

REVIEW

of the dissertation

for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Author of the review Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bistra Kirilova Mizova (Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Didactics)

Scientific field: pedagogical sciences

Professional field 1.2 Pedagogy

Scientific specialisation Theory of Education and Didactics - Pedagogical Communication

University St. Kliment Ohridski University

Faculty Faculty of Education

Department of Social Work

Doctoral Thesis entitled IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHER COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL CRISIS MANAGEMENT.

Author of the doctoral thesis: PhD student Radina Mladenova Mladenova

Supervisor: Associate Professor Silvia Ilieva Tsvetanska

Information about the PhD student

Radina Mladenova Mladenova was born on 29.03.1974 in Sofia. She finished her secondary education in 9th grade. French language school "Alphonse Lamartine". In 1999 she graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a Master's degree in History. In 2011 she graduated from the University of Nantes in France with a degree in Business Administration and Management. Between 2011 and 2018 she had several short-term specialisations in the field of educational management, pedagogical innovation, foreign language teaching, social

entrepreneurship and project work. Since 2012 her professional experience and expertise has been in the field of project proposal evaluation, school training, management and administration. From 2016 to date, she has held the position of deputy director in the portfolio of learning and international relations at the largest school in the country, 18 William Gladstone High School. Radina Mladenova's professional career as a teacher, educational manager and administrator in the school education system presupposes her deep involvement in issues of pedagogical communication and its manifestations in a managerial context in relation to emerging crises and problematic situations in schools. All this finds a natural extension in her decision to develop her interests and research as a doctoral student in the field of her professional interests on a scientific basis.

Details of the procedure

Radina Mladenova was enrolled as an independent doctoral student on 15.07.2021 (Order № RD 20-1271/05.07.2021). After successful completion of the procedure of internal discussion of the dissertation work before the academic board of the Department of Social Work and by decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy (Protocol № 3/29.10.2024) the procedure for directing the work of the doctoral candidate for public defense was opened. In its entirety - from enrolment to the final stage of the doctoral study - the procedure meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for acquisition of scientific degrees and occupation of academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Analysis of the dissertation and summary characteristics

The scientific problem of Radina Mladenova's dissertation is relevant to the current trends in the integrative field of pedagogical communication and school management, and in particular, the choice of the topic reflects the conscious effort of the doctoral candidate to seek practical and scientifically sound solutions in the field of crisis management, which is and will continue to be part of the reality of school organization.

The motivation for planning and carrying out the dissertation research is based on the doctoral student's pragmatic engagement with management issues in school education and her

research awareness of the need for a comprehensive pedagogical conceptualization of communication crisis management in order to improve the competencies for its implementation by educational managers and school-based educational specialists.

The focus of Mladenova's dissertation work is on an innovative and previously little researched issue - pedagogical communication in the context of the challenge of crisis management, which makes the chosen topic of the dissertation both fundamental and significant at the applied level of scientific research.

The presented text is of a respectable length, in line with the design, objectives and specificities of this type of research work, and comprises 233 pages of main text and a further 158 pages of appendices (separated in a self-contained book body) with evidence presenting the instrumentation of the empirical study, the results of the statistical techniques applied for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The bibliography used for the purposes of the thesis contains 161 sources, the majority of which are in Latin.

The structure of the dissertation is decided appropriately. The three-part structure of the main body of the dissertation has been preferred, with the formation of three chapters along with an introduction and a conclusion. A combination of different approaches has been achieved within the exposition—from the conceptual to the pragmatic, from the synthesis of data to their quantitative and qualitative analysis, from the problematization of the issues raised to the design of tools for finding solutions.

The introduction explains the chosen direction of the doctoral research and outlines the main components of the methodological framework of the research as a theoretical-empirical and applied whole. A brief overview of research approaches to the issues in the dissertation area, with a critical focus on both the multiplicity of perspectives and their limitations, stands out as a very positive point in the introduction. The object-subject field of the research and its goal orientation are correctly defined, which turns out to be multi-level and multi-layered because it encompasses several research aspects. The research tasks at the theoretical and empirical level are clearly formulated. The main research interests of the doctoral candidate are sensibly reflected in the key question and, to some extent, in the descriptively defined hypothesis.

The first chapter of the dissertation has the character of a conceptual framework to define the key concept of the research-pedagogical communication and its contextualization in terms of crisis management in the school organization. The theoretical positions in the field are presented at length, sometimes too much so, and with references to propositions that are well known in the specialized academic discourse. In this sense, I recommend a more selective focus on the selection of concepts and their critical analysis in order to serve specific aspects of the topic of the dissertation research. At the same time, the presentation would benefit in terms of informative value and logical coherence if theoretical ideas and accumulations in the field were presented in an explanatory-analytical rather than a predominantly descriptive manner. One aspect in which the doctoral candidate has made some omissions, probably for technical reasons, is the rules for citing and referencing other authors' ideas, and some departures from generally accepted standards in this respect are noticeable in certain parts of the text, e.g. on pp. 26-29. In the last section of the theoretical framework of the dissertation, special space is given to the presentation and discussion of crisis management standards as part of the professional standards for the position of school manager. The focus is on the frameworks with standards for the qualification of school managers of Western European countries such as France, Belgium and the United Kingdom, as well as the work done in this field in the Bulgarian context after the legislative changes concerning school education after 2015. In presenting these standards, the doctoral candidate does not only focus on individual elements of the competencies required for school leaders to manage crises and conflicts through high communicative competence, but applies a comprehensive, explicit and specifically grounded analysis-synthesis in order to clearly highlight the connections that the doctoral candidate makes with the applied model of a frame of reference that she proposes in chapter three.

Chapter two presents the setting and program of the empirical study. A number of classical propositions are outlined to justify the research design in terms of the main research strategy chosen, namely mixed methods, and the pragmatic rationale for doing so. Some of these can be spared to the intended audience of this dissertation because they are well known and have the character of standards in the field of methodology and methods of social, especially educational, research, for example, the aspects that define qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Personally, as a recipient of the text, I lack more information and reasoning about the design chosen by the doctoral student in terms of the main purpose of the research - whether it is exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or some other type. The author's staging, on which the vision for the

research is built, is based on two key lines in its planning and technological implementation: a focus on a pilot design phase for the instrumentation and a stage of the main research. In the first of the two phases, qualitative interviews were conducted with experts to gather in-depth information in relation to the concepts, construct characteristics, and variables underlying the instrument constructed for the actual study. The two phases (pilot and main study) are presented in order to demonstrate the relationships and implications between them. The sample described is the one most commonly used in educational research in recent years, namely a non-probability sample formed on the principle of respondents and including typical representatives of the subjects of the educational communication process in crises. I consider the doctoral student's work to be particularly valuable in that she has navigated well in the choice of statistical analysis approaches and has achieved a high degree of comprehensiveness in her conclusions about the subject of her research. Although the sample size was not impressive, it would have been interesting to track (e.g., through non-parametric test equivalents of analysis of variance) whether there were clear differences in attitudes and readiness to build crisis communication skills between different subgroups in the sample, moderated by different variables such as managerial role in crisis, amount of managerial experience, size of school and/or region, etc.

In the **final third chapter**, which has a strong authorial character, the doctoral student makes the claim to go beyond the "limits" of the prescriptive and to offer her own constructive solution to create a frame of reference for identifying and shaping the competences needed by school leaders to successfully manage crises and problematic situations in terms of communication. Radina Mladenova's experience in this regard is truly admirable, as it reflects excellent knowledge of the issues in the field she is researching, high expertise as a school leader regarding the needs for competence development in pedagogical communication crisis management, and key knowledge in designing practical training concepts.

To this third part of the thesis **are my main questions for the PhD student**, which could also be understood as guidelines for future optimization of the work:

1) Why is it necessary, in chapter three, to go back to analysing and structuring theoretical propositions about priority areas for improving crisis communication skills? Is there not a need for a synthesis between the theoretical overview realised in chapter one and the results of the empirical study in chapter two? Therefore, the logical question is whether the conceptual overview and the

empirical results have, in this case, achieved their effects as a reliable basis for the proposed design solution in relation to the frame of reference.

2) In the process of structuring the frame of reference, what were the doctoral student's guiding motivations for using the following concepts and their interrelationships as operationalisation tools: strategic learning themes, tasks, objectives, and learning goals? In my opinion, the choice of these concepts and their subordination is not convincing, and intuitively, the question arises whether a frame of reference is only structured for learning or whether it has other functions, e.g., descriptive, explanatory, (self-)evaluative, and, on this basis, designing and enhancing?

The questions raised are intended to help R. Mladenova to make the most useful decisions for her in order to optimise the dissertation research with a view to its possible publication as a book.

Scientific contributions

The undisputed merits and contributions of the development include the following:

1. At a conceptual level, an integrative research problem on the intersection between educational communication and crisis management in schools is formulated and seriously grounded, which is a contribution both to the field of educational communication and to that of educational management.

2. A multi-faceted empirical study with implications for both educational theory and educational management practice is provided.

3. The thesis as a whole raises very serious questions for the development of operational and workable standards related to the preparation and development of school leaders, which need to be addressed in the near future at the conceptual, normative, and practical levels.

4. A multi-level concept for structuring training in the field of pedagogical communication in crisis management is proposed, which, although it has its limitations at the stage of its primary structuring, is a valuable basis for discovering working tools in this field.

Summary and scientific metrics

The submitted summary meets the necessary requirements and accurately and adequately reflects the structure and content of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate has 5 publications related to the dissertation. Of these, 4 are articles in peer-reviewed national and international databases, and 1 is a peer-reviewed handbook-type book of marked practical utility, printed in the University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski," which exceeds the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of "PhD."

Conclusion

I believe that the estimation of a doctoral student should reflect not only what has been achieved within the dissertation work but is a result of the many other manifestations of their work as a doctoral student. Radina Mladenova is one of the outstanding Ph.D. students in the field 1.2 Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Sofia, precisely because of his work capacity and versatility in the field of project activity of the Faculty, in the field of international research exchange and mobility, and in the field of promotion of the results of his research.

The dissertation has the character of original scientific research of very good quality and reflects the high personal and professional commitment of the doctoral student to multifaceted research on the needs and readiness for formation and improvement of crisis pedagogical communication skills of school managers. All this is a reason to give a positive opinion on the dissertation research and to recommend that Radina Mladenova Mladenova be awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Education in the field of 1.2. Educational Theory and Didactics (Educational Communication).

Sofia, 30.12.2024

Reviewer:

/Assoc. Prof. Bistra Mizova/