

Opinion

By Prof. PhD. Zhaneta Stoykova Dobрева, DSc

Trakia University, Stara Zagora

Regarding: Dissertation submitted as part of an application for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Area of Higher Education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, Professional Field 1.2 Pedagogy /Special Needs Pedagogy/

on the following topic:

“Pro-social behavior in secondary school students within the context of general support for personality development in inclusive education”,

presented by Stanislav Petrov Pandin, doctoral student at Trakia University, Faculty of Education, Department of Pedagogical and Social Sciences.

The evaluation of the dissertation paper presented by the candidate was conducted based on a number of criteria, corresponding to this type of scientific work:

- I.Relevance and significance of the research problem
- II.Scientific and methodological validity of the problem
- III.Scope and representativeness of the study. Results and interpretation
- IV.Value of the research paper’s contributions to theory and practice
- V.Structure and design of the exposition, style and language
- VI. Conclusion

I. Relevance and significance of the research problem

The relevance and significance of the research problem examined in the dissertation paper are determined by two important considerations:

1. The need for modern education to be provided to secondary school students for the purpose of developing pro-social training and encouraging adolescents to perform helpful actions.
2. The fact that inclusive education is based upon the principles and standards of student pro-social behavior within the context of general support for personality development.

In search of answers to the questions raised above, the doctoral candidate has decided to explore the pedagogical and psychological conditions, underlying the formation of student pro-social activity in secondary education as the subject of the present dissertation paper.

II. Scientific and methodological validity of the problem

The theoretical section of the dissertation paper contains a detailed and multidimensional review of scientific literature on the theories of pro-social behavior, empathy and altruism.

The opinions of a number of foreign and Bulgarian authors are cited, with the list of citations including the names of scholars such as Zahn-Waxler, C., & Radke-Yarrow, M., 1990; Zahn-Waxler, C., Radke-Yarrow, M., Wagner, E., & Chapman, M. Eisenberg, N., Kolchev, S., etc.

The paper offers analysis of concepts developed by different authors concerning life cycle periodization (Laura Burk, Nancy Cobb, Santrock and others), which discuss the role of group interaction as a factor in the development of student pro-social behavior. It includes examination of the role of the class, the student government and informal student subculture groups in the socialization of adolescents in secondary school.

The dissertation paper is comprised of 218 pages, 196 of which are dedicated to theoretical analysis and the results of the empirical study. The remaining 22 pages contain the appendices. In terms of structure, the dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, findings, conclusion, list of references and appendices. The paper also contains 17 figures. The appendices include 2 charts, 3 questionnaire forms on adolescent altruism and 25 photographs.

The list of references indicates 156 sources – 58 in the Cyrillic script and 98 in the Latin script.

III. Scope and representativeness of the study. Results and interpretation

The experimental portion of S. Pandin's dissertation paper stands out with the following characteristics:

- the logic in the presentation of the elements of the research plan – research thesis, subject and object, the formulated goals, hypotheses and tasks.
- the well-substantiated research methods and instruments, presented in accordance with the goals and tasks of the study. The list of instruments used includes as part of the research practice a three-part “Questionnaire on altruistic dispositions in adolescence”, which was developed for the purposes of the dissertation study. Each of the three parts contains 7 questions. The empirical data collected in this manner is processed using the methods of descriptive statistics.

The study was conducted in three stages. The first one involved the participation of 384 students, while 362 and 368 students took part in the second and third stages respectively.

For the purposes of the diagnostic dissertation study, four focus groups were assembled. They were used, according to the doctoral candidate himself, as “an

additional diagnostic method for testing the hypothesis of the dissertation study, as well as for developing questions for the questionnaires.” (Author’s Summary, p. 28).

The results of the conducted research were analyzed. This analysis forms the basis of the PhD student’s proposal of a pedagogical and psychological model for the development of pro-social behavior in secondary school students, which was constructed as a symbiosis of the integral and reflexive approaches. In the author’s own words: “the model presents a type of technology for organizing the learning process toward encouragement of pro-social behavior...” (p. 157 of the dissertation paper). The different forms of implementing this model within the framework of general support for student personality development are described in detail.

Along with recognizing the indisputable merits of the candidate’s study, I also made certain observations and recommendations, some of which I consider important to share.

1. The dissertation treats the terms pro-social behavior, altruism and empathy as synonymous, which perhaps reflects the views of some authors. However, I believe that the paper would benefit from a more thorough exploration of the differences between these terms, which can be found in the specific characteristics of their deeper meaning.
2. The questionnaire serving the function of a diagnostic instrument concerns dispositions towards altruism, instead of pro-social behavior.
3. The empirical research utilizes only one research method, namely the “direct survey method” (p. 109, dissertation paper) as the author calls it, as well as only one instrument – the questionnaire.
4. Although the topic of the dissertation is focused on the formation of pro-social behavior among students as fundamental to relationships in

inclusive education, the characteristics and nature of inclusive education itself are analyzed only in the second chapter of the paper.

IV. Value of the research paper's contributions to theory and practice

Out of all the contributions of the dissertation paper listed and claimed by the candidate S. Pandin, I acknowledge the following as valid:

1. Empirical research was conducted on the altruistic dispositions of secondary school students.
2. An empirical-theoretical model was developed for encouraging pro-social behavior of students in grades 8-12.
3. Analysis was presented on personality development support teams and on the position and activity of the school psychologist.

I regard the remaining contributions listed by the PhD candidate as mostly results of the conducted research, which is a requirement for every dissertation paper.

V. Structure and design of the exposition, style and language

Concerning this criterion, S. Pandin's dissertation is characterized by:

1. Logical exposition of the conceptual plan; formulation and argumentation of the individual focal points of the paper's content, delineating the main ideas and their significance. The paper is structured into logically defined and interconnected chapters.
2. The format and content-related characteristics of each chapter are presented through:

- specifically formulated headings and subheadings, pointing toward succinct description and generalized accentuation of the main problems discussed therein;
- demonstration of intention to provide useful interpretation, overview and justification of formulations, ideas, results;
- use of an accessible writing style that still meets the required scientific criteria.

The author's summary submitted alongside the dissertation reflects the latter's main content and provides information about four publications written by the candidate on this topic, as well as two additional preprints.

VI. Conclusion

My concluding statement is that the dissertation entitled “**Pro-social behavior in secondary school students within the context of general support for personality development in inclusive education**” meets every requirement of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and Trakia University's Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff. The author possesses the necessary skills and competences to conduct scientific research. Based on the review presented above, I give my vote in favor of awarding Stanislav Petrov Pandin the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.

7.02.2023

Stara Zagora

Signature:

(Prof. PhD. Zh. Stoykova, DSc)