

## **STATEMENT**

on the dissertation of Desislava Ivanova Stoeva

on

### **Development of 5-6-year-old children's social competence in Montessori and mass kindergartens in Bulgaria**

#### **1. Compliance of the procedure with the current legal regulations**

Doctoral student Desislava Stoeva has fulfilled her obligations under the individual study plan. The Phd thesis has also successfully passed the mandatory check for plagiarism absence in the Anti-Plagiarism system of Sofia University.

According to Art. 74, para. 1 of the Law on Higher Education, Art. 24, para. 6 of the Regulations for Implementing the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 63, para. 3 and para 6. of administrative procedures have been followed by the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The currency statement is prepared based on the Order of the Rector No. RD-38-286/ 04.06.2024 on the procedure for the defence of a dissertation on the topic "Development of social competence in 5-6-year-old children in Montessori and mass kindergartens in Bulgaria", developed by Desislava Ivanova Stoeva, a full-time PhD student in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool pedagogy) with supervisor Prof. Danail Kirilov Danov for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

#### **2. General biographical presentation of the candidate (education, qualifications, professional experience, etc.)**

Desislava Ivanova Stoeva completed secondary education at "Knyaz Alexander I" humanitarian high school with foreign language studies in Plovdiv. She continued her education at the University of National and World Economy, Sofia, majoring in "Finance", where he obtained a BA in Economics. In 2002, she graduated with a master's degree in philosophy, specializing in "Virtual culture" at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski". She holds an International Diploma "Early Child Development and Montessori Pedagogy" from Montessori Center International, London, United Kingdom and an International Diploma for Montessori Trainer Montessori Center International, London, United Kingdom. Founder and mentor at Montessori kindergarten "Casa dei Bambini". Since 2022, Desislava Stoeva has been a full-time PhD student at the "Preschool and Media Pedagogy" of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with PhD supervisor Prof. Danail Danov.

The academic activity of Desislava Stoeva began in 2012 as a part-time assistant at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski in the bachelor's program "Pedagogy of mass and artistic communication", postgraduate qualification "Montessori pedagogy in the modern society" and master's program "Montessori pedagogy in the digital society".

Desislava Stoeva's research interests as a PhD student explore early childhood education in Montessori pedagogy. Her work is a compelling journey into education and child development.

### **3. Actuality of the issues of the dissertation work**

Psychological and pedagogical studies have proven the critical role of early childhood development in forming those personal structures and qualities that determine the construction and future affirmation of the personality. In the dissertation, emphasis is placed on researching the social competence of 5-6-year-old children, as it is among the essential competencies playing a significant role in the future development and realization of the individual. In this sense, the approved model for studying social competence in 5-6-year-old children is essential and has exceptional value for early childhood development, theoretically and practically.

### **4. Structure and content of the dissertation work**

The presented dissertation is structured, according to the requirements for this type of scientific research, in an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, recommendations, contributions, bibliography, and appendices. The text of the dissertation research is in a volume of 243 pages, in which 76 tables, figures, graphs, diagrams, and six appendices are presented. The bibliography contains 178 titles, of which 64 are in English and Spanish.

### **5. Scientific-theoretical and practical-applied contributions**

I accept the scientific contributions derived and systematized by PhD student Desislava Stoeva. We can systematize the achieved results and the main contributions from the theoretical-empirical research as follows:

#### **5.1. Contributions of a scientific and theoretical nature.**

1. The dissertation's research subject has been systematized, and the main concepts have been justified in a systematized terminological framework.
2. A theoretical severe study and analysis of international, European, and national documents were carried out, based on which early childhood education and care specificity were deduced.
3. A thorough and comprehensive analysis of Montessori pedagogy was conducted, providing clear opportunities and perspectives for its application in the practice of kindergartens in Bulgaria.
4. The theoretical parameters of social competence in the context of Montessori pedagogy and preschool education are outlined.

5. Based on an in-depth study and analysis of international empirical studies related to the development of social competence in Montessori and preschool children's institutions, a framework of a model for the study of social competence in 5-6-year-old children was constructed.

5.2. Contributions of a practical and applied nature.

1. One of the first empirical studies was conducted on social competence among 5-6-year-old children in a Montessori environment and public kindergartens in Bulgaria.

2. To foster the development of social competence in preschool children, a model framework with practical implications for creating a supportive educational environment has been developed. This Model framework enriches a traditional educational environment with Montessori practices.

3. Questionnaires were adapted and approved for the teachers and parents of the studied children, and a test for the children - challenging situations task (CST 3-6), Option A (Denham et al., 1994), which could be successfully used to study the social competence of preschool children in both Montessori and kindergartens in Bulgaria.

4. Recommendations for legal changes and for deepening empirical research in our country have been made to improve education quality and support social competence development in children from birth until they enter primary school.

## **6. Abstract**

The abstract, clearly synthesized, presents the structure and content of the dissertation.

## **7. Publications on the topic of the dissertation (content and scientometric requirements)**

The doctoral student presents five publications, with which she covers the requirements for implementing the scientometric indicators by the minimum national requirements in connection with the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in scientific direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program "Preschool pedagogy. The publications, all of high scientific value, thematically and content-wise, are related to the issues of the dissertation research.

## **9. Notes, recommendations and questions**

I am impressed by the in-depth and analytical presentation of Montessori's pedagogy, which is the result of Mrs. Desislava Stoeva's long-term experience as a team leader of a Montessori kindergarten. Her work has the potential to significantly impact the Montessori system, as she has successfully trained over 300 specialists who can apply this pedagogy in their work.

I want to ask the following clarifying question: On p. 12 of the dissertation, it is written, "Education experts note that most 21st-century learners are still taught by teachers using 20th-century pedagogical practices in 19th-century school organizations" (Vitanova, 2023,728). What

is the innovativeness of Montessori pedagogy in the 21st century? We know it was created at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is recommended to further explore the social competence of early childhood children, potentially by broadening the study to include a larger sample. This area of research is crucial for understanding and enhancing the development of young learners.

#### Conclusion

The dissertation is written in academic language, and the text is stylistically correct and meets the requirements for a dissertation.

The dissertation research contains theoretically applied results that represent a significant and original contribution to pedagogical science. It meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law, and the relevant Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."

The dissertation shows that doctoral student Desislava Ivanova Stoeva possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills. Her work demonstrates qualities and skills for independent scientific research, and I am confident in her potential to make significant contributions to the field of pedagogy.

The presented results give me a reason to offer the respected scientific jury my positive vote for awarding Desislava Ivanova Stoeva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in higher education: 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool pedagogy).

1.07.2024

Prepared the opinion:.....  
/Prof. Dr. Reni Hristova-Kotseva/