ACADEMIC REVIEW
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For the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in
Professional Field 8.3, Music and Dance Arts,
Doctoral Programme in Choreography, to the candidate

TEODORA MARINCHEVA STANEVA

Dissertation title: **"THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN DANCE IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM"**

VARNA FREE UNIVERSITY
"CHERNORIZETS HRABAR"
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
DEPARTMENT OF ARTS

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Teodora Marincheva Staneva is a choreographer and educator with extensive professional experience in dance and dance education. She holds Bachelor's degrees in Choreography (2008) and Journalism (2010) from Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar", and a Master's degree in Ballet Directing (2019) from the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" in Plovdiv. She has also obtained the Third Professional Qualification Degree.

Since 2010, she has taught dance disciplines at Varna Free University and at Konstantin Preslavski Secondary School of Humanities and Arts in Varna, where she holds the position of Senior Teacher. She also pursues an active artistic career as a choreographer and artistic director of Karma Dance Studio. She has created stage works and received professional distinctions, including an award for choreography at the National Dance Competition in Burgas (2016).

Her professional career demonstrates sustained interaction between pedagogical and artistic practice, which is directly reflected in the subject matter and applied orientation of the dissertation under review.

Teodora Marincheva Staneva's dissertation, "The Development of Modern Dance in the Secondary Education System", constitutes an in-depth, extensive and professionally substantiated

study addressing a topical and significant issue in dance education. A particular merit of the research is its successful integration of historical and theoretical analysis with the author's longstanding pedagogical and creative experience. Her endeavour not only to systematise existing knowledge and educational practices but also to propose an original, scientifically grounded model for professional training in modern dance deserves high commendation. It is precisely this connection between scholarly reflection and direct pedagogical applicability that defines the substantial value of the dissertation.

The dissertation comprises an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and nineteen appendices, totalling 484 pages. The main text contains four tables and three figures; the bibliography includes 139 titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English, together with 24 online sources.

Teodora Staneva is an independently enrolled doctoral candidate in the Department of Arts, Faculty of Architecture, at Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar". She has three publications during the research period, as documented in the submitted materials. The author's abstract accurately and faithfully reflects the dissertation.

The first part of the study provides a general overview of the dissertation, in which Teodora Staneva examines the theoretical, methodological and regulatory foundations of vocational training for the occupation of Dancer, specialisation in Modern Dance, within Bulgarian secondary education. The principal research focus is the development of an integrated pedagogical model bringing together established modern-dance techniques, classical training, contemporary movement practices, theoretical knowledge, improvisation and composition within a unified pedagogical system.

The research proceeds systematically across three levels:

– historical and theoretical;

– comparative, juxtaposing American, Russian and Bulgarian educational experience;

– regulatory and curriculum-oriented, culminating in a model for the organisation, content and interrelationships of subjects taught from Grades 8 to 12 at Konstantin Preslavski Secondary School of Humanities and Arts in Varna.

A distinctive feature that makes the dissertation particularly valuable is the author's dual role as both developer and researcher of the first curricula for this specialisation introduced following the 2016 legislative reform. The central research question concerns how to ensure the progressive development of technical competence, creative independence and professional readiness for stage performance.

The relevance of Teodora Staneva's research stems from the dynamic evolution of modern and contemporary dance and the need to organise the diversity of techniques and practices within a coherent pedagogical framework. "The contemporary professional environment requires dancers to master more than one movement system." Training therefore requires a foundation in academic movement technique, work with weight, gravity and breathing, improvisational and compositional skills, and the capacity for interdisciplinary stage performance. Without conceptual and terminological clarity, instruction risks becoming a disconnected collection of styles and teaching approaches.

The 2016 Pre-school and School Education Act emphasises a competence-based approach and institutional autonomy; however, the subjects and teaching hours prescribed by regulations do not in themselves ensure methodological integration. The scholarly significance of the dissertation lies in its systematisation of the historical and methodological foundations of modern dance, its differentiation from contemporary dance techniques, and its substantiation of an applicable educational model. Its practical significance lies in translating regulatory requirements into sequenced curricular content, interdisciplinary connections, expected learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The model supports not only vocational qualification but also students' personal, creative and social development.

The object of the research is vocational training for the occupation of Dancer, specialisation in Modern Dance, within Bulgarian secondary education. Its subject encompasses the historical, theoretical, methodological, regulatory and curriculum-related foundations for the organisation and interaction of dance disciplines from Grades 8 to 12. The analysis covers the author-developed curricula, the state educational standard, Framework Programme B, Variant B4, and model and school curricula, with an institutional focus on Konstantin Preslavski Secondary School of Humanities and Arts in Varna.

The research problem arises from the tension between the individual, dynamic nature of modern dance and the requirements of vocational education that is regulated, age-appropriate and subject to objective assessment. It is necessary to identify the stable technical and historical core of training, clarify the distinctions between "modern dance" and "contemporary dance techniques", and establish the functions of classical dance exercises, improvisation, composition and stage practice.

A significant issue is the absence of a prescribed mechanism for pedagogical coordination among technical, theoretical, creative and practical disciplines. The central question is how international methodological experience, the Bulgarian regulatory framework and the author-developed curricula can be integrated into a sustainable, adaptable and professionally applicable educational model for the Modern Dance specialisation.

The thesis advanced by Teodora Staneva is that effective training in Modern Dance requires a pedagogical system that is grounded in regulations, vertically progressive and internally integrated, with a stable historical and technical core and a variable component. Established techniques should be taught in conjunction with their underlying philosophy, terminology and principles of movement; classical dance exercises fulfil a complementary role, while contemporary practices expand the acquired movement vocabulary.

Training from Grades 8 to 12 is organised according to a spiral progression, with technical, analytical and creative tasks becoming gradually more complex. Cross-curricular coordination, shared terminology and comprehensive assessment foster technical stability, creative autonomy, healthy movement practices and stage competence. The author-developed curricula embody this concept in practice.

Teodora Staneva aims to substantiate a conceptual model for the development, organisation, teaching and improvement of dance subjects within the Modern Dance specialisation, aligning

historical and methodological foundations, regulatory requirements, professional competencies and stage practice.

To achieve this aim, she sets out several principal tasks: (1) to trace the historical emergence of modern dance and pedagogically significant established systems; (2) to systematise the principles, terminology and methodology of leading established techniques; (3) to distinguish modern dance from contemporary dance techniques and define the complementary role of classical training; (4) to compare American, Russian and Bulgarian educational experience and derive principles applicable to the Bulgarian educational context; (5) to examine the institutional preconditions for the development of the specialisation in Bulgaria and Varna; (6) to analyse the regulatory framework after 2016, including Framework Programme B and Variant B4; (7) to analyse the author-developed curricula for Grades 8 to 12, their progression, strengths and risks; (8) to establish an integrated model of technical, theoretical, creative and stage training; (9) to formulate a comprehensive assessment system and a final competence profile; and (10) to identify mechanisms for implementing, monitoring and adapting the model.

The methodology draws on historical-theoretical, comparative-pedagogical and systems-structural approaches. It employs historical-genetic analysis of ideas and techniques; theoretical and terminological analysis of key concepts; comparative analysis of educational models; documentary and regulatory analysis of legislation and curricula; content analysis of the author-developed programmes; functional analysis of cross-curricular relationships; pedagogical modelling of vertically and spirally organised content; and critical reflection on professional experience.

Teodora Staneva's dual role as curriculum developer and researcher of the underlying rationale provides direct insight into the construction of the model. To ensure analytical rigour, her reflections are considered alongside regulatory documents, specialist literature, international practices and the identified professional competencies.

The empirical component includes pedagogical observation, a pedagogical experiment, expert evaluation and analysis of educational activities at Konstantin Preslavski Secondary School of Humanities and Arts in Varna. Experimental work was undertaken to improve the teaching of Modern Dance and the organisational conditions of the educational and creative process. The model was tested over a complete educational cycle, culminating in a state examination for the award of a third-level vocational qualification in theory and practice.

Scope limitations: the study excludes amateur dance, higher education in Choreography, and training in private modern-dance schools and clubs.

In the second part of her study, doctoral candidate Staneva presents the scope and structure of the dissertation.

In Chapter One, Teodora Staneva traces the historical development of modern dance, analysing its philosophical, aesthetic and pedagogical foundations. The chapter argues that modern dance should not be taught in opposition to the classical tradition. Classical dance offers a time-tested system for developing the qualities essential to the sustainable formation of a professional dancer. The research highlights the continuity between foundational theoretical concepts and established modern-dance techniques, as well as their importance in shaping contemporary educational practices.

On the basis of this analysis, Staneva establishes the need for an integrated pedagogical approach in which classical training, modern-dance techniques, improvisation and composition function as mutually complementary components of vocational education. She emphasises methodological progression, consideration of learners' individual characteristics, and the development of stable technical, artistic and creative competencies that contribute to preparing professional dance performers capable of meeting contemporary expectations.

A central emphasis of the study is the understanding of dance education as a holistic process of professional and personal development, integrating movement culture, artistic expressiveness, creative independence and social communication. According to the doctoral candidate, the subjects comprising the Modern Dance specialisation should form a unified, progressive and age-appropriate system rather than a mechanical aggregation of separate disciplines.

Chapter One thus establishes the historical-theoretical and methodological basis for the subsequent development of a comprehensive educational model for the Modern Dance specialisation.

In Chapter Two, the doctoral candidate identifies methodological foundations for a comprehensive system of Modern Dance instruction in Bulgarian secondary education. Teodora Staneva undertakes a comparative analysis of American, Russian and Bulgarian educational models in vocational dance training. The study highlights their distinctive pedagogical principles, organisational characteristics and methodological approaches, examining the possibilities for adapting them to the Bulgarian education system.

On the basis of this comparative analysis, Staneva substantiates the need for a balanced educational model combining academic progression and technical discipline with pedagogical flexibility, interdisciplinarity and creative independence. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between classical training and modern and contemporary dance techniques, as well as to the importance of stage practice for learners' professional development.

Considerable attention is devoted to the historical and institutional development of the Modern Dance specialisation in Bulgaria, highlighting the role of pedagogical initiative, international professional exchange and cooperation between educational and cultural institutions. The experience in Varna is presented as an example of sustainable development in specialised dance education.

In Chapter Three, Teodora Staneva presents the conceptual, regulatory and methodological foundations for constructing a comprehensive educational model for the Modern Dance specialisation. The study emphasises the need for an integrated approach in which established techniques, contemporary dance practices and classical training are combined within a progressive pedagogical system consistent with regulatory requirements and the specific nature of vocational dance education.

A significant contribution is the substantiation of a vertically structured educational model spanning Grades 8 to 12, based on continuity, spiral progression of curricular content and the staged development of professional competencies. Staneva underscores cross-curricular integration, methodological progression and a balance between technical training, artistic expressiveness and creative independence.

Particular attention is devoted to the comprehensive assessment of learning outcomes, encompassing not only technical skills but also the creative process, stage interpretation, individual development and professional discipline. The need for a holistic competence-based approach is thereby established, aimed at preparing adaptable performers who are technically proficient and creatively independent.

In summary, Chapter Three constitutes the conceptual and applied-methodological core of the dissertation, in which the historical-theoretical propositions and comparative analyses of the preceding chapters find concrete expression in the author's educational model. The study identifies opportunities to improve vocational dance education by combining regulatory stability, pedagogical flexibility and contemporary artistic practices.

In her dissertation, Teodora Staneva identifies theoretical scholarly contributions, applied research contributions and contributions to professional practice concerning the development and improvement of vocational education in Modern Dance. Of particular significance is the fact that she developed the first curricula for this specialisation following the entry into force of the 2016 Pre-school and School Education Act; these curricula also constitute the principal object of scholarly analysis.

The theoretical scholarly contributions consist in systematising the historical, terminological and methodological foundations of modern dance and substantiating its status as an integrative professional discipline. Through comparative analysis of international educational practices, Staneva develops a concept for an adaptable pedagogical model integrating classical training, established techniques and contemporary dance practices within a unified educational system.

The applied research contributions relate to the development and scholarly substantiation of the author's curricula in accordance with the applicable regulatory framework. Of particular importance is the proposed vertical model of training from Grades 8 to 12, based on methodological progression, spiral development of curricular content and cross-curricular integration. A concept for comprehensive assessment of learners' technical, artistic, creative and professional competencies has also been developed.

The contributions to professional practice are evident in the direct applicability of the curricula to vocational dance education. The proposed model offers opportunities for improving curricular content, coordinating individual disciplines, monitoring learning outcomes and adapting to different institutional contexts.

In summary, the contributions of Teodora Staneva's dissertation are distinguished by their theoretical grounding, methodological consistency and practical applicability. The study connects historical and pedagogical experience with contemporary regulatory requirements and proposes a comprehensive concept for the sustainable development of vocational education in modern dance.

I recommend that the doctoral candidate consider publishing the dissertation as a teaching resource and refine its title by adding an appropriate subtitle that highlights its principal applied research contribution within the secondary education system. This would emphasise the pedagogical orientation of the study and facilitate its practical application in secondary education and other educational institutions in Bulgaria. These recommendations do not diminish the quality or scope of the results and contributions achieved.

On the basis of my analysis of Teodora Staneva's dissertation, I consider the research to be timely, thorough and of clear scholarly and practical significance for the development of vocational dance education in Bulgaria.

The doctoral candidate demonstrates a profound understanding of the historical, theoretical and methodological foundations of modern dance, together with the ability to systematise and apply them in contemporary educational practice. I particularly commend her original contribution to developing the curricula for the Modern Dance specialisation and her scholarly substantiation of an integrated pedagogical model that reconciles regulatory requirements with the artistic specificity of dance.

I consider the stated research aims and objectives to have been fulfilled and the identified scholarly and applied research contributions to hold potential for practical implementation and further development in vocational education. The dissertation attests to Teodora Staneva's professional competence, independence as a researcher and capacity to interpret pedagogical practice within a scholarly and theoretical framework.

In conclusion, I give my positive assessment of the dissertation entitled **"THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN DANCE IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM" and consider that it possesses the necessary scholarly merit and original contribution to warrant the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD)**.

On this basis, I confidently recommend that the esteemed Academic Jury **award Teodora Marincheva Staneva the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in Professional Field 8.3, Music and Dance Arts.**

Sofia,

30 October 2026

Respectfully,

Prof. Anna Pampoulova, PhD