

STANDPOINT

By Prof. Katerina K. Karadjova, PhD from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” on the materials submitted for entering a competition for the acquisition of the academic title of Professor announced by Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” in State Gazette №57 from 26.06.2020

In the higher education area 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education)

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc

I. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By Decree №P33-4118 from 24.08.2020 I was elected a member of the scientific jury for the competition for professorship on 26.06.2020 with a sole participant Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc. She acquired her higher education at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” in biology. She completed specializations to obtain first and second class qualifications in biology, and second class in oligophrenopedagogy at SU “St Kliment Ohridski”. Assoc. Prof. Atanasova holds the following academic degrees: Doctor and Doctor of Sciences. In 2006 she was conferred the academic title of Associate Professor.

As a scholar and faculty member Assoc. Prof. Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc actively tackles the problems concerning the methodology of teaching SEN children, restructuring the learning content, the possibilities for including SEN children in mainstream classrooms, introducing innovations in the area of education, optimizing an accessible architectural environment, etc.

Since graduating her higher education to present she has worked as a teacher, assistant director, honorary lecturer at Trakia University, senior expert in integrated learning and associate professor at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”. Throughout the years she has gained considerable practical experience which is a serious pre-requisite for achieving high scientific and theoretical and applied results.

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has a strongly distinguishable and dominating presence in the national and international academic life. She has participated in many scientific conferences (national and international) and promoted her views on innovations in the conditions of inclusive education. Simultaneously, she has taken part in the development and implementation

of a number of research projects, training courses with pedagogical specialists, directors and academic instructors.

II. Description of the scientific theoretical and applied production of the candidate for the academic title of Professor.

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has a rich and interesting research production. For the purposes of the competition she has submitted 50 research works that include: three monographs, one study, 38 research articles, from which 30 in Bulgarian, seven in English, one in Russian, three textbooks and four manuals for students, and one manual for teachers. All of them have been developed and published after the acquisition of the academic title of Associate Professor.

I will briefly describe some of the more important publications with regard to the specifics of the announced competition and the research and teaching qualities of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc.

The monograph *Determinants in the access to education of children and pupils with special educational needs* concerns a very important and pertinent question related to the educational policies and changes in the regulations on the right to equal access to quality education for SEN children. The fact that there are still schools and kindergartens which lack the necessary components for access to educational institutions has provoked the author to discuss her ideas and analyses. Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has justified the need to improve the architectural and physical environment, as well as the possibility for real access of all children to appropriate curricula and learning content. From this perspective, the monograph submitted by the author is timely, original and unconventional.

The main groups of SEN children and their real access to education have been reviewed competently and thoroughly. The candidate has argumentatively and purposefully analyzed the idea for integrated learning as a first step of including all children in the educational process to reach the current concept of inclusive education.

The author has presented the design of her experimental study in a focused and professional way and has justified the reliability of the research methods used. Unarguably, the most important and detailed part of the monograph is the fourth chapter where the data from the experimental study

have been analyzed and summarized. As a result of the conducted study, Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEsSc has made convincing conclusions with theoretically scientific and applied aspects. In the context of the above mentioned, I will add that the proposed questionnaire for self-assessment of directors may be used as orientation to the main components for access to educational environment and can facilitate the formulation of higher criteria for working with SEN children.

The monograph *Remedial development education in Biology of children with intellectual disabilities* provokes the need for changing the attitude to children and pupils with intellectual disabilities. In the monograph the possibilities for overcoming the cognitive disorders of pupils with intellectual disabilities have been described, as well as the components which characterize the teaching of these children. The interest and intention of the author to improve the methodology of teaching children with intellectual disabilities are admirable. They follow the current trends of optimizing inclusive educational environment, and the requirements for reducing the learning content of children with intellectual disabilities.

The monograph *Assistive tools and technologies for children and pupils with special educational needs in inclusive education* is dedicated to a current and unexplored problem. It is the issue of adopting assistive tools and technologies in the process of inclusive education. The importance and benefits from this innovation have been emphasized. Concurrently, the need for social support and understanding of SEN children and pupils has been justified. A key pre-requisite and condition for it is the good professional formation of teachers who work with these children.

The monograph presents the classification of assistive tools and technologies related to the individual needs of SEN children. Assoc. Prof. Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has made a successful attempt to scientifically argue the need for inclusion of a new discipline in the academic course plan: Assistive tools and technologies for SEN children and pupils.

Studies, research articles, participation in conferences

In general, in these publications Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc tackles the problems related to inclusive education of the different children, and almost everywhere she emphasizes the role of the teacher in teaching these children in an inclusive environment.

The publications regarding the components of inclusive environment and the need for their optimization are interesting and very significant. In the context of the above said, I will mention the publications dedicated to the need for timely additional support to SEN children.

An important place in the publications of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova occupy the issues concerning the professional qualification of those working with integrated children. She proposes the idea that the qualification of the pedagogical specialists must be continuous and constant.

A positive aspect of the research works of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc is the fact that she presents the innovative functions of the teacher in the contemporary educational environment. This was done in view of the new requirements of the modern educational system where all children are being educated regardless of their ethnicity, disability or special gifts.

The fact that most of the research and theoretical works of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc have been approved and implemented in the real pedagogical process deserves respect. I will mention the proposed model for basic training of students, the adoption of suitable assistive tools and technologies in the learning process, the adapted checklist for needs assessment, the use of alternative and complementary communication, which additionally support children.

I cannot disregard the fact that Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc is the author of many textbooks and manuals for students and pupils which may successfully be used during seminars or for exam preparation.

All of the above is a very serious attestation of the candidate applying for the academic title of Professor.

III. Contributions

I highly evaluate and admit that the contributions described by the candidate for the academic title of Professor are realistic. They have been differentiated in seven thematic areas and envision a summary of the scientific theoretical and practical aspects of the entire production. I fully approve of them. In this part of my standpoint I will try to summarize them and present them in the way I have perceived them:

1. An exceptionally large volume of the analyzed problems which contains thorough, encompassing, rigorous interpretations emphasizing the need for searching and finding

innovative approaches for the organization and structure of inclusive educational environment.

2. Thorough professional skills for scientific interpretation and adequate application of the developed innovations.
3. Scientifically justified innovations in the area of assistive tools and technologies as well as the launch of determinants for accessible educational environment.
4. Justification of the necessity for constant formation and improvement of teachers participating in the process of inclusive education.
5. Promotion of the Bulgarian pedagogical experience abroad

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova has 54 noted citations. This is sufficient for the conferral of the academic title for which she is applying.

The number and quality of the reviewed publications, the research contributions and the originality of the conducted studies fully meet the minimal research requirements for the acquisition of the academic title of Professor.

With respect to the minimal national requirements set by art. 25 of the *Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria* the minimal points for indicators for research and teaching activity (A-50, B-100, C-565, D-465, E-595) sufficient for the conferral of the academic title of Professor I conclude that Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has largely exceeded them. The minimal number of points for the groups of indicators for professorship is 550, whereas Assoc. Prof. Atanasova has 1875.

CONCLUSION:

I believe that the reviewed research production fully complies with the requirements for professorship, for which Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc is currently applying.

From the above mentioned, I am convinced that the candidate has the potential to continue her research work with which she will help implement innovation in science related to the inclusion of SEN children.

On the basis of all positive points described and argued in my standpoint, and considering the qualities and abilities of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, I propose to the respectable scientific jury to vote in favour of conferring the academic title of Professor to the candidate.

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