

REVIEW

of the dissertation on the topic: "Development of transferable competences through the teaching of philosophy at school", for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", Field of higher education: 2.3. Philosophy / Philosophy of Education

Author: Milena Stoyanova Plougarova - Raycheva, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski"

Scientific coordinator: Prof. D.Sc. Sergey Gerdzhikov, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski"

Reviewer: Prof. Yanka Merdzhanova, PhD, Faculty of Education, Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski", Department of Didactics

General presentation and characteristics of the candidate and the work: The researched topic is extremely timely, necessary and promising. The competency approach is a classical area in both cognitive, social and academic practice in higher education, but as an educational paradigm of secondary general education it currently requires competent expertise and shared visions. The author is a philosopher by training and a teacher with many years of professional practice /since 1996/. On the one hand, this reflects the maturity and intrinsic motivation of the research, and on the other hand it marks its definitely applied-practical focus and result-orientedness.

Substantive evaluation: the very architecture of the study and the thesis, the chapter and paragraph headings testify to the sustained interest and continued reflection on the chosen field. Milena Plougarova-Raycheva does not work in a contemplative and self-serving way. The dissertation is both a logical consequence and a bridge to a secure future, and to the development of the candidate precisely as a school philosophy teacher. This characterology of the work and of its author determines a positive attitude and high trustful expectations towards them from the very beginning. The work comprises 200 p., including 4 chapters, conclusion, bibliography /171 titles - in linguistic terms 100 in Bulgarian, 59 in English, 8 in Spanish, 3 in Russian, 1 in German; in content terms 89 books, 32 online resources, 13 normative documents, 18 textbooks on philosophy for grades 8-10, 17 textbooks for specialized education for grades 11-12, and 5 on Civic Education/. The appendix is an electronic Handbook of Philosophy in English. Milena Raicheva has an excellent general knowledge of teaching documentation in education and specifically in philosophy and civic education - from international strategies to curricula to a variety of textbooks and teaching aids. Her analytical presentation of these in view of the research aims is the most valuable portion of the essay.

The introduction comprehensively explicates the topic and methodology of the study. The object is correctly defined. The object of the research is too generally formulated as the key problems of philosophy education and their possible solutions, because they are extremely numerous. The research should specify "the development of transferable key competences through concrete practices" as its object, in order to further follow, as a theoretical-empirical procedure, a route which is well-defined, which leads to a logical goal, and which yields concrete results. The scientific hypothesis on p. 9 is very interesting and meaningful. But the 4 resulting sub-hypotheses are too large, go beyond the scope of the research procedures utilized, and cannot in practice be reliably tested using relevant evidence and empirical arguments. I also take them as a request for future research by the PhD student.

Part One looks at different approaches to teaching and learning. The author, with correct language and good knowledge of the literature on the subject, presents some approaches. One would expect a more precise differentiation and use of the terms 'teaching' and 'learning', which with a fair amount of convention can be considered a 'construct'. Mainly behaviorist, cognitivist and humanistic approaches to learning are presented. There are also other approaches, both classical and contemporary,

considered in the last half century of didactics, but the choice is probably due, on the one hand, to the author's judgment of their conformity to the competence approach, and on the other hand, to the specificity of philosophy as a cognitive field and as a school subject.

Part two is central and links the competency approach to philosophy teaching in schools. It presents the key competences according to European standards, normative documents, school philosophy curricula, the aims and functions of philosophy as a subject and activities for the development of key competences. Information culture, analytical skills, concreteness, correct use of multiple sources are prominent. I believe that the functions of philosophy in school are classified inhomogeneously by describing both functions and specifics at the same time. Nevertheless, Milena Raicheva logically identifies on p. 60 that 4 of the key competences are also applicable to philosophy education - learning skills, civic competence, entrepreneurial competence and cultural awareness and expression. The author's critical insight into the necessary thematic linking of philosophy curricula with those of other subjects is very valuable for the development of key competences that are transferable to different fields and also for the integrated development of personal, social and learning competences, which are at the centre of the life competences concept in the third part of the work.

This *third part* introduces emotional intelligence and the LifeComp concept. I consider it as a conceptual bridge for the dissertation research itself. Here, the author sets out her claim to experience both the process of the formation of key transferable competencies and their context within the paradigm of life ones and the effectiveness of philosophy education for complex personality formation.

According to this logic, Part IV continues with a description of the colleague's professional experience with the approbation of the author's English Philosophy Handbook in a real classroom setting at Thomas Jefferson AEG and possibly also at 145 and 147 SU. The first paragraph presents the research methods. After a critical analysis of two of the dozens of existing questionnaires and tests for the study of personality characteristics and emotional intelligence, the author concludes that such instruments are not relevant to contemporary education and she will use a qualitative, inductive and deductive method. The author points out that she will use the distractors of the theories of emotional intelligence and the concept of life competencies as tools of qualitative analysis in the empirical part and to assess students' development. I note that qualitative methods also belong to a large spectrum and elsewhere Milena Raycheva correctly points out that she tracks development through observation, self-observation and discussions with students. The Inductive and deductive methods are characteristics of a full-fledged content analysis of research findings and a method of cognition at a theoretical level, but not a method of empirical inquiry. On the other hand, in the introduction on p. 10-11, the colleague establishes analysis as her own method - at the theoretical level of literature and documentation, of his own experience and of implemented practices. The analyses are indeed done extensively, but there is none on the actual development of students based on collected data. I am convinced that there are some, but they have not been processed and placed in the work as real evidence and proof of the development of young people.

The description of the empirical study is not clearly enough presented - exactly in which schools, in which period, with how many students from which classes and age. It is generally stated here that the classes are real and it is in fact an empirical study in a natural learning environment. In two other places schools and numbers of pupils are given, but it is not clear whether this is actually the sample of the study. A second paragraph describes the Philosophy Auxiliary, followed by the presentation of three educational practices - to develop personal competence, social competence and citizenship competence. The fourth paragraph analyses the results. The colleague is a true professional, with extensive teaching experience. Even just the development of an author's manual in English, is a sufficient contribution to the aims of this procedure. Critical reflection on the candidate's work derives precisely from the qualities of the Handbook and the work done, which, with more rigorous empirical scrutiny, will indeed be validated for the needs of multifaceted educational practice. Therefore, in terms of the requirements for empirical research, the need for empirical data on certain indicators and indicators of the three types of

competences - at the beginning and at the end of the process - is acutely felt, in order to be able to reliably and validly claim that the changes in students' behaviour and attitudes are due precisely to the work with the handbook within the studies carried out. No data are presented on the functioning of systematic observation, self-monitoring and discussion, nor what these consist of. And it is in the natural process of learning and in the PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT paradigm of transferable competencies that the author knows this best - each student progresses differently. It is not possible for all students to go through this process at the same pace, with the same attitudes and dispositions, with the same outcomes. For practice, accounting for and accommodating this uniqueness is paramount. A more precise framing and use of the methods in a clearer setting would allow the author to typify the changes in the students, their outcomes, to draw more significant conclusions from the concept precisely in terms of the distractors and the different approaches to different personalities.

The scientific contributions - I accept in general the self-assessment of the candidate, but I suggest some corrections and point out a number of potential contributions in order to be able to define the research – first as open to future investigation, and at the same time broadly impacting the other subject-educational areas of school education and beyond. Second, I define the scientific contributions as a result of the analysis of the work, and also as relevant to the requirements not only of the degree, but also of the Professional field in which it is positioned - Philosophy /Philosophy of Education/. And thirdly, but not least in importance, the scientific contributions are in the field of the main focus of the research - the practice of teaching philosophy in school, based on leading modern scientific ideas and on educational formal strategies. I believe that forming one's own theoretical contributions to Philosophy, Methodology and Didactics at this stage of the colleague's work would be a bit premature, since all the theoretical philosophical-pedagogical-psychological formulations of Jacques Delors have been examined and systematized, Ivan Pavlov, John Watson, Edward Thorndike, Bruce Skinner, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Albert Bandura, Jerome Bruner, David Ausubel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers; publications related to various theoretical and practical aspects of competence-oriented education: Alexander Andonov, Veselin Dafov, Sergey Gerdzhikov, Silvia Krasteva, Yana Rasheva-Merdzhanova, Vasya Delibaltova, Maya Mitrentseva, Evelina Ivanova-Vardzhijiska, Nikoleta Nikolova, Svetla Petrova; as well as the concept of the study of emotional intelligence in the context of LifeComp, are a fact in the respective scientific fields and contents of basic textbooks in Philosophy of Education, Didactics, and Methodology. But building on the theory, on the practical-applied level, the work has its indisputable achievements and makes unquestionable contributions to meet the requirements of both the dissertation defense procedure, and Methodology:

1. On the basis of a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the 2018 school philosophy curriculum documentation, constructive comprehensive proposals are made for its improvement, firstly, by linking the key transferable competences to personal, social and learning skills; secondly, by linking the different cultural-educational areas and curricula.
2. On the basis of theoretical analysis of competence-oriented modern education, the conceptual framework of Life Comp is adapted to the specific functions, goals and objectives of philosophy education in school concerning interdisciplinarity and complexity of personal development through the resource of emotional intelligence.
3. The author's Auxiliary of Philosophy in English, especially valuable in teaching philosophy in English and in specialized high school education, has been developed.
4. The Auxiliary has been approbated in a real teaching environment in a team which includes an English teacher.
5. The practices described and analyzed for the development of social, personal and civic competence are useful not only for current teachers but also in the academic preparation of future philosophy teachers.

The first and second contributions are of relevance to the applied level of Philosophy of Education. The third, fourth and fifth are for the applied level of Methodology of Philosophy Education.

Abstracts and publications on the topic: the abstract meets the requirements, the publications are valuable: 4 independent and varied - in a scientific journal, and in a doctoral forum, and a scientific conference, and the author's electronic Handbook of Philosophy.

Critical comments - some have been highlighted in the course of the analysis so far. I systematize them with a view to future publications, appearances, activities of the candidate. They do not await a response or a "defense" in the usual sense of reviewing, but rather future continuations as next stages of Milena Plougarova-Raycheva's development both as a teacher, as a philosopher-methodologist, and as a strategist of philosophy education at school:

1. The methodological platform of the research needs adjustments in terms of its subject, aim, hypotheses.
2. The design of the empirical study, both in terms of methods and program, should also be fully described at the beginning of the empirical fourth part of the dissertation.
3. Criteria and indicators need to be derived, as well as indicators for the observations and self-observations made during the practices, and questions for the discussions with the students. Now the practices have been analysed, the colleague's experience has been analysed, but not the students' development itself, **which** is presented and stated in general terms as an outcome, without factual empirical evidence and illustration.
4. There is no initial and final measurement and positioning in the level and extent of formation of the key and life competencies in order to **draw** a convincing and proven conclusion - proving that the hypothesis is confirmed - that there is realized DEVELOPMENT of these same transferable competencies.
5. Most of all - it would be very valuable for all professionals to see the products and evidence of this development in applications - documented reactions, attitudes, positions, difficulties encountered, satisfaction, texts produced, thoughts, ideas of the students - even a feedback questionnaire could serve as an empirical method.
6. It is important to highlight the specific, special cases, because in such a developmental process students do not follow the same paths, in the same way, with the same difficulties and successes.
7. In order to test the value of the Handbook and its applicability, it is necessary to gather the opinions of both sides of the learning process - both students and teachers - other philosophy teachers who have used the Handbook or whether and how they will use it in the future.

The questions address the most interesting part of the candidate's undeniable lived experience. I am convinced that she has the answers /in the observations and discussions/, but they never found their way into the work. Thus, I express my expectations towards the stated issue, and I invite Milena Raycheva to formulate them explicitly and share them in her future works and in professional communities:

1. First, a complex question concerning the shared practices with three sub-questions: first, what specific and distinctive things could the candidate share about the students who **used** the manual during the practices - difficulties, peculiarities, specific cases, typification of their development? Second, does she have insights from other philosophy teachers' opinions about these practices? Thirdly, the programme of the empirical study - where /in 2 AEGs, in 145 and 147 SU?/, for what period of time, with how many students were the practices implemented? On p. 54, in the context of another analysis, it is stated "494 students - 26 students in 19 classes" - is this the sample of those studied?
2. Second complex question also with three sub-questions: first, the greatest strengths, according to Raicheva, of the manual. Second, its manifest limitations as directions for its improvement after the practices - because this is one of the most serious meanings and tasks of any empirical approbation for the researcher and teacher - to optimize our teaching experience. Thirdly, how does the colleague see the application of the manual in non-formal education outside school -

because the development of social, civic and key competences in philosophy are a priority for the whole educational network, which already operates in active symbiosis as formal and non-formal educational sectors.

Conclusion: first of all, I underline the three normatively required parameters of the positive evaluation of the thesis: first, both the thesis and the procedure implemented as training and advancement of the thesis by the FF are in compliance with the requirements of the Law on Research and Development and the professional field of the competition 2.3. Philosophy /Philosophy of Education/. Second, the candidate's activities meet the national science metrics and criteria for the degree requested. Thirdly, the dissertation is undoubtedly an authentic work of authorship.

Next, I emphasize the borderline interdisciplinary nature of both the thesis, the defense procedure, and the candidate's profile. For the education of the future, this type of specialist will be most valuable. They will be the product of an academic and personal culture of a new nature, the fruit of the selfless spiritual, intellectual, professional, and personal collaboration and support of professionals committed to the actual constructive mission of philosophy in schools. It is therefore with satisfaction, with gratitude, with respect that I commit myself to this procedure, accepting myself as part of just such a thirty-year team - academic, interfaculty, interprofessional, interpersonal, working for the cause of philosophy education and the training of its personnel. I am convinced that the philosophy-education traverse and the methodological core of philosophy education will continue to develop in the future, through the ongoing collaboration between philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy through our efforts as a team - in mutual rigor, mutual trust, mutual generosity. Therefore, I accept, analyze, and challenge the cause of this dissertation and its future multiplication and transference of its experience as our common cause - a pledge for the sustainable future of philosophy in schools. Milena Stoyanova Plougarova-Raicheva is one of the representatives of this school. She has yet to assist and introduce other followers into the profession, combining academicism and conceptual competence with applied methodological mastery. In which endeavour I wish her success.

Finally, I reaffirm the merits and contributions of the dissertation itself - the valuable points in the content, the rich meaning and qualities of the work, the present and future benefits to philosophy education in schools of the candidate's work. Therefore, I propose with conviction to the esteemed members of the scientific jury that they endorse the awarding of the degree of Doctor of Education in the professional field 2.3 Philosophy /Philosophy of Education/ to Milena Stoyanova Plougarova-Raycheva.

22. 09. 2022
Sofia

Reviewer:
(prof. D.Sc. Yanka Merdzhanova)