

## REVIEW

From Prof. Elka Kirilova Yanakieva, DSc

Of the thesis of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rosalina Plamenova Engels-Critidis

Submitted for acquiring a scientific degree

Doctor of Science in Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool education).

On the topic:

### **INDIVIDUALIZATION AND DIFFERENTIATION OF THE PEDAGOGICAL INTERACTION IN THE KINDERGARTEN**

The dissertation submitted contains a total of 312 pages, illustrated with 14 tables and 47 figures and 56 photographs. The reference list includes 140 titles in Cyrillic, 50 in Latin alphabet and 3 on-line resources. It is structured into an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, recommendations and appendixes.

The wording of **the dissertation topic** is very clear, in essence it outlines the scientific problem that is being sought. The context of the title contains the object of study (the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction), the subject of the study (pedagogical interaction) and the purpose (their application in pedagogical practice in the kindergarten with a view to improving the educational process). The topic of the dissertation is fully consistent with the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool education).

**The topicality of the dissertation** is determined by the parameters of the following contradictions:

- At **the socio-pedagogical level**: on the one hand, there is constant expert pressure on teachers to differentiate developmental and educational tasks with regard to the individual characteristics of the children, to fulfil them with personality-oriented content, and on the other hand, humanization of the educational system and the democratic changes in our society widen the perimeter of the individual differences between children, which makes the teacher encounter difficult practical problems.

- At **the scientific-pedagogical level**: on the one hand, we need individualization and personality-significant orientation of the educational process in kindergarten, and on the other hand, we do not have a theory and a practical model on the basis of which this contradiction can be resolved;

- At **the scientific and methodological level**: on the one hand, we need to use the developmental and educational potential of preschool-specific activities (games, art, work, learning) and, on the other hand, there are no pedagogical technological solutions for determining individual, personality-oriented routes that allow child development to be based on child-satisfying, personality-relevant content aspects of different types of activity.

I think that the wording of the dissertation topic contains these contradictions, it directs us to them, and makes us expect clarification of the ways and means of resolving them.

The dissertation has a **separate introduction**. It states, in the very first lines, that in the course of the study the child is placed in the center with his various individual needs and peculiarities, with the emphasis on his emotional well-being. **Definitions of the concepts of individualization and differentiation** are given and the nature of their specific relationship is clarified. Specifically, individualization is determined by the understanding of the personalized approach, which in pedagogical practice is carried out through a variable-dynamic educational system. In other words, individualization is seen not as a fixed structure but as a process of change and development. Hence, logically, differentiation becomes a micro-group version of the organization of children, which provides an optimal process of individualization. In the light of these definitions given by Rosalina Engels-Critidis, individualization and differentiation have been interpreted not only from a theoretical perspective; but they are also interpreted in terms of pedagogical technology. Therefore, the **purpose of the study** is logically justified: to develop and substantiate a conceptual-technological, variable-dynamic model for the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction.

**The focus and the object of the study** are interrelated, they are formulated in a justified way as the focus of the study is positioned within the object. Their parameters guarantee a sufficient amount of experimental work and reliable results.

One general **hypothesis** has been formulated, from which five sub-hypotheses have been derived. In the main hypothesis, we note several significant points. *First*, the educational progress of children is seen as a function of the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction. *Second*, in order for this function of individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction to be effective, it needs to be appropriate, multidirectional and active. *Third*, in order to ensure the activity of children, it is necessary that pedagogical interaction be carried out in the context of learning by experiencing and enriching the child's personally meaningful experience. These three points of the hypothesis are logically interrelated and are in organic unity. The five sub-hypotheses extend the content of the

hypothesis without repeating it, outlining the circle according to which both the diagnostic toolkit and the content of the psycho-pedagogical experiment should be organized.

Sub-hypotheses diverge meaningfully the basic hypothesis by consistently linking it to the importance of children's age, behavioral traits that are organically linked to psychosexual development (boys and girls), the link between the well-being of individual children and their educational progress, on the one hand. On the other hand, including individual children in the pedagogical interaction and ensuring their educational progress, and last but not least - the overwhelmingly positive attitude towards individualization and differentiation of the pedagogical interaction by all members of the teaching team.

The hypothesis and sub-hypotheses are developed at a high scientific level, they can be a source for ideas in science, and in particular in the epistemology of scientific knowledge.

There are nine **research tasks**; in substance, their formulation would be better if the author had confined them to the requirements of the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses and had subjected the tasks to them. This would possibly mean five research tasks aimed at testing each of the sub-hypotheses. In fact, the further logic of the dissertation research is not based on the logic of the research tasks formulated by Rosalina Engels-Critidis, but on the logic of the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses. Which confirms the objective nature of my remark.

Rosalina Engels-Critidis has implemented a new way of deriving and applying the Dissertation **Diagnostic Toolkit**. She does not follow the classic description of research methods, as we all know it from textbooks on experimental psychology: the method's name, the research objective, materials, procedure, reporting, analysis and conclusions. Contrary to tradition, she first determines **the criteria and indicators of the study**. And from a scientific logic point of view, this is justified in the dissertation under consideration: first, the criteria that are consistent with the content of the sub-hypotheses are determined, and then methods are sought to collect data on these criteria. Rosalina Engels-Critidis has listed **indicators and grades** for measuring each of the criteria. The criteria, indicators and grades are logically interrelated, they are scientifically understandable and convincing.

**The organization of the research** is described very well (three phases and five stages of research; an impressive number of participants).

Rosalina Engels-Critidis's dissertation research is **methodologically sound** and uses the following **approaches**:

○ **The system-structural approach and system-functional approaches**, which are traditional for pedagogical studies, but here they are applied in order to go beyond traditionalism. Individualization and differentiation are explored in parallel, from several

perspectives and in their interrelationships. Against this background comes the organic unification of these two processes, of these two functioning tendencies, in which the pedagogical interaction plays a decisive role.

○ **The historical approach**, which examines the development of ideas about children's individuality and the studies of its phenomenology, the emergence and development of ideas about individual approach and differentiation of pedagogical impact, and later interaction, about the role of personal experiences and the activity as pedagogical determinants of childhood development and behavior. It could be implemented with greater completeness and consistency, though, based on the contemporary Bulgarian pre-school pedagogy and the genesis of its ideas. There is no analysis and evaluation of such great teachers and researchers and organizers of pre-school education as Nikola Zhivkov, Prof. Dimitar Katsarov (Luba Popova's lectures), the influence of the American kindergarten, and in particular the ideas of Elizabeth Harrison, Sofia Avramova, Elka Petrova, Vasilka Manova-Tomova, Tsonka Sheitanova, Boryana Boneva, Snezhina Makedonska, Nadezhda Vitanova, Marin Andreev, Petar Nikolov, Dina Batoeva, Lyuboslava Peneva, Dimitar Kr.Dimitrov. Some of them do not speak directly about the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical impact and interaction, but the understanding of these processes is at the heart of the pedagogical models they create and the pedagogical practices offered. The absence of these authors undermines the historical analysis of the genesis of the subject matter of the research, and consequently limits the possibilities for complex identification and contradiction that determine the attainment of the research goal.

○ **The activity approach** that is conceptualized through the theoretically and practically applied idea of learning by experiencing and acquiring a personally meaningful childhood experience. The latter in Bulgarian pre-school pedagogy has invariably been associated with the game, which is understood not only as a leading activity in mental development, but also as an activity to which the child is most passionately attached and everything related to it is highly personal and meaningful. The genesis of this idea starts from Elka Petrova's theory of unity of the main activities, which is a specific and original Bulgarian contribution to the pre-school pedagogy, it goes through the analysis of the game as a social system according to Nadezhda Vitanova and goes on to the typical game technologies, enriching pedagogical interaction and domination of subject-subject relations in the pedagogical interaction in terms of Dimitar Kr. Dimitrov. It should also be noted here that these ideas are embedded in the pedagogical technologies for game interaction developed by Vesela Gyurova.

**The content of the dissertation is characterized by:**

○ **Objectivity.** Despite the remarks made, I believe that in Rosalina Engels-Critides's dissertation objectivity is present, it is manifested in the selection of theoretical sources for shaping the scientific concept, in the scientific validity and realism of the formulated hypotheses, and in the scientifically determined tasks which are adequately posed.

○ **Verification.** The results of the dissertation are described in such a way that any discovered regularity, factual description or scientific thesis can be verified.

○ **Applicability:** the diagnostic toolkit and the design phase of the study were optimally performed - with the least waste of time and energy high results were achieved. They are comprehensible, easy to analyze and apply, so their focus on widespread pedagogical practice will not encounter misunderstanding or resistance.

○ **Reflexivity.** There are indications that the nature of the study may emerge from the internally theoretical nature of the problem of individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction, and aim not only at determining the educational progress of children, but also at their overall socialization. In the process of the latter, self-esteem, claims to achievements and the self-image are formed.

Rosalina Engels-Critidis has conducted a **psycho-pedagogical experiment** whose structure also breaks the usual framework of this type of research. It contains several stages: preparatory-ascertaining, conceptually-developing, experimental-empirical, analytical-statistical, training-promotive and controlling (analysis of the obtained results). The study adheres fully to the logic of the hypothesis and the content of the sub-hypotheses. It aims at checking the main productions reflected in them. It shows the functioning of the conceptual-technological, variational-dynamic, educational model for individualization and differentiation created by Rosalina Engels-Critidis, focused on expanding the educational progress of each child.

**The conclusions and recommendations** summarize the basic idea of the dissertation research and are determinants of the optimality and efficiency of the educational process in the kindergarten.

**I accept the reference for the scientific contributions** of the dissertation, but at the same time I would like to emphasize which, in my opinion, are the most important of them:

○ **In terms of theory:** an analytical summary of pedagogical studies on the individualization and differentiation and determination of optimal pathways for pedagogical interaction with pre-school children has been made; the main tendencies in the development of

this idea as well as the main criteria, indicators and degrees of development of the individualization and differentiation of the pedagogical interaction are outlined.

○ **In terms of practice:** a conceptual-technological, variational-dynamic, educational model for the individualization and differentiation of pedagogical interaction has been created, the success of which is guaranteed by a complex of educational methods and techniques. The performance of the model has been experimentally confirmed. The model is science-based, innovative, easy to apply in pedagogical practice.

Rosalina Engels-Critidis has presented **12 publications** relevant to the topic and content of the dissertation, 6 of which are written by the author alone, the other 6 are co-authored. They are distributed as follows: 2 - in the Journal of Pedagogics, 1 - in the Journal of Educational Research of Sofia University, 1 - in the Annual Journal of Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" - FEPP, 7 - in scientific conference proceedings.

The content of the **abstract** corresponds to the content of the dissertation. It is structured according to all requirements. It includes *an objective reference for the scientific contributions*. Rosaline Engels-Critidis's *publication activity* is also included.

Rosalina Engels-Critidis's dissertation work is **a completely independent achievement**, despite the large number of adherents who have supported and assisted in its work. The content of the dissertation and the scientific results achieved are consistent with the purpose of the research and provide a basis for confirming the hypothesis. They definitely and unequivocally bring practical benefits. Therefore, I believe that the proposed study is a major scientific achievement in the field of pre-school pedagogy. It complies with the requirements of the LDASRB, the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the Regulations for the development of academic staff.

The **abstract** of the dissertation reflects the essence of the research and correctly presents its contributions. There is **no plagiarism** in the dissertation, the abstract and the submitted scientific publications; **the research, its design and presentation are original**, and **no copyrights and intellectual property rights of anyone are violated**.

I would like to ask Rosalina Engels-Critidis the following **questions**:

○ In her research, Prof. E. Petrova thoroughly develops the idea of the child's independence and its role in the development of his personality. She emphasizes that the determinant factor for the development of self-reliance (which in her research should be regarded as synonymous with subjectivity) is the personality-relevant experience of the child gained in the lessons (which we now call pedagogical situations), and the personality meaningful experience is when the child is convinced that what he is learning (here and now)

will need him in the creative game. Then the child is most motivated and learns best and most effectively. That is why E. Petrova logically links the content of the familiarity with the environmental reality with the content of the games preferred by the children, mainly the creative ones. What is your opinion of these studies and why their analysis has not found its place in the theoretical part of your research, and the practical innovations made by it are not a source for the development of yours?

○ Do you know the theory of the enriching pedagogical interaction of Assoc. Prof. Dimitar Kr. Dimitrov? His research in the technological provision of enriching pedagogical interaction, of the functions and determinants of subject-subject relations in the development of the child, of the learning through play, can significantly support your ideas, can help you develop them further, and even change them to some extent.

**In conclusion,** Rosalina Engels-Critidis's dissertation **contains theoretical statements and solutions to current scientific and research problems**, which are important for solving a number of practical issues related to the organization of the pedagogical process in the kindergarten and the innovative development of pre-school education. The results achieved have an INTERDISCIPLINARY IMPORTANCE; they could stimulate the development of science and the theory and logic of research. I GIVE A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE Dissertation and recommend that Rosalina Engels-Critidis BE AWARDED THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE DOCTOR OF SCIENCE in the Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool education) by the Scientific Committee.

January 14<sup>th</sup> 2020

REVIEWER:.....

Prof. Elka Yanakieva, DSc