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## ***Teachers' Work Ethic: Croatian Students' Perspective***

### ***Ética del trabajo docente: perspectiva de los estudiantes croatas***

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**Abstract:** Teachers' work ethic is one of the key factors in school environment and the overall educational process. It is vital for a teacher to possess and promote the highest standards of work ethic as well as to be a role model to the students. A high level of work ethic thus becomes *conditio sine qua non* of the teachers' profession and all other educational professions. The topic of teachers' work ethic is insufficiently researched in the national scientific and research circles, and as such, represents a novelty. This paper will present the results of a research that examined students' evaluations of teachers' work ethic. The research was conducted on a sample of 107 first and third grade secondary school students. The research results indicate that the students perceive the teaching process as mostly uninteresting and uncreative, that the feeling of comfort in working with teachers is very rare and that the teachers rarely or sometimes value students' efforts and rarely abide by the rules. The result that raises most concern is the one which indicates that the teachers insult students when they differ from the rest of the group. In due course, all the above will be analyzed in the context of the defined paper topic.

**Keywords:** student evaluation of teachers' work ethics; indicators of teachers' work ethics.

**Resumen:** La ética de trabajo de los docentes es uno de los factores clave en el entorno escolar y el proceso educativo en general. Es de vital importancia para un profesor poseer y promover los más altos estándares de ética de trabajo, para convertirse de este modo en un modelo a seguir por los estudiantes. Un alto nivel de ética de trabajo se convierte así en *conditio sine qua non* de la profesión de los docentes y del resto de profesiones educativas. El tema de la ética del trabajo de los profesores ha sido insuficientemente investigado en los círculos científicos y de investigación nacionales, y, como tal, representa una novedad. En este documento se presentan los resultados de una investigación a través de la cual se examinaron las evaluaciones realizadas por los estudiantes en relación a la ética de trabajo de sus profesores. La investigación se realizó sobre una muestra de 107 estudiantes de los grados primero y tercero de secundaria. Los resultados de la investigación indican que la mayoría de los estudiantes perciben el proceso de enseñanza como poco interesante y poco creativo, que la sensación de confort en el trabajo con los profesores es muy rara y que los profesores valoran escasamente o en contadas ocasiones los esfuerzos de los estudiantes y rara vez se respetan las normas. El resultado que plantea mayor preocupación es el que indica que los profesores insultan a los estudiantes cuando difieren del resto del grupo. Todo lo anterior se analizará en el contexto del tema que es objeto de estudio en este trabajo.

**Palabras clave:** evaluación de los estudiantes sobre la ética de trabajo de los docentes; indicadores de la ética de trabajo de los docentes.

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## 1. Introduction

Teachers' work ethic, as a part of scientific research and a subject of professional interest, is a rarity in international (Miller, 2001; Heleta, 2011) and national context. Moreover, there is no significant attention devoted to this particular topic (except in a broader sense) and as such it represents an extremely large and unexplored territory. National scientific research area is abundant with papers dealing with research on various topics of school issues<sup>1</sup>, however, the topic of teachers' work ethic is absent from that wide field.

Work ethic finds its roots in the work and activities of Max Weber and his Protestant ethic whose definition is associated with religious values and which involves hard work as a response to God's expectations and economic success as a sign of God's grace. The Protestant work ethic assumed that everyone has the control over their own actions and the responsibility to live according to the moral values, whereby asceticism was to be respected (Miller, 2001; Geren, 2011). In contrast, the contemporary interpretation of the concept of work ethic is not associated with religious values but refers to one of the most important characteristics of the business world which includes reliability, confidentiality, desire to learn and work, responsibility for one's actions and willingness to cooperate (Miller, 2001). Work ethic can be determined as a «set of attitudes and behaviors based on the work values - responsible attitude towards work, good work habits and the belief that work itself is good and useful for development of an individual and the community» (Heleta, 2010, p. 14).

In that sense, teachers' work ethic is one of the most important factors in the (business) school environment and in the overall educational process. It is vital for the teacher, as one of the most important stakeholders in the education system, to own and promote the highest standards of work ethic and to act as a role model to his/her students. Kretz (2014, p. 340) advocates that «ethical educators have a moral responsibility to facilitate not only critical moral thinking but critical moral agency». Due to that, a high level of work ethic becomes *conditio sine qua non* of the teacher's work as well as the work of all the employees in the education system. Moreover, schools should be involved in the development of a work ethic system of their students with the goal of nurturing future (independent) citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of school issues, Croatian scientific research area is largely marked with topics such as frequent (unexcused) school absences and its relationship with the students individual and family characteristics and increased parental tolerance to student absences (Zrilić, 2007; Markuš, 2009; Pahić, 2008). Also, an important role in the school issues studies is given to topics like - emotional problems and behavioral disorders in primary and secondary schools and their regulation at the school level (Keresteš, 2005; Jedud and Lebedina-Manzoni, 2008; Bouillet and Bijedić, 2007), public health problems including frequent consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs as triggers of risky behavior among students and their control (Unković and Majdak, 2010; Anić and Brdar, 2007), emotional and physical violence against children in school (Zloković and Bilić, 2006), violence among peers (Zloković, 2004), etc.

## 2. Work Ethic in the Education System – Different Perspectives

Work ethic, in the context of the education system, can be analyzed from several different perspectives. In this paper, the analysis will be based on an overview of international examples of good practices, national *policy* documents, practice standpoint as well as theoretical and empirical research.

Within the educational institutions as well as professional context the terms: «ethical code», «code of conduct» and «standards of professional practice» are used interchangeably. However, there are specific differences among these terms and is thus necessary to contextualize each of them in order to understand and use them accordingly.

Banks (2003 in Van Nuland, 2009) points out that ethical codes derive from professional ethics which can be defined as a set of beliefs which teachers accept regarding relationships with students, colleagues, employers and parents or caregivers. These beliefs influence the manner in which teachers perform their daily activities. In contrast to the above mentioned, the code of conduct derives from the values referred to by the ethical code but it also «sets out the standards of professional and personal conduct and professional competence that the profession expects from its members» (King, 2008, p. 82 in Van Nuland, 2009). Aside from that, countries such as Scotland, New Zealand and Canada developed standards of professional practice which often incorporate elements of codes of conduct as well as (indirectly) ethical codes, however they are concerned with the teaching process and the activities happening in the classroom. As has already been mentioned, the code of conduct derives from the ethical code, and the standards of professional practice derive from the code of conduct, therefore, overlaps are to be expected in what these documents prescribe.

All of the aforementioned codes or standards are prescribed by teaching councils on a national level.

Countries such as Ireland, Iceland, New Zealand and India have codes which are largely directed towards ethical principles of the teaching profession. For example, the Irish code of teaching profession serves as a guide to classroom management and is based on the following ethical values - respect for cultural and democratic values, environmental concern, positive impact on students, reliability and honesty in work and responsibility to the students and the profession (Teaching Council, 2012). Furthermore, the Icelandic ethical code based teachers' attitude towards work on the idea of ensuring a positive working atmosphere, setting fair rules for the purpose of work and behavior in the classroom and caring for each individual student and his/her learning process (The Icelandic Teachers' Union, 2010). A similar code is present in New Zealand's

teaching profession which, in addition to all values stated above, indicates the need for explicit teacher commitment to their students, parents and the society in general. It also states that teachers should be aware of their social responsibilities: preparing young people to live independently in the society (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004).

Finally, Indian code of professional ethics for school teachers describes in detail the obligations teachers have towards students, parents, community, society as well as the profession and colleagues. It is obligatory for the teachers to treat every child equally irrespective of their caste, religion, economic status, disability or place of birth. Teachers are supposed to be role models and to instigate their physical, social, intellectual, emotional and moral development. In this context, teachers are considered to be professionals who adapt their way of teaching to individual students' needs, maintain confidentiality of information concerning students, parents and colleagues and spread pluralistic ideas and ideas of tolerance (National Council for Teacher Education New Delhi, 2010). This code also requires signing the teachers' oath, according to which, the teacher promises to abide by all the guidelines of the code of professional ethics.

Apart from the aforementioned ethical codes, Hogan (2011, p. 35) discusses the importance of ethics and relationships of learning, emphasizing the role of ethical dimension of reasoning which should be characterized by «originality, perceptiveness of understanding and moral energy, innovation, collegiality and practical planning» (Hogan, 2011, pp. 36-37). In that context he distinguishes four sets of relationships that characterize the teachers' practice: (1) the teacher's relationship to the subject or subjects being taught; (2) the teacher's relationships to the students; (3) the teacher's relationship to colleagues, parents and guardians and to the wider public; (4) the teacher's relationship to himself/herself (the teacher's self-understanding). The latter, the author discusses, is an important precondition for tackling with the educational practice and creating a positive learning environment.

Based upon the illustrated points it could be concluded that there exist different practices in defining ethical codes and their implementation. However, what they all have in common is advocating students' rights, teachers' working conditions as well as some specific factors that characterize the social and professional context of a country or a social community.

However, Rich and Reagan (1986 in Miller, 2001) point out that the adoption of ethical codes and principles of the profession is not influential enough and that it is necessary to further intervene in the area of education. Thus, the teacher is not only obliged to work in accordance with the ethical principles, but he/she needs to teach them as well. On that note, it is possible to find interesting

international examples of encouragement and development of work ethic in schools. For example, Dublin High School defines work ethic through a series of indicators and categories divided into work habits and work surroundings which teachers evaluate in students' work. In addition, those indicators are woven into the school curriculum and embedded in daily activities, responsibilities and work methods of all teachers (Dublin Unified School District, 2011). Additionally, British secondary school Stafford Grammar School, which was declared the most successful school according to the national performance indicators, created an internal document of the school: *Policy to promote good behavior and good work ethic*. This document promotes and encourages work ethic in the manner that the employees of the school are obliged, by their own example, to encourage exemplary behavior of the students from the moment of their enrollment to graduation. Accordingly, employees of the school promote and show respect and courtesy to their students by monitoring their work, rewarding, sanctioning undesirable behavior and involving and informing parents (Stafford Grammar School, 2011).

Given all the above, we can conclude that, at the international level, work ethic is present in the education system through the rules and regulations of the state teaching councils, but also in specific school plans and programs involving teachers' work. Behaving in accordance with the work ethic is a professional obligation of every teacher, whilst its teaching is considered to be one of the fundamental competencies of the teaching profession.

In the national context, the Croatian Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (2010) states that the goal of education is to ensure a systematic way of teaching students and to encourage and develop their intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, moral and spiritual development in accordance with their abilities and preferences. Accordingly, the Law states it is the duty of each school committee, in collaboration with other school bodies, to adopt the code of ethics and internal regulations of the school. Internal regulations define the rules and behaviors of all school stakeholders while the code of ethics prescribes duties of promoting moral values and ensures the implementation of school activities with the highest ethical standards. However, in the national context, except for these lawful obligations, it is not possible to find any additional information on the implementation of the principles of work ethic. Based on the analysis of legislative documents, such as the Labour Act (2010) and the Book of school regulations<sup>2</sup>, it can be concluded that most of the information in these documents apply only to administrative issues while the matter of work ethic is completely neglected.

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<sup>2</sup> The analysis included publicly available books of regulations of the following schools: Elementary School Matija Gubec (Gornja Stubica), Elementary School Josip Kozarac (Lipovljani), High School (Požega) and High School Isidor Kršnjavi (Našice).

Content analysis of the aforementioned documents has shown that the element of work ethic in Croatian schools is predominantly found in the ethical codes in primary and secondary schools<sup>3</sup>. Based on the analysis of randomly selected sample of ethical codes in several Croatian schools<sup>4</sup> it can be concluded that all of them are based on similar frameworks and written by following an almost identical model. Some of the publicly available samples<sup>5</sup> emphasize the importance of equal treatment of «all students without discrimination or favor on the basis of race, color, sex, age, nationality, ethnicity or religion, social or economic status, family situation, or any other basis» (Školski odbor Srednje škole Valpovo, 2009, p. 1). They also stress the importance of education «in accordance with basic human values: truth, peace, proper behavior, honesty, love and non-violence» (Školski odbor Osnovne škole Jure Kaštelan, 2009, p. 1). Furthermore, the codes indicate the principle of professionalism based on which the school employees «are expected to be responsible, conscientious, professional and ethical towards their obligations to students, colleagues, parents and other partners (...) and to eliminate any attempt of corruption (...) and promote students' awareness of unethicity of cheating» (Školski odbor Prve riječke hrvatske gimnazije, 2010, p. 3). Some of them also mention prohibition of discussing colleagues' work and reputation with students, especially in a negative context (Školski odbor Medicinske škole u Rijeci, 2008). It is possible to notice a number of ethical principles that the teachers are expected to adhere to in their work. They are mainly related to compliance with laws and regulations of the Republic of Croatia, protection of human dignity, the equality and the environment as well as acting in accordance with sustainable development (Školski odbor Osnovne škole A. G. Matoš, 2009). Finally, the codes indicate that «a teacher's job is very complex and socially important and it is necessary to achieve a high degree of professionalism and moral responsibility» (Školski odbor Osnovne škole Antunovac, 2009, p. 2) and that the teacher «must be devoted to teaching obligations which he/she will accept (only) after realistic assessment of their own capabilities» (Školski odbor Osnovne škole Antunovac, 2009, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> In Croatian education system, primary school starts at the age of 6/7 and lasts until the age of 14/15. Secondary schools are divided in schools that lasts for 3 years and the ones that last for 4 years, accordingly, secondary education starts at the age of 14/15 and lasts until the age of either 17/18 or 18/19.

<sup>4</sup> The analysis included the codes of ethics of the following schools: Secondary school Valpovo (Valpovo), Rijeka's First Croatian high school in Rijeka (Rijeka), Medical School in Rijeka (Rijeka), Elementary school Jure Kaštelan (Zagreb), Elementary School Antunovac (Antunovac) and Elementary School A.G Matoš (Zagreb). Moreover, it is necessary to add that code of ethics are adopted and signed by the school committee of each school who are also the governing bodies of schools.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to emphasize that not all codes of ethics in Croatian schools are publicly available and published on the official school site. Many Croatian schools have publicly available only school curricula while other documents, such as rules, codes of ethics and statutes are unavailable. This example shows that Croatian schools are still not aware of the need for transparency and availability of information relevant to the proper functioning of the school.



The above mentioned examples represent the only official documents where elements of work ethic and the need for its promotion can be found in the national educational context on a primary and secondary school level. Unlike the international context where work ethic is more explicitly emphasized and serves as an indicator of quality assurance for all school employees and student performance, on the national level it is mainly related to general and insufficiently defined responsibilities of the school to ensure functioning in accordance with the ethical values and the commitment of the teachers to encourage and promote these values. At the same time it is not possible to identify clear methods and mechanisms to promote and encourage work ethic in the daily activities of educational institutions. Considerations about a more systematic and adequate (re)defining and content determination of the elements of work ethic within the underlying documents of national education, remains a challenge for the proposers of the national education policies.

### 3. Work Ethic: Research Approach

As already pointed out, pieces of research in the field of teachers' work ethic are rare not only among domestic researchers, but also on the international level.

Ghahremani and Ghourchian (2012) identify effective factors that influence teachers' work ethic. As the main factors, authors distinguish: gender, level of education, scope of education, age, previous jobs, marital status and job satisfaction. The conducted research distinguished the social status of teachers and union membership as two important social factors that have an impact on the level of teachers' work ethic, as well as organizational-managerial factors of informal organizational structures, and organizational justice and involvement in decision-making processes. Finally, of all the research factors that affect the teachers' work ethics the authors cite social factors, personal beliefs and values, organizational-managerial factors and individual factors as the most influential (Ghahremani i Ghourchian, 2012).

Caropreso and Weese (2005), in their paper on the inclusion of educational ethics in teachers' education, talk about the rising trend of violence in American schools. In that context, the authors call educational ethics in teacher education «a new cultural norm for conflict resolution» (Caropreso and Weese, 2005, p. 1) the authors report a clear concern for the future of school children and propose the introduction of educational ethics in the education of future teachers and those who are already in practice. Their idea is based on human morality which stands for ethicality of opinions, behaviors and practices that are «between institution and theory» (Caropreso and Weese, 2005, p. 3) and which then make the



basis for decision-making and taking action. In that way, the teacher becomes a «moral agent» (Strike and Soltis, 1985 in Caropreso and Weese, 2005, p. 3), and his moral action pervades the entire teaching process focused on the student. The process of introducing educational ethics in teachers' work is in this way based on teaching of virtues and creating a positive environment in the overall process of teaching and learning<sup>6</sup>. In addition, one of the factors of teachers' work ethic is based on the principle of providing a positive example. This can directly be linked to Lumpkin (2008) who indicates the fact that teachers spend most of their time in the classroom with students and vice versa, students spend most of their day, or school life, with their teachers, learning from them more than what is prescribed by the curriculum. Lumpkin (2008) highlights several virtues, such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility, which are essential not only for teachers but for the students as well. Thus, teachers can, and should, apply them in their work and insist on them when it comes to expected student behaviour. These and other authors (for example Sanger and Osguthorpe, 2013) clearly advocate giving teachers the tools to approach the teaching profession through moral reasoning.

Gunnel (2006), in his research on teachers' ethics, synthesizes the most important research questions and results and provides us with four areas common to the previous studies in the field: the relationship between caring and justice, the conflict of virtue ethics and duty ethics, the relationship of moral education and professional ethics and the issue of what is morally significant in teaching profession and what teachers perceive as important. Among the research areas that are underrepresented, the author highlights the issue of a morally good teacher and the teacher's responsibility for the content of teaching. In this context, Gunnel (2006, pp. 373-374, according to Jackson *et al.*, 1993) concludes that teachers are, to a large extent, not aware of their moral influence on the students and the ways of transferring moral ideals. Furthermore, Richardson and Fenstermacher (2001 in Gunnel, 2006, p. 374) argue that the implicit and explicit transmission of virtues affects students' behaviour while Fenstermacher's (2001 in Gunnel, 2006, p. 376) suggests that rules have a very important role in the moral influence of the teacher. Specifically, by establishing rules, the teacher encourages the creation of a pseudo-community within which certain rules must be respected. In this way, students internalize moral values. Kretz (2014) includes the concept of student empowerment among teachers' responsibilities and claims that there is a rising culture of «doom and gloom» (p. 347) which leads to apathy in student behaviour. In that context the author emphasizes «the responsibility of teachers to address emotional dimensions of moral experience» (p. 352).

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<sup>6</sup> Teaching on virtues Lickon (1997 in Caropreso and Weese, 2005, p. 4) calls work ethic.

Although there are no studies at the national level that explicitly deal with work ethic, it is possible to single out those that touch upon some of its' elements in the educational context. Vujčić (2003), in his analysis of Croatian secondary school students and their concept of citizenship concludes that most secondary school students have a high awareness of their rights and very low of their duties and obligations. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the secondary school environment transmits a relatively low level of responsibility to the students. Furthermore, Bezinović and Puzić (2011), in the study of Croatian secondary school students' values, concluded that the socialization in the transition period had a significant contribution to the acceptance of a wide range of values. Students are directed to the continuous competitiveness, growth and development, while not giving significant importance to the values on which their actions should be based. Another indicator can be recognized in the Razdevšek-Pučko (2004) research. Their results show that the school principals, when asked to determine competencies of a successful teacher, do not cite any of the competencies of moral reasoning or any ability to act based on the values of responsibility, hard work and conscientiousness.

However, studies of several authors point to the importance of work ethic and moral values in the teaching and pedagogical profession. Jurčić (2012) speaks about the teacher competencies in the area of creating classroom environment and in that context mentions the structure of teacher's support consisting of six elements: accepting and respecting student's specificities, calmly and patiently resolving mutual problems, creating a permanent space for professional respect of each other, sending optimistic messages, giving motivating and encouraging comments and directing students to act responsibly. Even though work or professional ethic is not mentioned explicitly, it is visible that these competencies belong to the ethical principles represented in the ethical codes, codes of conduct or standards of professional practice.

In the research on teacher competencies, Rangelov Jusović, Vizek Vidović and Grahovac (2013) discuss the competencies of professional knowledge, skills and values. Each of these competencies is further described through teachers' attitudes towards different domains - students and learning, environment, teaching and assessment, professional development, family, community as well as towards school and the improvement of the education system. The competency of professional values, which is related to ethical reasoning is, among other, defined as the teachers' responsibility to develop the value of learning and respect for diversity in their students, as well as to treat every student with dignity and respect. At the same time, it represents an obligation to promote the profession, support and respect the colleagues and to actively participate in the development of the institution and the wider community.

Ledić, Staničić and Turk (2013) speak about the competence profile of the school pedagogues<sup>7</sup> and explicitly state professional ethic as one of the key determinants of the pedagogical profession «when it comes to pedagogical profession, professional ethic includes ethical principles that should be taken into account in collaboration with other subjects of the educational process: students, educators, teachers, parents, managers and colleagues in other fields of expertise» (Ledić, Staničić and Turk, 2013, p. 31). In the context of the ethical principles of the pedagogical profession, among other, the authors note the importance of caring for the welfare of students, data confidentiality, respect for colleagues and the profession.

Based on the analysis of the policy documents in the international and national context as well as the results of the research conducted thus far, it can be concluded that the question of work ethic represents one of the basic elements of different educational professions and professional environments. Although in the national context still insufficiently researched and present, in the international context it is an inevitable indicator of institution's work success and quality. Teachers' work ethic represents caring for the students, creating positive environment, protecting professional information and a commitment to parents and social environment. By adhering to the basic determinants and rules of work ethic, the teacher is the one able to set the rules and norms of behavior in educational practice and is also the one who by positive and exemplary behavior becomes a role model to the students. In order to realize the mentioned determinants of work ethic, the emphasis is on the importance of education and preparation of the teachers with the purpose of stimulating their efforts to create high standards of work ethic in daily educational practice. The importance of education and awareness of teachers for moral education and the acquisition of competencies of moral reasoning is a challenge in the national framework which surpasses the existence of documents such as ethical codes or codes of conduct of particular schools.

#### 4. Research Methodology

Work ethics, with its embedded values of independence, responsibility, efficiency, diligence and consciousness should represent support for students and

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<sup>7</sup> In Croatian education system, a school pedagogue is defined as a person who has competence for professional work with young people or adults in learning new knowledge, perspectives, value orientations and in systematic development of their various abilities. They are perceived as experts who manage social, administrative and innovative work, introduce changes in school operation, direct and encourage teachers in their proactive work, prepare children and young people for a life in a modern society, and promote the idea of civil society and community engagement (Turk, & Ledić, 2014).

their future plans. Accordingly, teachers should set a good example through their actions and work. Therefore upbringing and education, as two separate yet mutually inclusive processes represent the key for development and shaping of the young. Work ethic stands as a key indicator of modeling and developing responsible and independent future citizens. In the end, it represents a goal each school should strive for.

In line with this, the aim of the research was to examine students' assessment of the presence (of indicators) of work ethic in the work of secondary school teachers.

Research is based on the assumption that there are significant differences in understanding and perception of work ethics among students of different age groups. However, sex as a variable is also frequently used with age, since it may also suggest statistically significant differences among examinees. Given the sensitivity of the subject of work ethic, we examined the differences in perception among students who are at the beginning of secondary education and those who have over the previous three years accumulated experience of going to secondary school.

Research was conducted through a questionnaire, on a sample of total 107 students from a secondary school in Rijeka, Croatia. Out of 107 examinees, there were 55 first-grade students (N=55) and 52 third-grade students (N=52). The questionnaire was drawn based on quality indicators for work ethic in secondary schools retrieved from the Dublin High School official web site. It was necessary to translate the indicators into the national (Croatian) context. The questionnaire was made up of 78 items, i.e. positive statements in 14 categories which define teaching through and for work ethic in schools. The fourteen categories are divided into two groups - (a) *Work habits* and (b) *Work surroundings*. The first group, *Work habits* contains following indicators – Punctuality (arriving to class on time and respecting deadlines); Diligence and responsibility towards work and work results; Creativity (entrepreneurial spirit, inventiveness, originality); Active citizenship (understanding and practicing rights, duties and privileges related to democracy, respect and acceptance of authority, equality, justice and freedom of speech); Tolerance (accepting and understanding others' customs, beliefs and life styles when they differ from one's own); Self-respect in work and action; Courage (readiness to face dangers); Honour (truthfulness and honesty); Personal hygiene; Patience (reacting in a non-impulsive way, haste); Self-control (taking charge over one's own emotions and actions). Indicators belonging to the other group, *Work surroundings* - Cooperation and kindness (working for mutual benefits and respecting the co-worker); Accountability and confidence in work; School pride (contributing to the school community); Ecological awareness (preserving school grounds, school materials, environment, etc.); Respect for others (motivating and caring for others' benefit); Justice and Sport behaviour (acting

without preferences or for one's own interest, behaving in accordance with competition rules and being dignified when victorious as well as when defeated); Compassion and Generosity (empathizing with others' pain and misfortune and being supportive); Optimism and kindness (politeness in action and speech); Loyalty (being true and honest to someone or something; an institution, tradition or idea to whom one is attached through duty, debt or promise).

The students assessed the degree of frequency for each situation or phenomena described by a particular statement on the Likert scale. The degree of frequency was assessed from 1- never to 5 – always, with the additional option 0- I cannot assess.

Data analysis was carried out via a statistical program for social sciences, SPSS (v.20.0). Methods used include; univariate analysis, frequency, percentages, measures of central tendency, measures of variability and t-test for independent samples with the Levene's test of homogeneity of variances, F ratio and degrees of freedom. Statistical significance was tested on the risk level of  $p < 0,05$  and  $p < 0,01$ . Statistical significance, when occurring on the  $p < 0,01$  level, is stressed in results. T-test was conducted separately for each variable category<sup>8</sup>.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics shows differences in ratings made by first-grade students (first group) and those by third-grade students (second group). First groups' ratings (AM=3,022) cluster around upper values of the Likert scale while the second groups' ratings (AM=2,744) lean towards lower ones. Overall results show that all ratings, made by all students in this research, are situated in the lower section of the Likert scale (AM=2,887) with a growth tendency toward the central value.

Table 1. Overall descriptive statistics

Grade	Arithmetic means (AM)	Standard deviation (SD)
1	3,022	1,398
3	2,744	1,274
TOTAL	2,887	1,346

T-test was used to determine the differences among ratings of the two groups. It was conducted for each category made up of statements extracted

<sup>8</sup> To prevent it from influencing the results of the t-test, the zero frequency (0-I cannot assess) was excluded from the test since they do not contain any data relevant for this research.

from the indicators. They will be presented in the same order they appear in the questionnaire.

By observing statistically significant items of the first two categories: *Punctuality* and *Diligence and responsibility towards work and work results* (see: Table 2), it may be concluded that there is a significant difference in ratings of the two groups of examinees since the arithmetic mean is higher with the first group's ratings. Namely, by looking into the statistical values of the following items; *Teachers are late for classes* and *It takes more than two weeks for the teachers to bring in test results*, it is evident that there is a significant difference in the assessments. Presumably, first-grade students, as being new to the secondary school experience, tend to have lower criteria while appraising their teachers' behavior and are thus not as critical as their older peers seem to be.

Table 2. Statistically significant items in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> category<sup>9</sup>

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 1: Punctuality					
Teachers are late for classes	1	53	2,87	,900	,124
	3	52	3,33	,923	,128
It takes more than two weeks for the teachers to bring in test results	1	55	1,93	1,016	,137
	3	51	2,57	,831	,116
Category 2: Diligence and responsibility towards work and work results					
Teachers encourage students to be ever better in completing tasks	1	54	3,89	,883	,120
	3	50	3,26	1,006	,142

Further insight into the categories indicates an alarming finding when it comes to the teachers' creativity in class (see: Table 3). Specifically, a statistically significant difference among the groups has been found on the level of 1% where the third grade students' ratings were significantly lower in assessment of teacher encouragement in individual tasks outside classroom and creative expression through school activities.

<sup>9</sup> Tables include the following values: total number of respondents who evaluated the particular item (N), the Mean or average, arithmetic value of student's evaluations (M), standard deviation (SD) or the average deviation from the Mean and standard error of the mean (SEM), which stand for a supposed error to which we are exposed when arguing about the student population of the first and third year of high school based on the sample.

It seems that there is a significant disparity among students when appraising teacher support. In addition to that, the results suggest that the teachers may be more encouraging about independence and creativity with first-grade students and tend to decrease in intensity over the years by gradually handing the responsibility over to the students themselves. This suggestion is also confirmed by a significantly lower rating in boost frequency for completing school activities found between the two groups, second group being lower in valorizing the item. There are also differences found in the assessment of the motivating characteristics of teachers' presentation of the teaching materials. The results suggest that the first-grade students considered the content and the teaching materials to be interestingly presented because it is possible that the materials represent a novelty in their education. Unlike them, the third-grade students are already saturated with the repetitive teaching styles and methods used by their teachers. The key teacher competences to educate and motivate as well as to continuously introduce new approaches to teaching, regardless of the age or level of education, seem to be absent from their work. In this context, it would be interesting to follow the sample of the first-grade students in a longitudinal research (repeating the test at the end of each school year according to the same indicators) in order to determine whether their assessment changed and in which categories.

Table 3. Statistically significant items in the 3<sup>rd</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 3: Creativity					
Teachers encourage individual student work outside classroom	1	54	3,19	1,047	,143
	3	49	2,41	1,135	,162
Teachers perform their classes in a creative way	1	55	2,67	,982	,132
	3	50	2,28	,948	,134
Methods in which teachers present teaching material are generally interesting and motivating	1	54	2,83	1,023	,139
	3	50	2,42	,992	,140
Teachers mostly use technology (overhead projector, computer) when teaching	1	55	3,33	,862	,116
	3	51	2,94	,925	,130
Teachers encourage students to creative expression through assigned activities	1	54	3,02	1,107	,151
	3	50	2,48	,789	,112



In the category of *Active citizenship* (see: Table 4) significant difference in assessment is structured around the argument related to respect for the students as well as tolerance and respect for opinions. Considering the fact that these are highly important segments of the work ethic it is concerning that the third - grade students, at the level of risk of 1% assess the occurrence of situations where *Teachers insult students who stand out from the group* as more frequent than the first-grade students. Regardless of the fact that this assessment may indicate potentially different experience, such occurrences should experience a zero-tolerance policy in educational institutions, and the expected assessment of frequency should be minimal or non-existent.

Apart from the aforementioned authors who deal with questions of ethical reasoning in the teaching and pedagogical profession as well as the existence of ethical codes in schools, it should be noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) emphasizes the importance of zero-tolerance policy to all forms of discrimination against children. The Convention thus in article 2.1. emphasizes that:

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990, p. 5).

States Parties, also according to the Convention (article 29.1) accept that:

the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own... (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990, pp. 11-12).

Although the Convention, as one of the fundamental documents related to human rights, clearly states the right of the child to protection from any form of discrimination, the survey results point to the fact that discrimination still occurs in the classroom environment. Even though the results should be considered with caution (because in order to generalize it is necessary to examine the opinions of a representative sample of students as well as the opinions and attitudes of the teachers) they may be indicative in the context of advocating zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination in all educational institutions as well as respecting the rights prescribed by the Convention and signed by the Republic of Croatia.

Table 4. Statistically significant items in the 4<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 4: Active citizenship					
Teachers are showing respect to students	1	55	3,65	1,109	,150
	3	52	3,19	,971	,135
Teachers respect different student opinions	1	53	3,81	1,001	,138
	3	51	3,35	,976	,137
Teachers respect student personality	1	50	3,64	1,120	,158
	3	48	3,02	1,101	,159
Teachers insult students who stand out in a group	1	50	1,52	,974	,138
	3	49	2,10	1,195	,171

In the fifth variable category *Self-respect in work and action* (see: Table 5) it is noticeable that the statements regarding boosting intrinsic motivation and positive reinforcement have proven to be statistically insignificant. The only item that has turned out to be statistically significant is *Talking to teachers helps my assurance that I can successfully solve a problem by myself*. This suggests that the teachers are ready to cooperate and interact when students show initiative, however their teaching approach does not include this method. Communication skills, apart from being a way to achieve good interpersonal relationships are, in the context of a classroom, considered to be the basis of creating positive environment between teachers and students. Juričić (2004) stresses the need for the communication which encourages the development of social, emotional, cognitive, personal and intercultural competencies of both teachers and students. Communication which involves interaction between stakeholders of the educational process and is encouraging and motivating, affects the way students perceive the classroom atmosphere and the teacher. Therefore, the lack of stimulating communication between teachers and students may have a detrimental effect on classroom atmosphere, students' motivation and the relationship of mutual trust.

Table 5. Statistically significant items in the 5<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 5: Self-respect in work and action					
Talking to teachers helps my assurance that I can successfully solve a problem by myself	1	50	3,40	,969	,137
	3	47	2,55	1,119	,163

Looking into the 6<sup>th</sup> category, concerning *Patience and Self-control* (see: Table 6), we find statistically significant difference concerning the item *Teachers tend to share their personal problems with us* with a large difference in the arithmetic mean in the responses of the first-grade and third-grade students (AS1=1,81; AS2=2,69). The difference can be interpreted in terms of the affection teachers may have for older generations, because they have developed a closer relationship with them than the first-grade students. Due to this, a kind of distance that occurs in the teachers' relationship to the first-grade students may account for the impression the students have of the more professional and reserved relations, and their perceptions are therefore reflected in their lower assessments of this item in the research.

Teachers' self-revelation and disclosure of their personal experiences in the classroom can be an incentive in terms of rapprochement and deepening of relations between teachers and students. The purpose of self-discovery is also an opportunity to create a suitable impression about teachers, and form mutual trust. However, unlike the disclosure of some personal experiences, sharing personal problems with the students represents an unprofessional level of communication. Although determining the boundaries of proper and improper self-discovery can be challenging for each individual, it is a fact that the students are aware and are able to recognize that boundary and characterize such practices as inappropriate and inadequate for a professional relationship.

Table 6. Statistically significant items in the 6<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 6: Patience and Self-control					
Teachers tend to share their personal problems with us	1	54	1,81	,973	,132
	3	51	2,69	1,157	,162
Teachers are pleasant	1	52	3,85	1,055	,146
	3	51	3,22	,945	,132

The category *Cooperation and kindness* (see: table 7) has proven to be particularly indicative. On the level of risk of 1 %, third-grade students assess that the teachers rarely or sometimes respect their effort and work and that is rarely pleasant to work with the teachers in class, compared to the first-grade students who are one degree more positive, assessing that it is sometimes pleasant to work with the teachers. This information is of particular concern, because the values in this category which teachers are expected to transmit, relate to respect and teaching cooperative competencies students will inevitably have to possess. Assessments

in the range from rarely to sometimes refer to a negative image of the teachers who lead the class and recognize only their authoritative value, while they often neglect the role of the students as collaborators in the educational process.

Table 7. Statistically significant items in the 7<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 7: Cooperation and kindness					
It is pleasant to work with teachers during class	1	53	3,38	,837	,115
	3	52	2,90	,955	,132
Teachers encourage us to respect one another	1	53	4,02	,951	,131
	3	49	3,39	1,077	,154
Teachers encourage us to respect others' work and effort	1	53	4,06	1,027	,141
	3	50	3,36	1,208	,171
Teachers appreciate our work and effort	1	54	3,80	1,088	,148
	3	50	3,16	1,113	,157

In the category 8: *School pride* that questioned the sense of belonging and contribution to the school, there is a statistically significant difference on a large number of items (see: table 8). We can interpret the results with consideration to the (national) tradition, which is not focused on creating strong relationships or a sense of belonging within a school. It is a more common occurrence that this kind of loyalty or a sense of belonging happens on a wider territory than the school, and is mainly connected to neighborhoods. At a higher level it is linked to affiliation to the community (for example a town), and then moves on to the national level. Such feelings of belonging are generally strongly associated with identity development and often carry the connotation of social deviance.

Table 8. Statistically significant items in the 8<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 8: School pride					
Our school community is made up of all its' students, teachers, school staff and students' parents	1	47	3,81	1,227	,179
	3	44	2,95	1,478	,223
The main attribute of our school community are strong bonds between its' members	1	47	3,40	1,097	,160
	3	45	2,24	1,209	,180

I belong to a school community that is comprised of all my fellow students, our teachers and other staff	1	49	3,67	1,088	,155
	3	45	3,11	1,352	,202
Our school organizes various events and manifestations where students socialize with one another	1	54	3,15	1,204	,164
	3	49	2,45	1,191	,170
I have a feeling I contribute my school's development	1	52	3,08	1,152	,160
	3	45	2,11	1,265	,189

By analyzing the results, a discrepancy in the assessments of the third-grade students in the category of *Ecological awareness* was observed (see: Table 9). Specifically, students are often aware of their responsibilities to protect the environment, but at the same time they assess their actual concern for the environment is rare. However, this phenomenon is not surprising, given the fact that the students assess that the teachers rarely or sometimes abide by the rules and that they only sometimes remind the students of timely performance of their duties. Thus, the teachers are sending a clear message that compliance with the rules (and therefore responsibility) is not necessary, despite the fact that there exists an awareness of the rules.

Table 9. Statistically significant items in the 9<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	M	SD	SEM
Category 9: Ecological awareness					
Students care about the school environment	1	47	2,26	1,093	,159
	3	48	1,71	,874	,126
Teachers react when a student/ students are doing something to the detriment of the environment	1	51	3,35	1,278	,179
	3	48	2,65	1,313	,189

When assessing statements related to the 10<sup>th</sup> category: *Respect for others*, the item *Teachers motivate us to help one another*, is assessed one degree more negatively by the third-grade students (see: Table 10). The reason for this difference can be found in the explanations related to the lack of motivating students to work. Specifically, if the teachers do not use creative teaching, do not vary in the use of different teaching methods and are not prone to using group or pair work in class, developing mutual help among students will be considerably reduced.

Furthermore, in the 11<sup>th</sup> category: *Justice and Sport behaviour*, the item *Teachers abide by the rules* has proven to be statistically significant whereby the third-grade students assessed it more negatively, the same being true for the item *Teachers understand our emotional states and regulate their behaviour accordingly* in the 12<sup>th</sup> category: *Compassion and Generosity*. It seems that the teachers take greater care of the younger students and make more effort in the sense of providing a positive model of behavior when working with them. However, assessments of both groups of students are retained in the range from rarely to sometimes, which suggests a relatively low engagement of teachers in transmitting values such as respect, fairness and compassion.

Table 10. Statistically significant items in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 10: Respect for others					
Teachers motivate us to help one another	1	52	3,71	1,054	,146
	3	49	2,94	1,248	,178
Category 11: Justice and Sport behaviour					
Teachers abide by the rules	1	53	3,19	1,020	,140
	3	50	2,78	,932	,132
Category 12: Compassion and Generosity					
Teachers understand our emotional states and regulate their behaviour accordingly	1	53	3,17	1,172	,161
	3	50	2,46	1,014	,143

After examining the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> category *Optimism and kindness*, it is possible to notice that the answers of all students, regardless of their grade, are retained in the central value of the scale, with a tendency towards a higher degree among first- grade students. Only two items related to kindness of teachers and their willingness to listen to their students have proven to be statistically significant. It is possible to conclude that the teachers are in most cases cheerful and kind to their students and are generally willing to listen to them. However, they are more likely to manifest such behavior with the first-grade students which may possibly be explained by the initial phase of establishing relationships between first-grade students and teachers. Therefore there are less different school situations which the first-grade students experienced with their teachers as opposed to third-grade students.

Table 11. Statistically significant items in the 13<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 13: Optimism and kindness					
Teachers treat students with kindness	1	53	3,51	,912	,125
	3	52	3,08	,904	,125
Teachers are prepared to listen when we ask them to	1	51	3,78	1,064	,149
	3	50	3,12	1,100	,156

Assessments in the last category, that is, the *Loyalty* indicator (see: Table 12) are consistent with the assessments in all other categories. The third-grade students with a large difference in the arithmetic mean, assessed the relationships among teachers and the relationships between teachers and the principal much more negatively than the first-grade students. If we return to the previous conclusions which suggest that the teachers potentially develop close relationships with the students and establish emotional relations with them over the years, these assessments are not surprising.

Table 12. Statistically significant items in the 14<sup>th</sup> category

Items	Grade	N	AM	SD	SEM
Category 14: Loyalty					
Teachers remind us about the importance of timely fulfilling our duties	1	53	3,81	,982	,135
	3	52	3,40	1,176	,163
Teachers encourage us to fight for our beliefs	1	52	3,60	,934	,130
	3	49	2,94	1,107	,158
Teachers have positive attitudes towards other school employees	1	50	3,72	,970	,137
	3	40	2,98	,862	,136
Teachers talk bad about the school principal	1	48	2,42	1,412	,204
	3	43	3,28	1,221	,186



## 6. Conclusion

Given the theoretical discussion and the results of empirical research, it can be concluded that the work ethic in the teaching profession is not merely an added value to students' education, but a mandatory segment which the process of education is based on. A stronger commitment for the subject of the work ethic is therefore necessary in the context of its systematic and adequate content determination in the fundamental educational documents at the national level. In that way, the mechanisms and methods of its improvement could and should be clearly defined and identified. In addition to articulating the guidelines of work ethic in the aforementioned documents, it is necessary to promote work ethic in every teaching situation which will then guarantee a better educational future for all students. In this context, it is indispensable to raise the awareness and educate teachers about the importance of the work ethic and the acquisition of related skills.

Although the conclusions based on these research results cannot be generalized (for that it would be necessary to examine a representative sample of students and teachers' attitudes on a national level), the data indicates inadequate representation, absence or negative assessment of certain indicators of work ethic. Thus, the results can be indicative of the need for reflection on the entire Croatian education system. Additionally, they can also be used in order to define new research questions and to realize future research. Taking everything into account it is worth noting some of the most significant conclusions of this research.

The research results suggest that the students perceive the classes uninteresting and uncreative, which can be one of the indicators of ineffective use of teaching methods and techniques. Apart from that, students consider that it is rarely pleasant to work with the teachers and that the teachers rarely appreciate their efforts and abide by the rules. The research results also show that students rarely express concern for the environment even though they are familiar with the rules about its protection and preservation. Such actions may be indicative of students' awareness of the responsibilities but also their resistance against acting in accordance with the rules of environmental protection.

A particularly worrisome result of this research is that the teachers insult students when they differ from the majority in the group. This finding is unacceptable in the context of the professional and moral principles of the teaching profession and can suggest there are individuals in the system who violate the majority of school, national and international legal regulations. This result is a message to the national education system which should find adequate ways and measures to deal with this and similar unacceptable behavior of their employees.

Apart from introducing an unexplored topic in the national scientific and professional space, this paper raises new questions and dilemmas which pave the way for new systematic research. It is clear that the future Croatian researchers will find this field to be *terra incognita*, full of data to be collected, processed and analyzed, and, what is especially important, put in an appropriate theoretical and social context.

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