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Searching for the Identity of the Serbian Primary School Teacher – Sketches of the Past and Challenges of the Present

Extended summary

In the course of modern history the Serbian people have shown a strong desire to build an independent national state. This is not an unusual phenomenon, but a reflection of the European ideas about the state and national movements. As education and upbringing were the crucial factors in the process of state building, the role of primary school teachers was crucial in the development of national identity. In the period of enlightenment, traditional teacher education, in which the Serbian Orthodox Church played the most important role, was faced with an influx of new secular ideas. This phenomenon required a new mindset and consideration of all attitudes, regardless of their dogmatic weight. The ideological taboo topics became a target of constant criticism and influenced the development of the character of teaching profession. A primary school teacher is a specific profession which had, and still has, a significant impact on the identity of a nation. From the late 18th century, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and up to the present times, Serbian primary school teachers have built their profession by facing many social challenges. The study of the two-century-long primary teacher education at the Teacher Training School in Sombor has shown that openness to new trends and scientific disciplines, along with adhering to tradition and preserved values, was the core concept of the primary school teacher training in Serbia. This vision was worded and built carefully and cautiously, in line with the circumstances of the times. Despite the warnings of many educated people, the ideologies which Serbian people embraced in a more recent history were not in favour of analytical and critical approaches. The philanthropy of teachers and their reliance on Jesus Christ as an example have always supported the change of human behaviour, but were against the changes made by disregarding other people's needs. Different interests were to be negotiated, not imposed. The aim of this paper is to present, by acknowledging the circum-

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stances in the society, the key areas which define the character of the primary school teaching profession. Primary school teachers have developed their identity by nurturing humanness, patience, education, curiosity, ethics, creativity, and acting by giving example.

Keywords: primary school teacher, Serbs, values, education, identity.

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