

RECENZIA

of a dissertation work for the award of an educational and scientific degree 'doctor' in a professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Design of educational programs) on the topic 'ADAPTATION OF A TEACHING DESIGN MODEL IN THE CONTEXT OF INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT /DANCE SCHOOLS/'

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reviewer: Assoc. Dr. Zlatin Marinov Kostov

Information about the author: In mine many years of practice as a dance teacher, including and in an informal educational environment (NFO) and as a teacher in the specialty 'sports dance coach' at the 'Vasil Levski' NSA, as well as an active participant at almost all administrative, managerial and sports-pedagogical levels in the construction and development of the aesthetic sports discipline "dancesport" in Bulgaria, I have had the opportunity to build and evaluate the performance and sports-pedagogical knowledge and skills of a constellation of talented Bulgarian youth, in their pursuit of improvement and self-affirmation in the field of this wonderful and unique in its characteristics dance art-sport. One of them was undoubtedly the doctoral student Ralitsa Merdzhanova-Stefanova, whose continuous and successful career development in this field, first as an athlete-competitor in dancesport at the KST 'Rainbow' - Sofia, and later as a dance teacher at DS 'Dance Academy' and head of DS 'DanceStation', I have been a witness from the very beginning and until this moment, when she stands before us not only as an accomplished dance teacher, which she undoubtedly is, but also with fully justified aspirations for the protection of her dissertation work and the acquisition of a qualitatively new status for her - that of the pedagogue-researcher in the vast field of this ancient and eternally young science, as well as a brave innovator and inspirer for the development and improvement of art education, and in particular of the dance ones in Bulgaria, in the conditions of an informal educational environment (IFEE) that is unfortunately still insufficiently developed and regulated in our country.

General description of the work: The dissertation submitted for my review covers 228 pages, including introduction and setting of the study, four chapters, conclusion, appendices and bibliography. The dissertation contains 7 appendices, 2 diagrams, 18 tables, 6 diagrams, several photos and an attached video file. The lists of abbreviations, diagrams, tables, diagrams and working concepts used by the author also make a pleasant impression. The bibliographic base covers a total of 80 significant sources, of which 37 are in Latin, 31 in Cyrillic, and the rest are informative websites. Despite the not particularly large number of sources used by the doctoral student, their significance and relevance in her research field is indisputable and they definitely, significantly contribute to the full shaping and presentation of her theses, the bringing out of the current issues in them, as well as to the adequate formulation of her scientific hypotheses and for their possible solution in the field of the theory and practice of pedagogical science in our country. The text is written in literary sound and appropriate scientific language with minimal grammatical errors. In terms of structure, the content is presented appropriately and with clearly expressed logic in both the theoretical and empirical levels of its research. However, in our opinion, Chapter 4 should be presented in the structure of the dissertation before Chapter 3, since its content includes considered fundamental theoretical statements, on the basis of which the author builds and also presents her research concept for the process of adapting a learning design model, her author's matrix for adapting the selected learning design model (Backward design model) to the IFE in dance art in Bulgaria, as well as his author's development of the resources that are the basis of the experimental part of the dissertation, which is presented in Chapter 3. I.e. this content is necessary for the reader so that he, with a greater

understanding of the essence of the problem and the author's approach to its research and resolution, can get to know and appreciate the text of Chapter 3, which, in our opinion, is of primary importance for the high practical value of the work and deserves adequate and high evaluation. The detailed and multifaceted motivation and argumentation of the chosen problem area and especially of its relevance in the introduction, supports the reader in his general perception of meaning and directs him along a natural, even for those not tempted by the topic, path to his understanding and evaluation of the significance of its results. I think that I could not, as a reviewer, express myself more clearly and categorically in support of the author's declared importance, ambition and at the same time enormous difficulty of the work on her chosen topic, and therefore I will take the liberty of quoting her: *'Art education in itself is quite an ambitious activity, since in addition to the characteristic gifts and talents of the students themselves, a specific environment/context of conducting and happening on the one hand the education itself, and on the other hand the art itself as the end result, is also necessary /product of training, from the third – the strict orientation of art as a result to different publics/audiences. That is why the task of considering non-formal art education centers in general is very complex and should be the result of extremely thorough analyzes and studies on a large scale of the specifics of each individual art that falls into the field of study. In the specific case of this dissertation, attention is paid to the art of dance and its specifics in the learning process in the context of the informal educational environment and the huge need to arrange and give direction to the development of the processes in it in a national plan'*. I cannot but also express here my deep admiration for her for illuminating this painful and long insoluble problem for me, as tempted by the subject, as well as for her courage in tackling its difficult solution, precisely in practical plan.

Substantive evaluation: So, without special claims on my part for the completeness of the analysis and evaluation of the work from the point of view of pedagogical science, in the field of which, without being a graduate specialist, I myself have devoted most of my conscious life, being tempted by one specific branch of hers - the pedagogy of dance education, I will try very briefly and from my point of view as an interdisciplinary scientist - theoretician and practitioner, to present my impressions and evaluations of the author's dissertation work.

In the conclusion of the introduction, the subject, the object, the setting, the goal and the tasks of the research are precisely stated, and here my only remark is that the theoretical and practical methods used by the author are presented before the tasks that they are called to solve. It makes a pleasant impression that the main research questions that the author will try to answer through her work are also formulated at the end.

In Chapter 1, the problem of 'educational design' is formulated in detail, examined and critically analyzed in a historical and contemporary perspective as one of the most current problems in the field of didactics.

In Chapter 2, the focus of the author's attention is on the IFE and its relationship with art schools in an informal educational context, as well as the existing dance schools in our country, functioning in the context of the difficult and insufficiently regulated informal educational environment in Bulgaria and their specific characteristics, which could be used by her as a basis for preparing appropriate instructional design models, adapted to the research objectives and the particular context of the environment. The principles of the IFE, its functions and essential dimensions are examined in detail, and the need for collaboration at the institutional level between the structures in the formal and informal education systems is substantiated. The art of dance is analyzed as a concept and realization in the context of IFEE, where both its main forms are represented - dance training in the context of developing high dance mastery and in the context of practicing in a social environment and social dancing. A critical review and analysis of the activities of some of the main organizations in

the field of informal dance education (NFTO), both internationally and in Bulgaria, has been made, and they are quite appropriately differentiated and categorized by the author into single-style and multi-stylish. The trends of rapid development of diversity and diversification in the sector internationally and in the context of the Bulgarian reality have been traced, and a desire to open up the environment, giving the opportunity to more and more dancers to be involved in the various performances, to more and more dance schools to be members of different organizations at the same time has been established, with a view to enriching the knowledge and experience of their teachers and students.

In Chapter 3, which, in my opinion, has the main weight for the high practical value of the doctoral student's work, the author's design of dance education in the IFEE of the dance school (DS) 'DanceStation' and the results of the empirical stage of the research are presented, the so called 'case study'. The Training Program is analyzed and the purpose, tasks and research questions of interest to the author are indicated. The research procedure is described in detail and the specifics, structure, activity and performances of the specific DS 'DanceStation', as well as the qualification of the personnel, and socio-psychological features of the training process in it, are examined. The methods and tools of the research are presented, including observations, document research, surveys among dance teachers and students, as well as two focus groups - of dance teachers and heads of DS. The stages of the research and their content are described. A justification of the selected training design model is made from the point of view of the final overall goal of the training, the training content, the organization of the learning process, the motivation of the participants and the context of the environment. Special attention is also paid to the organization and traditional design (so-called 'medal systems' of ISTD, IDTA, WDC, etc.) of IFE in dance in countries with great traditions and experience in the research field of the PhD student (England, USA, Australia and some Western European countries) and their training programs for different dance styles, in informal educational contexts of training, both for performing arts and social dancing, were also reviewed. On the basis of the comparative analysis between these long-proven systems in international practice and the dance training program of DS 'DanceStation', the doctoral student makes a well-founded conclusion that it complies with international standards and requirements in this field. Next, the detailed analysis of the questionnaire surveys among teachers and students from a representative sample of the existing dance schools with IFE in Bulgaria is presented, the main conclusions of which are in support of the theoretical justifications of the doctoral student as the most adequate to the modern socio-economic and pedagogical environment in our country, IFE design - so-called 'Backward Design', chosen by her for its adapted application in her experimental 'case study' - DS 'DanceStation'. The pedagogical observation of the application process of the adapted author's design was carried out with 185 children from the school for a period of 4 months. The systematized results of it are shown in relevant protocols of the observations carried out at the various stages of the training, some of which are presented in the Appendices and are illustrated with suitable photographic material. As the most important criterion for the final assessment of the qualities and shortcomings of the author's chosen educational design, she gives us the opportunity to enjoy the result of its application - its dance educational product, the performance 'The Magic Factory', presented in an attached video file with the performance on stage by the training participants. The analysis of the results of the 'focus group' conducted with the teachers in order to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the specific resources used: the curriculum and the performance product, shows that they all find it challenging to develop the specific teaching content for each dance style in long term, but overall these resources are valued as valuable and developmental instructional design tools. The chapter ends with an analysis of the results of the conducted 'focus group' and with a representative sample of the heads of dance schools with IFE in our country, regarding the state and prospects for the development of dance training in the IFE in Bulgaria, with a focus on the need for the creation and application of a unified training design in different dance styles.

In our opinion, the conclusion that: *'...according to the participants, a unified dance training program could be created, which in its essence offers solutions and concepts for a comprehensive macro- and micro-level approach to the training process, with appropriate strategies and tools affecting the specifics of dance training from the point of view of art - a direction of attitude towards the dance itself, towards myself and towards others.'* is very important. However, the most significant and valuable outcome, in our view, is that the leadership group is united around the need to increase the quality of the content offered in dance classes and the creation of a branch structure to represent organizations in the field of dance training in an informal environment at a national and international level, to protect the interests of those employed in it, to monitor the quality of the services offered, the qualification of the staff, the increase of awareness in society about the benefits and advantages of dancing, in the context of personal development and full improvement of the individual and society as a whole .

In Chapter 4, as I have already indicated above in my review, fundamental theoretical statements are examined, on the basis of which the author builds her research concept for the process of adapting a learning design model, her author's matrix for adapting the selected learning design model (Backward design model) at the DS with IFE in Bulgaria, as well as the author's development of the resources, that are the basis of the experimental part of her dissertation work, the content and high evaluation of which I have already presented above.

In the Conclusion of her dissertation, the author has summarized all the essential aspects and problems of the IFDE in our country, as well as the answers she received in her theoretical-applied scientific work on it, to the questions that excited her as a young scientific researcher and were formulated in the Introduction of the work. A pleasant impression is also made by the sharing of the conceptual questions in the field of her scientific research that excite her, but have not yet found their answer in this study, which is a sure sign of the birth and a guarantee for the future development of an alert young scientist, whose deep empathy for the problems of the development of her beloved dance art will continue to lead her on the way to the heights both in it and in the pedagogical science and practice to which she has devoted herself. And finally, as the author modestly expresses herself, she 'dares' to present the moments of her dissertation that she considers to be beneficial, which we, after getting to know it in detail, define as such with conviction.

Scientific theoretical-applied contributions: as far as we know, this is the first study of its kind and the first analogy between formal and informal educational environments in a dance context in Bulgaria. In addition to the scientific, theoretical-applied contributions of the dissertation stated by the author in the Conclusion of her dissertation work, with which we fully agree, the following labor moments, in our opinion, contribute to the development of the IFE in arts and in particular in dance in Bulgaria, also deserve to be noted:

- the convincing disclosure of the already 'thank God' realized by the heads of the DS and the dance teachers themselves in our country, need for their continuous and purposeful development and improvement, as well as increasing their qualifications in the context of the IFE in arts and its connection with the principles of the FE;

- the convincing defense of her position on the need for professionalization of the dance training sector in the Bulgarian IFE, in two main aspects – theoretical-methodical and qualification-personnel.

Publications, documentation and abstract: Ralitsa Merdjanova-Stefanova presents 3 scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation. Both the publications and the author's abstract meet the genre and bibliographic standards and are a valid proof of the authentic authorship of the research and the dissertation developed by her. All documentation on the doctoral studies and the procedure

for discussion of the work adequately represent the actual process of preparation, design and implementation of the scientific research in the Faculty of Pedagogy under the guidance of its scientific supervisor.

Questions for the PhD student: as a professional colleague of the author and her reviewer, I 'dare' to ask her the following questions:

1. Does the author believe that under the conditions of the IFEE in Bulgaria, it is possible to implement sport dance training (competitive LAT and STT) for children and adolescents in the DS, in the context of achieving high dance results, and if so, which of the considered in dissertation models of instructional design would she adapt at DS 'DanceStation'?

2. Does the author believe that, under the conditions of the IFEE in Bulgaria, it is possible to implement training in the context of social dancing of sports dances (competitive LAT and STT) for adults and seniors in the TU, and if so, which of the design models considered in the dissertation for training, would she adapt to TU 'DanceStation'?

3. From the scientific point of view and the author's experience as a long-term dance pedagogue and head of a DS in the conditions of the IFEE in Bulgaria, what in her opinion should be the first strategic organizational and methodological steps, and by which organization (or organizations) in our country in the field of IFEE, should they be undertaken in order to accelerate the process of professionalization in the sector of dance training in IFEE in Bulgaria, in the two main aspects - theoretical-methodical and qualification-personnel?

Conclusion: The significance and actuality of the scientific problem, its consistent theoretical and empirical research and the formation of the text version of the theoretical-empirical procedures are according to the requirements for a dissertation work. Its results are objectively obtained, and the conclusions of their analysis are convincing, theoretically grounded and empirically proven. Some of them represent a theoretical-applied contribution in the field of didactics in our country. Their publication in scientific periodicals and presentation at scientific forums verify their authenticity and are a mirror of the high quality of the entire dissertation work, as well as the pedagogical, scientific and personal merits of the doctoral student. All this gives me reason to confidently recommend to the members of the esteemed scientific jury to give a high evaluation of the work and to vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree 'doctor' in Professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy /Design of educational programs/ to Mrs. Ralitsa Atanasova Merdjanova-Stefanova.

30. 03. 2024

Sofia

Reviewer:

/ Assoc. Dr. Zlatin Marinov Kostov/