

# REVIEW

by Radoslav Dimitrov Radev, Prof. Dr. at the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" for Stoika Yordanova Chakarova's dissertation on topic "Development of students' communicative competence through project-oriented learning in Bulgarian language" for acquisition of educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.3. Pedagogy of training in ... (methodology of training in Bulgarian)

Research supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tatiana Angelova

## **1. Data about the doctoral student.**

Stoika Chakarova is a doctoral student at the "Methodology" department in the Faculty of Slavic Philology at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski". All legal requirements for the realization of the doctoral studies have been met, the dissertation work has been discussed by the department, the necessary scientific publications in prestigious publications have been carried out. The required documentation is attached. The specific thing about Stoika Chakarova's educational and scientific development is that she has a broad horizon over humanities. She studied philosophy at University of Veliko Turnovo "St. Cyril and Methodius", so she embraced the mother of science, she graduated with a master's degree in Bulgarian philology at the University of "St. Kliment Ohridski", and this specialty is one of the few stable things in our education, combining philology, history and culture. That is why, in the case of the doctoral student, the integrative, the synthesis is clothed in tolerance of thinking and behavior. It should be noted that her secondary education is related to biology and German. An amazing combination of possibilities for thinking and making the possible happens. With all this educational kaleidoscope, she is a teacher at the "Princess Maria Luisa" Professional High School of Clothing, and it is known that

mythologies slumber in knitting and sewing. I say all this because in the dissertation knowledge is transformed into a horizon of expectation, which explains her addiction to constructivism. Last but not least, it should be noted that the methodology for the preparation of this dissertation work is possible thanks to the efforts of colleagues from Sofia University to open up language learning, so that the beginning to be the need for communication, the essence is synthesis of knowledge, and the functionality be based on ability. The tower of knowledge cannot have only one door, as a lesson our language will give us the words "porta", "protka", "komshuluk", but will also put a diminutive "vratitsa" to know that a door opens with love.

The doctoral student has presented five publications that are related to the topic of dissertation. It is important to note that a part of them are result of participation in scientific forums and conferences, included in collections, which means that they already have scientific review and are in circulation in the educational sphere. From these articles, it becomes clear her approach to solving the problems of dissertation - gradualism and depth in reaching the essence of the investigated phenomenon.

The abstract gives an accurate and clear idea of the content, composition and scientific side of the dissertation work. It shows a sense of synthesis and the ability to give additional strength to scientific theory and experiment.

## **2. Characteristics of the dissertation work.**

The dissertation work is conceptual and integrative, it opens up different points of view in the theory, but in the difference of individual productions, opposition is not sought, so as not to come to negation, but to understanding. The experiment is not a will for the suddenness of discovery, but a need to communicate with students. That's why even the survey has a linguistic form for grading "I agree". The work has a volume of 213 pages of text and 114 pages of appendices, and this ratio shows the key role of the specific practical activity, as well as the need for

examples in the scientific presentation. The bibliography consists of 81 sources in Bulgarian, English and Russian. An important place is occupied by research of Bulgarian specialists on the methodology of language teaching, which takes into account the continuity in scientific knowledge. The subject, research question, hypothesis and micro-hypotheses are clearly stated. The target group of students is from PGO "Princess Maria Luisa", Sofia. The project has been implemented for 7 years, and the results study is in the academic year 2022-23 and covers 28 students. The main research method is survey, but since the project is of serious duration, observation is a sign of tracking the activities. This is how a model is built for realizing the effectiveness of the conducted training. All this is clarified in the first chapter of the dissertation "Dissertation Research Design". In this chapter, Stoika Chakarova gives clear scientific definitions for project-oriented and project-based learning (p.10, the statements are expanded in the third chapter), giving preference to project-oriented because it is a "pedagogical method aimed at the realization of an authentic project, going beyond (not necessarily tied) to academic content of academic subjects and oriented towards activities and goals carried out outside school, in real social conditions" (p.10, p.203). I take this definition to be very accurate and I think it is protected by the shared work on the Dream Garment project, so it is also noted in the conclusion. The value of this type of research, when starting from an important theoretical framework and toolkit and combined with solid pedagogical experience, is that the truth vibrates, cannot but be felt. Perhaps the tolerance of Stoika Chakarova, which is a quality of her work, does not allow her to impose her views, but only to place them in the circle of functionality. In this sense, she prefers beauty to courage. I like that. But it is clear from her entire dissertation that project-oriented learning is a provocation to the class-lesson system, that it cannot be fully realized if the existing organization of learning process is not reformed, which was denied in 1930s by Peter Peterson, dear guest in Bulgaria as well. And I, like Ivan Vazov (with imitative bias, of course), will exclaim: "- Poor, poor class-lesson system,

why didn't it die during 1930s?" I consider this dissertation very timely, and it can provoke discussions that generate good intentions.

Project work is not identical to team work, as a project can be a form of coordination of individual activities. It is therefore a thematic organizational form. From the survey that was conducted, it is clear that not a small percentage of students prefer individual work in the project. "The entrance test shows that most of the students prefer to work independently: 82.14% answer with 'I completely agree', 'I rather agree' and 'I agree' and only 17.86% are ready to participate in a team "(p. 181). This is a very large percentage. The setting to think of the project as an organizational activity with the aim of building a thesis through different points of view presented by the students is particularly valuable for teaching of Bulgarian language. In this I see the essence of the dissertation work.

In the second and third chapters, in which the theory and concepts necessary to clarify the problem of project-oriented activity and in particular the "Dream Garment" project are understood, the author has familiarized herself with significant scientific literature. This huge volume of information devoted to constructivism in its methodological, psychological and philosophical plan, the problem of communicative competence in its institutional and research aspect, the correlation of literacy - competence, the problem of clothing and fashion and undoubtedly the most large-scale project-oriented learning, could take over the dissertation, if it is not author's sense of synthesis and measure. She is aware that these problems are tools of thought and experimentation, and therefore she approaches them on the principle of functional sufficiency. It appeals to this clarity of opinion and, without denying, simply states a position in the form of a summary. "To summarize, from the point of view of teaching practice, the synonymous use of the two concepts is unacceptable." (p. 40) And in this case, it is about the serious intertwining of literacy and competence. The exceptional maturity of Stoika Chakarova's thinking is impressive. It appears that with her

philologist and philosopher are sitting at the same table, and teacher is serving them their meals. As much as she is attracted to constructivism, she is aware that it also contains dangers, as it is full of contradictions. The doctoral student herself likes in her style contradictory language constructions in which the meaning stands as a surprise, for example, after noting the difference between language training and language education, she makes the distant close: „*In this sense, the work on specific project approaches the characteristics of language education and has a positive role for students' language education*" (p. 118). In our entire evaluation system, however, contradiction is excluded. We allow it in test, but there it doesn't cultivate thinking. The language of communication is also contradictory, and this is its magic. We say "work", but it seems that two young people are in love.

Stoika Chakarova affirms the new face of language learning, but in several places in her dissertation she explicitly emphasizes that the new is not everything, because it does not come from nothing. "Often the constructivist approach is contrasted with the traditional (behaviourist) approach in education. The extremes of adopting and rejecting either model of learning lead to deficits in student learning, and overcoming that particular deficit often requires methods and means characteristic of the 'opposite' approach." Such thinking of the doctoral student allows her, as an experienced teacher, to find the connection between established learning and the new one. This is particularly evident in fourth chapter of the dissertation with the so-called authentic communication, theoretically prepared in the previous chapters (p. 30). Authentic communicative tasks and situations involve real interactions with people and institutions and have a social and personal outcome. It can definitely be said that learning through situations is Stoika Chakarova's style. It is for this reason that through the work on the "Dream Dress" project, the doctoral student proves that project-oriented learning allows for better coherence between written and spoken speech. In my opinion, this is the

essence of the proposed model for development of students' communicative competence in grades 8-12, as it implies interaction with institutions, companies, organizations and people outside the school environment. The "Dream garment" also has references to the fairy tale - the magical "benefactors". The true and authentic is known in the concrete, and by giving strength to situation, Stoika Chakarova also discovers the face of detail. For the motivation of students, especially when highlighting inter-subject connections, detail is like lemon in tea – it sharpens the taste, awakens the senses. The findings of the graduate are also in these details. It seems so, by the way, although included in the system of project-oriented learning, is judgment about making mistakes, which "are a natural process of learning and mastering skills and competences. Mistakes often lead to better decisions, motivate and unify the team, and develop interpersonal relationships." (p.122) Just what project-oriented learning gives us is worth becoming its devotees. The proposed model for communicative competence is developed in its entirety, with the necessary tools, with a functional sequence, with working tasks, with conclusions drawn for the individual stages, with a survey conducted, which gives an idea of the educational effect of the experiment. Analyticism summarizes what has been done and sets an optimistic strategy for language learning.

Contributory points of the dissertation are indicated correctly. I would also add to them the affirmation of project-oriented learning as a transitional form of change in the class-lesson system.

Evaluating the scientific contributions of the dissertation "Developing the communicative competence of students through project-oriented learning in Bulgarian", the qualities of the doctoral student for research and experimental work, as well as the applicability of the work in Bulgarian language learning, I propose Stoika Yordanova Chakarova to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences,

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