

Review

of the dissertation titled “*Formation of personal experience through experiencing emotions - variable applied strategies in the activity of the modern pedagogue*”,

for the award of the educational and scientific degree **Doctor** in Professional Field 1.2
Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics)

Author: Doctoral student Rumyana Aleksandrova Georgieva-Ilieva

Reviewer: Prof. DSc Yanka Dinkova Merdzhanova, Department of Didactics, Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Evaluation of the topic and the significance of the work: The issues addressed in this dissertation have maintained sustainable relevance since the end of the 20th century and are especially sensitive and key in the global age and educational environment. Childhood and adolescence significantly intensify the critical nature of personal experience and emotional engagement within the context of a socially open environment. Thus, the dissertation addresses some of the most pressing areas of pedagogical practice in its full scope: within professional-school settings, institutional non-formal education, informal family settings, and the broader social environment. The **benefits** of the work are relevant to all **four dimensions**.

General characteristics of the dissertation: The dissertation spans 276 pages, including 3 chapters, 37 figures, 4 tables, and 11 appendices. A total of 80 bibliographic sources have been effectively utilized. The first part presents the main concepts such as “personal experience,” “experiencing,” “variable pedagogical strategies,” “experiential pedagogy,” and the “relationship between reflection and resilience.” The doctoral candidate builds on knowledge of the German pedagogical experience and proficiency in the German language. The second part presents the empirical research structured **in four stages** of an educational experiment, a survey conducted with youths aged 16+ and children aged 10, based on implemented formative training through experience, and the realization of the project “On the Path of Change”, along with an evaluation of its outcomes. The third part describes a Model for Integrating Variable Applied Pedagogical Strategies for learning and education through experience, and the educational game “*The Path of Change*” into pedagogical practice.

Presentation of the Candidate: The full-time doctoral student Rumyana Georgieva-Ilieva holds a Master's degree in Bulgarian Language and Literature. She is currently a volunteer chairperson of the “Center for Experiential Learning” and a German language teacher. She is also a certified Outdoor Instructor, having completed qualifications and participated in projects that have developed her precisely in the direction of her professional and personal choices. This alignment ensures the sensitivity and undeniable authenticity of the work—from conception to final product—which, in turn, predisposes a trusting and supportive expert reading of the dissertation.

Specific Achievements in the Dissertation Research:

1. Optimal scope supported by a rich array of sources. The individual parts are balanced and demonstrate a proportionate focus on the core issues relevant to the topic: personal experience, variable pedagogical strategies, the contemporary pedagogue, analysis of experimental training results and empirical studies.
2. In the relevant sections, the author very precisely identifies the definitions of key concepts adopted as working terms in her study. Her effort to conduct the research in alignment with these definitions is conscious and intentional. The references to particular definitions are well-argued and justified.
3. The object, subject, aim, and tasks of the study are clearly and coherently formulated. Overall, the research questions and hypothesis guide the procedure for theoretical and empirical validation.
4. The doctoral student competently refers to distinguished Bulgarian and international authors in the respective thematic sections. Both theoretical and applied works are utilized. It is evident that the dissertation is directed toward practical-applied contributions.
5. The author's language and style are consistent, clear, and appropriate for academic work.
6. The research is distinctly authentic and original, carried out over an extended period, and includes experimental and control groups. Additionally, an empirical study was conducted within the framework of a real-life project. The entire research is imbued with professional dedication and engagement. **In this way, the author's ideas ALREADY extend beyond the boundaries of a closed academic study, entering real practice with demonstrated positive effects—including personal value development, cognitive development, civic engagement, and self-knowledge through self-reflection, based on the synergizing of personal experience and social environment via the developed educational game. From my perspective, these are radiating scientific contributions, which will continue to strengthen and multiply each other in practice through the variable implementation of the proposed concrete product.**
7. **The developed game “The Path of Change” is transformative for all participants—educators, children, and youth alike.** This makes it forward-looking and highly relevant in the context of transformative, competency-based education.

The entire text is written without excessive descriptive theorizing—highly concise, purposeful, while at the same time providing the necessary conceptual, terminological, meaning-value, and practical-applied clarity to support the procedures.

Critical Notes:

1. I note a certain discrepancy between the *subject* and the *aim* of the research. If the subject is defined as “the processual progression of experience acquisition” (which in itself is somewhat vague), then the aim would not be “to reveal the essence, characteristics, and role of pedagogical experience,” but rather its pedagogical

structuring and organization—which is, in fact, **what the doctoral student does**. That is, the pedagogical variable strategies should take center stage.

2. The entire third part is dedicated to the Model. However, it is narrated rather than demonstrated. This approach does not highlight or present it with the key required parameters—namely, its components and the substantive and functional interrelations between them within a system—to enable its actual meaningful, yet adaptable, application by professionals. Following reflections on principles, methods, and tools, the Model should be systematized, visualized, and categorically described using the author's chosen and precise terminology—**PRINCIPLES, INTRA-SYSTEMIC RELATIONSHIPS, COMPONENTS, STRUCTURE, AND CONTEXT**. Only then can the author's reflection be evaluated—what in the model is original, what is borrowed, and what is adapted. At present, the principles are expressed more in terms of meaning than as actionable “normative” guidelines; the methods require classification into educational and formative, with identification and visualization of their intersection points, and how these influence the specificity of the tools—so as to clearly derive the distinctive characteristics of Romyana Ilieva's proposed approach that make it innovative and significant in a new way within pedagogical practice.
3. The contributions of the dissertation are revised accordingly in the relevant section of the review.

Recommendation: I recommend the publication of a **practical guide**, but I consider it essential that additional *variations be developed and described* in order to create a fully-fledged, flexible and variable program for both school and out-of-school settings. It is important to reflect upon and design four model variations, corresponding to the four dimensions I outlined at the beginning of my expert evaluation. These should give rise to concrete, context-specific versions—**synergistically uniting contexts and issues, children and youth, specialists and partners**.

Scientific Contributions: I accept the contributions indicated by the candidate—they are realistic, authentic, original, and have proven themselves through both **empirical evidence and practical application**. Additionally, the previously emphasized radiating future effect should be acknowledged as a strategic contribution. On the theoretical level, I suggest a more restrained interpretation—the contributions are to be considered as building „**upon**“ existing work within the Bulgarian context, rather than as a foundational introduction or justification for the inclusion of the concept of experiential learning in Bulgarian pedagogy and practice.

Abstract and Publications: The abstract and publications accurately reflect the author's work and research in both bibliographic and public academic spaces.

Conclusion: The dissertation presents a *rich and authentic professional experience* of doctoral candidate Romyana Georgieva-Ilieva, the kind that is highly valued in contemporary pedagogical research. *The critical remarks and recommendations express a firm expectation*

for the candidate's further development—conscious, motivated, and inspired, rather than intended as discouragement. For all of the above reasons, and in accordance with the procedure of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), and the candidate's compliance with national scientometric criteria, I give my **highly positive evaluation** of the **clarity and precise logical structure of the dissertation and the chosen research direction.** I confidently propose the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Romyana Aleksandrova Georgieva-Ilieva in Professional Field 1.2 Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics).

May 10, 2025

Sofia

Reviewer: Prof. DSc Yanka Merdzhanova