

## **Opinion**

of dissertation for the acquisition of educational and scientific degree "doctor of sciences"

Author of the review: Prof. Dr. Marinela Velikova Mihova, St. Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Scientific area: Pedagogical sciences

Professional area: 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool education)

University: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "

Faculty: Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts

Department: Preschool education

Dissertation Title: Individualization and Differentiation of Pedagogical Interaction in Kindergarten

Name: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosalina Plamenova Engels-Critidis

### **1. Biographical data**

The professional biography of Assoc. Prof. Rosalina Engels-Critidis is extremely rich and valuable - evidence of lifelong learning. From 1994 to 2004 she graduated with honors as a Master in pre-school pedagogy and as a bachelor's degree in Bulgarian philology and history.

As a full-time PhD student in 2000-2004, after successfully defending her dissertation, she was awarded her doctorate degree.

For a professional development she participates in various educational courses and specializations at foreign universities in Germany, Slovakia, Sweden, Hungary, Greece, Belgium and United Kingdom.

On the basis of acquired qualifications Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosalina Engels-Critidis has professional realization as preschool teacher, history teacher and English teacher. She works in the Faculty of preschool and primary pedagogy (now Faculty of Education and Art) from 2000 year – first as a part-time assistant, and from 2006 as a full-time senior assistant.

In 2014 she acquired the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional area 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool pedagogy - mastering the language and developing speech)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosalina Engels-Critidis has accumulated educational and research experience over the years and passes it to the students of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's degrees. Evidence of her useful work with PhD students is the four successfully defended dissertations of her PhD students.

Acknowledgment for the expertise of Assoc. Prof. Rosalina Engels-Critidis is her participation in PhD scientific juries, her involvement as a reviewer for European projects, participation in national and international scientific forums and projects.

The professional biography of Assoc. Prof. Rosalina Engels-Critidis is a biography of a scientist who is constantly improving and upgrading herself, who is seeking, researching, proving and developing a scientific field that is within his interest.

### **2. Dissertation and abstract information**

Actuality of theme

The chosen theme "Individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction in kindergarten" is in the context of contemporary educational priorities related to the requirements and high expectations for early childhood education and the problems of inclusive education. The connection of Individualization and differentiation with the increasing quality of education and stimulating children's curiosity make the topic of research scientifically meaningful with enough value arguments for theoretical details in combination with practically applicable solutions. Actuality and public-scientific need of the dissertation are its undeniable worth. This type of research supports the introduction of innovative practices in the system of pre-school education, which aim to develop the full potential of the child.

#### *Compositional unity of the thesis*

The dissertation is structured according to the scientific, which is required for this type of research. It contains the main text and annexes (312 p.). The content of the dissertation covers an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, conclusions and recommendations; bibliography (16 pages) in Bulgarian (140 sources) and English (40 sources) and applications (4 pages). The bibliography provided is evidence of knowledge and serious research work.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and is conditioned by the research aim. The separate parts of the research are not mechanically collected but build a compositional unity with common purpose – "to reveal in the scientific-theoretical and applied aspect the significant role of individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction in kindergarten, as well as to develop and substantiate conceptual technological variational-dynamic educational model for individualization and differentiation, focused on expanding the possibilities for educational progress of each kid." (8 p.)

First and second chapter are the theoretical basis of the study. The first chapter focus is on individualization and differentiation in education in a multifaceted perspective, including psychological, historical and regulatory dimensions. The theoretical analysis involved clarifying the individual-personality relationship in the views of different authors; substantiated demonstration of the richness of the child's personal potential - knowledge, skills and attitudes, the result of the interaction of hereditary factors and the social environment. The value and importance of the differences between people are emphasized in term of the modern meaning of incisive education. The pedagogical analysis of the two key concepts of the dissertation research involves a deepening in their historical roots and the understandings formed over the years, which we find in the legacy of the classics of pedagogy and the work of modern scholars. From the standpoint of a well-established scientist, a "constructive critical analysis" was made of three basic normative documents for pre-school education, arguing the need and outlining the specifics of the application of individualization and differentiation in kindergarten.

The second chapter is about the interaction between learning by experience and the personal meaningful experience of the child in the context of individualization and differentiation of the pedagogical interaction. The emphasis of theoretical analysis is on clarifying the nature and specificity of learning by experiencing in pre-school education by focusing on its specificity with regard to the form of teacher-child interaction; provoking emotional experiences and recognizing the importance of the child's emotional well-being; appreciation of the unstructured, spontaneous activities of the children and appreciation of the

teacher's role in pedagogical interaction with characteristics of personal significance for the child. The theoretical analysis in this chapter is based on the views of different authors as well as on the basis of joint publications of Assoc. Prof. Rosalina Engels-Critidis with experienced preschool teachers-innovators who make the connection between theory and practice.

Chapter 3 presents the design of the psycho-pedagogical study of the effect of enhanced individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction in kindergarten. For the realization of the purpose and the nine operational tasks and as a consequence of the analysis of the scientific literature and the experience of pedagogical practice, a realistic hypothesis with 5 concretizations is formulated. They are directly related to the criteria, indicators, methods and organization of the psychological and pedagogical research.

The study is continuous - almost 9 years, and was conducted in three phases which are divided in other five phases. They are described in great detail in terms of methods and participants (129 teachers, 230 principals, alternate directors, principal teachers, 244 masters and bachelor students) and are structured with scientific logic. It begins with a study of the need to apply individualization and differentiation in kindergarten, continues with the development, experimental application and study of the effect of applying an educational model to individualize and differentiate pedagogical interaction in kindergarten and conclude with training forms to promote the importance of individualization and differentiation and the developed educational technologies among preschool teachers, principals and students.

The analysis of the results of the psycho-pedagogical study is in Chapter Four. Six null hypotheses are used to prove the hypotheses, which are tested by appropriate statistical methods - Correlation analysis method, Student's t-test method, Chi-square method. The data from the empirical study are presented correctly. The results are tabulated and graphically displayed. The rich empirical material resulting from the application of various quantitative and qualitative research methods has been thoroughly analyzed, presenting different correlations between the variables relevant to the study, which are also in the direction of proving the hypothesis.

Chapter Five is devoted to the author's "Variational-dynamic educational model for individualization and differentiation of interaction in kindergarten". The individual dimensions of the model are deployed on the basis of a predefined understanding of individualization and differentiation as a system of methods, techniques, tools and forms of group pedagogical interaction, aiming at maximizing the potential of each child based on emotional well-being and active involvement in pedagogical interaction with respect for all other children in the group.

The model has two clearly outlined innovative aspects that focus on the child and his / her perception as an active learner who not only realizes the created educational environment with the structured interactions in it, but also plays the role of the subject that initiates and creates them. The first is that in the process of differentiation, grouping and regrouping is a function of both the teacher and each child, through self-assessment, to choose the degree of difficulty of the tasks as well as their thematic attachment to children's interests, etc. The second is the understanding of the need for a supportive environment and its management, which provides opportunities for smooth and natural transitions between deliberate pedagogical situations and unintentional, child-initiated interaction.

The model summarized in Chapter Five is theoretically expanded and experimentally proven in the other chapters of the thesis. The dissertation conclusion is a meaningful summary of the findings. In it, Assoc. Prof. Rosalina Engels defines clear evidence of the research objectives. Based on the understanding that pedagogical studies are value, if they are oriented towards improving the educational reality in the dissertation, recommendations for improving pedagogical practice, legal framework, university and continuing education are specified.

The dissertation is a complete concept of the author, original in nature, in which new aspects of the problem are discussed. The theoretical generalizations and the proposed solutions are a significant and original contribution to the development of advanced pre-school pedagogy. The abstract in principle presents all the most important parts of the dissertation.

### **3. Scientific contributions**

The scientific work proposed for review is an achievement in the field of pre-school pedagogy and its contributions should be sought and discovered in this field of science.

#### **Contributions in the theoretical aspect:**

1. A serious, theoretical and multidimensional study of individualization and differentiation has been made and their importance for pedagogical interaction in kindergarten has been revealed.

2. In the context of the specific nature of pre-school education and through the prism of individualization and differentiation, educational opportunities and the link between learning by experience, emotional well-being and the degree of active involvement of each child have been revealed.

3. There is a serious study that demonstrates both the key role of the teacher in personally meaningful pedagogical interaction and the need to respect child-initiated activities and self-selected activities.

4. Theory and practice are enriched with the developed author's system of criteria and indicators for studying the influence of individualization and differentiation in pedagogical interaction in kindergarten.

5. A detailed analysis of significant correlations relevant to the successful implementation of individualization and differentiation in pedagogical interaction in kindergarten has been made.

#### **Contributions in the practical aspect:**

1. An innovative "Variation-dynamic educational model for individualization and differentiation of interaction in kindergarten" has been elaborated and tested. It enriches the educational technology to group and regroup children in pedagogical interaction.

2. A rich pedagogical tools for individualization and differentiation of interaction in kindergarten is described and critically analyzed, which expands the possibilities for realizing learning by experiencing and achieving emotional well-being and active involvement in pedagogical interaction while respecting the personality of each child.

3. The dissertation research contains 14 author's tables, and 47 figures. On their own, they can be seen as a contribution because they can serve to find dependencies with another research focus.

4. The researched and analyzed opinions and attitudes of the principals, teachers and students are a kind of corrective to the problem studied and its implementation in practice.

#### **5. Compliance with the minimum national requirements for a PhD**

The quantity and quality of the scientific output submitted covers the Minimum National Requirements for the procedure for awarding the Doctorate of Science in 1.2. Pedagogy (pre-school pedagogy)

#### **6. Conclusion**

The dissertation submitted for discussion and defense has indisputable merits. It is a comprehensive and in-depth study of a current problem in pedagogical science, and in particular of pre-school pedagogy - the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction in kindergarten. On the basis of extensive empirical and experimental research, specific conclusions and recommendations have been formulated that are relevant for contemporary educational practice and policy.

Bearing in mind the distinguished merits of the dissertation on the topic "Individualization and Differentiation of Pedagogical Interaction in Kindergarten", as well as the overall scientific contribution of the author on the topic of the dissertation, I propose the honorable members of the scientific jury to award Dr. Rosalina Plamenova Engels-Critidis Doctor of Science degree (Dr.habil), 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool education).

16.01.2020

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Prof. PhD Marinela Mihova