

REVIEW

of the dissertation of Milena Stoyanova Plugarova-Raycheva on “**Development of transferable competences through the teaching of philosophy at school**”,

submitted for awarding educational and academic degree “doctor” in professional area 2.3.

Philosophy,

by Assoc. Prof. Iassen Zahariev Zahariev, New Bulgarian University

The dissertation has a volume of 200 pages. It consists of an introduction, four thematically separated chapters, a conclusion, an appendix and a bibliography. The bibliography includes over 150 titles in Bulgarian, English, Spanish, Russian and German. The dissertation was written under the supervision of Prof. Ph.D. Sergey Gerdzhikov.

Milena Plugarova-Raicheva is a long-time philosophy teacher in secondary school. In addition to two decades of teaching experience, she is the author of three articles, a handbook and four reports that are closely related to the topic of the dissertation. The dissertation develops and summarizes the long-term teaching experience of the candidate.

The subject and objectives of the study are clearly stated at the beginning of the introduction. The author aims to investigate the competence approach in education and its applications in high school philosophy education. The work has a practical focus on the first high school stage. The dissertation has a distinct pedagogical focus, the purpose of which, according to the author, is: "analysis of the regulatory framework, goals and activities in philosophy education in the first high school stage in connection with the practical application of a model for the development of transferable key competences" (p. 4). The research tasks are formulated according to the purpose and determine the structure and content of the dissertation work, at the beginning of which is the assumption that the model for the development of transferable competences leads to an increase in the levels of more general personal and social competences.

Before moving on to the presentation and analysis of the competence approach, the application of which in philosophical high school education is the stated goal of the research, the author provides an overview of the main psychological schools and paradigms related to learning. General statements from behaviorism, sociocultural theory, constructivism, and humanistic psychology are schematically but precisely derived. The author is critical to the presented theories,

which in their classical form cannot fully meet the educational needs of the 21st century. One of the main theses in the dissertation is that it is the competence approach that will satisfy these needs. It builds on the paradigm of constructivism and redefines educational goals and methods from subject-oriented learning to one that develops key competencies.

Training through key competencies is presented in a dissertation through a legal-administrative framework. The second chapter of the work presents and comments in detail a number of strategic documents, normative acts, strategies, prescriptions, curricula and textbooks, which formally and substantively refer to the competence approach. This framework is presented precisely in its historical genesis and current state, as the author points out some examples in which sometimes the formal goals and criteria in the programs turn out to be difficult to fulfill.

The main emphasis in this part falls on the study of philosophy. The goals of philosophical education according to Regulation 5 are discussed. The high school programs in philosophy and civic education are presented in detail. The relationship between the competences established in the curricula, expected results and activities in philosophy education is shown.

According to the author, the basis of personal and social competence is emotional intelligence, to which the third chapter of the dissertation is dedicated. The concept is well explained and presented by citing leading researchers and authorities in the field. It is central to the key competences mentioned above, as well as to the ability to learn throughout life. In this plan, the author also discovers the immediate connection between their development and philosophy education. In short, philosophy, armed with the competence approach, develops the emotional intelligence of those who study it. Here again, the exposition has a predominantly reference nature, consisting of the presentation of recommendations and frames of reference. The study is centered around EU education policy as expressed in the 2018 LifeComp Conceptual Framework.

The fourth chapter presents the content of a teaching handbook in philosophy, the author of which is the candidate. Almost everywhere, where it was possible, parallels were drawn between individual topics, learning activities and tasks with the educational goals of the various competencies laid down in the administrative documents and prescriptions discussed in the previous chapters.

A specific practical angle is given in the presentation of specific educational practices in subchapter 4.3. It presents the content and the results of the application of a model of integrative educational practice by the candidate as a teacher in the Second English High School in the city of

Sofia. A separate practical lesson on moral dilemmas, an interactive educational practice on the separation of powers and human rights are also presented.

Critical notes and recommendations

At the beginning of her research, the author puts forward the following hypothesis: "The application of a model for the development of transferable competences derived from the LifeComp conceptual framework in the teaching of philosophy in the first high school stage increases the level of personal and social competence of the participants in the study and contributes to the development of others key competences' (p. 9). The hypothesis is too general and it is difficult to define clear criteria for its verification. This, accordingly, leads to the trivialization of the working assumptions that follow from it, and to the answers that seem predetermined, even obvious. For example, the development of emotional and social intelligence clearly has a complex impact on students. This does not seem like a serious answer to a real hypothesis. A certain circularity of theses is also noticed, since personal and social competences are also transferable. Thus, it turns out that the model for the development of transferable competences ultimately leads to the development of other transferable competences. From competences to competences!

The analysis of high school philosophical education and the defense of the competence approach take place on the one hand in the context of psychological theories of learning. On the other hand, an important part of the dissertation is the exposition and analysis of various normative acts, programs and directives, reflecting the educational policies of the EU and Bulgaria from the last few decades, again in the direction of the development of basic and transferable competences. This was previously stated by the author as a goal that was successfully achieved in the study. However, this turns the dissertation text into an exposition of legal documents and institutional policies. It would only benefit if this conceptual framework were expanded and philosophized with a deeper analysis of the pre-legal, pre-established ethical and worldview understandings, principles, and grounds that govern not just competent competency training, but the philosophy education of students in the 21st century

At the beginning of the fourth chapter, a meaningful question is posed about whether and how the application of LifeComp concepts in philosophical education really contributes to the development of personal and social competences. The author presents possible methods and tools

for this check - observation and tests organized around different categories and criteria for checking emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, in the subsequent part of the chapter, instead of a research effort on this issue, a detailed presentation of parts of a philosophy handbook in English, authored by the candidate, is made. Not mentioning the merits of the handbook, which is not part of the dissertation work, I should point out that this presentation in no way contributes to an answer to the question posed. The description of the various topics, pedagogical tools and tasks included in the handbook does not contribute much to the assessment of their effectiveness. For example, writing homework on the question "What is the practical utility of taking philosophy classes?" falsely assumes that such utility actually exists or is yet to be gained by means of this assignment.

The integrative educational practice described in the fourth chapter also raises an interesting question. There is no doubt that the approach used actively engages students and leads to measurable results. Students learn to make a project and present their projects by answering questions such as: "What is your goal? How will you solve the problem? What activities will you carry out? Who will I report through? When does the project start and end? The question here is really what does all this have to do with philosophical education? Against the background of the answers received from the students, such as "to improve communication with my parents" or "to stop using plastic bags and plastic bottles", it is asked what distinguishes this project in the philosophy class from exactly the same project in the Entrepreneurship class? How then should one read the reported result of this practice, according to which the students "applied their knowledge of philosophy and English by integrating it into a new experience" (p.148)?

For the most part, the text of the dissertation is mainly descriptive. Neither a philosophical interpretation nor a sufficient critical distance from what is postulated in the standards, goals and means stated in the normative acts and repeated in the dissertation work stand out on the part of the author. The most valuable part of the work is the practical work presented in the fourth chapter, which is basically an application and could be useful for the purposes of philosophy education. Some of the titles in the attached bibliography do not have references in the main text.

Abstract and contribution points

The dissertation abstract accurately presents the content of the dissertation work. Of the listed contributions, I fully agree with the fourth – the work undoubtedly highlights and develops valuable educational approaches and has its practical value.

Conclusion

Despite the schematic and the abstract approach in the presentation of the proposed dissertation work, it has qualities that make a positive assessment possible. Its practical utility is beyond doubt.

Based on the above, I recommend the scientific jury **to award** Milena Stoyanova Plugarova-Raicheva the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.3. Philosophy.

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