

REVIEW

of the submitted academic works for participation in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor announced in State Gazette, no. 54/20. 06. 2021 in the professional field of

1.3. Pedagogy of teaching ... (Methodology of teaching literature. Information and communication technologies in teaching and working in a digital environment)

by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski ”

Review written by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ogniana Georgieva-Teneva, NBU, member of the academic jury of the competition appointed by order RD 38–366/21.07.2021 issued by the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Candidate: Dr. Natalia Mladenova Hristova-Peeva, Chief Assist. Prof. In the Methodology Department at the Slavic Philology Faculty at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski ”

Normative Value of the Submitted Documents

The submitted documents correspond to the Law for The Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria

Academic and Research Activity

The main academic work that the candidate presented to participate in the competition is titled *Transhumanism and the future of education (in literature)*. The topic of the monograph focuses the long-standing research interest of Natalia Hristova. Most of the academic articles presented in the bibliography were devoted to the influence of transhumanism on education and the issues explored were incorporated in the habilitation work. The long-term deliberation of the research horizon following methodically a common conceptual logic allows to make significant observations on the impact of high technologies and market laws on the secondary school and to take a clear position towards them.

First, I would like to point out that according to its thematic and problematic scope the monograph belongs to the relatively rare cases in the professional field in which the research interest is focused on phenomena caught in motion, in the process of their “crystallization”, at least as far as the educational situation in our country is concerned. Writing about such unidentified entities, about trends without a shape, about future states, is a special challenge that often holds risks. Natalia Hristova takes them and, more importantly, she

manages to carry out her research work that contributes to acknowledging important transformations in the field of modern education and asking key questions about its future.

The phenomenon of transhumanism is not unknown to the Bulgarian pedagogical discourse, however, the monograph of Natalia Hristova reveals its essential aspects and their influence on the personal formation of the youth using new means. The presented facts and interpretations enrich the idea of the impact of techno science on the emotional intelligence, moral consciousness and mental health of students.

The monograph moves along several main lines. The first and foremost is the one that focuses on the characteristics of today's education determined by high technology and the pursuit of rapid economic gain. There are educational changes presented, explicitly or implicitly supported by economic forces as well as frequently by political forces, which promote transhumanism in many countries around the world and have recently paved its way in our country, i.e. the dominance of the interest in the gross domestic product at the expense of the attention to the inner world of the individual; artificial enhancement of cognitive abilities through the use of nano-, bio- and information technologies at the expense of humanitarian culture and art activities. The picture drawn is considered as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment tradition, as a beginning of a fundamentally different type of education, related to the technocratic plan of the social policy.

The other line systematically developed in the monograph concerns presenting transhumanism in a diachronic plan. Natalia Hristova traces the origin, development and practical implementation of an impressive number of theoretical ideas. These references cover both explicitly and implicitly views of the school as a link in the economic logic of life with its techno-scientific rationality and the hegemony of the mechanistic and mechanised educational model. The monograph weaves a dense network of references and quotations that reconstruct the development of transhumanism in its a half-century of life. Behind the success of this meaningful perspective is the indisputable ability of Natalia Hristova to discover and systematise works that are important for the research topic, to present them in an order allowing insight into both the general logic and the specifics of various attempts to technologically improve human mental and physical capabilities.

The third line of the habilitation work, conceivably the most difficult one to implement, is the line that expresses the personal position of Natalia Hristova on the problems raised. It has been the great achievement of the author who has managed to balance between the indisputable successes of natural sciences and technologies on the one hand, and the disputable way of their application in the field of education. There are several positive effects of this balance. To

start with, I will point out the uncertainty of the notion of obviousness of today's educational situation, the emphasis on its socio-cultural interdependence and openness: it turns out that presumably right before our eyes, but somehow paradoxically in an implied way, education is being dehumanised, slowly but methodically and seemingly irrevocably. Natalia Hristova's monograph shows how in the context of various educational philosophies affirming personality, i.e. the humanistic, focused on the subjective needs of the student, the liberal, supporting individual freedom at the expense of external control, the constructivist, relying on the original, unobtrusive interpretation of facts, opposing educational practices have emerged and got established in close proximity to the supposedly waning behavioural model of training. It is the model that, as it is well known, seeks to rule over knowledge and impose automated behaviour, mental stereotypes, predicted and pre-set mental reactions.

Along with the triggered reflection on the negative nature of transhumanist education, the monograph achieves another positive effect, i.e. the conviction that it is important to resist the transhumanist educational model. Revealing trends discernible in many parts of the world and already detectable in Bulgaria, the monograph resounds a warning about the growing danger of neglecting humanistic subjects, of highlighting pragmatic educational goals indisputably dominating over the "useless" arts. This type of education forgets the human soul, emphasises research, suppresses imagination and critical thinking, erases historical memory and obscures the civic horizon.

Raising questions related to the general laws of teaching and learning, the monograph to be considered as a side in the modern debate on the philosophical directions of education, an in-depth reflection on the one-sided pragmatism of goals in cognitive, practical and value terms, as well as an alert for already caused and plausible future damage to the cognitive, moral and physiological identity of the youth.

Although it consists of 139 pages and seems more modest in volume than other habilitation works, the monograph is a coherent whole with clear academic views and convincing arguments. At the same time, it contains open structures and unexhausted issues that can be further developed and specified in the future, which would be very useful in view of the status quo and trends in literary education in our country in the context of the expanding transhumanism.

There is an internal coherence between the habilitation work and the rest of the publications with which Natalia Hristova participates in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor. Literary writing at school which is the subject not only of her doctoral dissertation, but also of her subsequent work, can be regarded as an antithesis of technocratically-oriented

education, as a way to reach beyond the unifying educational norms and appraise the individual mental and emotional potential of a student.

Natalia Hristova's academic activity is evident not only thanks to her publications, but also to her participation in numerous conferences and significant projects of Sofia University, as well as in individual research and specialisations in foreign academic units.

Teaching Activity

The candidate has taught practical courses on literature teaching methodology, elective courses on literary writing in high school, as well as lecture courses on literary education within a marked humanistic profile.

Conclusion

The presented academic and teaching activity is at a high academic level and meets the criteria for habilitation. Consequently, I propose with full conviction the academic jury that Natalia Hristovabe awardedthe academic position of Associate Professor.

November 8, 2021

Ognyana Georgieva-Teneva