



## REVIEW

by **Prof. DSc Yuliya Georgieva Doncheva, PhD**

‘Angel Kanchev’ University of Ruse

regarding the materials of doctoral candidate *Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli*, for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, by professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Doctoral Programme in Preschool Pedagogy- Intercultural Education), with supervisor Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD, at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Arts with the topic of the dissertation: "*Learning Space as a Factor of Children's Interaction and Communication in Multicultural Classrooms*".

**Data, finding and assessment of the competition procedure, the doctoral studies, the dissertation, the abstract and the publications for the competition.**

**1. Compliance of the procedure with the current regulations. Data on the competition and doctoral studies** - On the basis of Art. 4 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated SG No. 38 of 21.05.2010, amended by SG No. 81 of 15.10.2010, amended by SG No. 101 of 28 12. 20210; amendment No. 68 of 02.08. 2013, in force from 02.08. 2013; amendment and supplement, No. 30 of 04.03.2018, in force from 05.05. 2018 d.), decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Arts dated 22.10. 2024, Protocol No. 14 and on the basis of Order No. RD-38-617 of 29.10.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University, full-time doctoral student Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli was dismissed with the right of defense with a positive decision of the primary readiness unit and is her procedure opened.

A move has been made to defend the dissertation. All preliminary legal and regulatory rules provided for in this procedure have been complied with.

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

In summary form, it is evident from the presented resume that the educational qualification, academic growth and upgrading of the doctoral student is very active and dynamic. From 2005 to until today, she systematically and purposefully increased her competences. Here I will present only a part of them, namely *Education and qualification*:

2021-2024, A full - time PhD student in the professional field of Pedagogy, doctoral programme in: Pre-school Pedagogy –Intercultural education, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski;

2013, Master in Special Education, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski;

2013, Master in Lifelong Learning and Adult Education, University of Macedonia;

2011, Master in Intercultural Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki;

2007, Degree in Linguistics, Greek Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

**Expirience:**

2017-2024 Greek Language teacher in Secondary Education, Special Education, Ministry of Education Greece

2017-2018 8<sup>th</sup> Junior High School, Nea Smyrni, Athens

2018-2019 2<sup>nd</sup> Junior High School, Diavata, Thessaloniki

2019-2020 1<sup>st</sup> Junior High School, Menemeni, Thessaloniki

2020-2021 2<sup>nd</sup> Junior High School, Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, 1<sup>st</sup> Junior High School, Panorama, Thessaloniki

2021-2022 1<sup>st</sup> Junior High School, Menemeni, Thessaloniki

2022-2023 Junior High School, Asvestohori, Thessaloniki, Junior High School Filyro, Thessaloniki, Junior High School, Xortiatiss, Thessaloniki, 11<sup>th</sup> Junior High School, Triandria, Thessaloniki

2023-2024 8<sup>th</sup> Junior High School, Thessaloniki, 8<sup>th</sup> High School, Thessaloniki.

### **Key Responsibilities:**

- Provided individualized educational support to students with special learning needs within Inclusion Units and through Parallel Support.
- Designed and implemented Individualized Education Programs (IEP) aimed at improving students' academic skills.
- Collaborated with teachers from various disciplines, parents, and mental health professionals to create a holistic support program for students.
- Assessed students' progress and adjusted educational strategies based on their evolving needs.
- Organized and conducted lessons in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, tailoring educational content to the specific needs of the students.

### **Key Achievements:**

- Improved academic performance and self-confidence of students with special needs through the application of individualized teaching approaches.
- Developed educational materials tailored to the needs of students with learning difficulties.
- Enhanced collaboration with teaching staff to integrate special education into the general school curriculum.

The continuous desire, aspiration and realization towards training, self-improvement and provoking new academic achievements of the doctoral student

is impressive, such as the last one so far, namely the educational and scientific degree doctor (PhD).

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

The relevance of the topic "*The Learning Environment as a Factor for Interaction and Communication Among Children in the Multicultural Classroom*" is significant, due to several key social and educational trends in contemporary society.

a) **Increasing Multiculturalism in Schools:** With globalization and migration flows, more and more children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are being educated in the same classroom. This leads to the need to adapt the learning environment and teaching approaches to promote understanding and tolerance among students.

b) **The Role of the Learning Environment:** Research shows that the physical and social environment in the classroom can play a crucial role in fostering positive interactions among students. A well-organized classroom that creates conditions for mutual respect and participation plays an important role in reducing communication barriers and in developing social and emotional skills in children.

c) **The Importance of Communication and Interaction:** In a multicultural environment, students often face stereotypes and prejudices. At the same time, successful communication among them can be either a barrier or a bridge to effective learning. By encouraging interaction, the learning space can become a place for the exchange of ideas, cultures, and personal experiences, which supports not only academic achievements but also the socialization and integration of students.

d) **Support for Social-Emotional Development:** The learning environment has the potential to stimulate the emotional and social development



of children, especially in a multicultural setting. Building trust and relationships between students in the classroom can reduce social isolation and improve the integration of all children, regardless of their background.

e) **Development of Inclusive Educational Approaches:** Modern educational approaches increasingly emphasize inclusivity and diversity. Through the appropriate design of the learning environment, teachers can create conditions for the inclusion of all students in the educational process, which is a fundamental requirement in contemporary education.

In summary, the topic is relevant because it reflects the importance of the learning environment not only as a physical space but also as a social factor that shapes the way children interact, communicate, and learn from each other in the multicultural classroom.

The doctoral student's scientific supervisor, Prof. PhD. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, a scientist with extensive experience and competence in her field, finds the most current, the most modern, and in this case, by mentoring and finalizing this scientific work, she provides a model for all novice scientists! In addition, every study, theoretical, practical or practical-applied, related to "Learning space as a factor in the interaction and communication between children in the multicultural classroom" shows the importance of the learning space in creating conditions for effective interaction and communication between students from different cultures, ethnicities, religions, etc. This is important because it serves as the basis for their socialization, development of skills and ensuring equal access to education. Congratulations!

#### **4. Structure and content of the dissertation work. Dissertation data -**

The content of the dissertation includes: Theoretical part (Chapter One: Preschool education and learning space; Chapter Two: Modern approaches to the learning

space and Chapter Three: Learning space and educational process). Research part (Chapter Four: Research methodology and Chapter Five: Data analysis - results). Additionally, Chapter Six presents the conclusions and contributions of the author in the field of the results conducted and presented as facts from the specific scientific research. A list of the literature and appendices used is presented, as well as a catalog of tables and a catalog of graphs. The note has a total volume of 242 pages, of which 196 pages are the active text, the bibliography is presented on 24 pages, it includes 450 titles in English and the appendices are exposed on 22 pages. The scientific work presents 57 tables and 51 graphs. At the end, a list of the author's publications is included.

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

Content and evaluation of scientific contributions - Doctoral student Polixeni Vasilios Buyukli draws 6 (six main) as well as conclusions and inferences that correspond and complement the dissertation research. I accept her formulation, supplementing them in the following way:

- **Improving social integration:** A well-organized and adapted learning space can create conditions for better interaction between children/students from different cultures. Through the appropriate arrangement of furniture, group work and joint activities, teachers can encourage interaction and exchange of ideas, creativity, etc. between them.

- **Stimulating cultural diversity:** Multicultural classrooms offer opportunities to share part of one's own, personal, culture, traditions and language, which can enrich the learning environment and help build respect for differences. This is a positive aspect of a multicultural environment, which can be emphasized through a variety of resources depicting different cultures and traditions.

- **Development of communication skills:** When students are in a multicultural classroom, they often learn how to communicate with each other and

with their peers who speak different languages and come from different cultures. This develops not only their language skills, but also their skills of cooperation, tolerance and understanding.

- **Improving learning motivation:** A learning space that is designed to be inclusive and reflect the diversity of students can increase their motivation to learn. When they feel recognized and valued in the classroom, they are more engaged and have greater self-confidence.

- **Support for the development of social and emotional skills:** A multicultural learning environment can be supportive of the development of social and emotional skills as they learn to respect differences, resolve conflicts and collaborate in a diverse environment.

- **Changing perceptions and reducing prejudice:** A multicultural classroom atmosphere can play an important role in changing students' perceptions of differences, reducing stereotypes and prejudices. This is important for the formation of a more open, responsible and tolerant society.

- **Improved emotional safety:** When they are in a supportive and inclusive learning environment, they feel more secure and comfortable. This can reduce the stress associated with cultural differences and create a space where everyone feels valued and understood.

- And more, and other.

Summarizing the mandatory part of the opinion on the contributions of the scientific work, I will note that developments of this kind must find a place in the scientific literature so that pedagogical, non-pedagogical specialists, experts, those interested in the issue, and why not parents, can find their answers.

**6. Data on the auto-reference.** The abstract, with a total volume of 54 pages, of which one page "Scientific contributions" and one page for the publications on the topic (4 in number) meet all the standard requirements for a

synthesized and adequate, analytical-systematic development of the primary document, the scientific text, as well as the objective reflection of the content of the dissertation research. The scientific and technical requirements for the design and presentation of it in the paper version and in the digital form as an online publication have been met. The correctness is visible, the scientific value of the scientific work has been analyzed, as well as the quantitative data according to the normative requirements in the national and intra-institutional laws and regulations.

I state with satisfaction that no violations have been committed regarding the compliance of the dissertation and the originality of the work with the requirements of LDASRB, the Regulations for it, the Regulations for the acquisition of scientific degrees at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the institution's internal rules.

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

### **7.1. Publication data.**

The dissertation student presents 4 (four) publications on the topic of scientific research, published in the period 2022 - 2023. All are independent. Their content is adequate and corresponds to the dissertation, both as a stage and as a continuum.

### **7.2. Assessment of conformity of the scientific production according to the requirements of LDAS:**

The doctoral student participates with the following scientific production, related to the Scientometric criteria for the minimum national requirements for the scientific and teaching activity of candidates for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions, Department 1. Pedagogical Sciences, as follows:



- *Dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", Group A, Indicator 1 → 50 points.*

- *Group G 7. Articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes: 4 number of independent x 10 points = 40 points;*

*Publications - a total of 6 issues, independent, published in the period from 2022 to 2023. Total number of points according to the Publications indicator = 40 points.*

**Total number of points for indicators from groups A and G = 90 points.**

From here, it can be categorically summarized that the sum of the indicators of the respective groups **fully meets**, exceeding many times, the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of LDASRB and art. 1a, paragraph 1 of the RILDASRB and, accordingly, according to Art. 24, para. 1 of the Regulations for the implementation of LDASRB (for the educational and scientific degree "doctor") in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, by professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Doctoral Programme in Preschool Pedagogy- Intercultural Education).

### **8. Personal impressions.**

I do not know Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli personally, but judging by the scientific production - dissertation, abstract and publications submitted for participation in the competition, I can state that together, under the extremely professional and competent guidance of my scientific supervisor Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD, is a finalized scientific work, the subject of which is particularly significant, current and, I would say, a step ahead of its time, containing no significant weaknesses that would detract from its merits. Congratulations!

## 9. Notes, recommendations and questions.

As a recommendation, I can point out the following: it is good for the doctoral student to expand her participation in international educational projects. That is, there should be an effort to/to popularize the results of the research activity in publications, conferences, scientific meetings, etc., so that the results that are really significant are heard, visible and recognizable.

### Questions:

- Can your model be applied on a wider scale, like national, for example? Specify, in your opinion, the difficulties, the factors that would prevent the mass implementation of your concept?
- How do you generally see the application of the development, in your future specific work (from here on, how will you develop him/her)?

**10. Conclusion** - Doctoral student Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli has fulfilled her obligations arising from the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB, the Regulations of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", as well as the obligations under the corresponding individual study plan of the doctoral student, that is, it meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of LDASRB and art. 1a, paragraph 1 of RILDASRB. The form and content of the dissertation meet the requirements of Art. 27 of RILDASRB. All administrative procedures have been followed.



**Bearing in mind the above**, I confidently give my *positive assessment* of the conducted research, presented in the dissertation work, the abstract, the achieved results and contributions.

I declare *my positive vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Polyxeni Vasileios Bougioukli* in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, by professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Doctoral Programme in Preschool Pedagogy- Intercultural Education),

Prepared the review, as a member of the scientific jury:

(Prof. Yuliya Doncheva, PhD)

25.11.2024