point. Nine respondents (81.8%) based their observations on professional experience in both vocational secondary schools and general gymnasiums, one person (9.1%) indicated they had worked only in vocational secondary schools, and one (9.1%) only in general gymnasiums. The third question addressed the respondents’ teaching load. One person (9.1%) reported less than 40% of the standard teaching load, one (9.1%) had between 40% and 55%, one (9.1%) between 60% and 75%, and one (9.1%) between 80% and 95%, while seven respondents (63.6%) indicated that they had a full teaching load (100%). The fourth question concerned the philosophical subjects taught. Out of the total number of respondents, ten teach philosophy (90.9%), nine teach logic (81.8%), three teach medical ethics (27.3%), and two teach logic with ethics (18.2%).

From the gathered data we can infer that more than 63% of respondents have over five years of service which is sufficient to gain relevant teaching experience. Nine respondents (81.8%) have experience in both vocational secondary schools and general gymnasiums, which makes the survey diverse and representative. A significant proportion (63.6%) reported carrying a full teaching load. Furthermore, the majority of respondents teach philosophy (90.9%) and logic (81.8%). Based on the data collected on the respondents’ experience and professional engagement, it is reasonable to conclude that the survey results reflect the views of teachers with substantial experience in teaching philosophy and logic in both general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools. We will now proceed to the analysis of the second set of questions.

## **2.2. Opinions on the Curriculum, Textbooks and Teaching Philosophy**

The second block comprises questions about the total number of philosophy classes in a year, the curriculum, objectives and tasks to be accomplished, the textbooks used, and the teaching process.

Regarding the statement in the fifth question, that 64 classes per year are enough to cover the material for teaching philosophy, three respondents (27.3%) answered that they strongly disagreed, three (27.3%) answered that they mostly disagreed, one respondent (9.1%) stated that they were neutral on this, and four respondents (36.4%) said that they mostly agreed with the statement. None of the respondents affirmed that they strongly agreed with the assertion above. To clearly determine the professors' opinions concerning the required number of classes for the implementing the curriculum, we posed the sixth question, whether 96 classes per year were enough to cover the material prescribed by the curriculum for teaching philosophy. Two respondents (18.2%) answered that they completely agreed with the statement above, seven (63.6%) answered that they mostly agreed, and one person (9.1%) said that they had no opinion on this matter. One person (9.1%) said that they mostly disagreed with this statement, while none answered that they completely disagreed. Based on the results obtained from the two previous questions, we can conclude that most respondents consider 64 classes per year insufficient for implementing the curriculum and presenting philosophy, but that 96 classes per year are satisfactory in that respect.

Regarding the possible adjustment of the curriculum, the seventh question was posed. The respondents were asked to imagine a situation in which they would be forced to modify the officially recommended curriculum due to an insufficient number of classes. The question was as follows: at the expense of which teaching units would you adjust the curriculum? Ten respondents (90.9%) answered that it would be medieval philosophy, and one (9.1%) responded that it would be contemporary philosophy. The teaching topics covered within medieval philosophy deal with theoretical and abstract questions that are, to a great extent, remote from real life. Furthermore, within medieval philosophy, one often covers topics and treatises that do not have significant reception in later modern and contemporary philosophy, which makes them seem isolated in history and somewhat anachronistic. These might be the reasons why such subject matter does not attract much of the students' attention, so the teachers agree that reducing the curriculum at the expense of medieval philosophy is the most practical solution.

As for the statement in the eight question that the existing curriculum for philosophy is well designed and that it is the best way for students to receive basic education in philosophy, five respondents (45.5%) answered that they mostly disagreed, two (18.2%) had no opinion on this matter, three (27.3%) mostly agreed and one (9.1%) strongly agreed. None of the respondents answered that they strongly disagreed. From the responses to this question we can see that a considerable number of teachers, almost fifty percent, expressed their dissatisfaction with the curriculum, considering its present form inadequate for providing students with basic education in philosophy. The ninth question ran as follows: objectives and tasks specified in the curriculum (for teaching philosophy) – insisting on critical thinking, participation in public life, social responsibility, and skills in effective communication and teamwork, etc. – are consistent with the content of the curriculum and are achievable by following that program. Out of the total number of respondents, five (45.5%) answered that they mostly agreed, one (9.1%) was neutral on this, four (36.4%) mostly disagreed, and one person (9.1%) strongly disagreed. No one responded that they completely agreed with the claim about the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving the teaching objectives and tasks. The given answers suggest that, in the future, the content of the curriculum could be more closely aligned with the objectives and tasks to be accomplished.

The tenth question pertained to the way in which, given the specificity of the subject, one should teach philosophical subject matter in schools. The respondents were asked to choose an approach they regarded as the most appropriate. If they combined several of the offered approaches, they had to mark the one they nevertheless considered central. The proposition to teach about relevant philosophers chronologically, and in such a manner that lessons on a particular philosopher include their views on different philosophical fields (ontology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, etc.), was chosen by five respondents (45.5%). The plan to first formulate relevant philosophical questions in relation to an epoch, and then cover them in historical order, was selected by two respondents (18.2%). The proposition to select philosophical questions deemed the most relevant and then, in view of those questions, acquaint the students with relevant philosophical standpoints in the history of philosophy, was chosen by two respondents (18.2%). Studying important philosophical questions, but focusing on students' experience, their general knowledge or their knowledge of other disciplines, without special reference to philosophical teaching material from the history of philosophy, was chosen by two respondents (18.2%). There was also an option to answer this question in one's own words. The results show that around half of the respondents

are willing to continue teaching philosophical subjects chronologically, whereas the other half are prepared to change this approach by introducing alternative forms of presentation, such as the individual, problem-oriented and problem-historical approaches.<sup>7</sup>

In the eleventh question the teachers were asked, in light of their understanding of philosophical education, their relevant teaching experience, and their familiarity with students' motivation and current life circumstances, to answer whether it was possible to modify the curriculum for philosophy. If they answered this question in the affirmative, the respondents had the option to describe the direction these changes should take. One respondent (9.1%) said that they could not give a short answer, while one respondent (9.1%) stated that the curriculum was satisfactory and should not be changed. Nine respondents (81.8%) answered that it was possible to improve the philosophy curriculum, of whom seven (72.7%) offered concrete suggestions. The suggestions mainly focused on increasing the number of classes for revision and discussion, while insisting on the practical application of philosophical (especially ethical) knowledge and insights. It is necessary to focus on philosophical questions and problems, rather than on facts from the history of philosophy. Some have suggested including more topics on axiology, philosophy of religion, political philosophy and ethics, as well as emphasizing problem-solving from the perspective of the present rather than on learning the solutions presented in other epochs and periods. Moreover, there were requests to modernize the curriculum so as to cover more current issues and teachings of contemporary philosophy (at the expense of some lessons in medieval philosophy, for example), which should be accompanied by changes in the textbook content, as well.

In the twelfth question the respondents were asked which textbook they used in teaching. The survey showed that the most frequently used textbook is, *Filozofija za gimnazije i stručne škole* by M. Savić, N. Cekić and V. Cvetković, published by Zavod za udžbenike used by six respondents (54.5%). Four respondents (36.4%) use *Filozofija* by M. Jeremić, the textbook for the fourth form of general gymnasiums and four-year vocational secondary schools, published by Klett. Two respondents (18.2%) use the *Istorija filozofije za srednje škole*, by V. Korać and B. Pavlović, published by Zavod za udžbenike. Two respondents (18.2%) use *Filozofija* by M. Radić, the textbook for the fourth form of general gymnasiums, vocational secondary schools and art schools, published by Novi Logos. One respondent (9.1%) uses *Filozofija* by D. Pejović, for the fourth form of general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools, published by Kreativni centar, whereas one person (9.1%) stated that they did not use a textbook.

The thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth questions inquire to what extent the fields of ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy and philosophy of science and methodology are present in the textbook used by the respondents. Concerning the claim that the field of ethics is adequately represented, three respondents (27.3%) strongly disagreed, five (45.5%) mostly disagreed, two (18.2%) mostly agreed, and one (9.1%) strongly agreed. Regarding the assertion that the field of aesthetics is adequately represented, six (54.5%) strongly disagreed, two (18.2%) mostly disagreed, one (9.1%) was neutral, one (9.1%) mostly agreed, and one (9.1%) strongly agreed. As for the statement that the field of political philosophy is adequately represented in the textbook used in teaching, one respondent (9.1%) strongly disagreed, five

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<sup>7</sup> Milan Jovanović points out in his text "Our School in Eyes of Gamer Generation: How Video Games Expose Deep Problems of Our Education" that there are many problems related to our curricula. He claims that our education is outdated and that the way of learning that is implemented in that process is problematic (Jovanović, 2020).

(45.5%) mostly disagreed, one (9.1%) was neutral, three (27.3%) mostly agreed, and one (9.1%) strongly agreed. Regarding the statement that philosophy of science and methodology are adequately represented in the textbook, three respondents (27.3%) strongly disagreed, four (36.4%) mostly disagreed, one (9.1%) had no opinion on this matter, and three (27.3%) mostly agreed. Based on the data received, we can observe that between 50% and 70% of the teachers who completed the questionnaire consider the mentioned philosophical disciplines to be underrepresented compared to the content typically covered in metaphysics, epistemology and logic.

Within the seventeenth question, the respondents were asked to state what kind of competences, knowledge and skills, in their opinion, the students can acquire in the educational process through philosophy classes. The respondents could formulate their answers freely and in their own words, based on their past experience. We will present their observations. Through philosophy classes, students develop critical, logically valid and well-argued reasoning. Philosophy, by its nature, nurtures tolerance and responsibility towards oneself and others, and promotes impartiality in judging both other people's and one's own views, thereby significantly developing communication skills. It encourages independence in thinking, the ability to articulate ideas and capacity to defend one's own opinions and convictions. It deepens general education, cultivates curiosity, broadens perspective and prompts the development of self-awareness.<sup>8</sup> It was also pointed out that teaching philosophy is effective in fostering students' awareness, as citizens, of their right and duty to re-examine and criticize social phenomena, as well as to suggest possible improvements and solutions to social issues. From the given answers, we can conclude that the teachers have high expectations regarding the competences and skills the students can acquire through philosophy classes, and that the results of the educational process tend to confirm these expectations.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3. Teaching Philosophical Subjects and Students' Interest

The third block of questions was intended to reflect the students' interest in philosophy classes. Based on the respondents' answers, we can form a picture of the teachers' opinions regarding the students' level of interests. The questions in this segment of the questionnaire pertain to all philosophical subjects taught (philosophy, logic, logic with ethics, medical ethics) and aim to explore how teachers perceive students' attitudes towards these subjects.

The eighteenth question stated that it is easy to get students interested in the topics discussed within philosophical subjects. Eight respondents (72.7%) answered that they mostly agreed with this claim, one person (9.1%) stated that they had no opinion on the matter, whereas two respondents (18.2%) answered that they mostly disagreed. In the nineteenth question, respondents were asked to specify the teaching methods or methodological procedures they employed to arouse students' interest in philosophical subjects. The teachers pointed out that involving students in discussions, debates and the exchange of opinions on current topics stimulates their interest. As a starting point for conversation one can use texts

<sup>8</sup> The authors in the text "Teacher as a Leader in Modern Education System" note that our education system is complex and open to change, and that in the near future we can expect students to play a major role in organizing and implementing their own learning. A teacher who possesses the qualities of a good leader will be able to work effectively with these students (Milanović, Anđelković, Stojadinović, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Qais Faryadi points out that for a teacher to be successful in his/her job, he/she needs to clearly formulate his/her goals as well as the most modern methods of achieving them. It is crucial that we strive to achieve these goals and not just implement the curriculum (Faryadi, 2015: 65-66).

from the philosophical reading material intended for secondary school, as well as current topics from science, art, ecology and popular culture. The respondents also noted that students' interest can be further stimulated through writing essays in which they articulate and express their own opinions. Based on the last two questions, we can conclude that a large majority of teachers (over 70%) have no difficulty in arousing students' interests and that they achieve this primarily by organizing discussions on current topics.

The twentieth question aimed to determine whether teacher organized any extracurricular activities related to philosophical subjects at school. Four respondents (36.4%) answered in the negative, one of whom explained that their employment in three different institutions made it difficult to carry out additional extracurricular activities. Five respondents (45.5%) stated that they organized such activities occasionally, specifically: on the occasion of Philosophy Day, as part of additional classes, through existing school teams or at students' request. Two respondents (18.2%) answered that they regularly organized extracurricular activities related to philosophy, usually in the form of organized debates. Based on the responses, we can conclude that extracurricular activities related to philosophical content are either not organized regularly or not undertaken at all.

In the twenty-first question – are you familiar with the events in the area of philosophical competitions for secondary school students in the country and the region and do you follow them, four possible answers were offered. Eight respondents (72.7%) chose the answer indicating that they informed their students about such events. One respondent (9.1%) answered that they did not provide that information to students because there was not enough time to prepare, given the extensive teaching material that needed to be covered. Two respondents (18.2%) stated that they did not keep themselves informed on this matter. No one selected the option that they did not pass on the information about the competitions because students were not interested in this type of additional activity. Regarding the twenty second question: are you prepared to organize activities (both curricular and extracurricular) to popularize philosophy in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, nine respondents (81.8%) said that they would like to do so, one person (9.1%) noted that the cooperation was difficult due to their remote location, and one (9.1%) stated that, at the moment, it was impossible to organize cooperation because the school year was about to end. Judging from the collected data, it is evident that the teachers rarely organize additional philosophical activities independently, but there is considerable willingness to work on organizing new events in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy.

Next, we asked the twenty-third question: whether teachers, when they notice a special interest in and talent for philosophy in their students, suggest that they consider studying philosophy. Four of them (36.4%) answered that they suggested it, whereas seven said that they did not, out of whom five (45.5%) did not want to influence one's choice of studies, and two (18.2%) chose none of the offered explanations as their reason (the possibility to use the talents for other studies and socio-economic reasons which render employment difficult). In the twenty-fourth question, we asked the teachers if they have, during their career, through some kind of public engagement, contributed to the popularization of philosophy or to improving its image in the public sphere. One respondent (9.1%) chose the answer: I do not consider the public image of philosophy to be bad and/or that it should be changed. Six respondents (54.4%) answered that they did not take part in such activities since they did not have time and were not sure if they were capable of doing it. Two respondents (18.2%) answered that, as a part of their involvement, they wrote articles for newspapers and magazines. There were none who chose the option of participating in the

television programs, whereas two respondents (18.2%) said that they were active in other ways, other than those mentioned. We can conclude from this that just above 30% of the teachers are active in the social sphere in order to popularize philosophy, which certainly is not enough.

The following twenty-fifth question was answered only by those teachers who picked the option that they were active in other ways with an aim to popularize philosophy. In their answer, they were to describe in short the undertaken activities of popularizing philosophy and of influencing its public image. One respondent answered that, in cooperation with the students, they organized simulations of philosophical conversations from Plato's dialogues, with students wearing classical costumes, and that they performed these simulations in front of other students. One respondent stated that they organized performances with the students, which received television coverage, as well as questioned citizens, together with the students, about what happiness, love, etc., meant for them.

Based on the answers from this segment of the questionnaire, we can conclude that students' interest is not an issue, but that the extracurricular activities that would further guide and motivate students to study philosophical subject matter are not organized often enough.

#### **2.4. The Curriculum for Other Philosophical Subjects and the Curriculum for Vocational and Art Schools**

The fourth set consists of questions concerning the curricula for other philosophical subjects (medical ethics, logic, logic with ethics) and the curricula for vocational and art schools. Regarding the statement of the twenty sixth question, that the curriculum for medical ethics is well planned, three respondents (27.3%) mostly agreed, one respondent (9.1%) had no opinion on this matter, and one (9.1%) mostly disagreed, whereas six respondents (54.4%) answered that they had never taught that course. No one answered that they strongly agreed or that they strongly disagreed with this statement. Regarding the claim of the next question, that the curriculum for logic is well designed, six (54.4%) mostly disagreed, two respondents (18.2%) strongly disagreed, two respondents (18.2%) mostly agreed, while one respondent (9.1%) had no opinion on this matter. We can see from this that over seventy percent of the respondents think that the curriculum for logic has to be designed differently. Regarding the statement of the twenty eighth question, that the curriculum for logic with ethics is well planned, one respondent (9.1%) strongly disagreed, and one (9.1%) mostly disagreed, seven respondents (63.6%) answered that they had never taught that course, and two respondents (18.2%) had no opinion on this. It is obvious that a better textbook should be created for the subject of logic with ethics, as well. The twenty-ninth question closely relates to the previous three. Namely, the respondents were required, if they believed that there were significant problems with the curricula for logic, medical ethics and/or logic with ethics, to write what those issues were and what should be changed in the curricula. All of those who answered this question agreed that the textbook for logic was inadequate and that a new one should be created.

In response to the thirtieth question, whether the philosophy curriculum for vocational secondary schools should be identical to the curriculum for general gymnasiums (as is the case now), two respondents (18.2%) said that they strongly disagreed, five respondents (45.5%) mostly disagreed, two respondents (18.2%) said that they were neutral on this, one respondent (9.1%) mostly agreed, and one (9.1%) strongly agreed. The responses to this



question have shown that more than sixty percent of the respondents think that the curricula designed for vocational secondary schools and art schools should be different from the curriculum for general gymnasiums. The respondents who supported the separation of the curricula, in the last, thirty-first question, gave answers as to how the curriculum for those schools should be designed. The respondents are of the opinion that the curricula for vocational secondary schools and art schools should be adjusted to suit the needs of those educational profiles, and in that respect, the students should be offered more content related to ethical and aesthetical problems and current topics from the philosophy of law, political philosophy and the philosophy of science and technology.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE ROUND TABLE ANSWERS

In this section of the paper we shall consider the results of the round table which took place at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš on 23rd April 2021. Eleven teachers participated in the conversation. Most of the participants teach philosophy in secondary schools or general gymnasiums in Niš. Some of them are philosophy teachers from nearby towns of the Niš District. The talk was not held as a debate with the intention to confront opinions, prove a thesis, or search for the best argumentation. The round table was intended to initiate a discussion on important issues, as well as to give the teachers the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences.<sup>10</sup>

The discussion revolved around two issues. First, we discussed the main problems and challenges the teachers encounter in teaching philosophy. Through citations, without mentioning the teachers' names, we will list some of the most prominent views from the discussion. One of the teachers said that the students were not accustomed to asking questions, and precisely this is what constitutes one of the tasks of philosophy. In other words, rather than insisting on learning particular conceptions, it is more important to insist on adopting the philosophical attitude of wondering, as well as mastering the skill of asking questions. This problem is part of a broader task of developing an inclination towards inquiry and exploration in children. It is necessary to encourage them to ask questions, to stimulate their curiosity and their exploratory spirit, thus directing students not only towards learning about what is known, but also towards the exploration of the new and the unstudied. In response to the question about the challenges of teaching philosophy, the same teacher pointed out that students learned by rote, and that the teachers were responsible for this to a great extent. In addition, he remarked that students generally tended to learn by rote. This opinion should be taken in the context of the whole educational system, in which the problem of learning without understanding exists. From these two statements alone, we can already see that certain problems associated with teaching philosophy also occur more generally within the educational process. Hence, they arise as problems of the whole educational system, not just of teaching philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For possible advantages and disadvantages of using the focus group method for researching the pedagogical practices of professors in the higher education system, see the text *Focus Group Discussion as a Method of Data Collection in Higher Education and Related Fields* (Bajnok, Kriskó, Korpics F., Korpics M., Milován, 2024). The authors point out that focus group discussions are particularly suitable for researching educational methodology.

<sup>11</sup> We would like to point out the importance of a philosophical approach to the study of education and different philosophical methods of researching the process of acquiring knowledge. Related to this topic see texts "Philosophies of educational research" (Bredo, 2006) and "Epistemology and Educational Research" (Kelly, 2006).

An important part of the discussion was a polemic on students' motivation and interest in philosophy. The opinions were polarized between those who considered it easy to get the students interested and those who nevertheless deemed it difficult. This range of answers was somewhat expected, given that teaching is conducted in secondary schools of different profiles. In general gymnasiums, philosophy is studied for two years. Logic is taught in the third form of general gymnasiums and, in the fourth form, students are introduced to the most important teachings in the history of philosophy. Furthermore, in the general-program, humanities-program and languages-program secondary schools, philosophy is just one of many socio-humanistic subjects, so the students possess significant prior knowledge necessary for positioning philosophical teachings within their proper historical-epochal context. In vocational secondary schools, subjects such as philosophy represent, in terms of subject matter, a U-turn in relation to knowledge already acquired during the previous three years, so the transition to a new way of thinking is made with difficulty.

One of the participants emphasized that the teachers were not responsible for the (dis)interest of the students. Those students who show interest in certain problems will naturally direct their efforts at exploring and studying them. One of the teachers remarked that students' interest in philosophical questions exists in all types of schools, and that we should draw attention to another problem as having priority, namely that usually children are not able to present arguments for their opinion and that they also do not know what critical thinking means. All this is an obstacle for them when reflecting on philosophical questions. Two participants in the discussion agree that it is always the same percentage (around 10%) of students in a class who show greater interest in philosophical content, regardless of the type of school. One of the teachers stressed the importance and crucial role of the attitude with which students come to class, as well as of their passion for knowledge. In that context, we analyzed the opinion that "*philosophy is not necessary for many practical professions, that is if we do not plan to study philosophy*". This kind of prejudice is often a hindrance to learning and the acquisition of philosophical subject matter. The question of the practical utility of philosophy has accompanied its development from the beginning, together with the problem of its purpose in certain epochs and ages. It seems that the challenges philosophy meets in education reflect broader issues concerning the place, role and purpose of philosophy in society. The participants in the debate agree on the problem in the educational system, where discontinuing philosophy classes is a step towards aggravating the situation. Some have pointed out other social issues, as well, which should be resolved in order for philosophy to be more desirable and to give students good reason to engage in this intellectual activity. In that sense, one of the participants remarked that the results of critical thinking have to be more evident in order for philosophy to be more desirable.<sup>12</sup>

The second question around which the discussion revolved was whether it was possible to improve the prescribed philosophy curriculum and in what way. The expressed views mostly concentrated on criticizing the curriculum, which was said to be deficient and inadequate. Someone pointed out that the topics and classes aimed at compensating for the shortcomings of the curriculum significantly raise the quality of teaching. Certain teachers said that they took no account of the curriculum as it was more of a hindrance than a help. Someone

<sup>12</sup> The philosophy of education, and especially the philosophy of educating philosophers, has always been a topic that intrigues philosophers. In their text "Philosophical inquiry" Nicholas Burbules and Bryan Warnick talk about how philosophers during the long history of philosophy dealt with issues of acquiring knowledge and acquiring skills (Burbules & Warnick, 2006).

mentioned that it seemed as if we had a choice regarding the lessons in the curriculum, but in reality the options were limited. There were also suggestions that it would be good to have philosophy in some form during all four years. It is a shared opinion of the participants in the debate that a thorough modernization of the curriculum for philosophy in general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools should be carried out, in addition to pinpointing the tasks and goals to be realized in the educational process.

#### 4. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

The responses we obtained through the questionnaire and the views stated in the debate provided us with significant insights. The ultimate purpose of this project was not to reach definite conclusions or decisions. Within the project, we have set as a general objective first to present the real state of affairs regarding the textbooks used, the extent to which teachers manage to realize the prescribed curriculum, the challenges teachers face in teaching, which problems occur sporadically and which present persistent difficulty, and then later, through continuing the project activity, to search for optimal solutions and improvements. Propositions and suggestions made in reference to this are useful information and guidelines for what needs to be changed and in what way, in order to improve and modernize the curriculum for philosophy in general gymnasiums and vocational secondary schools. The results of this project will serve as a clarification of the proposal which will be further submitted to the proper authorities within the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia.

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## **SPECIFIČNOSTI NASTAVE FILOZOFIJE U SREDNJIM ŠKOLAMA I GIMNAZIJAMA, ANALIZA REZULTATA ANKETE I OKRUGLOG STOLA**

*Ovaj rad razmatra specifičnosti nastave filozofije u srednjim školama i gimnazijama u opštini Niš (Srbija). U ovom radu fokusiramo se na analizu podataka prikupljenih u okviru internog projekta Departmana za filozofiju, Filozofskog fakulteta, Univerziteta u Nišu. Ispitaćemo rezultate dobijene iz dva segmenta istraživanja. U prvom delu rada, predstavimo i interpretirati rezultate ankete koju su popunili nastavnici filozofije u srednjim školama i gimnazijama u opštini Niš, dok ćemo u drugom delu izložiti i analizirati njihove odgovore date tokom diskusije za okruglim stolom. Zatim, na osnovu iznetih stavova i zapažanja, dobićemo sveobuhvatan uvid i izvesti zaključke.*

**Ključne reči:** *filozofija, logika, udžbenik, nastava, plan i program.*