

## REFERENCE

By Prof. Teodora Stoycheva Stoeva

Regarding: scientific papers submitted for participation in announced in SG No. 60 from 14.07. 2023 competition for the academic position of "Associate professor" in the Faculty of Education of Thrace University, St. Zagora, by professional direction 3.2. Psychology, 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

The only candidate in the competition is Nedelina Zdravkova Koleva, PhD, Assistant at the Pedagogical and Social Sciences Department, Faculty of Pedagogy of Thrace University, Stara Zagora. The submitted documents meet the basic requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its Application for the Occupation of the Academic Position "Associate Professor".

Ass. Koleva's participation is a natural continuation of her academic development from 2008 to the present. Her professional biography and her overall scientific production show one essential fact - during this period her teaching and research activities were devoted exclusively to the field of Pedagogical and Age Psychology. I note this fact to emphasize that her scientific publications have the character of theoretical-empirical studies relevant to the lecture courses and seminar classes she conducts. In this sense, the university realization of Ass. Koleva takes place in the spirit of the classical tradition of coverage of the researcher and the teacher. The fact that she has an acquired professional qualification in the field of psychological counseling, which is an activity with a practical and applied orientation, is also important. He is also the head of students' educational practice. In this regard, her work is an example of making a connection between theory and practice, thus showing that fundamental knowledge has direct practical application.

### Biographical reference and general description of the applicant's works

Ass. Koleva started his teaching activity in 2008. Her total teaching load corresponds to the required minimum. She teaches lecture courses on "Social Psychology", "Addiction Prevention" and conducts seminars on the disciplines: "Pedagogical Psychology", "Psychology of Individual Differences", "Psychological and Pedagogical Characteristics of Early Childhood" at the undergraduate level at the University of Thrace. Stara Zagora. In the master's degree, she leads the lecture course "Psychological counseling and personal development of children with SEN" and exercises in Educational Psychology. It is noteworthy that the courses taught by her as a whole reflect a cycle of complementary disciplines in the field of Pedagogical and Age Psychology.

Ass. Zdravkova has presented 2 lists of her scientific publications - a total of 20 in number, which include a dissertation, 3 monographs, articles, studies and reports published in international and Bulgarian journals, collections in our country and abroad.

The subject of this competition are:

-3 monographs, in all of them she is an independent author

-8 articles and reports

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The monographs were published by an established Bulgarian publishing house - IC "Kota", Stara Zagora. The articles have been published in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign magazines such as: "Pedagogical Forum", "Science and technologies". There are publications in Bulgarian and English.

The topicality of the issues to which Ass. Koleva is oriented is proven by the references to the results of her research, which have become the subject of discussion by other researchers. The number of citations of her works in scientific publications - referenced and indexed in world famous databases, in monographs and collective volumes is an indicator of the significance of her scientific achievements, recognized by other scientists. References are also available from foreign researchers, which shows that Ass. Koleva has a strong authorial presence in the academic space not only of the Bulgarian, but also of the international scientific community.

The scientific indicators of the candidate exceed the minimum required points according to the various criteria provided for in the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of the Thrace University for the acquisition of the academic position of "Associate professor".

It is important to note that Ass. Koleva is a participant in a number of scientific forums in our country and abroad, as well as in international educational seminars.

Ass. Koleva is a member of scientific and professional organizations - Society for Individual Psychology "Alfred Adler" and the Union of Scientists.

#### Scientific activity

The scientific activity of Ass. Koleva is distinguished by its complexity and consistency. She participates in the research of current issues of applied significance from the thematic field of Pedagogical and Age Psychology. This shows the candidate's professional sensitivity to issues important to psychology and practice.

In the focus of her research interest are psychological problems such as: social interest, social responsibility, the educational environment, the professional suitability of the teacher. The unifying center of the variety of problems in her scientific works are the ideas of Al. Adler, seen as a forerunner of modern humanistic psychology, presenting a more optimistic view of man as part of the social environment. Thus, Ass. Koleva became an exponent of the new socially-oriented approach to the study of the human psyche. The claims of this approach are to get out of the closed world of ideas and focus on practice. All this gives reason for Ass. Koleva to turn this approach into a fundamental one in the treatment of problems in the field of Pedagogical and Age Psychology. The concept of social interest, a key concept in individual psychology, became a cornerstone of her scientific research. It actively joins the stream of efforts of many scientists to establish social interest as a paradigm for mental health and as a model for perceiving the world.

We find the zenith of her scientific research in this direction in the monograph "Lifestyle and social interest in preschool age", which was submitted for the main habilitation thesis. The theoretical design unfolds in the direction of understanding the leading constructs "lifestyle" and "social interest", treated as the main factors for the socialization of the individual. The theoretical statements related to these constructs are examined in the necessary completeness and content. In examining and critically evaluating them, Ass. Koleva shows an enviable ability

to reveal and fill with concrete meaning the content of abstract concepts in this field - such as socialization and adaptation. In order to clarify her authorial position, she refers to the opinions of scientists with whom she leads a controversy on discussion issues such as the one about the factors for the formation of attachment, which is the main mechanism in the socialization of the child. Thus, in the discourse of divergent thinking, Ass. Koleva summarizes his basic assumption that the interaction between the emotional and social development of the child is the basis for the development of his identity and adequate social functioning. Ass. Koleva convincingly defends this thesis by performing a comparative analysis of the leading points of view on social development and social interest, passing through the classic ideas of the emblematic science of psychology such as A. Adler, Z. Freud, and L. Vygotsky, reaching the modern conceptions of the problem of Josten and Eckstein.

The scientific works abounds with data, the result of empirical studies, which increase the evidentiary value of the presented abstract theoretical constructs, which verifies their reliability, thereby ensuring the scientific significance of the study.

Regarding the research methodology, it should be noted that the studied construct-social interest has been found suitable operationalization in corresponding variables based on the set theoretical framework. This is an indicator of compliance with the universal scientific principle of correspondence between a theoretical model and an empirical method. The obtained results validate the author's assumptions about the social development of children from different ethno-cultural groups. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the research prove that Ass. Koleva masters the art of meaningful interpretations. Of particular importance is the conclusion about the effectiveness of the paradigm of modern preschool education and upbringing in our country.

In the monograph "Social interest and educational environment" a comparative study of the social interest of preschool children is presented for the first time. The idea of the influence of the social environment on the developed is present as a leitmotif here as well, but in relation to children brought up in different environments - family and non-family. Of particular importance is the derived conceptual model of care for the development of social interest in children raised in a non-family environment. Those about the institutional care of children are systematically presented, as Ass. Koleva creatively rethinks them, reaching important conclusions for the practice, arguing the idea of the need for an alternative type of residential care. This monograph most clearly illustrates and establishes Adler's individual psychology as containing the greatest explanatory potential regarding the development-environment relationship.

In the monograph "Social responsibility and social interest - predictors of the professional suitability of teachers" is also built on the conceptual platform of Adler's individual psychology, and here a connection between social interest and professional activity is sought. The applied significance of the presented theoretical and empirical research is great, insofar as the creation of a professional profile of the contemporary pedagogue is of extreme importance due to the increased demands on the teacher's personality. In presenting her position on the problem, Ass. Koleva relies on the historical wisdom woven into the religious and philosophical teachings of Aristotle, Plato, Hegel and Sartre, arriving at empirical knowledge and evidence derived through the methods of modern science. A test containing 10 case studies was applied, which in its nature is projective, giving the opportunity to manifest the personal meaning that

the concept of "social responsibility" brings to each participant. Such a research method has allowed Ass. Koleva to reach a deep understanding of the research problem.

In general, the empirical studies are well conceived and correctly implemented. Different complementary methods were used (descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, T-test and F-test for comparing average values), which allowed to gather a respectable amount of information about the measured variables.

The researches of Ass. Koleva also take into account the theoretical and methodological positions of prominent Bulgarian scientists such as Prof. Stoikova. In this regard, it should be noted that, through his developments, Ass. Koleva became part of the creation of a tradition, enriching the accumulated experience with an original scientific contribution.

#### Contributions to the candidate

I agree with the author's self-assessment of the contributing moments in his scientific work. I would highlight the following contributions:

1. Scientific knowledge from individual psychology, treated as a precursor of social psychology, to the field of Pedagogical and Adolescent Psychology has been systematized, further developed and adapted. In this regard, theoretical statements about the construct "social interest" have been specified.
2. Significant problems for Pedagogical and Age Psychology related to the theory, methodology and practice in this field have been developed. Indicative of this are the studies in all three monographs dedicated to: the professional profile of the teacher, the type of educational environment, the role of the ethno-cultural context for socialization.
3. New knowledge was obtained on the treated scientific problems on the basis of the accumulated facts in numerous empirical studies.
4. The research toolkit of psychology has been enriched and further developed. A methodology for researching social interest has been approved for children raised in a non-family environment.

These are part of the contributions that illustrate the degree of match between the requirements of the position applied for and the qualities of the candidate.

#### Conclusion

Ass. Koleva skilfully combines teaching and scientific activities. Her scientific publications create the necessary publicity for her activities and enable the scientific community to get to know her. The subject of her publications corresponds to the subject of the announced contest. Her scientific and pedagogical activities satisfy the requirements of the law on the development of the academic staff of the Republic of Belarus and the Rules of its application.

Based on the positive assessment of the candidate's educational and teaching activities, the scientific significance of his scientific works and the response they have found in the academic literature, I give my vote for awarding the academic position of "Associate professor" to Ass. Nedelina Zdravkova Koleva.

Prepared the reference: