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The Primary School Moral Education Plan in Slovenia Ten Years after Its Introduction

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Abstract: Since the 2008/2009 school year, every primary school in Slovenia has had to prepare its own “school moral education plan” and undertake its moral education activities on the basis of this plan. Although the basic content areas of the moral education plan are prescribed by law, the openness of the legal provisions allows schools to exercise professional autonomy. After a decade of the implementation of moral education plans we conducted an empirical quantitative-qualitative study aimed at analysing them in terms of content. The objective was to determine the extent to which the plans include and how they define the prescribed content areas, as well as the extent to which they include and how they define additional content areas that are not prescribed by law but could be included by schools depending on their individual particularities and the specific challenges of their environment. Data were collected through publications on the websites of a representative sample of randomly selected schools and analysed with a specially prepared instrument. The research shows that upgrading moral education activities through the school moral education plan would require (1) reconsideration and upgrading of the concept, (2) continuous state support for the self-evaluation of schools specifically in this area, and (3) support for schools to gain a deeper professional understanding of current moral education challenges and of forming moral education strategies that differ with regard to the content differences in the reasons for individual moral education challenges.

Keywords: *Primary school moral education plan, preventive activities, moral education measures, school self-evaluation, authority.*

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Introduction

Since the 2008/2009 school year, the law in Slovenia has obliged all primary schools to execute their moral education activities on the basis of an autonomously prepared “school moral education plan” (PSA 2006, Article 60). The moral education plan should become a key factor through which the school develops the principles, norms, rules, activities, moral education strategies, procedures, measures, presentation of values and so on that support the specific actions of teachers, students, school leadership and parents in the field of moral education.¹ The aim of the change was not – or should not have been (Krofljic, 2006; Kovac Sebart & Krek, 2009) – to prepare the school moral education plan as a mere document, but rather to implement a permanent mechanism in schools to support the participants in their actual behaviours. The law also obliges schools to reflect on their activities in the field of moral education every year through a process of self-evaluation (PSA, 2006, Article 60d).

Although the basic content areas of the school moral education plan were prescribed, one of the aims of this conceptual and legislative change was specifically to make the state – in comparison with the then current state regulations – less prescriptive towards primary schools in the area of moral education activities when it comes to dealing with a particular situation, that is, in accordance with the professional autonomy guaranteed to professionals by the legislation (OFEA, Article 92; National Expert Commission for the Preparation of the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011; Krek, 2015a), schools should conceptually and actually exercise more independence in engaging in moral education activities (Krofljic, 2003, 2004, 2006). In this way, moral education activity should also be more considered, consistent and coherent across the entire school. If schools have the opportunity to form their own moral education scheme, they should also take greater responsibility for their decisions.

In order to verify how the ideas and intentions are implemented in practice, we conducted an empirical study ten years after the introduction of these quality assurance mechanisms in the area of moral education. The main purpose of the

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research was to analyse the primary school moral education plans of a representative sample of primary schools to determine (1) the extent to which they include and how they define the prescribed content area, and (2) whether or to what extent they contain and how they define additional content areas that, although not prescribed by law, could be included by schools in accordance with the principle of professional autonomy, taking account of their professional preferences, particularities and the specific challenges of their environment. With the first question, we merely follow the provisions of the law in terms of content. We wanted to determine and quantitatively assess the extent to which schools, through the content areas included in their moral education plans, follow the legal provisions. In addition to this assessment, we also carried out a content (qualitative) analysis of how these (prescribed) content areas were specifically formed and what kind of differences in content exist between them. The findings from the answers to the second question are intended to show the extent to which schools utilise the opportunity to autonomously form their own moral education approaches and activities and formalise them in the school moral education plan. The pedagogically autonomous supplementing of the moral education plan beyond what is prescribed may be an indication that, for the school, the moral education plan is not merely a document that it is obliged to produce, but rather a genuine support mechanism in the area of moral education, used by the school to reflect upon current moral education problems and coordinate moral education work at the school.

The provisions of the *Primary School Act*, in section IV.B, which speaks of the “moral educational operation of school” (PSA, 2006, Article 60 c, d, e, f), as well as prescribing the (compulsory) parts of the “school moral education plan”, do, of course, require a particular conceptualisation of the moral educational operation of school. Explanations of the individual parts of the concept of the “school moral education plan” were prepared by a special expert group at the Ministry of Education.ⁱⁱ We assume that, by introducing the possibility of including additional content in the moral education plan, the intention was to emphasise the professional autonomy of the school and the need for independent reflection of the school on its own moral education approaches. The aim of the present research was therefore to determine how schools utilise their professional autonomy in forming moral education plans, as they must (or should) evaluate, reflect upon and form their own moral education plans with regard to the specific situation in the individual school (Krofljic, 2006; MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002), and in view of the changing moral education challenges in society and in the environment of the school. For this purpose, we established additional criteria: content areas that are not covered by the legislation, but were formulated on the basis of a review of the professional literature, taking into account our own theoretical starting points as well as certain current education issues. Specifically, since the introduction of the school moral education plan, concrete proposals have emerged in the professional literature that point to other (not legally prescribed) content areas that schools could additionally include in the school moral education plan (Kovac Sebart & Krek, 2009). In the theoretical part of the paper, we explain why schools *could* include these proposals in their moral education plan (the prescribed content areas are not theoretically justified here). The additionally selected content areas indicate the complexity of the field of moral education and the need for professional reflection on moral education practices (Harju & Niemi, 2016; Balagova & Halakova, 2018). In the legal form of an act, it is only possible to write the basis of a moral education concept, so the formation and implementation of the moral education plan requires each school to undertake autonomous conceptual reflection and analysis of its own operation.

The fact is that schools have at their disposal quite a variety of professional resources and pedagogical approaches that they can rely on to update and adapt or supplement the content of the school moral education plan. In addition to various approaches to moral education issues in the professional literature – including moral education or preventive models by various authors who provide alternatives to the model of punitive discipline (Martella, Ron Nelson, Marchand-Martella & O’Reilly, 2012) – a range of publications and public polemics have emerged in the last decade (Krek, 2015b, 2019; Manesis, Vlachou & Mitropoulou, 2019; Messeschmidt, 2017; Zic Ralic, Cvitkovic & Sekusak-Galesev, 2018) that highlight the more pressing current problems of schools, and that should probably be given particular attention by schools. These issues are certainly partly specific to the environment in which the school operates. They range from seemingly minor “ordinary” general/moral education issues, such as disruption of lessons, failure to fulfil school obligations, and failure to respect agreements and rules, to more severe behavioural cases or individual excesses, often related to violence. Such cases highlight the need for schools to respond appropriately to violence, which is often also inextricably linked to the need for a reflected connection between “education” and “the law” (respect for the law). Contemporary school is committed to guaranteeing the rights of *all* students to quality education, including moral education, and to respecting the rule of law (Krek & Zabel, 2017). In the area of moral education, schools are also exposed to various justified, or less justified, interventions of parents (Cankar, Deutsch & Sentocnik, 2012; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). The school moral education plan provides schools with an opportunity to introduce principles and rules governing cooperation with parents, and to regulate encroachments on the professional autonomy of school staff (Inglis, 2012). It should also be noted that, with the legal introduction of the concept of inclusion (PCSNA, 2000), the number of students with the status of student with special needs has increased significantly over the last two decades (Smid, 2016), and that some regulation of the processes and behaviours in this area could also be included in the school moral education plan. Inclusive classrooms also have a positive effect on the conceptual understanding of inclusion of students without disabilities (Demirdag, 2017). In line with the aim of the legislative changes of 2008, it would be reasonable to expect schools to integrate and systematically include ways of

solving current moral education problems in their moral education plans, thus expanding their content beyond the prescribed content areas.

The immediate goal of the empirical research – to determine how existing primary school moral education plans are put together – was established so that the systematically obtained data and expert findings regarding what moral education plans include (and what they omit) can stimulate discussion on their planning, updating and supplementing, as well as on the concept and reality of moral education activity.

Rationale for the network of criteria for the analysis of primary school moral education plans

In order to carry out the empirical research, we prepared a network of criteria for the analysis of primary school moral education plans. The network of criteria includes all of the key content areas related to the moral education plan prescribed to schools by the Primary School Act (PSA). The expert justifications for the legally prescribed parts of the school moral education plan were provided by the drafters of the legal solution and other experts during the period of the introduction of this concept, so we only refer readers to them here (Krofflic, 2003, 2006; Working Group for the Preparation of Guidelines for the Moral Education Plan [WGPG MEP], 2008; Straser, 2012). The PSA first stipulates in Article 60.d that schools should use the school moral education plan to determine “ways of achieving and realising the goals and values referred to in Article 2” of the Act, which we have included in the network as the first criterion. In the continuation, the text of the Article defines “moral education activities”. We have also included all of the key content areas of the definition in the network of analysis criteria: “proactive and preventive activities”, “counselling”, the related category of “acknowledgments, commendations and awards”, “types of moral education measures” and “forms of mutual cooperation with parents”. The Act sets out the “school rules” in more detail (Article 60.e), so we verified whether the school has this document prepared in accordance with the provisions of the regulation. In so doing, and we specifically included information regarding whether or how the school “determines the moral education measures for individual infringements of rules”. The Act (in Article 60f) defines the “moral education warning” as a special moral education measure that follows when other measures have been exhausted, and the Minister adopted regulations applicable to all schools specifically for this measure. In addition to verifying the inclusion of the moral education warning in the moral education plan, we also determined whether the plan, or any other document published on the school website, also includes additional explanations or guidelines regarding the preparation of an “individualised moral education plan”, which the school must prepare when issuing a moral education warning. Since Article 60.d obliges the principal to report on the implementation of the moral education plan at least once a year to the parents’ council and the school council, and further stipulates that the report must be an integral part of the annual school self-evaluation, we also verified whether a report on the implementation of the moral education plan is included in the school’s self-evaluation report.

After considering the obligatory parts of the moral education plan, we wanted to determine whether the scope of the plan was broader than the requirements of the Act, that is, whether it included other content areas besides those explicitly required by the Act.

The first set of criteria for this part of the analysis was designed so as to select and identify individual content areas that are not prescribed by the Act, but that we judge the schools could reasonably include in their moral education plans. At the beginning of this part of the criteria, we established the concept of mediation and restitution, as we concluded that there was a strong likelihood that schools would include these two moral education approaches in their moral education plans. The Act explicitly mentions only the concept of “counselling” (PSA, Article 60.d), within the chapter “Counselling and the Amicable Settlement of Mutual Problems and Disputes”, but the concepts of mediation and restitution are recommended and specifically addressed in the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008). With this criterion we wanted to quantitatively verify the degree to which the inclusion of a moral education approach in the moral education plan is influenced by the fact that a certain approach to moral education has been formally recommended in a document that substantially explains the concepts used in the Act and is intended to serve as professional support to schools in the preparation the moral education plan. On the other hand, through a qualitative analysis of the records in the moral education plans of the schools, we wanted to verify whether and how the schools had built upon the content of the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008) related to mediation and restitution, which includes several paragraphs over two pages, since, in the period of the introduction of the legislative change, we find more in-depth expert treatments of these two approaches elsewhere (Verbnik Dobnikar, 2007a, 2007b). It therefore seemed reasonable to determine whether the moral education plan explicitly included mediation and (if so) how it defines mediation, and whether it explicitly included restitution and (if so) how it defines restitution.

The network of criteria includes the question of whether the school moral education plan explicitly addresses teacher authority. Although authority is an extremely important concept in pedagogy (Krofflic, 1997; Kuhar & Reiter, 2013), neither the *Primary School Act* (PSA, 2006) nor the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008) mention it in connection with the preparation of the school moral education plan. We can, however, find the “conceptualisation of the teacher as an authority” as a recommended part of the school moral education scheme in a professional proposal from the period before the legal introduction of the school moral education plan (Kovac Sebart, Krek & Vogrinc, 2006, p. 29), as well as after its introduction (Kovac Sebart & Krek 2009). Since it is not necessary for schools to include authority explicitly in

their moral education plan (as a separate content area using the term), yet the content of authority is nonetheless indirectly reflected and included in the plan, we verified the presence of the conceptualisation of teacher authority with an additional question to determine whether the plan *implicitly* addresses teacher authority.

The legal solution (PSA, Article 60) of the school moral education plan presupposes the complementarity of two principles: at the beginning, it lists proactive and preventive activities and counselling among moral education activities, thus extending the scheme of moral education activities and shifting away from the concept of disciplinary punishment; at the same time, it also retains the latter concept, as it states among the “school rules” that the school “determines moral education measures for individual infringements of the rules” (PSA, Article 60.e). If the school establishes sanctions for “individual infringements of the rules” in advance, it contributes to their universal validity for all, as well as to their transparency and the preventive establishment of the limits of what is allowed and what is not permitted. Determining measures for individual rule infringements may be appropriate in certain contexts, but in some situations (certainly in more complex ones) the teacher must delve into the reasons that led the student to a particular behaviour in order to be able to respond appropriately in terms of moral education and support (Bouillet, 2013; Saarento, Garandeau & Salmivalli, 2015). In more complex moral education situations, or in the case of repeated acts of disruptive behaviour and violence, in order to initiate appropriate pedagogical measures, it is not enough for the teacher to merely know only the cause that was the direct trigger of the individual action; an attempt must be made to understand the context, the reasons that operate in the “background” with regard to the student and guide his or her actions (Krek, 2019). This context was highlighted by the aforementioned authors with the suggestion that the moral education scheme should include “specific moral education strategies” (Kovac Sebart, Krek & Vogrinc, 2006, p. 30; Kovac Sebart & Krek, 2009, p. 211). We have therefore included among the analysis criteria the question of whether it is evident from the school moral education plan and/or the school rules that they differentiate between the reasons for the disruptive behaviour/violence of students, and whether they adjust the moral education/support strategies to the differences in reasons.

All professionals must follow the pedagogical principles defined by the umbrella school law which states that professionals carry out general/moral educational work in accordance with the law and publicly valid programmes in such a way as to ensure objectivity, criticalness and plurality while maintaining professional autonomy (OFEA, Article 92). The umbrella school law therefore links professional autonomy, as a principle of professionals’ pedagogical work, with the execution of general/moral educational work in accordance with the principles of ensuring *objectivity, criticalness and plurality* (Kodelja, 1995), which has been emphasised as a professional principle in the school legislation since 1996. We therefore verified whether the school moral education plans “explicitly include the requirement of the absence of indoctrination or the requirement to respect the principles of criticalness, plurality and objectivity”.

The relationship between the binding nature of the law and the principle of respect for the rule of law, on the one hand, and moral education principles, on the other, has often been highlighted as one of the many problems of the contemporary school (Krofljic, 2003; Medves, 2007; Kovac Sebart & Krek, 2009; National Expert Commission for the Preparation of the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011). The criteria therefore include the question of whether the school moral education plan addresses the relationship between the legal and moral educational operation of the school (conflicts in ensuring the individual rights of different students, collisions of rights, how the school acts when disagreements between the school and parents begin to be resolved through legal paths, and so on).

Taking into account these additional criteria for analysing the content areas of the moral education plan, which we defined ourselves, we included one completely open-ended question as a special criterion: Is the moral education plan broader than the requirements of the Act, that is, does it include any other content areas in addition to those required by the Act, and, if so, how?

Since the school moral education plan, as the currently used basis of the school’s moral education activity, needs to be updated, it also seems reasonable to assess whether it is clear from the whole that the school, in accordance with its pedagogical principles or beliefs, is updating the plan and adapting it to the school’s specific problems. In addition to the aforementioned criteria, which indicate the extent to which schools adapt and extend their moral education plans, this was also determined by a purely formal criterion, that is, when (in which year) either the school moral education plan or the school rules were formally updated.

Description of the Empirical Research

Research questions

1. To what extent do the moral education plans of the selected schools include the *prescribed* content areas (PSA, Article 60), and how do they define these areas?

2. The following questions determine whether, or to what extent, the moral education plans of the selected schools include and define content areas that are *not prescribed* but can be included on the basis of the principle of professional autonomy:

2.1 Do the moral education plans of the selected schools include content areas corresponding to the criteria that we have selected and justified for the purpose of the research, based on suggested content areas in the professional literature and on certain current moral education issues?

2.2. Do the moral education plans of the selected schools include other definitions of content areas?

3. To what extent do the schools update their moral education plans?

Research methodology

The empirical research was based on the descriptive method of educational research, with the use of a quantitative approach and content analysis.

Sample and data collection

The qualitative-quantitative approach of the research was based on a representative sample of 45 randomly selected primary schools from all regions of Slovenia and the moral education plans and other documents obtained from the schools' websites. In the sample of 45 schools, 5 schools (11.1%) did not have a school moral education plan published on the school website during the period of our review of documents, so the sample of analysed school moral education plans comprises 40 schools or 8.8% of all primary schools in Slovenia. In the analysis of the included "school moral education plans", the sample also includes other related documents, such as school rules and other documents.

As a data collection instrument, we created the "Network of Criteria – Content Areas for the Analysis of Primary School Moral Education Plans". In order to the answer the first research question we prepared 11 criteria (6 closed and 5 semi-open questions), for research question 2.1 we prepared 9 criteria (3 closed and 6 semi-open questions), for question 2.2 there was 1 criterion (semi-open question), and for question 3 there were 2 criteria (1 closed and 1 semi-open question). The prepared instrument was first tested with a pilot study. The moral education plans of five randomly selected schools were analysed and the instrument was corrected and expanded in line with the findings.

Since we used content analysis (analysis of moral education plans – documents – based on prepared criteria), we tried to ensure, in particular, the internal reliability and the internal validity of the instruments used as well as the findings (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982). Crucial to internal reliability is inter-rater reliability, that is, the extent to which the sets of meanings held by multiple researchers are sufficiently congruent, so that they describe phenomena in the same way and arrive at the same conclusions about them. This was ensured by using the prescribed legal terms and their definitions, as well as by coordinating the understanding of the authors of the article with regard to the studied content areas of the moral education plans. Internal validity, on the other hand, refers to the degree of agreement between the researcher's findings and the theoretical ideas s/he has developed in the research process. The internal validity of the analysis with regard to the individual criteria of the collection instrument was ensured by the fact that each moral school education plan was analysed by at least two researchers, who, after performing separate analyses, reconciled any differences in the findings together. The data were collected from March to July 2019 via a review of the selected primary school moral education plans and related documents.

For closed type questions, we present the data on a descriptive level with absolute values and as percentages. In the content analysis (for semi-open type questions), the texts from the documents were categorised. When presenting the results, we decided to display a particular category based on its level of representation and/or significance.

Results and Analysis

The data in Table 1 answer the first research question, showing the extent to which definitions of prescribed content areas are included in the schools' moral education plans. For criteria 1, 4, 5, 9 and 11, it is indicated that the results of the qualitative analysis are listed separately.

Table 1. Definitions of prescribed content areas included in the schools' moral education plans

Criteria for analysis – content areas	Inclusion	Inclusion
	(number/percentage) YES	(number/percentage) NO
1. Defines the goals and values of the moral education plan (<i>Add. 1 see text</i>)	40/100%	0
2. Includes a section on moral education activities	40/100%	0
3. Includes proactive and preventive moral education activities (<i>Add. 3 see Table 2</i>)	40/100%	0
4. Defines forms of mutual cooperation with parents	37/92.5%	3/7.5%
5. Describes the involvement of parents in the implementation of the moral education plan (<i>Add. 5 see Table 3</i>)	28/70%	12/30%
6. Includes counselling	36/90%	4/10%
7. Includes acknowledgments, commendations and awards	37/92.5%	3/7.5%
8. Includes the determination of moral education measures	40/100%	0
9. Determines actions for individual infringements of rules (<i>Add. 9 see text</i>)	20/50%	20/50%
10. Includes moral education warnings	36/90%	4/10%
11. Includes instructions/guidelines for the individualised moral education plan (<i>Add. 11 see text</i>)	26/65%	14/35%*

* This result shows that the documents published on the school websites do not include guidelines for the preparation of an individualised moral education plan, which does not mean that such guidelines do not exist at the school.

Add. 1: All of the schools' moral education plans contain *goals and values* in the introduction. The formulation from the Act stating that, in the moral education plan, the school "determines the ways of achieving and realising the goals and values referred to in Article 2 of this Act" (PSA, Article 60d) is taken into account by either literally stating or referring to these goals and values. The definitions in this content area are therefore general and the ways of achieving and realising the goals and values are, in most cases, not further "operationalised". The assumption is probably that the goals and values are specified in detail in other parts of the moral education plan.

Add. 2: All of the moral education plans (40 or 100%) contain a section on moral education activities. However, other data shown in Table 1 indicate that not all of the plans contain all the key content areas required by the Act.

Add. 3: In view of the importance attributed in the Act and the usual presence of these activities in school work, it is to be expected that all 40 moral education plans (100%) include definitions of proactive and preventive moral education activities. The Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008, pp. 16–17) distinguish between systemic and project proactive and preventive moral education activities and, in 17 paragraphs covering specific areas, list "some examples of different proactive and preventive moral education activities". The schools did not simply take all of the activities listed in the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008), but mostly selected certain moral education activities, which were then stated in the moral education plan, or added certain specifics. The content areas of these moral education activities are listed below in Table 2, indicating the frequency of their occurrence.

Table 2. Preventive and proactive moral education activities from the moral education plans

Category of preventive and proactive moral education activities	Number of occurrences
Addressing moral education content in classroom communities (including, for example, social games, violence, abuse and other forms of inappropriate behaviour), developing a favourable climate	33
Peer assistance	23
Workshops and lectures for parents, contacts with parents	22
Solidarity, humanitarian and voluntary work	22
Formulation of rules and agreements, familiarisation with rules	20
Familiarisation of students with the processes of self-evaluation, self-control and accepting responsibility	19
Projects with a moral education theme	17
Promotion of the school, local and other events; connecting the school and the local community	12
Intergenerational cooperation	12
Emphasising and rewarding exemplary student behaviour	11
Supervision at a designated location at and/or outside school, being on duty	10
Teacher education	9

Table 2. Continued

Category of preventive and proactive moral education activities	Number of occurrences
Care for the school environment, safety, ecological awareness	8
Active involvement of the students in planning, implementation and teaching work	6
Accepting difference	4
Informal gatherings	4
* Quality organisation of teaching/moral education activities (ad hoc content)	4
Involvement of the counselling service in classroom work	2
Pamphlet with the rules for students, teachers and parents	2
Question and problem box	1
Addressing the annual topic of the children's parliament	1
Including class representatives in the student community	1
Assisting the class teacher	1
* Activities for the successful integration of immigrant students	1
* High expectations in the area of learning and relationships	1
* Teacher setting appropriate limits and consistently realising agreements with students	1
* Ensuring the unity and consistency of the teaching staff with regard to students	1
* Assertiveness training for potential victims of violence	1

* The asterisk indicates proactive and preventative activities that have a small number of occurrences but would be expected to be more frequently included in moral education plans.

Add. 4: A total of 37 of the schools (92.5%) define forms of mutual cooperation with parents, but only three of the moral education plans (7.5%) include a specific section on this topic. Although one would expect this to form part of all moral education plans, the result of 92.5% inclusion nonetheless indicates that issues concerning parents are important to schools.

Add. 5: We examined the ways in which the moral education plans describe the forms of parental involvement in the implementation of the moral education plan. The moral education plans often include general definitions of cooperation with parents: individual parent-teacher interviews, parent-teacher meetings, informing parents, organising lectures for parents with moral education topics, and so on. In Table 3, we present other ways of cooperation associated with moral education issues and parent cooperation.

Table 3. Ways of cooperation with parents included in the moral education plans

Category of cooperation of the school with parents	Number of occurrences
Forming joint decisions (parents and school) to overcome and solve problems	14
Involving parents in solving moral education problems and imposing moral education measures	14
Participation of parents in the development of an individualised moral education plan	5
Respecting the teacher's integrity	5
Encouraging children to study and to regularly fulfil their obligations	3
Encouraging children to respect the natural environment (ecological awareness)	2
Encouraging children to accept difference, solidarity, voluntary work and tolerance with their own example	3
Developing a positive attitude towards knowledge, realistic expectations of children	2

Add. 6: A large majority of the schools (36 or 90%) include a section on counselling with the content definitions within the framework of the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008), but four of the schools (10%) fail to include this section.

Add. 7: A large majority of the school moral education plans (37 or 92.5%) include acknowledgments, commendations and awards. Conceptually, these were already part of the previously valid regulations, and schools were able to follow these models. In three of the schools (7.5%), however, the moral education plan and related documents do not define acknowledgments, commendations and awards (it is nonetheless likely that the schools announce or distribute such awards).

Add. 8: All of the moral education plans (40 or 100%) have a section with specific moral education measures.

Add. 9: The schools are nonetheless divided regarding *determining specific measures for individual infringements of the rules*. Half of the schools (20 or 50%) determine measures for individual infringements, as required by the Act with regard to the school rules (PSA, Article 60.e). In these cases, the infringements are usually categorised as minor, more serious and most serious, and a specific moral education measure is determined for each infringement. However, the other half of the schools (20 or 50%) do not establish moral education measures for individual rule infringements in

the school rules (or anywhere else). Although these schools do list moral education measures, they fail to specify which moral education measures are used for a specific rule infringement. Various explanations were found in the moral education plans of 11 of these 20 schools; for example, that the choice of moral education procedures should take into account the individual characteristics of the student and the circumstances, including the professional judgment of different participants (parents, teachers, counselling services), or that the selection and implementation of the moral educational process takes place after examining the case/conflict and clarifying the situation.

Add. 10: A large majority of the school moral education plans (36 or 90%) specifically mention the moral education warning as a moral education measure. Even without specifically mentioning this moral education measure, the remaining schools (4 or 10%) can directly apply the Minister of Education's regulations. Since it is highly unlikely that these schools would never use this measure, the question of the transparency of their moral education activities for the sake of students and parents does, however, arise.

Add. 11: The moral education plans (or other documents available online) of 14 of the schools (35%) do not indicate whether or how they have preparations for the individualised moral education plan (IMEP) in place. A total of 26 of the schools' moral education plans (65%) include some instructions or guidelines regarding the IMEP. However, in only three cases (out of these 26) is the content of the IMEP defined in more detail in the moral education plan. In one case, a form was also attached to the moral education plan. The definitions of the items in the moral education plan are as follows: description of the infringement, goals, plan of appropriate assistance for the student, method of monitoring and implementing the IMEP, timeframe, consent of participants, list of persons involved, and consequences of realisation or non-realisation of the IMEP. In 23 (out of 26) cases, the moral education plan includes more general instructions.

Below we present the results of the research on the second research question. Table 4 shows the answers to the question of whether or to what extent the schools' moral education plans contain content areas according to the criteria selected and justified for the purposes of the present research.

Table 4. Inclusion of non-prescribed content areas in the schools' moral education plans according to the selected criteria

Criteria for analysis – content areas	YES	NO
12. Is mediation explicitly included?	32/80%	8/20%
13. Is mediation defined and, if so, how? (Add. 13: see text)	27/67.5%	13/32.5%
14. Is restitution explicitly included?	33/82.5%	7/17.5%
15. Is restitution defined and, if so, how? (Add. 15: see text)	27/67.5%	13/32.5%
16. Is teacher authority explicitly dealt with? (Add. 16: see text)	1/25%	39/97.5%
17. Is teacher authority implicitly dealt with? (Add. 17: Table 5)	27/67.5%	13/32.5%
18. Do the moral education plan, the school rules or other documents of the school reveal a conceptualisation of the different reasons for student violence and adaption of moral education/support strategies to these differences in reasons?	0	40/100%
19. Is there specific inclusion of the requirement of the absence of indoctrination, or the requirement to respect the criteria of <i>criticalness, plurality and objectivity</i> in the execution of instruction and school work?	0	40/100%
20. Is the relationship between the legal and moral educational operation of the school dealt with? (Ad 20: see text)	7/17.5%	33/82.5%

Add. 12: Although these concepts are not found in the Act, as many as 32 schools (80%) explicitly include mediation and only 8 schools (20%) do not. Probably the reason for the widespread use of this moral education approach is that it is specifically recommended and discussed by the Recommendations in the section "Counselling and the Mutual Resolution of Problems and Disputes" (WGPG MEP, 2008, pp. 17–20), and that it was promoted – partly through the education of users (students and teachers) – in the period when school moral education plans were being introduced.

Add. 13: Although four fifths of the schools state the use of mediation, only two thirds (27 or 67.5%) also define the key characteristics of mediation in the moral education plan. Of the 13 schools (32.5%) that do not define mediation, the majority (8) do not mention it at all, and it can therefore be concluded that they do not use it. Definition of the characteristics of mediation typically consists of one paragraph, with content consistent with the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008). Unlike the Recommendations, however, the definition most often does not involve peer mediation.

Add. 14: Slightly more schools (33 or 82.5%) explicitly include restitution, while seven schools (17.5%) do not include it.

Add. 15: A total of 27 schools (67.5%) also define restitution, while no definition is found in the moral education plans of 13 schools (32.5%). In the plans of six of these schools, restitution is cited but nothing is written about it, raising the

question as to whether they actually use this approach. Restitution is, however, probably used in the two thirds of the schools (67.5%) where it is defined.

The cases of the inclusion of mediation and restitution in the moral education plans of the schools show that the content of the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008) has probably had a significant influence on the preparation of school moral education plans. The impacts are both positive and negative. The latter is evident, for example, in the case of mediation, where the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008) state only the “positive sides” and do not point out cases in which it is inappropriate to use mediation. In not one of the school moral education plans, nor in the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008), which actually recommend peer mediation, is there any mention of the fact that mediation is not always an appropriate way of resolving peer disputes. It is not only that it is necessary to obtain the agreement of both parties involved prior to using mediation to resolve a dispute; Verbnik-Dobnikar (2007b) emphasises that we do not opt for peer mediation in cases of physical violence, a highly age-unequal relationship between the victims, or peer abuse.

This is in line with research findings (Authors) that revealed a lack of familiarity among teachers with the characteristics of the use of mediation. In the case of a description of peer violence in which it was evident that there was a clear power imbalance between peers, more than half (50.9%) of professionals chose mediation, even though it is an inappropriate moral education approach in such a case. Of course, this cannot be attributed solely to the absence of warnings in the Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008) or other documents; it is probably even more important that, when recommending certain moral education approaches, the state also provides ongoing appropriate (re)training to professionals, and that schools take advantage of such opportunities.

Add. 16: The inclusion of teacher authority in moral education plans is the first criterion that incorporates a pedagogical concept that was not used in the context of introducing the primary school moral education plan, either in the Act or in the supporting documents. This is also reflected in the moral education plans of the schools. In only one school (2.5%) does the moral education plan explicitly include and explain the authority of the teacher; in all of the other 39 plans (97.5%), there is no trace of authority as a term that is conceptually defined. In the one case where it does appear, the authority of the teacher and other professionals is explicitly placed in the moral education plan as a *principle of moral education activity* that is achieved by setting an example, by expertise in the quality of the organisation and delivery of lessons, by autonomy in professional work, by a fair and respectful attitude towards students, by consistently adhering to school rules, and by personality traits that instil confidence, a sense of security and acceptance in the student.

Add. 17: When we examined whether the moral education plans addressed the question of teacher authority implicitly, however, we found that the texts of about two thirds (27 or 67.5%) of the plans included such definitions, while 13 (32.5%) did not include them. Although the Act does not oblige schools to conceptualise authority, the issue returns in various specific respects. These individual appearances of the issue of authority are sometimes covered by categories within the framework of proactive and preventive activities, as would be expected. The content areas of the definitions are divided into 11 categories, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Implicit inclusion of teacher authority*

Category of implicit inclusion of teacher authority	Number of occurrences
Personal example	21
Setting the child appropriate limits, expectations regarding behaviour, consistency	8
The choice of measure is left to the autonomy or professional judgment of the teacher	7
A respectful attitude towards students, justice	7
Expertise in the quality organisation and execution of lessons, innovation, professional development	5
The teacher him/herself develops clear rules and standard of permissible behaviour	3
The teacher him/herself develops a view of the life and work of the school	2
Teachers ensure the unity of the teaching staff	2
Expressing constructive criticism and self-criticism	1
Class teachers carefully monitor their class and happenings among the students and respond to problems	1
Teachers respect the moral educational values of parents within individual families	1

Add. 18: In their moral education plans and related documents, not one of the schools conceptualises the different reasons for disruptive behaviour or student violence, or adapts moral education and support strategies to these differences. In other words, in all 40 schools (100%), formally on the school level, there is a complete absence of *pedagogical conceptualisation* of disruptive behaviour and violence related to moral education/support strategies.

Add. 19: A similar result – 100% absence – is obtained with regard to the next criterion: in none of the moral education plans can we find explicit inclusion of the requirement for the absence of indoctrination or the principle of respecting the criteria of criticalness, plurality and objectivity. This fact again confirms that, despite professional autonomy – and despite the fact that this principle is found in the Act, but in another place – the moral education plans of the schools are significantly determined by the concept and the explicitly used terms and provisions of the Act (PSA, Article 60).

Add. 20: A large majority of the schools (82.5%) do not deal with the relationship between the legal and moral educational operation of the school. In this result, we have disregarded certain cases of specific provisions, such as the need to form a three-member commission when a student with special needs is involved in an infringement, or the fact that a school should not take action against an offender unless the infringement is established beyond reasonable doubt, and the like. The relationship between the legal and moral educational operation of the school is somewhat more systematically addressed in the moral education plans of seven schools (17.5%). In four of these schools, however, it is primarily a case of introducing certain legal principles. Among these, one involves procedures or protocols for protecting the rights of those involved in a particular case of violence, while three more broadly state certain legal principles.

The responses to question 2.2, regarding whether the moral education plan includes other definitions of content areas, are presented quantitatively in Table 6 and categorised by content areas in Table 7.

Table 6. Inclusion of other definitions of non-prescribed content areas

Criteria for analysis – content area	YES	NO
21. In comparison with the provisions of the Act and the additional research criteria, does the moral education plan of the school conceptually or otherwise include additional content area?	12/30%	28/70%

Add. 21: The moral education plans of 28 schools (70%) contain only the content areas specified in the Act (or additional content areas that we have defined as additional research criteria). In this figure, we do not take into account content areas that we have considered elsewhere (earlier and below). Less than one third of the moral education plans (12 plans or 30%) contain at least one of the content extensions that have been categorised and are shown below in Table 7 (certain moral education plans include multiple categories, so the number of occurrences is greater than the number of moral education plans in which they appear).

Table 7. Categories of content extensions

Categories of additional content extensions	Number of occurrences
Careful planning and implementation of moral education activities (activity description, responsible persons, timeframe, monitoring and evaluation)	9
Alternative moral education measures	3
Etiquette (generally expected cultural norms of behaviour are listed for each group of participants)	2
Compulsory social service work	1
Preventing various forms of violence (but without reference to the reasons for the violence)	1
Systematic conceptualisation and treatment of moral education activities as part of instruction (part of the moral education content and a number of activities are realised in parallel with the implementation of the curriculum in individual classes: the topics in which the teacher can implement moral education are listed for each grade).	1
A detailed procedure for registering moral education measures and unjustified absences as well as related measures	1

Schools should update their moral education plans and adapt them to their specific needs in accordance with their pedagogical principles or beliefs and in line with the findings of their self-evaluation. The answers to the third research question, regarding the extent to which schools update their moral education plans, were obtained according to the formal criterion of the date of the last update. It was assumed that each school should update its moral education plan at least every two years. We therefore took into account moral education plans adopted *from June 2017 onwards*. According to this criterion, 13 of the schools (32.5%) had an updated moral education plan. Taking into account moral education plans adopted *from June 2016 onwards*, it was determined that 22 of the moral education plans (55%) had been updated in the last three years. In other words, approximately one third of the schools are updating their moral education plan, or slightly more than half of the schools according to a less strict criterion. It is worth mentioning that 10 of the schools (25%) adopted their moral education plans *in 2009 or earlier*; thus, the plans were adopted during the period of introduction, but have not been formally modified in the last ten years. Regarding at least a quarter of the schools, the question therefore arises as to whether the school moral education plan can be a relevant factor in moral

education at all, given that it has remained unchanged for ten years. Moreover, it should be recalled that, in the original sample of 45 schools, 11% (5 schools) did not have a moral education plan published online. If it is not even published online, is it still being used at the school? It is therefore likely for an even higher proportion of these schools (about one third) that the moral education plan is merely a document they have because it is prescribed by law, and its actual value in the area of moral education is highly questionable.

“School rules” form an important part of overall moral education planning, being a document in which moral education measures are defined in more detail. We therefore asked whether schools update the school rules more often than the “moral education plan”. We found that 27 school rules documents (67.5%) had been adopted in 2016 or later, compared to 22 moral education plan documents. Taking into account these updates, about two thirds of the primary schools surveyed (67.5%) had updated their moral education plans or related documents in the last three years. According to these criteria, it can be concluded that, in these schools, moral education planning in recent years continues to be formally carried out within the framework of the school moral education plan.

We also verified whether a report on the implementation of the moral education plan had ever been included in the school’s self-evaluation report and found that this was the case in only seven schools (17.5%). In 33 schools (82.5%), the report was either not included or not evident from the documents published online. Only four schools had published reports for the 2017/18 school year, while two schools had reports for 2016/17, and one school had reports on the moral educational operation of the school in previous years, most recently for 2014/15.

We are aware that, on the basis of the analysis of documents alone, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions regarding the actual moral education practices at primary schools, nor is this the purpose of the research. Nonetheless, publicly available moral education plans are not insignificant and reveal a great deal. Not least, with its publicly available documents, the school demonstrates its attitude towards moral education issues at school, towards cooperation with parents, and towards all those who seek to obtain information related to this area online.

Discussion and Conclusion

We believe that the findings related to the first and second research questions about the presence of prescribed and non-prescribed content areas of the school moral education plan (the results in Table 1 compared to Table 4) demonstrate that *the concept and legal provisions of the Act* (PSA, Article 60) predominantly determine the content of school moral education plans. What is written in the Act is of great importance, and this is reflected in the content areas written in moral education plans. Moreover, the inclusion of mediation and restitution (Table 4, criteria 12, 13, 14, 15) indicates that the expert recommendations related to the legal solutions also have a significant impact on the inclusion of the content areas, that is, on the content of the moral education plan.

From the standpoint of autonomous reflection on the moral educational operation of the school, one would also expect more differences between schools in the content areas of moral education plans. An evaluation of the implementation of school moral education plans from as early as 2011 showed that the teams formed to prepare the school education plans “mostly do not operate anymore”, “which creates the impression that the moral education plan is a finished ‘story’” (Straser, 2012, p. 15). From our findings ten years after the introduction of the school moral education plan, it can be concluded that about one third of schools are most likely not using the moral education plan in practice (it could be that they formally adopted it at the beginning but did not use) or that they are not using it in such a way that it is adapted and updated based on ongoing evaluation. In two thirds of schools, however, the moral education plan is at least formally updated, which indicates that, in one way or another, it is in fact considered as the basis of the moral education activity of the school.

The results nevertheless show that, after the completion of the introduction of the school moral education plan (in the last eight years), there has largely been no further development in this area. Although modifications and conceptual upgrades would be possible in line with the principle of professional autonomy, the analysed content areas of the transformation of the school moral education plans largely fail to show any such development. The results of the study reveal “satisficing behaviour” among schools; in other words, the preparation of the plan for its own sake and with minimal authentic investment, revealing the problem of inauthentic plan development. These findings correspond to research in the United States that found substantial evidence of satisficing behaviour in school improvement planning as early as nearly two decades ago (Mintrop, MacLellan & Quintero, 2001; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002), and to recent research that has revealed a lack of authentic school improvement planning (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019), that is, deficiency in the use of professional autonomy.

With regard to the execution of school self-evaluation and the modification of the school moral education plan, the research also showed that the consistent linking of self-evaluation and moral education was the exception rather than the rule. An evaluation conducted eight years ago (Straser, 2012, p. 15) demonstrated that schools need professional support (from the state) in this area. This is consistent with research undertaken in other countries: in relation to a school improvement initiative in the United States, researchers determined that education authorities should facilitate the implementation of school plans (Strunk, Marsh, Bush-Mecenas & Duque, 2016; Van Der Voort & Wood, 2014). In addition, there is evidence that the quality of school self-evaluation depends on the quality of the instruments (van der

Bij, Geijsel & ten Dam, 2016). In view of the initial goal of making the “school moral education plan” an instrument that contributes to reflection on moral education at school (and in the state), the state should therefore systematically support the execution of self-evaluation in this area.

Although schools largely do not take advantage of the possibility of individually designing moral education approaches within the framework of the moral education plan, or at least not in forms that are formalised, we have no doubt that, in practice, moral education is adapting and changing in the light of current challenges. This is, however, probably left to individual teachers and remains in a non-formalised form on the level of the individual school. Nonetheless, researchers argue that “by continually amending plans through a formal process (rather than making undocumented practice changes), plans (and ongoing organizational learning) may be afforded greater longevity” (Strunk, Marsh, Bush-Mecenas & Duque, 2016, p. 302). If schools were to use this legally prescribed instrument to continuously reflect on the performance of their moral education activities, this would probably contribute to the coherence and quality of moral education practices at school. It should, however, be noted that the quality of moral education plans varies: some schools already have high-quality moral education plans that are up to date and surpass the average standard described here.

School moral education plans define ways of cooperation with parents, and could also be a means for the orderly resolution of potential conflict situations. However, the research data do not indicate that schools are taking advantage of the school moral education plan to regulate and pre-empt potential conflict situations to which they would otherwise often be exposed. The phenomenon of parents coming to school with a lawyer is often mentioned in public. However, if we connect the analysis of forms of cooperation with parents (Table 3) and the analysis of how the relationship between the legal and moral education activities of the school are included in the moral education plan (Table 4, criterion 20), one can only guess from the absence of solutions either that this is in fact unimportant or that schools do not recognise the moral education plan as providing a form through which the school can approach these undesirable situations.

The research found that schools mostly remain within the content areas stated in the Act (PSA, 2006) and the associated Recommendations (WGPG MEP, 2008). Has the moral educational operation of schools also remained conceptually within the framework established at that time? Would reconsideration be needed? If we examine the results of the analysis of the content area of authority, both on the level of conceptualisation and implementation, questions of authority arise in each of the key content areas of the school moral education plan: proactive and preventive activities, school rules, moral education measures, cooperation with parents, etc. However, the legal concept of the “school moral education plan” does not, of course, direct schools to conceptualisation of and reflection on authority, which is also evident in the results of the research (Table 4, criteria 16 and 17, Table 5). This can probably be explained by the fact that, from the point of view of most institutions, which, above all, seek to have a moral education plan in line with the statutory provisions, it is less controversial if they include only the content areas stipulated by the Act. They therefore do not emphasise authority as a content area, even if they do in fact undertake professional consideration of this area. The analysis of other non-prescribed content areas shows similar results (Table 4, criteria 18, 19, 20). The research data therefore suggest that the competent ministry should support conceptual expert debate on the “school moral education plan” and, according to the outcome of the debate, reflect on changes to the Act.

Certain shifts in the school system also indicate that this would be advisable. As indicated in the introduction, one of the important systemic changes is the introduction of the concept of inclusion. In the last two decades, inclusion has gradually established itself in mainstream schools as a parallel system of specific, individual treatment of students with special needs (Kavkler, Kosak Babuder & Magajna, 2015). Solutions, processes and changes directly related to inclusion actually affect the entire moral education activity of the school, and vice versa. One would therefore expect these solutions and procedures to be incorporated in the school moral education plan. Although this area is omitted by the legal concept, the research data (criterion 21, Tables 6 and 7) show that schools do not in fact include these issues in their moral education plans. We therefore suggest that one of the questions for professional discussion should be whether or how to connect “inclusion” to the concept of the “school moral education plan”. Currently, these are formally formulated as two separate worlds, so to speak, whereas in practice schools and teachers should connect and coordinate them in their actions.

With criterion 18, we sought to verify whether school moral education plans include specific moral education strategies related to violence. The latter is a phenomenon with a variety of background reasons, often pertaining not just to the specific circumstances of the individual student, but to a number of students or groups of students, because these reasons are, to some extent, typical. Referring to student achievement, Huber and Conway (2015) recommend that schools develop high-quality school improvement plans that focus efforts directly on subgroup performance. It would be logical for the moral education/support strategies used by teachers at school in relation to specific *groups of students* to form part of the school moral education plan, as pedagogical action targeted at specific groups of students or moral education challenges – *not at violations of the rules* – requires the systematic prior identification of the reasons for undesirable behaviour or problems, and concerted action at the individual school.

The research showed that schools do not conceptualise different *reasons* for disruptive behaviour or student violence, and do not adapt their moral education and support strategies to these differences (Table 4, 18). Nowhere in the documents of the sample did we find evidence that teachers identify the occurrence of typical forms of disruptive student behaviour and/or recurrent situations of violence and their reasons, and, based on their findings, devise *specific pedagogical strategies* designed as a targeted response to the identified phenomenon (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012) or a content-oriented pedagogical response to typical causes of phenomena that occur more frequently in *groups* of students. The analysis suggests that upgrading moral education activities through the school moral education plan would therefore require deepening the substantive understanding of pedagogical contexts and the creation of specific moral education and support strategies designed in this way. This would, of course, require prior professional discussion.

Suggestions

The research showed that, in most cases, the principle of the professional autonomy of schools does not lead to the conceptual upgrading of moral education plans, even though this would be justified. Schools need additional support in this area. Upgrading moral education activities through the school moral education plan would require (1) reconsideration and upgrading of the concept, (2) continuous state support for executing school self-evaluation specifically in this area, and (3) support for the professional deepening of schools' understanding of current moral education challenges and the formulation of moral education strategies that differ with regard to the content differences in the reasons for individual moral education challenges.

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ⁱ In the Slovenian professional and cultural context, we conceptually differentiate between “moral education” (*vzgoja*) and “general education” (*izobrazevanje*). Since, in this connection, “general education” is primarily concerned with the field of knowledge transfer, the state, by introducing the concept of the school *moral education* plan, sought to encourage primary schools to devote special attention, in an even more systematic and reflective way, to the area of moral education and behaviour, which covers the formation of the student’s personality, the relationships between those involved, their behaviours, the values and norms that these behaviours actualise, and so on.

ⁱⁱ On 30 October 2007, the Minister appointed a Working group for the preparation of guidelines for the moral education plan (WGPG MEP), which prepared the “Recommendations on the Ways of Forming and Implementing the Primary School Moral Education Plan”, published in August 2008 (WGPG MEP, 2008).