

Review

in a contest for the position Associate Professor in the field of higher education

1. Pedagogical Sciences, PS 1.3. Pedagogy of education in... (Methodology of teaching in Bulgarian Language and Literature in the primary stage of education), *requested* by the Faculty of Education of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", *announced* in Official Gazette No. 56 of 30.06. 2023, *ordered* by

Rector's Order RD 38-453/19. 07. 2023 г.

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General characteristics of the competition and the procedure: the competition was *launched* by the Faculty of Education of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". It was *announced* in Official Gazette No. 56 of 30.06. 2023, *ordered* by Rector's Order RD 38-453/19. 07. 2023 г. All legal requirements of the procedure have been met technologically and in terms of time. Due to the recusal of one of the regular members of the scientific jury, quota "internal", Prof. Dr. Nelly Stoyanova Ivanova, the jury has been completed by the reserve member Assoc. prof. Despina Lyubomirova Vasileva Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". At its first meeting on 08.09.2023, with 7 votes in favour, the Scientific Jury judged the report of one of the candidates, Dr. Irena Hristova Raykova, to be non-compliant with the minimum national requirements under Article 26 of the Law on the Scientific Jury and with the requirements in the Regulations of the Sofia University, Article 105 and Article 107. The other candidate, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Sotirova Sotirova, was admitted to the competition.

Content evaluation of the applications: the review comments on the performance of the admitted candidate.

Work experience: since 2011 Maya Sotirova has been an associate professor in ПП 1.2. Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the South-West University of Blagoevgrad. Prior to that, she worked for 10 years as a lecturer at the Pedagogical College Dupnitsa - as an assistant professor and senior assistant professor. She has professional experience as an elementary teacher, completed a full-time doctorate at the Faculty of Education of the University of Sofia in 2001 with a dissertation on "The child's unconventionality as an educational problem". Master's degree in primary school pedagogy.

Scientific publications: the candidate presents a list of 55 scientific publications and 34 textbooks and teaching aids for primary school. A total of 22 publications are described for the competition, including 1 habilitation monograph, 10 articles in refereed and indexed journals, 11 in non-refereed and peer-reviewed journals. The applicant has not included the textbooks and manuals for grades 1-4 in the List of Publications for the contest, but I include those 20 of them, since 2017, which are under the new law on school and preschool education. The reviewed materials were explicitly judged to be relevant to the profile of the current competition

1.3. - 1 monograph, 10 articles in refereed and indexed journals, 3 of them in a foreign language; 11 articles in non-refereed journals and volumes, 3 of them in a foreign language, and 20 textbooks and teaching aids in BLE grades 1-4 active in the school

network. As problems I divide them into 3 scientific directions of pedagogical knowledge and in these directions the scientific contributions of the author can be subsequently highlighted.

The 2023 monograph is "Personalized learning in BE at the primary level." It is a natural summary - a unification of the authors' stages of development over the decades. The logic brings together the intercultural context, and the key competences of Bulgarian Language and Literature in integration with functional literacy, and distance learning, and the inclusive context, and the role of the teacher, but housed in the perspective of personalised learning. An analysis is made of related concepts - personalization, individualization, personal orientation. A conceptual framework for the technology of personalized learning in elementary grades of BE is outlined. The monographic work fits into the field of Elementary School Pedagogy and Methodology of Teaching in ELT, along with publications 6, 7, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 and all textbooks and teaching aids. *Expectations remain related to the interdisciplinary and integrative aspects of teaching ELL in multilingual contemporary global education.*

The remaining scholarly publications cover *three strands of primary school pedagogy* and contemporary education, with no clear marker between the educational levels. The author has the ability to intersperse the issues discussed between ages and between territories, between partners in education. I appreciate this as an asset and a valuable quality, both as a researcher and as a writer. Several articles are positioned in the field of *intercultural education and training* - 6 in refereed and indexed journals, also in a foreign language (3, 5, 10, 15, 23). The transformations of intercultural dialogue and communication with implications in educational processes in the direction of integration, inclusion, special professional assistance to children from vulnerable groups and Roma background are commented in depth. A second group of publications focuses on issues of *integration of new educational technologies, BUT in the context of personalized and personal development of young students* (8, 9, 14). I judge the very alignment of trajectories here as a scientific contribution. And *the third group of materials can be specifically addressed to 1.3. Methodology of teaching in Bulgarian Language and Literature grades 1-4* as regards the materials related to the development of communicative-speech skills, reading skills, classroom partnership, specific techniques and tools, and strategies for working with multicultural and mixed ethno-educational environments. These problematic territories for the author are also constantly considered in relation to teachers, on the one hand, partnering students and other social actors in contemporary education; and, on the other hand, to educational technology as a new type of educational context. I commend the author's effort and competence to link these paradigms in his conception of personalized learning in BE 1-4 grade.

The currently functioning *textbooks and teaching aids for pupils and teacher's guides for BE 1-4 grade*, approved by the Ministry of Education, is a product methodological achievement. In them, the author, as a proficient and collaborating co-author, convincingly develops at a concrete level the main methodological titles. The striving for an active partnership with young students and the stimulation of their self-reflection and self-knowledge are present. For me, this is particularly valuable.

Citations: the candidate lists 19 citations in refereed journals, 24 in collective volumes, 6 in non-refereed journals and all are supported by evidence.

Scientific and teaching activity: for the last 20 years Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova has established herself as a university lecturer. She has supervised 2 successfully defended PhD students and 76 graduates. At the bachelor and master level, she has taught a wide range of subjects under the competition code Methodology of teaching in Bulgarian Language and Literature - methodology, didactics of primary literacy, communicative-speech skills, methodology of teaching children with special educational needs, pedagogical theories and technologies of teaching in BLE, intercultural education, language teaching of children with special educational needs, e- learning.

Research and project activity: the candidate has multiple *qualifications and trainings* related to intercultural education, cloud technologies, steam learning, educational and social inclusion. Also 4 national and 5 international *scientific conferences since 2011* are described. Assoc. prof. Maya Sotirova has participated in different capacities in both *national and international projects* in priority research areas - innovative educational technologies, university teacher training, steam technologies, cloud technologies, intercultural education - philosophy and implementations, language courses, inclusive education. The candidate has been a supervisor, an expert and a trainer, i.e., has exercised and developed a variety of research competencies. Out of the 2 submitted as supervisor, 8 national and 7 international projects, I accept 6 for participation in the current competition - after 2011, indirectly related to his profile - 5 for integration of children and students with vulnerable background and 1 for teacher training and qualification. My colleague has expert participation as a *member of scientific editorial boards* of an electronic journal and of proceedings of scientific conferences and forums.

Administrative and managerial experience: the candidate was Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in 2011-12. For many years she was Deputy Director of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Faculty. Assoc. prof. Maya Sotirova has grown steadily in this direction as well, gaining organizational and administrative experience.

Scientific contributions: I accept the substance of the candidate's description, but the structuring and formulation are not entirely correct. As to the 4th scientific contribution on the competences of future teachers, I do not find it sufficiently meaningful/explicit in the profile of the current contest, since the author's publications are more focused on the teacher in general and not so much on the teacher of Bulgarian Language and Literature. As to Research contributions 1 and 2 on personalized learning and competence-oriented learning, I do not find grounds to distinguish them meaningfully either, as they are mutually supportive and the author herself states in research contribution 1 that personalized learning is interpreted on the basis of "the competence-oriented, person-centred and value-centred approaches" (reference to research contributions). I would highlight in another way the contributions in the candidate's work that correspond to the profile of the competition.

I can see major contributions in the three scientific areas "under the umbrella" of primary school pedagogy, which is covered by the author's scientific publications. **In previous historical-scientific thinking, they would be irreducible to a single field, but in the global perspective of social and educational development, in the open research context, and especially in its integrative transformation, these fields and their findings can collaborate in the direction of Methodology of Teaching of Bulgarian Language and Literature in Primary Education. This has been grasped, implemented, realized to a significant extent by the candidate and overall, I define this forward thinking mentality and research integrating status quo of Assoc. Maya Sotirova as her core, "global" contribution to the development of the professional field. And most of all - as a guaranteeing onset for its forward-looking development in the direction of integration of educational content; pedagogical strategies; methodological approaches; concrete technologies, techniques and tools; binary textbooks and teaching resources; binary teaching teams.**

1. Scientific contributions **in the field of intercultural education with emphasis on work in primary school age** - inclusion, specific methods and means for working with children from vulnerable groups, with children of Roma origin, dialogical and communicative-speech skills, new educational technologies - synchronous and asynchronous distance learning, multilingualism and intercultural communication in the modern world and education, multicultural career guidance. Based on 8 articles in refereed and indexed journals and the monographic work.

2. Scientific contributions **in the field of Personalized learning and personal development of young students in the context of using modern educational technologies** - key competencies of young students and functional literacy; integration of cloud technologies, distance synchronous and asynchronous learning, steam learning; stimulation of children of Roma origin, socio-pedagogical competence of students future teachers and in the educational space as a whole. Based on 6 articles and a monographic work.

3. Scientific contributions **in the field of Methodology of teaching in BLE 1-4 grade** - dialogical communication, personalized development through specific methods and means, inclusive education, speech-communication skills of young students. Based on a monograph, 2 articles on dialogic development, 3 articles on speech-communicative skills, 20 textbooks and teaching aids.

4. Scientific contributions **at the product level in the methodology of teaching in BLE 1-4 grade** - textbooks and teaching aids for BLE 1-4 grade, as well as methodological manuals for teachers.

I cannot help but note *some cross-repetition of content in individual publications, but my expert assessment indicates a tolerable degree of necessary evolutionary growth of the material and the author's maintenance of a steady trend of stating and developing views; as well as their objective de-position in the field of SCHOOL PEDAGOGY.*

Recommendations, critique and questions: the gaps I identify have been **transformed from findings into questions, first to** test the proscriptive strategic vision of Assoc. Sotirova's vision for the future development of the professional field she is applying to lead, as she is currently an Associate Professor of 1.2. Pedagogy; **third, the** questions are intended to provoke and allow the candidate to reveal her attitudes and position on being a full member of the particular faculty community and preparing her student educators as future teachers and in the particular university context. **I look forward to these three perspectives-as interpreted by the candidate-in answering the questions posed. This is the constructive-critical focus of this review, with the SUGGESTION that the candidate not answer all 7 complex questions, but co-focus on those 3 of them that she considers to be the priority mid-points most important to argue for her candidacy precisely as an Associate Professor in 1.3. BLE 1-4 grade in the academic context of the Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University.**

1. How would you develop or reformulate the topic of your dissertation on the child's unconventionality - as a future issue and in a "non-problem" vision?
2. What is for her the Methodology in Bulgarian Language and Literature 1-4 grade - **FIRST ASPECT:** methodology in language (or native, mother tongue, etc.), in literature, in cultural inclusion, in values development, in social inclusion, in identity formation... how would she hierarchize or interlink these directions? **SECOND:** as an interrelationship with the Methodology of Bulgarian Language and Literature from grade 4 upwards? **THIRD:** as an integration with the other private methodologies in the primary stage
- what is the candidate's view of binary classes, open classes, etc. how can the native normative framework and teaching documentation contribute to these already factual processes on an international and national scale?
3. What are the main components of personalized development for Maya Sotirova? For her, what is the relationship between personalized and personal development as concepts and as realities? What is the relationship between competence-based and personalized learning and is one possible without the other (a hint not to separate them because of situational needs)?
4. Are there and which are the key specific competences of the teacher of BEL 1 -4 grade, other than those commented in the Regulation for professional qualification of pedagogical specialists? Which of these are **MOST URGENTLY** in need of development - i.e. a forward- looking view of the qualifications of teachers of BEL Years 1-4?
5. If you have to write a binary integrated textbook - which subject for the primary stage would you engage, as a co-author, Assoc. prof. Sotirova?
6. The place of Methods of teaching in the preparation of future teachers - in a longer strategic perspective, in Education and School of the Future? On its own, as an integrated methodology of teaching other languages - how would the colleague present a futurological view?
7. Your personal professional and research development and involvement in the development of PE in the coming decades - specifically in PE, specifically as the holder

of the Methods strand of BEI 1-4 grade, for specific students of the faculty and in the specific academic university context of faculty autonomous development and inter-faculty collaboration?

Conclusion:

- on the basis of the analyses, findings and conclusions,
- supplemented by a possibly satisfactory statement by the candidate on the problems of Methodology of teaching in Bulgarian Language and Literature 1-4 grade,
- if the application complies with the minimum national requirements,
- in case of legal compliance of the competition procedure in all its stages with the Law on the Protection of Competition,

at this stage, before the public second meeting of the scientific jury with the participation of the candidate, I support the **proposal for the for the introduction of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Sotirova Sotirova to the scientific position of "Associate Professor" in PH 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching (Methodology of Teaching in the Elementary Stage of Education) for the needs of the Faculty of Education, Sofia University "St.**

Sofia

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