

**OPINION ON A DISSERTATION**  
for the award of the educational and scientific degree „PhD“

Scientific field: 1. Pedagogical Sciences

Professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy

Scientific specialty: Preschool Pedagogy - Intercultural Education, with instruction in English

University: Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“

Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts

Department: Preschool and Media Pedagogy

**Title of Thesis: „LEARNING SPACE AS A FACTOR OF CHILDREN’S INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS“**

PhD student: Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli

Scientific supervisor: **Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD**

Prepared the opinion: **Prof. Reni Hristova-Kotseva, PhD**

**1. Compliance of the procedure with the current regulatory framework**

PhD student Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli has fulfilled her obligations under the individual curriculum. The text has also successfully passed the mandatory plagiarism check in the Strike Plagiarism system of Sofia University.

According to Art. 74, para. 1 of the Higher Education Act, Art. 24, para. 6 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 63, para. 3 and para. 6 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, all administrative procedures have been complied with.

The opinion is prepared on the basis of the Rector's Order № RD-38-617/29.10.2024. on the procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic „Learning space as a factor in the interaction and communication between children in the multicultural classroom“, developed by Polixeni Vasilios Buyukli, a full-time doctoral student in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy - Intercultural Education) with instruction in English, with a scientific supervisor Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD for the award of the educational and scientific degree „PhD“.

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

Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli graduated with a bachelor's degree in linguistics, Greek language and literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 2007. In 2011, she graduated as a master's degree in intercultural education at the same university, and two years later, she completed two more master's programs: in special pedagogy at Sofia University „St. Kliment

Ohridski“ and lifelong learning and adult education at the University of Macedonia. From 2021 to 2024, she is a full-time PhD student in the doctoral program in Preschool Pedagogy - Intercultural Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“.

The basic competencies acquired in the master's programs direct the scientific interests of doctoral student Polyxeni Bougioukli towards the study of multicultural education and the search for theoretical and practical solutions related to the interaction and communication between children in the multicultural classroom.

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

The globalization of the modern world meets people of different nationalities, with specific culture and values, attitudes, behavioral, linguistic and communicative skills, who live, learn and work together. The successful socialization of a child in a multicultural society depends on the formed skills for understanding and accepting diversity, for respecting the rights of others, as well as the possibility of freedom of personal choice. These skills develop in the years of early and school childhood, therefore, models for multicultural education are developed to assist teachers in building educational and social competencies in children and students. In this sense, the topic of the dissertation work and the conducted research on how the educational space can support and encourage interaction and communication between children in a multicultural classroom model is of current importance and has particular value both in theoretical and practical terms.

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

The presented dissertation is structured, according to the requirements for this type of scientific research, in an introduction, a theoretical part, developed in three chapters, a research part, including the methodology of the research and analysis of the data and results, and a sixth chapter, which presents the conclusions and contributions of the author in the field of scientific research. The text of the dissertation research is 242 pages long, of which 24 pages are bibliography and 22 pages are appendices. The research is illustrated with 57 tables and 51 graphs. The bibliography includes 450 titles in English.

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

I accept the scientific contributions derived and systematized by doctoral student Polyxeni Bougioukli. I systematize the achieved results and the main contributions from the theoretical-empirical research carried out in the following way:

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

1. A systematized terminological justification of „learning space“ has been made, based on relational and sociomaterial approaches, in which learning spaces

are not considered only as physical buildings in which learning takes place, but rather as a place for cooperation and interaction between participants in the educational process, organized in such a way as to provide opportunities for cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of each child.

2. A serious theoretical study and analysis of the physical design and social relationships of the preschool education environment, which has an impact on the child's security, behavior, creativity and educational progress, has been carried out.

3. An in-depth analysis of the basic principles on which modern education operates, the methods and organization of the educational environment, which facilitate the learning process by stimulating the activity, independence, initiative of the student, ensuring learning through experience and satisfaction from joint team learning activities, has been carried out.

4. The theoretical parameters of intercultural education in preschool age and the role of the multicultural environment in ensuring educational equality and forming skills for multicultural acceptance, communication and interaction from the earliest childhood have been outlined.

5. Based on an in-depth study and analysis of international theoretical research, a concept of interaction and communication in the different stages of education - preschool, school, university - is presented, emphasizing their interconnectedness in building educational and social competencies.

## **5.2. Practical and applied contributions.**

1. An observation of 5–6-year-olds in a multicultural group was conducted, in which there are children from Albania, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Ukraine. The criteria used in the observation of the multicultural room – interior design; organization of space for teachers and space for children; interaction and communication between children, the number of surveyed 109 children from three kindergartens in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, and the applied statistical methods, give integrity to the research process and reliability of the results found.

2. The survey conducted with teachers and the processing of the data from it prove their positive attitude towards the organization and functional capabilities of the educational space and the inclusion of students in its restructuring, which, according to the respondents, can lead to improvements in the interactions and communication of children in the classroom.

3. The achieved results are valuable and enrich pedagogical practice with practical ideas and solutions on how to optimize learning spaces so as to support effective communication and interaction in multicultural classrooms.

4. The conclusions convincingly prove the positive effect of the program, since the correlation between the two variables, the learning space and the development of the two main parameters – interaction and communication between children from different countries in preschool education, showed a statistically significant difference, before and after the intervention in the classroom with intercultural changes.

## **6. Abstract**

The abstract clearly and synthesizedly presents the structure and content of the dissertation work. It includes a list of the author's publications.

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

The doctoral candidate presents four publications, with which she covers the requirements for fulfilling the scientometric indicators in accordance with the minimum national requirements in connection with the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree „PhD“ in scientific field 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program Preschool Pedagogy - Intercultural Education. The publications have scientific value, thematically and substantively are related to the issues of the dissertation research.

### **Conclusion**

The dissertation is written in academic language, the text is well-structured in terms of style and meets the requirements for a dissertation.

The dissertation research contains theoretical and applied results that represent an original contribution to pedagogical science and meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the relevant Regulations of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“.

The dissertation work shows that PhD student Polyxeni Bougioukli possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

The achieved results give me reason to propose to the esteemed scientific jury my positive vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree „PhD“ to Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy - Intercultural Education).

5.12.2024

Prepare opinion:.....

/Prof. Reni Hristova-Kotseva, PhD /