

## ACADEMIC STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Ivanova Bakaova, IFS, BAS

on

dissertation submitted for external defense on the topic:

*Development of Transferable Competences through Philosophy Education in School*

by Milena Stoyanova Plugarova - Raicheva

Sofia University "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy

Milena Stoyanova Plugarova - Raicheva, PhD candidate, has submitted a dissertation of 200 pages, complying with all the norms and requirements for the submission of such a dissertation. Milena Plougarova – Raicheva has a master degree in Philosophy from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Soon after, she became a philosophy teacher at the Secondary school and currently has 26 years of experience in that domain. The candidate has written a textbook on philosophy for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, which is an electronic resource in English. She has three publications, one of which is in the indexed journal *Philosophy* and the last is under print. All three publications are on the topic of her dissertation. The candidate has covered the minimum national requirements for academic achievements.

The dissertation, entitled *Developing Transferable Competences through Philosophy Education in School*, summarises the candidate's long experience of teaching philosophy in schools and her in-depth knowledge of normative documents related to European educational strategies. The dissertation topic is of utmost importance. It brings to the fore an aspect of philosophy that makes philosophical activity meaningful for the larger population. Thereby, it lays the foundations for a discussion that would be good to continue among the school and university teachers in philosophy. It concerns the issue of how the pursuit of philosophy can develop qualities that help one to navigate effectively and intelligently in situations of a very different nature.

The focus of this dissertation is on aspects of philosophy education that are related to the acquisition of transferable competences. What are transferable competences? We, philosophers will notice from the outset that the phrase "transferable competence" is a tautology. Indeed, as the author herself points out, "An essential characteristic of key competences is their transferability across situations and contexts. /page 37 of the *Dissertation*/. In fact, any competence is transferable, i.e. by definition it works in more than one situation of a certain kind. Leaving this remark aside, the term 'transferable competence' plays an essential role in the context of the European framework of education and fully deserves to be the central topic of a doctoral dissertation. The phrase emphasises the idea of actually applying what is learned outside school, rather than simply learning in order to do well at school. It is based on a broader and more humanitarian notion of pragmatism in learning, derived from European human values.

Namely, it is based on the personal virtues and decision-making abilities of the individual that unify his rational and emotional intelligence. The presumption behind that is that basic competences are universally applicable. Philosophy education in secondary schools may indeed contribute to the development of such competencies in adolescents, yet it must be borne in mind that the link here is not unconditional and self-evident. This is precisely why this dissertation is written.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters and conclusions. The first chapter outlines the main approaches to learning and education from the mid-20th century to the present day and outlines the advantages of the competence approach, which emphasises "the development of key competencies; real-world application of what is learned; engaging students in the learning process; developing social skills; a holistic approach; and stimulating personal initiative." /page 172 of the *Dissertation*/ Chapter 2 discusses the competence approach and reveals the potential of philosophy to satisfy the goals of this approach: "Philosophical method, like the competence approach, is holistic, it values interconnectedness, super-objectivity, understanding, attitude." /page 82 of the *Dissertation*/ The functions of the philosophical method are listed. Here, the reader would like to see more analysis of how these functions enable building key competencies.

Chapter 3 is about the notion of emotional intelligence and the LIFECOMP conceptual framework. As the author explains, "the LifeComp (2020) conceptual framework ... gives us a toolkit for making the idea of competencies operational." /page 89 of the *Dissertation*/ This would mean "to /ensure a common understanding and shared language at European level, following the 2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, to support initiatives to ensure that these life skills are acquired by the majority of Europeans through education..." (2020: 74). The author here raises an important question: how can knowledge be made meaningful to students? The answer lies in the emotions that students attach to potential knowledge, she claims. The issue of the meaning of knowledge and its relation to emotions deserves a separate future study, and I strongly encourage the candidate to write a book on this subject.

At the end of the chapter, Milena Plougarova-Raicheva argues that the LifeComp framework gives us guidance on how to recognize competence development through observed behavior. I would like to learn more about these guidelines, they are very important from a pedagogical point of view and should have been outlined in the text. Also, I would like to learn what the difference is between traits of character and transferable competences.

The last chapter briefly analyses the main theories of emotional intelligence, discusses the applications of the candidate's Philosophy Textbook in English for Grade 10 to teaching key competencies. This is a valuable part of the dissertation. I would also like to raise another question for the defence here. After all, there are other school subjects, besides philosophy, that are expected to develop emotional intelligence. Literature, music, fine arts, and even history, have such a purpose. So, what is the particular contribution of philosophy education to the development of emotional intelligence? And one last question: when teaching is of good quality in any area x, it creates useful habits of learning in general. For example, it is claimed that

students at Sofia Mathematics Gymnasium are noticeably better in all subjects, including literature, than their classmates in other schools. How does philosophy education specifically differ in its contribution to our general skill for learning?

Overall, the presented dissertation is beyond the average level of doctoral dissertations. The text is clearly written and well structured, it presents in sufficient detail the theories of transferable competencies, and it raises important and original questions. At times, the exposition is a bit too schematic and gives us too many details at the expense of more analysis – something that we often encounter in dissertations. I hope that the candidate will continue to address these issues and that in her future research we will find more specific answers to the questions raised here. Based on this statement, I will vote in favour of awarding the degree of Doctor of Science to Milena Stoyanova Plougarova-Raicheva and I recommend to the other members of the jury to do the same.

Sofia, 16.09. 2022

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Bakalova