REVIEW

From Assoc. Prof. Violeta Kotseva, PhD,

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for obtaining the degree of PhDoctor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the Faculty of History, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

For the dissertation titled: **Value-oriented models of interaction in an interethnic educational environment (1991-2016)** with authod PhD Student Dafina Latchezarova Pandin and scientific supervisor Prof. Irina Koleva, PhD

The PhD student Dafina Pandin was enrolled in doctoral studies in a full-time form of study by Rector's Order RD 20-613/ 25.02.2021, for the period from 1.03.2021 to 1. 03.2024 at the Deaprtment of Ethnology at the Faculty of History at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. During the period of study, she completed all the tasks set out in her Individual Curriculum has got a positive attestation. The dissertation work was discussed and directed for defense by the Council of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", held on 12.11.2024.

The dissertation work presented for discussion by doctoral student Dafina Pandin falls within the broad field of scientific and practical research, the broader goal of which is to expand the scope of intercultural education as a standard with a view to implementing a successful policy at the national level on integration and socialization, overcoming inequalities, desegregation and implementing real opportunities for an equal start in the conditions of Bulgarian education. A number of authors work in this field, in which the undisputed leader is Prof. Irina Koleva, scientific supervisor of the proposed dissertation. The dissertation candidate manages to find her place among the numerous studies on the topic, combining interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of ethnology, sociology, pedagogy and psychology. The dissertation skillfully examines individual cases in order to deduce processes at the national level and to propose adequate and working solutions. The application of a comparative approach in the study of individual cases, derived on the basis of in-depth field studies, gives high value to the analysis.

The relevance of the topic is undeniable. For anyone who has had the opportunity to observe the processes in Bulgarian education and their current state, the deficits it has in terms of working with children of different ethnic, social, confessional and cultural backgrounds, working with children with special needs, children at risk, etc. are evident. The environment in places reproduces practices considered to be traditional, which contribute to the early dropout of students from the educational system with an emphasis on the dropout of girls of Roma origin after reaching sexual maturity, early marriages, early childbirth. Part of the picture is the reproduction of closed and conservative family-genital circles, in which the national language is inferior to the mother tongues and its poor command proves to be a serious obstacle to the assimilation of the material and contributes to the process of early dropout from the educational environment. In this situation, widespread in the Bulgarian ethnic environment, the emphasis on preschool education is particularly significant. There is no doubt that deficits in mastering the national language and in the accumulation of social competencies are most easily compensated for in earlier years. Therefore, the focus of the dissertation was logically chosen to fall on the period 3-7 years in child development, as a basic period for the development of social competencies. The reader finds additional reasoning for this choice in the psychological literature used in view of cognitive capabilities in early childhood.

The dissertation follows the classic structure of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of references and appendices with a total volume of 276 pages. The separation of the main conclusions into separate paragraphs makes a good impression. This author's decision emphasizes the contributions of the dissertation research and makes it easier for readers. The appendices are well selected, complement the text by clarifying the methodological issues related to the structure of the interviews and to the conducted surveys. The figures, tables and diagrams are sufficiently illustrative and clear. So the appendices and the text itself create a semantic unity. The abstract strictly adheres to the text and is sufficiently informative about the achievements and analyses made in the dissertation. The text has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism system, with no incorrect matches or unfair citations being found, as evidenced by the reports from the anti-plagiarism system, as well as the report from the scientific supervisor.

The PhD student unfolds her research within clearly defined chronological boundaries. The choice of the initial time point of the research is justified by the overall changes that have occurred in Bulgarian society after the change of the communist regime in 1989. and the publication in 1991 of the first after the changes to the Public Education Act. The upper limit is related to the promulgation and approval of the Law on School and Pre-school Education (in force from 1. 08. 2016) and the promulgation of Ordinance No. 5 on preschool education. The chosen chronological period marks the years of the most active changes in the educational sphere, which should be reformed based on the principles of democracy, equality and tolerance, taking into account the specifics of the various ethnic, religious, social and cultural groups with a view to their socialization in the educational process and the prevention of early dropout from the education system. Within this framework, the doctoral candidate makes an internal periodization, marked by various regulatory acts and political changes that reflect on education in general and on preschool education in particular.

The introductory part contains the highlights required for a dissertation research. The dissertation clearly outlines the main objective, namely to develop a theoretical-empirical model for education in an inter-ethnic environment in the system of organized preschool education. The tasks of the dissertation work are also dedicated to this goal - to typologize and hierarchize ethnopsychological practices and models in relation to educational markers in an interethnic environment; to conduct a SWOT analysis of the state educational standard in civic, health, environmental and intercultural education; to conduct an analysis of value orientations of ethnic groups of Roma and Bulgarian Turks in specific areas of the country; to conduct a diagnosis of the intercultural competence of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists in kindergarten conditions, etc. The working hypothesis of the doctoral candidate is that the typology of educational markers in the conditions of the kindergarten will have a stimulating effect on the value-oriented interaction between the individual addressees in a preschool educational institution and will have a preventive role in reducing the number of dropouts from the educational system. The research methods and approaches are indicated, and the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology, which implies completeness of the empirical material and the subsequent analysis, makes a good impression. This impression is complemented by the fact that the study was conducted on the territory of seven regional cities, each with specific characteristics in terms of ethno-confessional characteristics and demographic structure. This gives reason to assume that the generalizations and conclusions made in the course of the research go beyond the local character and can claim to be relevant at the national level.

In the first chapter, Dafina Pandin carries out a situational analysis of preschool education in Bulgaria in the period 1991-2016. Changes in educational policies and strategies are monitored. Special attention is paid to the realization of conceptual concepts, programs, and program strategies for kindergartens in this period. This is of utmost importance, because in these turbulent years there is often a divergence between regulation and practice, and ideological concepts often set the pattern by which regulation later changes, in a continuous interdependence. This chapter is of particular importance to clarify the situation regarding the application of a reflexive approach in the conditions of preschool education in this period. Conceptual projects from the early 1990s are considered in sequence. It is essential to the work that the dissertation shows how the change in educational strategies goes hand in hand with a change in the concept of the child and his role and place in the world, with emphasis on principles such as democracy and humanity. The difficulties in this path and the long time of changing the child's role from being primarily an object of influence in the educational process in the conditions of pre-school organized education to an active participant in it are shown. It is of particular importance to follow the ideological concepts, some of which show how long there is to recognize every child regardless of his ethnic origin as an equal participant in the educational process and the need to adapt techniques and content to this fact. Tracking innovative author programs emphasizes the role of art for socialization in preschool. The new accents are highlighted - intercultural, ecological, etc. I also find the analysis of teaching aids for parents in a multicultural educational environment particularly valuable. In this way, attention is paid to the advantages and deficits in the aids and ideas for the development of preschool education. The chapter ends with a discussion part, in which the doctoral candidate brings out the trends in the development of preschool education that are important according to her observations and analysis.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of value-oriented reflective practices of interaction in a multi-ethnic educational environment. The dissertation student considers the importance of early socialization for the successful realization of the personality. Shows a good command and handling of literature, skilfully combining the analysis of psychological, pedagogical and ethnographic terrorist trends. Emphasis in the second chapter is placed on the role and significance in this process in the conditions of preschool education of the reflective approach. The various levels of reflection are reported, and in view of the goals set in the dissertation research, the focus falls on the personal aspects of reflection and the process of forming values and value orientations. Of particular importance for clarifying the role of the reflexive approach in the conditions of preschool organized education is the analysis proposed by the dissertation. She emphasizes the fact that although the child is able to form an ethnic identity at the age of about 10-11 years, ethnic understanding and recognition is formed at the age of 3-7 years (p. 78). This shows the importance of preschool education in the formation of values ​​and value attitudes. A special part of this chapter pays attention to ethno-psychological markers and their role in the formation of value-oriented behavior of the child in the conditions of preschool education. The importance of a reflexive understanding of the meaning of different cultures is emphasized, especially in view of the colorful ethnic picture in our country (p. 81). In this chapter, the PhD student also conducts a SWOT analysis of textbooks and teaching aids intended for preschool education in Bulgaria during the period under study. This is a method of particular practical value, which makes it possible to clearly distinguish the positive and negative sides. Thus, this part can directly support the process of increasing the quality and improvement of textbooks and teaching aids. In my opinion, this is a particularly contributing part of the dissertation, as research must first and foremost have practical value and applicability to benefit society, especially in areas such as early childhood socialization, education, etc. The same can be said about the SWOT analysis of regulatory documents with a view to their improvement. The described personal reflection of the author is of particular importance to the whole text (starts on p. 137). The personal observations of the doctoral candidate from her professional career as a school and child psychologist, combined with the research conducted, are a serious argument for the conclusions drawn.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the results of the field ethnological research carried out by the PhD candidate. In it, the doctoral student demonstrates skills in working with qualitative and quantitative methods, for objective analysis and drawing reasoned conclusions. The PhD candidate has mastered the skills to observe objectively and critically, to conduct structured and semi-structured interviews and to combine their results with the surveys conducted. A good impression is made by the personal reflection of the PhD student, who shares the difficulties of working in an institution with a view to extracting quality information beyond the institutional framework. She points out the importance of working with parents and the impact she herself felt on herself after such encounters. Interesting are the observations that point to deficits at the national expert level in preparing strategies and programs, and not only the skills and competencies of teachers.

The results of the conducted surveys are extremely interesting. It is important to emphasize that they were conducted among 73 pedagogical specialists working in 21 kindergartens across the country. The interviewed non-pedagogical specialists were 30 from 15 kindergartens. The profile of the respondents is well outlined, with markers such as gender, educational level, professional position, by region of origin with a small-big city marker being taken into account. The results obtained are indicative, in which almost 80% of the respondents indicated the importance of value-oriented models for education in a multicultural educational environment. 86% consider the importance of intercultural education in the kindergarten as a factor for positive changes in Bulgarian education. A very indicative result for the need for more work in the direction of intercultural education is the fact that 33% of the respondents indicate the presence of prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas among teachers and parents, and 66% do not indicate their presence. However, as the doctoral student rightly points out, the question remains open (p. 170), because for the conclusions to be definitive, additional research in this direction is needed. The results of the surveys related to the knowledge of strategic documents, innovative programs and strategies are important. In view of the completeness of the analysis, it may be good to trace whether there is regionalization in the responses to the questions. Thus, the influence of the center-periphery relationship in the knowledge and application of strategic documents can be considered.

All these observations are supplemented by the results of in-depth interviews. Questionnaires are part of the appendices to the thesis. Here I also have a question for the doctoral student related to the methodology of the research. When preparing the questionnaires, were the areas in which the research would be carried out already clear, or is the questionnaire universal in nature? If it is the second, was there an adjustment of the questionnaire in the specific region and the specific situation? And if so, did that lead to different results in the responses?

The main findings are commented and summarized in the conclusion. It considers the importance of the theoretical-empirical model of educational interaction with the application of a reflexive approach in the conditions of preschool education, developed by the doctoral student and its significance for education in a multi-ethnic environment.

The doctoral student reports five publications, evidence of her thorough and consistent work during the course of her dissertation research

In conclusion the procedure corresponds to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application, as well as the internal Rules for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and for holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Therefore, expressing my categorical positive opinion, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Dafina Latchezarova Pandin for the dissertation research on the topic **Value-oriented models of interaction in an interethnic educational environment (1991-2016)** and I will vote positively for it.

Sofia Signiture:

20.04.2023 Assoc. Prof. V. Kotseva