

## **STATEMENT**

on the dissertation titled

### **IMPROVING PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

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Professional Field: 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication)

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#### **Structure and Content of the Dissertation**

Radina Mladenova's dissertation is structured into an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, references, and appendices. The dissertation consists of two main parts: a theoretical-empirical analysis in the main body (233 pages) and appendices (158 pages). The introduction emphasizes the relevance and exploration of the topic, the object and subject, objectives and tasks, hypothesis, and key terms. The first chapter, "Theoretical Coordinates of the Research," examines the theoretical aspects of pedagogical communication, its role in school management and crisis situations, and includes an analysis of European standards for crisis communication in schools with examples from Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom. The second chapter, "Empirical Study on Attitudes Toward Pedagogical Communication in Crisis Management in Schools," presents the results of an empirical study based on surveys and interviews with school leaders regarding their attitudes and preparedness for crisis management, supplemented by discussion and conclusions. The third chapter, "Improving Pedagogical Communication Skills for Crisis Management in Schools as Part of Continuing Education for Pedagogical Professionals," proposes a conceptual framework for training in crisis communication skills. This framework focuses on modern approaches and interactive methods such as simulations and role-playing games, with particular attention to debriefing and the feedback as a tool for evaluation and its limitations. The conclusion summarizes findings, recommendations, and future perspectives, while the bibliography and appendices provide the theoretical and methodological foundation for the study.

#### **Relevance of the Topic and Knowledge of the Issue**

Crises have become inevitable challenges in recent years, affecting all areas of life at various levels. The topic of pedagogical communication in crisis management is highly relevant in the context of the modern school environment. The increasing number of crises related to natural disasters, pandemics, terrorism, and violence highlights the need to develop effective crisis communication skills. This dissertation successfully addresses this need by examining crisis communication in the school context. Key aspects discussed include the role of communication in school management, European standards for crisis communication, and the specific needs of the Bulgarian educational system. The author emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence and social skills in managing crises. Mladenova demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the topic, supported by an extensive bibliographic base (161 sources, 107 in English). The theoretical section presents key concepts and models, such as Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory and European standards for crisis leadership. A significant contribution is the comparison of international practices with the Bulgarian context and the identification of major challenges faced by Bulgarian school leaders, such as the lack of structured crisis management training and insufficient resources for handling emergencies.

### **Research Methodology**

The research employs an empirical approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. Mladenova uses surveys and interviews to identify the attitudes and needs of school leaders and pedagogical professionals. Specific elements of the methodology include: A web-based questionnaire to measure attitudes toward crisis communication Interviews with school principals to examine practical aspects of crisis management. Data analysis using modern statistical methods, ensuring reliability and validity of the results.

### **Evaluation and Contributions of the Dissertation**

The dissertation by Radina Mladenova represents an invaluable study that combines theoretical concepts with practical guidelines and achieved results. It illustrates the current state of crisis communication management in Bulgarian schools, compares it to international practices and standards, applies a well-founded methodology for investigation, and proposes scientifically grounded and practical solutions.

The main scientific contributions include:

1. Development of a conceptual framework for crisis communication training adaptable to national and international standards.
2. Systematization of skills needed for effective crisis management, including emotional intelligence and social interaction.
3. Identification of challenges faced by Bulgarian school leaders and solutions to overcome them.
4. Creation of a guide for school leaders and pedagogical professionals outlining specific approaches to crisis management through communication.

The practical value of the research is undeniable, as the proposed methodologies can be integrated into continuing education programs for pedagogical professionals, as well as in the training of future teachers and managers.

The author has published articles related to the dissertation, reflecting the scientific and practical value of the research and its various stages. These publications cover critical aspects such as awareness, socio-emotional support, and the evolution of communication skills among school leaders post-pandemic, as well as the state of crisis communication at the institutional

level in Bulgarian schools. The handbook “Crisis Communication for School Leaders” provides valuable strategic guidelines for managing crisis situations in schools through effective communication.

The abstract is prepared as required, providing a clear and comprehensive overview of the main results and contributions of the dissertation work. The structure of the abstract follows the logic of the dissertation, emphasizing the need for training school leaders and the importance of a conceptual framework for qualification.

### **Recommendations and Questions**

I recommend implementing the developed conceptual framework and proposed training approaches in continuing education programs for pedagogical professionals. The results of the study could serve as a basis for developing national policies in crisis management in the educational sector. Expanding the proposed frameworks for training and integrating them into an international context could also be a potential direction for future work.

*Question to the doctoral candidate:* Do you see a role for crisis communication training in the preparation of future teachers and school managers? If so, how?

### **Conclusion**

I am convinced that Radina Mladenova’s dissertation meets all the requirements for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor.” It contains significant scientific and practical contributions and demonstrates a high level of professional competence and academic depth. Therefore, I give my positive evaluation and recommend that the esteemed academic jury award her the degree of “Doctor” in Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication).

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Prepared by:

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