Review

by Prof. Dr. Sci. Vesselin Dafov

of a dissertation submitted by Katya Rossenova Dimitrova for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor" (professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in…(Methodology of Education in Philosophical Disciplines)) with the title:

"Students' Expectations of the Philosophy and Civic Education Teacher as a Determinant for His "Professional Self-Image" (Grades 8–12)"

The presented dissertation is dedicated to a current, socially significant and methodologically complex problem, namely - the construction of a "Professional Self-Image" of the Philosophy and Civic Education teacher in the conditions of a transforming educational environment and changing student expectations. The work is structured in two main parts - theoretical and empirical. In addition, it contains an Introduction, Conclusion, Bibliography, Appendices and formulated Scientific Contributions. The total volume of the work is 182 pages.

Already in the Introduction, Katya Dimitrova clearly formulates the main scientific problem - the discrepancy between traditional pedagogical models and the expectations of new generations towards the modern teacher. In view of this, the figure of the teacher is no longer considered primarily as an institutional bearer of knowledge, but as a social mediator, value orientation and communicative center of the educational process (for example, p. 40 and p. 141 of the Dissertation). It is also important to note that the dissertation does not treat the teacher's identity as a fixed professional characteristic, but as a dynamic, interacting with other realities, and socially constructed phenomenon, which is formed in the interaction between the teacher's professional self-reflection, institutional expectations and student perceptions and assessments.

This attitude and research perspective in the text gives the work a distinctly interdisciplinary character - between philosophy of education, pedagogy, social psychology, communication theory and philosophical anthropology.

Katya Dimitrova's dissertation has successfully passed internal discussion and defense. According to the presented metric data, the work to date meets the minimum requirements for obtaining the scientific degree of "doctor".

1. Relevance and significance of the topic

The topic is undoubtedly relevant both in a national and international context. Even more so considering the contribution to world philosophy of the philosophical community and philosophy education in Bulgaria, which found expression in the initiatives initiated by Sofia University: 1/ introduction of the subject cycles in Philosophy, World and Personality (now - "Civic Education"), 2/ National, International and to date World Philosophy Olympiad, as well as the

national Civic Education Olympiad. It seems that every modern educational system, in order to truly be such, should be able to undergo a process of transformation. This time, the specifics of the transformation are related to: digitalization, the crisis of authority, the change in communication models, the increased role of emotional intelligence and the growing expectations for the school as an institution for social and civic training.

Katya Dimitrova rightly notes that it is the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education who occupies a special place in this process, since his function is not only informative, but also normative, interpretative and value-orienting.

The study raises an essential question: whether the legitimacy of the teacher's authority in the modern school is no longer based primarily on the institutional position, but on the teacher's ability to be recognized by students as an authentic, fair, empathetic and communicatively adequate professional subject. In my opinion, this thesis has serious theoretical and practical value.

2. Philosophical foundations and ontological status of the "Professional Self-Image".

One of the most significant contributions of the dissertation is the attempt to conceptualize the “Professional Self-Image” as a relatively stable, but dynamically updated construct. From a philosophical-ontological point of view, this concept is deployed in the unity of a personal, social, communicative and institutional phenomenon. Katya Dimitrova successfully avoids reducing the teacher’s identity to a set of competencies, administrative criteria or professional qualifications (what a danger, and in many studies, this is ultimately done). The dissertation advocates the understanding that the teacher’s identity is procedural and relational. The definiteness of the position advocated can be enriched by noting its proximity to symbolic interactionism, the phenomenology of the social world, social constructivism and partly to the hermeneutic tradition. This is done with particular force in relation to the dialectics of the “real self”, the “ideal self” and the normative professional image.

In this sense, Katya Dimitrova works with a multilayered ontology of professional identity, without, however, explicitly articulating the philosophical tradition to which she belongs. This is both advantageous and a condition for some misunderstandings. The advantages come primarily from the possibility of interdisciplinary flexibility. And possible misunderstandings would arise from the lack of a clear distinction between psychological, social and ontological levels of analysis.

3. Philosophical Anthropology and the Image of the Teacher

The dissertation implicitly defends a certain philosophical-anthropological position: that man is a being who is constructed through social recognition and dialogical interaction. This is clearly evident in the thesis that the authority of the teacher is no longer given “by right”, but is built daily by satisfying certain student expectations. It is easy to make historical-philosophical references to, for example, Hegel’s idea of recognition, Buber’s dialogicity, as well as to social-

constructivist models of identity. But I realize that the dissertation is ultimately not in the scientific field of philosophy and there is no need to develop the indicated philosophical grounds in detail and explicitly. But still, it should be noted that some conceptual transitions remain more intuitive than strictly reasoned.

4. Normativity and the moral function of the teacher

A strong point of the dissertation can be the analysis of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education as a “civic mentor”. In it, Katya Dimitrova recognizes that teaching philosophical disciplines is not a value-neutral activity. The concept of the teacher as a mediator between knowledge, values, moral orientation and social practice is developed consistently.

Particularly valuable is the thesis that the teacher of CES does not simply “transmit information”, but translates abstract categories (such as: freedom, justice, dignity, responsibility) into practical social models of action (which means that he puts them into action). This line of analysis has serious philosophical potential. Especially if we consider the most modern achievements in the field of philosophy with children ("Philosophy for Children" (e.g. Lippmann, Sharp), "Philosophical Investigation" (e.g. Catherine McCall), Philosophical Wonder (e.g. "Ontoidea"), Socratic Dialogue (e.g. Nelson), Neo-Socratic Dialogue (e.g. Van Leeuw), Philosophical Consulting (e.g. Achenbach, Dafov, Alexandrov), etc.)

5. The Concept of "Education of the Future"

The consideration of alternative educational models Montessori, Waldorf Pedagogy, "School 2100", Khan Academy, etc., is informative and functional for the general structure of the work. However, a certain conceptual unevenness is observed in this part. Some examples are presented descriptively, without sufficient critical distance. In places, pedagogical practices; philosophical concepts; technological forecasts and journalistic hypotheses are mixed.

For example, the discussion about the possible “replacement” of the teacher by artificial intelligence could be philosophically deepened through the philosophy of technology, the critique of techno-utopianism, or the theory of digital mediation. In its current form, these topics remain rather declarative.

6. Methodology of the empirical study

Research design

The empirical part of the dissertation is well structured. Katya Dimitrova uses survey methods, comparative analysis, statistical processing, and interpretive analysis of the results. The toolkit was developed on the basis of a previously formulated theoretical framework and was consulted with colleagues, university professors, and practicing teachers. This increases the content validity of the study. The use of SPSS and Q Professional for data processing is also a positive indicator of methodological seriousness.

Validity and reliability

I pay special attention to the validity and reliability of the study, which has its positive sides in the clearly described criteria, the expert evaluation of the questionnaires, the standardized instructions, the large sample, the statistical verification of the differences.

However, some methodological limitations are also noted. For example, there is a lack of a sufficiently detailed description of: the sample size, the selection method, the representativeness, the socio-demographic characteristics (particularly to student's group).

Also, a check of internal consistency was not carried out. The candidate argues this with the descriptive nature of the study. However, when constructing a complex construct such as "Professional Self-Image", it would be useful to use some of: Cronbach's alpha, factor analysis or correlation testing.

One is also left with the impression of a certain dependence between the previously formulated theoretical expectations and the interpretation of the data. In places, the empirical analysis seems to be more confirmatory than critical-research.

Analysis of the results

The analytical part is convincing and well organized. Particularly interesting is the result that with increasing age, students do not decrease their need for personal and social support from the teacher, but on the contrary - it increases. This is important empirical observation that problematizes widespread pedagogical assumptions. Also valuable is the conclusion that "purely human qualities", justice, empathy and dialogicity turn out to be more significant for students than purely methodological characteristics of the teacher. These results have serious practical applicability and open up new horizons for the preparation of teachers and the argumentation of the teaching profession before government institutions and the public.

7. Academic and academic-applied contributions

The formulated contributions are generally real and defensible. I would highlight the following:

- the conceptualization of the "Professional Self-Image";

- The construction of an author's model;

- The analysis of student expectations;

- The concept of the teacher as a "civic mentor";

- Practical communicative models;

- The empirical problematization of age dynamics.

In this way, it is also noted that the presented dissertation recognizes both theoretical and methodological positions, as well as those with immediate practical applicability.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations

Along with the contributions noted above, the dissertation also contains some shortcomings. For example, it lacks a sufficiently clear philosophical positioning, in places the terminology remains conceptually unspecified ("mentor", "authority", "identity", "value"). In addition, at times it falls into a mix between descriptive, normative and philosophical analysis, which in itself is not necessarily a weakness, but for this purpose the difference should be explained. Also, the risk of excessive psychologization of the teacher's role is not sufficiently problematized. Apart from this, risks are also taken from the point of view of a certain idealization of the figure of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education, which idealization I personally like very much and would defend with passion, but for the genre of the dissertation text more evidence (either empirical or speculative) should be provided. I would like to note that the mentioned critical remarks do not reduce the overall academic value of the presented work.

9. Summary assessment

The dissertation work of Katya Rosenova Dimitrova represents a serious, independent and up-to-date study with a clearly expressed interdisciplinary character. It shows the good theoretical preparation of the author, contains a real empirical study, offers author's conceptual models, poses significant philosophical and pedagogical questions, and last but not least - has practical applicability in the field of teaching in philosophical disciplines.

10. Conclusion

The author's abstract fully corresponds to the dissertation.

I have no joint publications with Katya Dimitrova.

I have not found any plagiarism in the dissertation research.

Based on the above and on the presented dissertation work, its scientific contributions, theoretical development, empirical validity and practical significance, I give a positive assessment to the dissertation "Students' Expectations of the Teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education as a Determinant for His "Professional Self-Image" (Grades 8–12)" and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Katya Rossenova Dimitrova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in… (Methodology of Education in Philosophical Disciplines).

Sofia

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