

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Rosalia Yordanova Kuzmanova-Kartalova

of the dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences
professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Theory of Education)

At: Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Department: Theory of Education

Author: Rusana Georgieva Gadzhanova

Title: Educational and Therapeutic Aspects of Photography

Scientific Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vladislav Gospodinov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

PhD data

By Order No. PD-38-70 of 03.02.2025 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for providing a procedure for defending a dissertation on "Educational and Therapeutic Aspects of Art" for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Theory of Education). The author of the dissertation is Rusana Georgieva Gadzhanova – a full-time PhD student at the Department of Theory of Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with scientific supervisor Assoc. prof. Vladislav Gospodinov, PhD, from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

A dissertation and an abstract in Bulgarian are submitted for review, a curriculum vitae – European format is attached, a reference for compliance with the national minimum requirements for the PhD degree, with 80 points indicated and covered, distributed as follows: 50 points for a dissertation for the acquisition of the PhD degree and 30 points for three reports published in edited collective volumes.

No violations were found under the procedure.

Brief biographical data about the dissertation

Rusana Gadzhanova is a graduate of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2000, she specialized in Social Psychology at the same university, majoring in Social Psychology. She obtained a master's degree at the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" with a degree in Clinical Psychology in 2004. In 2016 he acquired a new qualification at the Center for Continuing Education of the New Bulgarian University of Art Therapy.

In the period 2021 – 2024 she was a full-time PhD student at the Department of Theory of Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Her work biography is rich and varied. She started working at the Angel Balevski High School in Sofia, where she worked in the period 2003 – 2005 with responsibilities related to documents and records management. In 2005 – 2007 she worked as a manager of Bulgarian educational products at Bulgarian Academic Products Ltd., Sofia. In 2007 he was the manager of

"Slanchovtsi" Ltd., Sofia. Sofia, where work services for children are provided. In 2008 – 2009 she worked in "Kenga & Ru" Ltd., Sofia. Sofia, as a pedagogue for working with children. In 2009 she was a technical assistant in the Social Assistance Directorate – Oborishte District, Sofia. Sofia, regarding correspondence and processing of documents in the field of social activities. In 2009 – 2010 she was a technical assistant at Saubermacher EAD, Sofia. Sofia in terms of translation and work with documents.

In the period 2010 – 2011 she worked at the SPO Foundation, at the Velingrad Children's Center, with the main function of caring for residents. In 2011 – 2014 she held the position of a social worker at the Community Support Center in Velingrad with main commitments – counseling and working with children and families. In different periods she also worked as a psychologist: in 2012 – 2015 at the OSSU – CSRI, Sofia. Batak with commitments - consulting and working with users; in 2013 – 2015 at the Family Accommodation Center 1 and 2 – Velingrad; as of 2015 in CSC – Velingrad; in 2017 – to the Municipality of Kaloyanovo under OPHRD "Integrated Services and Complex Care in the Home Environment".

In 2017, she also worked with her third professional qualification – as an art therapist at the DBM Foundation for Children with Disabilities accommodated in the Center for Children with Disabilities in Sofia.

The focus of her three qualifications - as a social pedagogue, clinical and social psychologist and art therapist find a logical combination in her current position, which dates back to 2016 - manager of "Alternatives for Development and Therapy" Ltd. with a focus - counseling and working with children, adults and organizations.

PhD student Rusana Gadzhanova also has teaching experience. In the period 2018 – 2023 she was the head of the student bachelor's practice at the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"; in the period 2018 – 2020 she was a lecturer in the course "Art Therapy in Speech Therapy Practice" in the Master's program "Language and Speech Pathology" at New Bulgarian University; in 2021 – 2022 she was a lecturer at the professional qualification "Art Therapy" in the course "Observations on the practice of the specialty"; in the period 2018 – 2023 she was a lecturer in the "Art Therapy" module, specialty "Music Therapy" for a master's degree at the National Academy of Music "Prof. Pancho Vladigerov". From 2024 to the present, she has been an assistant professor at the Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Affairs at the Faculty of Education and Arts Sciences.

Her research activity is related to participation in conferences - eight in number, three of which are in Bulgaria with international participation and one international - in Romania. In four of them he participated with reports.

In addition to the three publications under the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor", Rusana Gadzhanova has implemented other publications, such as: The pre-graduate practical training of students in the specialty "Social Activities" as a basis for their future professional realization (Pedagogy magazine, 2024), co-authored with lecturers from the Faculty of Pedagogy, implemented on the basis of research under a project at the Faculty of Pedagogy; Life and Being of the Art Therapist (in the collection of the Institute for Therapy and Expressive Arts, 2021), Art Therapy in Measure (in the collection of NBU, 2019).

PhD student Gadzhanova also implements other scientific and practical activities, such as participation in: online discussions related to the needs of people with disabilities; training in adolescent skills to prevent the risks faced by children whose parents work abroad; summer school for NGOs, etc.

Her expertise includes numerous project activities in which she participates as: trainer, psychologist, art therapist, supervisor, facilitator, coordinator in the fields of social and educational spheres.

She is also a certified trainer in "Positive Parenting" since 2011 and has completed a training for increasing personal potential - Psychodrama, since 2006.

She has been a member of the Union of Scientists since 2024 and of the Society of Psychologists in Bulgaria since 2005.

He is fluent in German and English.

Summary: Rusana Gadzhanova's biography presents her as a candidate with very good preparation in educational, research, practical-applied, publication-teaching aspects, combining theoretical preparedness with very good expertise and practical competence in the field of helping professions with an emphasis on social work, psychological assistance and art therapy intervention.

Structural composition of the dissertation, characteristics and assessment of its content

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation has a total volume of 297 pages, of which 288 pages are main text and 9 pages are appendices. It is structured in an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a conclusion, a bibliography, which includes 200 sources, of which 161 in Cyrillic, 22 sources in Latin, 1 video and 15 Internet sources. The literature in Cyrillic and Latin includes fundamental sources on the subject of the dissertation. There are also 3 appendices – Questions for conducting a focus group with teachers and 2 questionnaires related to the study of the possibilities for the application of photography in various activities. The research data are illustrated in the text of the dissertation with 5 figures, 58 tables, graphs and diagrams, 58 photographs and 4 illustrations.

Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

In the introduction of the work, the author has successfully substantiated the significance of the problem and the motives for its study as a dissertation problem.

On the basis of successful argumentation of the historical conditionality of photography as a documentary tool, and its positioning as a tool for transforming the present and setting directions for the future, a request is made for translating its effect and impact today in the individual process of consultative work with clients, as well as for group work. In group work, the educational element of photography is prioritized for additional and in-depth activities of self-observation, reflection, self-expression, self-expression, interaction with educational and self-educational elements. These theses are the starting point in the scientific research of the dissertation.

Already in the introduction, a request is made for the skillful use of the multidisciplinary approach in the work, and through the integration of knowledge and practices from the fields of art, philosophy, psychology, sociology, pedagogy and other humanities and social sciences, the benefits of using photography for the purposes of education and introspection in personal terms are argued.

Here is the scientific apparatus of research – object, subject, goals, tasks of theoretical and practical nature, hypothesis, research methods, which is well built and presented. The goals of the dissertation are related to the opportunity to provoke and support the process of self-observation and self-exploration through work on photo tasks and to achieve harmonization in functioning and socialization (developing skills for (self-)reflection, effective self-expression, self-expression) and getting to know and interact between adolescents in a group through the language of photography. The research group is argued - children in adolescence, a period characterized by intensive formation of identity, ideas about themselves and the world, active search for meaning, purpose and establishment of relationships.

It can be taken into account that the hypothesis set in the study corresponds to the formulated goal and the tasks set. The specially built research methodology, including quantitative and qualitative methods, covers the perimeter and specificity of the research focus – the possibilities of photography in its educational and therapeutic aspects. The methods used are: survey, focus group, observation, case study, research of products of the activity. They are fully consistent with the specifics of the study, correspond to the goal setting and the tasks set and are a reliable basis for the objectivity of the survey results.

The first chapter "Prerequisites for the use of photography in educational and therapeutic practice" lays the foundations of scientific analysis in the dissertation research, by examining, analyzing and specifying the theoretical foundations of the research and justifying its multidisciplinary nature, combining theories, concepts, concepts and techniques from the field of pedagogy, psychology and philosophy.

A very good historical review of the function and role of photography in the public life of pre-liberation Bulgaria is made. The combination of psychoanalytic concepts in the analysis and interpretation of the meaning and impact of the photograph in different historical periods is impressive.

Emphasis is placed on the possibilities and role of photography today for the processes of upbringing, development, socialization and self-actualization of the personality. The connection between pedagogy and photography is sought, the educational aspects of photography are analyzed, and the author substantiates the thesis of the existence of natural connections in their common fields of interaction. I find it necessary to emphasize the depth of the analyses carried out by the dissertation, based on fundamental sources, of classics in the relevant scientific fields. A special place is given to the relationship between social pedagogy, individual pedagogy and civic education. The relationship between photography – psychology – psychotherapy is examined, and theories, approaches, functions and factors of influence are successfully examined. Based on a thorough analysis of concepts and statements in this direction, the dissertation comes to the conclusion that photography has an important role in the formation of a worldview and aesthetic sense and that its use in psychotherapeutic work largely has similar characteristics to counseling. At the same time, they also take into account essential differences between the two processes, which, according to her, are determined by some features of

working with photographs, as well as that group pictorial work and work with photographs proceeds differently from the individual form. The deduced specifics from the theoretical scientific research are applied and are the basis for the development of a model for working with photography in a photo studio, as well as in the use of photographs in the individual sessions presented in the study.

This chapter also analyzes the features of remote counseling and therapy in terms of effectiveness and limits. Of interest is the conclusion of the dissertation that: "... The phototherapy process in a remote format provides an opportunity for the individual to satisfactorily and effectively connect with his inner resource, and for specialists to apply various techniques, the detailed description of which in clinical practice can only enrich the idea of effective work in psychotherapeutic assistance, counseling and psychosocial support through art."

The analyses made and the arguments presented in this theoretical chapter emphasize the value and importance of the multidisciplinary approach for combining the achievements and specifically applicable specifics of different scientific fields on the topic of phototherapeutic impact on the person in need or for the prevention of problems by strengthening the educational effect and self-education. It is clearly understood that the systematic use of photographs according to the so-called model for working with photography can be an appropriate tool for those working in the pedagogical field and in consultative practice.

The second chapter "Model for Educational and Therapeutic Work with Photography" presents the experimental process of studying the model, examining, specifying and analyzing the basic concepts that determine it, and are the foundation in the concept of the dissertation. Its justification, structure and content for the study of the educational and therapeutic aspects of photography in the consultative practice with individual clients and in a group format (photo studio) are included.

The developed author's model is successfully implemented in a program that includes three thematic modules aimed at supporting the young person for self-knowledge, (self-)reflection and interaction with others, self-education and self-actualization. The working stages and modules in the model's program for working with photography are presented in detail.

This chapter also contains the apparatus of empirical research, which is conceived and implemented in accordance with the author's goal and concept.

The third chapter contains the results of the empirical study. The possibilities for the application of elements of the model for working with photography in the consultative work are presented in detail and motivated. The selection of cases from consultative practice, which are the contingent of the study, is successfully justified. The applied techniques for the practical use of photographs in face-to-face and remote form to study the impact and effect of working with them both in the individual process and in group work are argued. The emphasis in the individual consultative work is with elements of therapeutic impact, and in the group work it is more of an educational nature and provides the participants with the opportunity for additional and in-depth activity on self-observation, reflection, self-expression and self-expression, interaction with educational and self-educational elements.

It can be emphasized that for the purposes of the study, the method of individual case study was skillfully used, and a very good justification, observation and analysis of cases was made.

In the second part of the chapter, through the analysis of information from observations, case studies, products of activity and questionnaire studies, interesting results are obtained regarding the possibilities of the educational and therapeutic aspects of photography. Along with the qualitative analyses, which are focused and comprehensive, quantitative methods are also used, and in the analysis of the survey data, in addition to percentage ratios and diagrams, statistical methods are applied to evaluate the results, such as correlation analyses, Cronbach's alpha, etc., which emphasizes the importance of the results obtained. What can be recommended is to strengthen the analytical component in presenting the results at the expense of the descriptive one.

In general: An in-depth empirical study has been done. An author's model for working with photography has been experimented to investigate its educational and therapeutic aspects and its impact on various areas of life activity - to increase the well-being of adolescents and to gain deep insight into experiential states, to recognize the causes of the problem and appropriate approaches to their control. This experimental approach of research increases the importance of the model both with the reliability of the results and with the stability and specificity of its elements for influencing difficult life situations. The model claims to be innovative and non-traditional both in the formulation of the theses and in the collaboration of methods, approaches and techniques in its application and for non-traditional insight into the helping field through a new approach of impact and for educational and therapeutic work - photography.

Another structural unit of the dissertation is the conclusions from the overall research, which are interesting, in-depth, substantiated and correspond to the actual research work performed and the results achieved.

The abstract, in a volume of 53 pages, objectively reflects the content of the dissertation, the main results achieved in the research and is prepared in accordance with the requirements.

Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation

3 publications on the subject of the dissertation have been realized - two in conference proceedings and one in a textbook, published by New Bulgarian University (NBU).

One of the publications "Art Therapy Practice in Working with Clients Experiencing Crisis and Loss" (16 pages) was published in 2017 in "Art Therapy Practicum", an edited edition of NBU. The article "Therapeutic aspects of photography in the experience of loneliness in adolescence and youth. Development of a Program for Work with Adolescents and Youth" (6 pages) is published in an edited collection of the conference "35 Years of the Faculty of Pedagogy - Continuity and Future", University of Economics "St. Kliment Ohridski". The third article "Possibilities of Phototherapeutic Impact in Remote Counseling" (6 pages) promotes the ideas in the dissertation in an edited collection of another scientific conference "30 Years of Psychology" at the University of Transport "St. Kliment Ohridski". St. Cyril and Methodius" in 2023.

The articles as chronology and content speak of a step-by-step and purposeful presentation of the problems on which the dissertation is working and of good popularization of the results of the dissertation research among the scientific community.

Scientific contributions

I accept the contributions formulated by the dissertation as actually achieved and with significance for science and practice, commenting on them as follows:

1. A comprehensive theoretical multidisciplinary study of the essence, role and specifics of the application of photography in various scientific and practical fields related to educational, socially assisting and psychological-therapeutic work has been made, with an emphasis on its educational and therapeutic capabilities.
2. On the basis of an in-depth analysis of theories, concepts and formulations of Bulgarian and foreign authors from the fields of pedagogical, social, psychological and therapeutic schools, the integrative links of the relevant sciences with photography have been deduced, systematized and argued, and the possibilities of the multidisciplinary approach and the specific influence of photography in terms of self-observation, self-research, achieving harmonization in functioning and socialization have been empirically proven, as well as for getting to know and interacting with adolescents in a group.
3. An author's model for working through photography for self-knowledge, development of skills and (self-)education, which presents the action-procedural side of the educational and therapeutic aspects of photography, has been built and tested. The model has been tested and has practical and applied value in terms of the proposed author's program to support the young person for self-knowledge, (self-)reflection and interaction with others, self-education and self-actualization to help pedagogical subjects and helping specialists.

In general, the dissertation demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the problem related to the possibilities of using photography in educational and therapeutic practice. The literature used is on the topic of the dissertation and presents the problem in its comprehensiveness and multilayeredness. On the basis of a successful scientific and theoretical analysis of essential features, functions, approaches and practices, a successful author's systematic model for working with photographs for children in need and for supporting their social functioning has been built.

The chosen methodology of empirical research provides the opportunity to achieve the goal set in the dissertation research. The main hypothesis that photography has educational and therapeutic aspects that contribute to the construction, development, improvement of the skills for (self-)reflection has been proven; for (self-)education through the formation of aesthetic taste, moral qualities, attitude, and it has been established that the skills for self-knowledge, self-expression and self-expression, the skills for interaction with others and higher satisfaction of interaction, relationships and that the experimental model for working with photography contributes to more effective socialization.

Recommendations

Given the high value and significance of the issues related to the educational and therapeutic aspects of photography, I recommend the dissertation to promote the results of her research even more widely by publishing them in refereed and indexed journals.

Also, for future scientific projects, it would be useful to strengthen the analytical component in the presentation of the results of empirical research, at the expense of the descriptive one. Thus, the important and significant results that have been achieved would stand out even more clearly.

Conclusion

The dissertation contains distinct scientific, scientifically applied and applied results that represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The presented materials and dissertation results show that the PhD student Rusana Gadzhanova has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the field of the theory of education with an emphasis on the educational and therapeutic aspects of photography, demonstrating qualities and abilities for independent scientific research.

In view of the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the peer-reviewed dissertation, abstract, results achieved and contributions, and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Rusana Georgieva Gadzhanova in the field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Theory of Education).

20.03.2025

Reviewer:

/Prof. Rozaliya Kuzmanova – Kartalova,
PhD/