

REVIEW

of PhD Dissertation

Theme: *„A Model for the Development of Visual Expression in Fine Arts Learning in Seventh and Eighth Grades*

in General Education in Secondary Schools“

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Area of Higher Education: 1. Education Sciences

Research area: 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in

Scientific specialty: Teaching Methods in Fine Arts

Department: „Visual Arts“

Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts

Author of the dissertation: Elena Veselinova Panayotova

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Veselinova Dimcheva

Reviewer: Prof. Plamen Anatoliev Legkostup, Dr. Habil

I. Data on doctoral studies

Elena Panayotova was enrolled as a part-time PhD student at the Department of Visual Arts, Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. By order of the Rector No. ПД 38-668 dated 26 November 2019, her thesis was approved for defense and scientific jury was appointed.

The doctoral student has fulfilled all the requirements and conditions of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring academic degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

The dissertation is approved and commissioned for official public defense by the Department of Visual Arts. In the overall realization of the dissertation thesis, no procedural and formal violations were detected.

II. Data for the dissertation and the abstract

The dissertation consists of 247 pages, illustrated with: 21 tables, 5 diagrams, numerous photographs, illustrating some of the results of the students' own artistic activity, as well as screenshots, related to information on the use of various software for creating graphic images and multimedia projects.

The bibliography consists of 131 sources, 90 of which in Cyrillic, 13 – in Latin, and 28 Internet resources. The oldest source is from 1905, so modern

sources are predominant, the latest being from 2019. In addition, numerous normative documents related to the topic of the dissertation have been researched.

The dissertation includes theoretical, methodological and analytical parts, which are properly structured and meet the established requirements and accepted practices. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, ending with conclusions, general conclusion and bibliography. In the form of an Appendix, in a separate book body with a volume of 133 full-color pages, visual materials for the dissertation are presented, containing the illustrative material collected and systematized as a result of the cultural research, as well as materials, presenting the students' activities on the topics set in the model, complement the main text.

The topic chosen is modern and socially significant. Thus, it has been developed to complement the pedagogical theory and practice with new ideas in the context of the modern educational paradigm. *The main idea* of the dissertation is to draw students' attention to the philosophy of Life through theme-symbols: "Tree of Life", "Wheel of Life", "Eternal Life" and "Harmony on Earth", which allow them to explore their cultural roots, to foster a responsible position in the students to study and preserve the intangible cultural heritage, as well as to preserve the harmonious and ecological balance of the Earth in real terms. Studying this enriches students' knowledge, enables them to create new visual images, as well as to adapt to the requirements of modern society through the opportunities offered by arts and computer technologies.

"Today, writes Elena Panayotova, society is gradually becoming aware that it has disturbed the harmony on Earth. Therefore, I think it is appropriate to draw students' attention to life on Earth, to awaken their awareness of nature and Earth conservation". I absolutely share the doctoral student's views, as well as the fact that she reasonably seeks ways to "awaken" and direct students' interest in this field, taking into account their age characteristics and knowing their involvement in modern digital technologies and the opportunities they provide. Therefore, Elena Panayotova suggests that it will be interesting and appropriate that eternal philosophical topics such as the Tree and Wheel of Life, Eternal Life and environmental problems, which humanity faces, are not only raised and explained, but also presented in a more interesting and inherent for the 14-15 year old students way, namely through the capabilities of information technology, combined with elements of computer graphics.

The *pedagogical model* suggested in the dissertation aims at activating the creative activity of the students, while assimilating and effectively using modern technologies. Thus, by analyzing theoretical ideas and synthesizing them in active

visual-creative activity, today's students and future citizens will have a chance to realize environmental problems, to perceive Earth as a single, complete, interconnected organism, and then at least try to restore harmony in the nature of our home planet.

In the *Introduction*, the doctoral student presents the motives for the choice and the actuality of the topic, outlining the problematic fields to which her research interest is directed. The *purpose*, *object* and *subject* of the research are well-formulated. I accept the seven *tasks* outlined, but the presented *hypothesis* of the study, in my opinion, could be a bit more precise in order to be relevant to the research made, which parameters are actually larger.

The design of the methodology of the pedagogical research, its scope, as well as a brief annotation of the dissertation work are presented.

Here again, the author's personal involvement to the chosen problems and the possibilities for professional and competent defense are clearly outlined.

In the *First Chapter*, entitled **Theoretical Framework**, Elena Panayotova presents the theoretical concept of the problem:

She accurately and thoroughly characterizes the mythology and image of the "Tree of Life": the development of its symbolism as a fairy tale, myth and theme, presented in different cultures and visualizing its corresponding philosophical meaning, clarifying its terminology and classification. It is concluded that the image of the Tree of Life is a symbol that impresses artists and philosophers from ancient times to the present day.

Ms. Panayotova competently interprets ideas and opinions about the essence of the symbolism of the Wheel of Life as the abstract and philosophical development of the Tree of Life, and substantiates the importance of the symbols, embodied in the Wheel of Life for understanding life as a cycle of development. She explores the theme of "Eternal Life" in the artworks of Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master, examining the philosophical meaning of his works and commenting on the mythological archetypes used by him in his paintings, thereby convincing us of the Master's idea of a permanent connection between people and nature.

The author puts an accent on cyclicity in nature and in life, considered in philosophical and life contexts. On this basis, she examines the essence, artistic practices and the ideological and philosophical framework of the holidays in Bulgarian lands as part of the value system of the traditional Bulgarian heritage. She is capable of interpreting ideas and positions regarding the harmony of the Earth and the responsibility of all of us for its protection.

In *Chapter Two*, entitled **Learning Process. Required knowledge and skills** the research parameters of the study are presented:

The place and role of fine arts and information technology training in seventh and eighth grades, related to the state educational standards, are examined.

In the pedagogical context of the integration of information and computer technologies into the education system and specifically into art education, the knowledge and skills that students acquire in the seventh and eighth grades through the proposed pedagogical model, as well as the role of digital technologies in art education are indicated.

The possibilities of different software for creating graphic images and multimedia projects suitable for teaching at school and being accepted and used by students are considered.

In *Chapter Three*, entitled **Description of the proposed pedagogical model. Model Aprobation**, an experimental learning model adapted to the subjects *Fine Arts* and *Information Technology* in the general education is presented. The proposed pedagogical model is based on the principle of integrated art education, and within 27 topics, developed in 112 lessons, the mastery of the knowledge, skills and techniques of fine arts is given, while the knowledge of information technology and computer graphics are so structured as to purposefully serve the topics, defined by the subject *Fine Arts*. Knowledge and skills of working with editors to create graphics, animation and editing software are applied, which are needed to effectively and invariantly solve the tasks posed in the model. It is built to create students' skills to respect and appreciate traditional art but also to draw valuable ideas from it to be creative in today's environment, making modern design solutions by competently applying modern information technology achievements. 158 students in the 7th and 8th grades at 144 Secondary School „Narodni Buditeli“ in Sofia, participate in the testing and aprobation. The School has an expanded study of fine arts and a good material base for the development of the creative process.

The parameters of the study are logically formulated, ordered and interconnected. This presupposes the optimal implementation of the research program and the acquisition of objective data. Tables and diagrams illustrate the activities embedded in the model and the competencies they develop. The methods and approaches used are justified. The methodology used is presented in detail. The plan for the pedagogical experiment was purposefully elaborated. Scientific methods, diagnostic tools and specialized methods are applicable and have the necessary credible and reliable character. The analysis was carried out

in the direction of knowledge in theoretical aspect and skills – in practical aspect, as well as in the direction of visual literacy – compositional construction, sense of rhythm, color construction and artistic expressiveness – content of the drawing, composition center, color harmony.

On the basis of the analysis of the experiment results and the control stage of the experimental study, a comparative analysis of the empirical data obtained is made. From the summarized results between the input and output levels, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference in the relevant indicators.

In the *part* of the dissertation called *Summaries and Conclusions*, the author summarized the results of the systematic work on the proposed pedagogical model, believing that the goal was achieved, namely: students have skills and habits to be able to connect the cultural heritage, full of valuable examples, and the contemporary challenges to the visual arts. The conclusions drawn are relevant to the seven tasks set, and the hypothesis formulated is confirmed. I agree with the summary of the results and the conclusions drawn in this part of the thesis.

The *Conclusion* focuses on the fact that as a result of the conducted interactive training in *Fine arts* and *Information technology*, students have been given the opportunity to lay the foundations of their development as individual creators, completing artistic projects that are the basis for their future creative development, and the results obtained give the students self-esteem and striving for a better expression, by integrating knowledge and skills from different fields.

I would like to pay special attention to the materials, presented in the Appendix: On the one hand there are studied samples and visual materials on different topics – The Tree of Life, The Wheel of Life, "Eternal Life" in the work of Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master, Harmony on Earth, Renewable and non-renewable energy sources, and on the other – the students' works, the holiday calendar, the two multimedia projects – evidence of the success of the applied pedagogical model. For me, as an artist working in the field of computer graphics, both tests used to measure students' level of knowledge in vector and raster computer graphics are of great interest.

After an in-depth analysis, we are convinced that on the basis of this research, scientific conclusions and recommendations, important for the artistic and pedagogical practice, can be made.

The dissertation thesis meets the legal norms and requirements.

The author's abstract reflects the synthesized and analytical essence of the survey made, correctly presents the contributions from it and meets the generally

accepted requirements. A text box could be added to it to give information about the history of the procedure.

III. Scientific contributions

The following scientific contributions are formulated in the dissertation:

1. A review of philosophical and visual symbolically emotional material from the cultural and historical heritage has been made, treating the theme "Life" in progress and eternal repetition;

2. The work of Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master from the point of view of the theme "Eternal life" and the inextricable connection of people with nature are considered;

3. Emphasis is placed on the need to educate students in harmony with the principle of sustainable development in order to restore and preserve Earth's harmony;

4. A pedagogical model for the development of the visual expression of students in the Seventh and Eighth grades in *Fine Arts* and *Information Technology* classes has been proposed and tested, by drawing students' attention to the philosophy of artefacts from the cultural and historical heritage;

5. The proposed pedagogical model was tested, student works developed during the model's testing were presented, as well as the statistical material of the students' results, which showed the effectiveness of the model for developing students' visual expression, was processed.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the scientific contributions presented show that the experimental methodological model functions successfully in the process of teaching fine arts. The anticipated expected results have been achieved and the model could successfully be used in the practice of fine arts teachers.

IV. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums

The PhD student has submitted eight publications on topics related to the topic of the dissertation, which is above the required minimum.

V. Critical Notes and Recommendations:

Against the background of the rich content of the dissertation, the following notes and recommendations can be made:

1. It would be good to have a control group in the experiment, though from the summarized results between the input and output levels, it appears that there is a statistically significant difference in the relevant indicators.
2. The conclusion of the dissertation could be broader and outline the research perspectives generated by the results of the experimental work, as well as the future possibilities for developing the model.
3. The importance of the research requires that certain parts of it should be published in scientific journals in the fields of art and pedagogy, without undermining the qualities of the Electronic Journal of the Department for Information and Improvement of Teachers.
4. The shortage of research papers with relevant scientific, theoretical, practical and applied content, as well as the analyzed and summarized rich theoretical material, require adaptation and publication of the dissertation in the form of a monograph, which I strongly recommend!

The critical notes and recommendations made in the review do not call into question the indisputable and significant contributions contained in the dissertation, but could be the subject of further efforts by the author.

VI. Conclusion

I do not personally know the doctoral student but from the materials that I have thoroughly and with interest studied, I can conclude that Elena Panayotova is an erudite author who possesses the necessary intellectual and professional qualities of a researcher and educator.

After having thoroughly read the dissertation and its appendix, I come to the conclusion that they are original research work of the author. I accept the structure of the dissertation, although there might have other opinions. The style meets the requirements for this type survey and research, and Elena Panayotova's statement is at an academic level. I take this opportunity to congratulate the research supervisor – Assoc. Prof. Maya Veselina Dimcheva for the achievements of her PhD student.

Bearing in mind the relevance and importance of the researched topic, the indisputable merits of the dissertation, revealing the undeniable qualities and ability of the doctoral student Elena Panayotova for independent research activity, her capability for discovering new scientific facts that enrich the pedagogical practice, I give a **positive** assessment of her work.

I propose to the honorable academic jury to vote positively and to award to Elena Veselinova Panayotova the requested educational and scientific degree "doctor" in area of higher education: 1. Education Sciences, research area: 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in..., scientific specialty: Teaching Methods in Fine Arts.

18.02.2020
Veliko Turnovo

Reviewer:



(Prof. Plamen Legkostup, Dr. Habil)