

POSITION

from Associate Prof. Maya Sotirova Sotirova, PhD

concerning a dissertation on a topic:

Formation of Ecological Culture through Teaching in the Subject "Man and Nature" at the Initial Stage of the Basic Educational Level

for obtaining an educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical sciences,

professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy,

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Didactics

Author: Galina Petrova Vasileva

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Boncho Gospodinov

1. Information about the author of the dissertation

Reading the professional biography of Galina Vassileva leaves the feeling of dedication to the mission of Teacher, motivation for growth, self-demand and institutional connection. The latter is an impressive and increasingly rare phenomenon for me, given the challenges of the modern world, in the context of which experience gained in a wider range of professional positionings seems to be considered more valuable than experience in only one work field. Galina Vassileva's professional identity is formed by her many years of experience as a primary teacher at 119 Secondary School "Acad. Mihail Arnaudov". In this practice, the need for continuous professional improvement arises with dedication (the candidate has 2 specializations and 14 pedagogical qualifications), the acquired new competencies are returned to it in order to comprehend, verify and value them in the pedagogical interaction. The presented dissertation research of Galina Vassileva is valuable precisely because of this strong connection with pedagogical practice – as a rethinking of experience, as

methodological revision and innovation with a vision for better teaching and more active and successful learning.

2. Dissertation

The placement of the topic of the dissertation in the problem field of environmental education and upbringing of students undoubtedly predetermines its relevance and perspective. At the same time, it sets certain expectations for a contemporary, modern interpretation and approach to the problem – not only in view of the continuous research interest in it for decades and the indisputable traditions and achievements in this field, but mostly because of the increasingly acute need for the transformation of the collective consciousness in the direction of a stronger connection with nature and value-based sustainable development. In this regard, the focus of the study on the stage of primary school education is essential, especially in the context of the global environmental challenges that children of the new generation will have to overcome by the end of the 21st century.

The dissertation is 223 pages, of which 145 pages are the main text. It is logically structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, appendices. In *the introductory part* of the dissertation, Galina Vassileva outlines environmental problems and challenges, comments on them not only globally but also nationally, and on this basis raises some discussion issues in relation to the teaching of Man and Nature at the Primary Educational Stage – in terms of the workload of the subject, the curriculum and the way it is presented in textbooks, the knowledge-centric approach to teaching and its effects on students' activity and engagement. The conceptualization of the study is based on personal pedagogical experience and is built with the clear intention to construct and approbate an effective modern model for the formation of environmental culture in primary school students through the teaching of Man and Nature.

The theoretical study presented in the first chapter situates the research problem in the discourse of the evolution of views in ecological knowledge. From the position

of the ideas of the connection of the biosphere and the noosphere, the key concepts in the research field (ecological awareness, environmental ethics, ecological culture), the relations between them, the content and structure of ecological culture are clarified. In my opinion, the attempt for a modern interpretation of the concept of environmental culture would be more convincing through its more categorical linking with the competence approach in education, which would reveal more methodological and methodological research perspectives.

Methodologically valuable is the focus in *the second chapter* on the peculiarities in the process of forming environmental culture through the prism of age characteristics in the cognitive development and value growth of young students. The analysis of the modern concept of environmental education in primary school takes into account its interdisciplinary connection not only with civic, health and intercultural education, but also with all educational areas, focuses on the educational aspects of environmental education and considers it in the context of its integrativity, continuity and openness. In this context, the limitations of the subject-centered methodology seem to stand out more and Galina Vassileva justifiably expands the scope of the didactic toolkit, thus bringing it closer to the concept of open education. In my opinion, this research strategy, which is conceptually deployed and technologically operationalized at several levels in the presented author's model for the formation of ecological culture, is promising, especially in view of the wide opportunities for invariant methodological solutions. The model has a constructivist design, the tools are rich, each of the four levels (motivational-value, cognitive, activity, reflective) is deployed as a system of tasks, forms of work, methods, means, techniques, activities, the results of their practical application in a real learning environment are described, a thematic distribution with a detailed description of each of the implemented activities is presented. I believe that this foundation of tested in practice, meaningful and shared experience is an indisputable merit of the dissertation

and an invaluable contribution of Galina Vassileva to environmental education in primary school.

The results of the experimental training with students from the 4th grade in 119 Secondary School "Acad. Mihail Arnaudov" confirm the research hypothesis about the effectiveness of the model. At the end of the formative stage, a positive change was reported in each of the indicators for environmental culture - ecological knowledge, attitude to nature and practical skills of students for research and nature conservation activities.

The overall impression of the dissertation is a high professional commitment to the issues and a clearly expressed practical and applied orientation. The text is author's, academic ethics is respected when citing. For the purposes of her dissertation, Galina Vassileva has used 149 literary sources in Bulgarian, Russian and German. An appendix of 60 pages presents diagnostic tests and photographic material with products from the activities of the students involved in the experimental training.

3. Scientific contributions

The contributions formulated by the author synthesize the achievements in the implementation of the research tasks. With regard to the theoretical conceptualization of the problem, I accept with some reservations the author's character of the concept of environmental education in primary school, which does not question the contribution of Galina Vassileva to the systematization of concepts, approaches, policies that form the modern vision of education for sustainable development. The practical and applied contributions of the dissertation research are categorically stated with the developed and approbated author's model for training for the formation of environmental culture in primary school students through the education in the subject Man and Nature. The diverse possibilities for variability that are embedded in it reveal broad prospects for its creative application in school practice.

4. Conclusion

In terms of content and volume, the dissertation meets the accepted requirements, as well as the regulatory requirements for acquiring scientific degrees. On the basis of this and the above general positive characteristic of the research activity of the PhD student, the merits of the developed dissertation and the assessment of the contributing moments in it, I give my positive background for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy, scientific specialty Theory of Education and Didactics of Galina Petrova Vasileva.

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Assoc. Prof. Maya Sotirova PhD

Sofia, March 19, 2025