REVIEW

On the dissertation of Asya Valcheva

"The Тeacher - Mediator Between Tradition and Modernity of the XX-XXI century

(Ethnological study) "

Asya Valcheva's dissertation is dedicated to a significant and topical issue. The introduction of innovation as a teaching method in secondary education and the role of the teacher in this complex and multifaceted process is a currently unexplored problem, which the author addresses through an analysis of the normative base, as well as through a survey and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The 240-page dissertation contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. The purpose of the study is "to outline the dynamic changes in education in the twenty-first century, and to analyse the role of the teacher in upholding the enduring educational and human values"(p. 5). A basic dichotomy that permeates the entire text is already set out here: the values-innovation opposition. In other words, how the values-oriented secondary education system perceives the new teaching methods imposed by the rapid development of technology in recent years; what is the role of the teacher in this process and what is the attitude of the teachers themselves towards it. As a teacher and a deputy head teacher, the author has first-hand knowledge of the processes of education. She has been a participant in them and has a personal relation to the issues, which determines the certain borderline and interdisciplinary character as well as the applied character of her research.

The introduction sets the broad framework of the problem under study. Chapter One, "Mediation and Education," aims to describe the challenges facing contemporary teachers and their working conditions. The normative framework on innovative education globally and nationally is presented in great detail, with numerous and lengthy quotations from Council of Europe and Ministry of Education documents. Bulgaria's achievements in this respect are also shown - over 500 innovative schools in the country by 2020 - as well as plans for the near future. Against the background of a general description of artificial intelligence and its many applications in education, the European Council regulations on the use of digital products with artificial intelligence are listed. In this context, the European educational model is outlined. The following paragraph discusses common human values and their application in the global world. Attention is paid to Eastern educational models, using the example of the philosophy of Integrated Lifelong Learning (ILL) of the Japanese Yoshiko Nomura. The relation of this model to the specific topic of the study, i.e. to the Bulgarian context, is not clear. The professiogram of the teacher is examined - the skills, qualities and competences that the teacher should possess are defined. It is mentioned that many teachers "overheated" during the Covid pandemic, when they had to master the intricacies of online teaching in a short time. This essential theme is missing from the interviews in Chapter Three - i.e. there is no specific data on teachers with a similar problem, which would set an important direction for the thesis.

 Chapter Two, 'The School Institution: Development and Directions', traces the historical development of education in Bulgaria. Numerous facts are listed and numerous documents are cited, again with the author's focus on the legal framework. A SWOT analysis of the so-called STEAM educational approach in Bulgarian schools is also presented, including strengths, weaknesses, risks and threats. On p. 83 Anthony Giddens is mentioned, not Gibbons.

The third chapter "The Teacher - Tradition, Modernity and Today (Ethnological Study)” contains the contribution part of the work. The author examines the role of the teacher in traditional, socialist and postmodern society, incorrectly placing the end of the traditional period in 1944 (p.74). It is an indisputable historical fact that during the period of the so-called Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878-1944), in the country there is a s process of accelerated modernization. Also incorrect is the statement on the next page that 4-5 children were educated in the convent schools in the monasteries. The teacher's relationship with parents and students is subjected to functional analysis. In the paragraph devoted to the field survey, data on the gender and age of respondents are presented. It is not clear what type of questionnaire was applied, open or closed, for example whether the values listed on page 106 were pre-set or freely formulated by the interviewees. In spite of this ambiguity, the results of the survey as well as the interviews contribute to addressing the main research aim of the paper and reflect the difficult acceptance and implementation of innovation by Bulgarian teachers. When citing respondents only by initials, it remains unclear what their gender and age are, from which further conclusions and inferences could be drawn. Clarifying what respondents understood by pedagogical innovation is useful. Some reasons and barriers to the introduction of this type of innovation are outlined, e.g. formal teacher training organised by the Ministry of Education. The attached empirical data paint an interesting picture and set directions for future research.

The conclusion reiterates and summarizes the main ideas of the text. It is followed by a list of references and appendices. The abstract is formatted according to the requirements for the formatting of an abstract, and the author's publications cited in it comply with the requirements of the law.

In spite of the remarks and comments set out above, appreciating the scientific and applied potential of the work and considering the difficulties that Asya Valcheva overcame as an active teacher and PhD student during the pandemic, I believe that her dissertation work as a whole deserves a positive evaluation. I therefore recommend the members of the esteemed scientific jury to award Asya Valcheva the degree PhD.

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