

**ACADEMY OF MUSIC, DANCE AND FINE ARTS "PROF.
ASEN DIAMANDIEV - PLOVDIV**

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elitsa Petrova Lukanova

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts

" Prof. Assen Diamandiev - Plovdiv

on dissertation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science

Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", doctoral program "Music"

**on METHODS OF DANCE THERAPY
THROUGH CONTEMPORARY DANCE
FOR PERSONALITY SELF-IMPROVEMENT**

Doctoral student: Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova, PhD student at the
Master's Faculty, scientific specialty Musicology and Music Art of the **New
Bulgarian University**

Scientific supervisor: : Assoc. Prof. Anna Pampulova

The review is based on the following documents submitted by the PhD student: thesis; abstract and CV.

- ✓ The dissertation has 197 pages, of which 174 are main text, with the following structure: introduction, statement in four chapters, conclusion, statement of contributions, bibliography and appendices. The bibliographical reference includes 30 titles in Bulgarian and English, 13 internet sources, attached photographs.
- ✓ Abstract, 24 pages, prepared in accordance with academic requirements.

The author has built a structure that clearly reflects the content of the title. Considering the presented biography and the professional path of Kristina Merdzhanova, the proposed dissertation for review, clearly suggests the reason for her orientation towards the research topic: **the methods of dance therapy through contemporary dance for personal self-improvement**. A topic that combines rich creative and pedagogical experience and doctoral training appears as a natural continuation in the improvement of professional and personal qualities.

The topicality of the dissertation is justified: on the insufficient popularity and development in the given field in Bulgaria. The issues developed in the proposed dissertation text have their relevance in the broad spectrum of personal improvement that the dynamics of today offers. The emphasis placed on dance not as a means of creating an artistic image, but as a way of achieving harmony between body and mind, draws the thematic lines of the research and establishes dance therapy as a contemporary method of self-discovery and personal development.

The introduction justifies the relevance of the topic with the need for a more comprehensive and in-depth exploration and analysis of the possibilities that body movements offer for finding a balance between spiritual, physical and mental health. The motivation for the choice of the topic is the doctoral student's personal interest in answering the question "Can dancing help people fight stress in a stressful lifestyle?" /p.5/ , which formulates the main objective to explore and analyze the usefulness and necessity of dance therapy. The object of the study is dance therapy and the subject is "... the various dance movements in dance therapy and their implementation through specific techniques of spirit and thought, which could be a means of self-improvement of the individual." /p.4/ The aim also specifies the main five tasks set:

1. To trace the history of dance therapy from its inception until today through the eyes of famous psychologists, scientists, choreographers, for the need of the dissertation.

2. To present a variety of information from different articles, books, publications in order to enrich the knowledge and development of dance therapy in our country, which is part of the evidence for the usefulness of the scientific work.

3. To describe and analyze different perspectives, knowledge, findings of scientists, psychologists and specialists in the field of dance therapy.

4. To provide information about some of the centers that offer various specialized trainings in dance therapy.

5. To provide specific tasks (improvisational methods in working with children) that can demonstrate (through analysis) the overcoming of problems in: communication, expression of needs, feelings, information about object relations, development, super ego, defense mechanisms, dynamics and personality analysis.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, the PhD student defines the concept of authentic movement. Referring to some of the early researchers Mary Whitehouse, Janet Adler, Joan Chodorow, **Authentic Movement is a method of active imagination in motion.** It is a kind of meditative practice in which the relationships in the witness-mover relationship are central. In Authentic Movement, the performer learns how to embody consciously all that they can feel, every physical sensation. This skill develops his ability to focus on his physical sensations and inner experiences. This inner experience, which can take the form of image, sound, and emotion, helps the experience transform into movement. In this approach, bodily experience is expressed without the interference and control of reason. Thus the unconscious takes form and becomes visible to the conscious mind. The body becomes a conduit to the depths of the human psyche, to the ocean of the unconscious. This process resembles a dream. The body dreams, so through images a ray of light is thrown into the dark recesses of one's inner world. Inasmuch as he usually watches for actual sensory impulses, new movements appear which may sometimes coincide with the expectations of the mover, and may be quite unexpected to him.

Sources of movement are discussed in detail with emphasis on the importance for coding and interpreting movement by Dr. Judith Kestenbarg and the Kentenberg Movement Profile - KMP/KMP - a system for noting observed movement patterns, classifying these patterns, and analyzing an individual's movement repertoire: "The Seven Sources of Movement - Movements Coming from the Primal Unconscious"; Sources of Impulses in Authentic Movement, Movements Coming from the Primal Unconscious; The Importance of Coding and Interpreting Movement; Darwin's Conclusions; Benefits of Dance in Children; A system of dance notation called Labanotation, which is still used as one of the main systems of dance movement notation.

In chapter two, the focus is on Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) and the types of therapies. The essence of the American Association for

Dance therapy, which translates dance movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral, and physical awareness. DMT strengthens the body/mind and creates connection through body movement to enhance the experience of both mental and physical well-being. As a form of expressive therapy, DMT was created based on movement and emotion, they are directly connected. Dance-movement therapy has been defined as a branch of psychotherapy that uses dance movements as a method to promote the integration of the individual into society. Creative therapies are discussed, edited by Paul Wilkins, The Body Mind School of Bonnie Bambridge Cohen, which defines dance-movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral, and physical awareness. The analysis formulated the conclusion that dance therapy is useful for both healthy people and people with certain needs and health problems. Particular attention is paid to "Therapy through Breathing" used by Yogis for centuries - a force to evolve their consciousness. By applying the techniques of breathing, an alchemical reaction actually occurs and levels of awareness change, a profound healing process begins.

I would define **the third chapter** as the bearer of the most significant contribution to the dissertation. Building on the theoretical research and practical experience presented in the previous sections of the thesis, an experiment was conducted to investigate the applicability of dance therapy and authentic movement through the application of different tasks to children aged 12-18 years. The extent to which children share their personal experiences through their natural movements is analysed. 11 detailed tasks are posed:

1. To express an emotion, which each person chooses for himself/herself, according to the momentary feeling of his/her emotional state. The children have a time of approximately 15 minutes to feel themselves, their momentary state and the emotion they wish to express through movements that are not rote, such as technique and dance style, but use their personal and authentic movements that are identical to their inner world and experiences.

2. To express moments in the children's lives that they remember and have left a lasting imprint on their memory, whether happy or unhappy events.

3. To find a way to move on the floor, to transition from the floor to standing and to standing. To work at first independently and then in groups of two and three children. This task is prompted by finding new ways of moving, given that there is an impediment to using a body part.

4. Self-heating of the body by moving only the right half.

In the supine position, children begin to move the right foot in slight circles left and right, up and down.

5. Crawling on the floor by moving forward and backward using the hands.

When a child comes into this world he comes a long way from lying down to taking his first steps in life.

6. Movement on a different ground surface.

A movement task is set on a different invertible surface.

7. Movements from the solar plexus to the peripheral parts of the body.

Children place their hand on the solar plexus while lying on the floor.

8. Leading a partner with eyes open and closed. Building trust, responsibility and determination to complete the task. Leading a partner requires trusting and predisposing them to relax and allow themselves to be led.

9. Working as a team to achieve weightlessness.

Trust, proper partner handling and attentiveness are of utmost importance in task performance.

10. Movement of a partner under the influence of feelings and experiences.

The task set to the children related to their experienced emotions (positive and negative) and leading a partner in a way they judge (under the influence of emotions).

11. The music and the feeling it brings.

The benefits of Music Therapy researched and proven over the years.

The tasks are besides individual and group, the communication between the children is observed, then analyzed by the "witnesses" without evaluating the experience. The successful outcome of the practicality of dance therapy in the experiment is evident from the attached essays of the participants.

Chapter four is devoted to the development of dance therapy in contemporary reality. It highlights the usefulness of Dance Therapy not only for the elderly and children with special needs but also in good health. In summary, the PhD student concludes that Dance Therapy evolved in psychology through the synthesis of art (movement, dance and science) and thus it continues to evolve based on a fusion of knowledge built on the therapeutic and spiritual use of dance over the centuries, cultural anthropology, philosophy, psychodynamic theories, various sciences, psychology of art and the creative process.

The final part of the dissertation summarizes the results and formulates specific conclusions validating the benefits and help that dance therapy offers.

I fully accept the six contributions of the thesis as outlined and presented analytically:

1. The dissertation traces the history of dance therapy without being detailed and elaborate, but analyzing the opinions of different psychologists, psychiatrists and movement therapists, which is important for the region and Bulgaria.

2. The dissertation traces the history of dance therapy without being detailed and detailed, but the knowledge and development of dance therapy in our country will be important for further research and research, as well as for practitioners in the field. The work may serve as a basis for future books and manuals on child psychology and development for teachers, parents, and amateurs.

3. The doctoral student has described and analyzed different points of view, knowledge, findings of scientists, psychologists and specialists in the field of dance therapy. The work can enrich

students' knowledge of psychology, semiotics, communication, linguistics, creative arts therapies, kinesiology, dance, drama and child development.

4. The study provides information about some of the centres that offer a variety of specialist training. It shares literature used and links to which the interested person can refer for further information and search or find articles, books and new research in the field of dance therapy.

5. The research can serve teachers and dance choreographers and therapists in kindergartens, schools (for integrating children with SEN and in teamwork), various courses and self-help groups, team building, health centers, etc. The tasks described in the work (Chapter III) can be used to analyse problems and overcome them in: communication, expression of needs, feelings, information about object relations, development, super ego, defence mechanisms, dynamics and personality analysis.

6. Scientific research proves the importance of movement (from embryonic state to adulthood and old age), emphasizes the relationship of the body to the soul, stresses about the importance of movement for the rediscovery and self-improvement of our personality. The scientific findings and the frames set by the study can serve for further development in areas related to the practice of biohacking and to life extension research.

The PhD student has indicated two publications and a significant amount of practical work applied to the dissertation topic.

III. CONCLUSION

Proceeding from everything said above I believe that the dissertation work of Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova "Methods of dance therapy through modern dance for self-improvement of the personality" presents a thorough analysis of the topic. I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award to Kristina Dimitrova Merdzhanova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", Doctoral Programme "Music".

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