

Writing in the professionalisation of Contemporary Dance in Guadalajara.

La escritura en la profesionalización de la danza contemporánea en Guadalajara.

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.v30.n89. e030 0

Ollin Yanabi Durán Rubio

University of Guadalajara.

(MEXICO)

CE: ollinyanabiduran@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6222-0604>

Received: 26/06/2025 Reviewed: 26/09/2025 Approved: 15/10/2025

How to cite this article (APA):

In paragraph:
(Durán, 2025, p. _).

In reference list:
Durán, O.Y. (2025) Writing in the professionalisation of contemporary dance in Guadalajara. *Sincronía Journal*. 30(89). 1-13
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.v30.n9.e0300

Abstract.

This article aims to explore the role of writing within the curriculum for professional contemporary dance training in Guadalajara. Writing is important for analysing, reflecting on and documenting dance, as it encourages a multidimensional approach to art, providing students with tools to communicate their artistic experiences, which enriches the creative process and generates more documentary products. Thus, this text makes suggestions for the inclusion of writing and literature in contemporary dance training programmes, as professional training curricula do not include literacy training, which perpetuates the lag in written production from the contemporary dance community in Guadalajara.

Keywords: Contemporary dance. Writing. Documentation.

Resumen:

En el presente artículo se pretende conocer el papel de la escritura dentro de los planes de estudio en la profesionalización de la danza contemporánea en Guadalajara. La escritura es importante para analizar, reflexionar y documentar la danza, ya que fomenta una aproximación multidimensional al arte, proporcionando a los estudiantes herramientas para comunicar sus experiencias artísticas, lo que enriquece el proceso creativo y genera más productos documentales. Así, en este texto se hacen sugerencias para la inclusión de la escritura y la literatura dentro de los programas de formación dancística contemporánea, ya que los planes de estudio profesionalizante no contienen una formación lectoescritora, lo cual perpetúa el

rezago de la producción escrita proveniente de la comunidad de danza contemporánea en Guadalajara.

Palabras clave: Danza contemporánea. Escritura. Documentación.

Introduction

Reading itself is a practice that has multiple physical and emotional benefits for people of all ages, from cognitive abilities to the development of creativity and critical thinking. However, the purpose of this article is not to review the countless advantages of literacy, but rather to note which of those advantages are relevant to the world of contemporary dance.

Compared to other artistic disciplines, dance does not leave a material product for posterity, being the most ephemeral of the arts. However, it is nourished by various disciplines and, like them, involves a process of research, creation and management of what is generally a stage production. Dance limits its public activity to performance when in reality its contributions encompass other fields such as pedagogy, criticism, methodology and theoretical conceptualisation; and these contributions remain only within the dance community, without transcending beyond the nucleus where they are learned, attributing this to a lack of interest and/or skills in writing.

Writing is in itself a creative process that can make dancers rethink and complement their dance work. Sandra Otálvaro says: "Writing in particular has the power to persuade, to motivate or demotivate, to affirm a conviction or to make someone take a path never before considered" (2014). Writing should not be underestimated by thinking that it has no relation to the performing arts, since music and theatre, for example, leave a written product and there is an extensive bibliography on their thoughts and methods of creation, so dance cannot be left behind.

It is here that we can see that the tools of literary literacy have not been sufficiently exploited in the dance community. Not only is it important for analysing and reflecting on personal learning, but it also acts as a catalyst for creativity, not to mention its great capacity to project its intellectual process outside the guild, and thus manage to increase the documentation on contemporary dance and, therefore, its heritage.

Thus, this article delves into the documentary gap on the part of the contemporary dance community in Guadalajara, Jalisco, as well as its possible causes from the educational institution's

perspective, and the potential inclusion of literary tools to bridge the gap between theory and stage practice.

The gap in written production from the contemporary dance community

In Mexico, as in Latin America in general, there is a significant movement of methods and systems of movement for contemporary dance that have been poorly documented, but above all have not been documented by their own authors. This is where the problem to be analysed lies: the lack of writing on the philosophies of movement for contemporary dance by its creators themselves. In Guadalajara, it is possible to enjoy an extensive programme of contemporary dance performances, but there is very little exposure of the intellectual creation behind them.

One of the reasons for this situation is, as Fernández Serratos (2023) points out, the imbalance between theoretical and practical knowledge/skills in dance, in the sense that the written production required in an academic or formal context does not allow for free expression or is not related to the practical side of dance:

[...] they confuse the serious and necessary fields of theoretical-reflective work with the pure field of correct and even beautiful words or verbal expression, without reflecting much on the real content of that expression (as if writing well were equivalent to theoretical work, that is, carrying out analysis, research, and serious reflection on dance). (pp.58)

Likewise, Fernández highlights the importance of theoretical classes as well as practical ones in institutional training, in order to be able to talk about dance in other ways and not only from the empty form of technique, but also to be able to identify the problems of dance and deconstruct it, since "taking the position that research or theorisation of dance does not exist or is useless puts us in a position of defencelessness before other artistic disciplines that do take the floor to make themselves present and to be thought about (theatre, plastic arts)" (p. 61).

The educational offerings for contemporary dance in Guadalajara include a variety of training systems that have made theoretical and/or practical contributions to the study of contemporary dance, such as: *El Cuerpo en Estado Crítico* (The Body in Critical Condition) by Leonardo Blanco; *Cuerpo Presente* (Present Body) by Karen de Luna; *Accionares movimiento* (Movement Actions) by Abraham Torres; *Phi Movement* by Lola Ramírez; *Cuerpo existencial* (Existential Body) by Renata Pérez, etc. Of these, only Karen de Luna has recently published reflections on her dance and her

theoretical concepts for movement (De Luna, 2023). The existing bibliography in Guadalajara on contemporary dance generally refers to the historical or biographical aspects of artistic figures, so that audiences in other cities could learn about the history of dance in Guadalajara, but if they wanted to learn about the aforementioned training system, they would have to come to the city or wait for those dancers to visit their city.

In other words, there is, of course, academic research on contemporary dance. However, there is not enough material documenting the creative and intellectual processes that express and link what is done on stage with what is in the mind that triggers everything that is seen in the body. It is necessary to learn that dance is both practical and theoretical, and that documentation, just because it is formal, does not have to be cold, but rather creative.

The question then is: how is the dance-writing relationship formed to achieve this written production that would position dance theoretically and creatively? There are many ways, but undoubtedly one of the most important is formal, university-level training in contemporary dance.

Literacy training in contemporary dance curricula in Guadalajara

Institutions offering professional-level studies in contemporary dance have a major impact on the formation of the dance community we now know in Guadalajara. Although formal education is not the only thing that trains dancers, it does have an important influence, as its role as an academic authority promises to meet the educational needs that a dancer requires to be a professional. This need has given rise to the professionalisation of dance: "In theory, what was expected from formal contemporary dance education through universities was to obtain practical and theoretical content that was not accessible through other means of studying dance" (Bojórquez, 2023, p.54).

In Guadalajara, there are two bachelor's degrees for the professionalisation of contemporary dance: in the private sector, there is the Bachelor's Degree in Contemporary Dance from the Instituto Superior de Artes Escénicas (ISAE), which has been operating since 2013. In the public sphere, Martha Hickman (2023) summarises in one of her sections the history of the creation and legitimisation of what is now the Bachelor's Degree in Performing Arts for Dance Expression at the University of Guadalajara (UdeG) and its modification in 2006, which, in addition to acquiring that name, sought to promote interdisciplinarity and strengthen the theoretical-practical framework, among other things.

Both degrees offer a wide range of practical subjects on contemporary dance techniques, as well as theoretical subjects such as history, administration and social studies. Although their curricula are quite different from each other, in a semester of seven subjects, for example, between four and five of them are practical (technique, composition and/or repertoire). One of the criticisms levelled at the academy is the current teaching of modern dance techniques such as Limón and Graham, which are taught at the University of Guadalajara¹ but not at ISAE² :

[...] in reality, most universities and higher education dance schools follow orthodox patterns and give priority to technique. This means that 1) the load of 'practical' subjects is more important and that of 'theoretical' subjects is greatly reduced; 2) the same view of technique versus style continues to prevail; 3) the same dance techniques, methodologies and teaching methods are maintained. There are, of course, exceptions, but it is necessary to review the achievements and shortcomings of their graduates. (Tortajada, 2021)

Beyond pointing out the true usefulness or otherwise of the techniques taught in each curriculum, it is curious that in the case of the University of Guadalajara, these modern techniques continue to be taught, even though many no longer consider them to be valid. However, they are documented, which makes it easier (and, in a way, legitimate) to resort to them. In any case, emphasis is placed on the author's first point, as neither of the two degree programmes includes a subject specifically dedicated to writing, reading or composition. It is understandable that they do not focus on any art other than their main activity, but just as they have a music subject because music is part of dance, writing and composition are also part of it if the aim is to transcend and expand the world of contemporary dance. So what is the point of adding subjects that are not directly related to dance performance, such as *project management* or *intellectual property*? If the aim is to train well-prepared, critical and knowledgeable dancers, assignments such as writing (creative and non-creative) are necessary.

In the presentation of the Bachelor of Performing Arts for Dance Expression at the University of Guadalajara, the training is presented as having three objectives, one of which is "bodily and documentary research as a tool to support any dance project"³ . However, the curriculum does not

¹ UdeG academic pathway <https://cuaad.udg.mx/?q=ruta-academica-aed>

² ISAE curriculum <https://isae.mx/licenciatura-en-danza-contemporanea/#>

³ <https://cuaad.udg.mx/?q=oferta/licenciaturas/laeed>

include any material, whether core, selective or optional, that deals with research techniques, documentation, writing or reading.

An example of the problems that can arise from not addressing these issues is provided by Kiryat Yatir (2023), a contemporary dance student at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, who criticises the discrepancies between the mission, vision and curricular objectives of the Bachelor's Degree in Dance and the real interests of the teachers, stating that these differences affect the student's dance training:

Research is one of the many things I am passionate about, even though there are teachers within the dance school who argue that research is useless for dancers because the only thing that matters is exercising the muscles. For me, both are equally important, because action without theory and technique is empty, and theory and technique without action is blind. (pp. 101)

This is not about pointing fingers at universities for not including writing in their curricula, as there are many subjects that they may or may not include depending on the philosophy of each institution and each degree programme, but rather about ensuring that they are consistent and committed to achieving their stated objectives. What this text suggests is that other tools are needed to train well-prepared dancers, and universities have the capacity and duty to meet those needs, as well as to stop the lag in written documentation in Guadalajara by providing students with other creative tools that serve not only to improve or complement the creative process of dance, but also to leave a documentary record of those processes, and for that it is necessary to encourage both creative and research writing.

Sergio Rommel (2015) argues that, although there are discrepancies between the university and the reality of dance, it is interesting to study the reasons why the need to formalise dance studies arose in the first place and to take advantage, he says, of university education to prepare for a world that requires skills ranging from the creative economy to other social problems in which the university could be a good and necessary mentor. Thus, in the same way that contemporary dance was implemented in universities and the Bachelor's degree at the UdeG was renewed, educational programmes must now also be renewed to combat another of the new challenges facing dance, which is, among others, the documentation of the creative process.

If this gap is addressed, hopefully in a few years writing will be positioned in dance training and could be replicated outside the university, in informal or semi-professional contemporary dance education. We will notice this when there begins to be more publication of books, articles, magazines, and essays addressing dance issues and creative, critical, and intellectual processes, as is the case with other arts. The key is to introduce future dancers to writing from an early stage in their dance training, not only as an academic requirement for certain subjects, but as a way to complement their creativity and ground their ideas of movement.

The inclusion of writing and literature in contemporary dance

Perhaps proposing a specific subject for creative writing is too much to ask for a degree in contemporary dance. However, it must be acknowledged that we are talking about the knowledge and experience necessary for creativity, the materialisation of ideas and the promotion of the documentation of the intellectual processes of this art form. Thus, the tools of writing can take many forms as long as they retain these objectives, including exercises within other theoretical subjects.

As Durán (2011) mentions, it may not be possible to demand a specific form of writing in dance, or in any art form, but rather to see writing as a form of the artistic process, whether through descriptions, analyses, letters, diaries, manuals, memoirs, and essays, which can be as creative as the artistic work itself, with the aim of sensitising both the artist and the viewer. In other words, writing as part of artistic training is not only relevant for the artist, but also for building bridges with the viewer, creating works for a wider audience that can understand the processes behind abstraction. As Mauricio Durán says:

Artists may judge writing to be useless given its partial insufficiency, felt more in its expressive needs than in its communicative possibilities. However, writing, being the most common and codified language, ends up being the best means of communicating the artist's intentions and instructions, the emotions and understandings of the audience, and the interpretations and exegesis of critics and theorists. (Durán, 2011, p.10)

In other words, contemporary dance is already a very abstract genre in itself, and by depriving the audience of texts that complement the movement, intention or feelings expressed on stage, contact with the spectator is lost. This results in contemporary dance becoming self-absorbed, focusing on

its own execution and not allowing the audience to access it. This is another important point about writing for dance: not to explain it, but to share it.

For this genuine relationship to emerge, writing must be as creative as movement. That is why it is necessary for dancers to contemplate a space to write freely, to express ideas without judgement or rules, because you never know if the next dance methodology or philosophy will emerge from there, which, when expressed, will form links with other arts, communities and the audience that contemplates it.

Writing as an academic norm is important in terms of composition, as research into dance (historical, biographical or social) is crucial, but so is allowing the same creativity that possesses the body to possess the pen, so that these drafts represent a potential document for the creative heritage of contemporary dance. Encouraging writing and reading not only stimulates the creativity of the mind but also that of the dancing body itself.

In these terms, let us think of writing as the trace of a cognitive process that is traversed not only by the sensitive, but also by the sociocultural construction of a world where historical, aesthetic and political paradigms crystallise, only to be reformulated with the passage of time. In this sense, could we not draw a parallel between the stroke of writing, the stroke of the dancing body and the stroke of the history of dance? For in all of them we observe a process of transformation and collective memory, *tracing* in each word, gesture or movement the cultural heritage of a world, or rather, a way of *feeling and thinking* about the world. (Dowling, 2022, p.14).

Adriana Dowling's words could not be more accurate. Experiences, learning and socio-cultural contexts all influence the way dance is conceived and performed, as art is always permeated by sensory experience. In this context, we can see the differences between the various schools of contemporary dance, from the roots of Latin American dance to the lightness of European contemporary dance. Writing about these influences means documenting not only a person's process but also that of a dance tradition based on individual thoughts and contexts, described with the same sensitivity with which they dance.

The rhetorical forms of poetry with body movement, narrative structures with choreographic composition, arguments that support an idea in an essay with philosophies that give rise to

movement, etc. There are more analogies than we could imagine, as all the tools of these literary genres have a place in dance. In Guadalajara, classes, workshops, seminars and courses in creative writing in its different genres are held. Bringing these writers and/or their teaching methods into dance classrooms would be a great collaboration between the arts, which would undoubtedly enrich both disciplines. It would even be possible to borrow some methodologies from the Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing at the University of Guadalajara, if not a direct collaboration between university centres.

In short, writing proves to be a powerful tool in contemporary dance training, not only because of its ability to enrich the artistic process, but also because of its transformative potential in the relationship with the audience. By integrating writing, dancers deepen their critical reflection on their practice and discover new ways of inhabiting and narrating the stage space. Thus, writing ceases to be an alien exercise and becomes a language allied with the body in motion.

Conclusion

There is much to be done in terms of dance training, but as contemporary dance is an increasingly abstract art form that is becoming more and more distant from its community roots, it is necessary to provide tools so that these experiences can be shared and leave their mark not only on audiences but also on the history of the development of contemporary dance. Writing may be the tool that dance needs to position itself as a critical and thoughtful art form.

It is not only a question of promoting the correct writing of an academic text, but also the writing of a text that conveys the same passion and sensitivity of the body, which is, therefore, an extension of dance. In this way, small writing and creative exercises through literature can change the products that the dance community leaves for posterity and for its audience, building bridges between dancers and spectators and sharing a broader, richer and more codified artistic heritage.

References

- Alfonso, S. R. (2015), Why do we take dance training to university? *Interdanza*, (22), 04-05.
<https://issuu.com/interdanza/docs/rev. interdanza n m.22 issuu>
- Bojórquez, C. (2023). "University training and its aspirations." In: Estay Reyno, P. L., Ramírez Macip, R. C. and Rivera Hernández, K. M. (Eds.). *Decolonising thought. The transformation in dance*

- training in higher education institutions (HEIs): a critique of theory and practice* (pp. 52-56). Mexico, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.
- De Luna, K. (2023) "Corporealities." In: Durán, O. Y. (Coord.). *Philosophies of the body and movement. Contemporary dance in Latin America* (pp. 13-25). Mexico, self-published.
- Dowling, A. (2022). Writing in dance as an expression and reflection of corporeality. *007-Gloria Contreras Chair in dance and its interdisciplinary links. The traces of dance: writings and corporealities.* <https://www.cuadernoscatredras.unam.mx/product/007-catedra-gloria-contreras/>
- Durán, M. (2011, February), Writing in the artistic disciplines. *Notebooks on music, visual arts and performing arts* 6(2). <https://revistas.javeriana.edu.co/index.php/cma/article/view/1788>
- Fernández, M. de L., (2023). "Faces of an experience: theory in practical niches. How the field manifests itself in teaching. Dichotomies in Western thought and how they affect dance." In: Estay Reyno, P. L., Ramírez Macip, R. C. and Rivera Hernández, K. M. (Eds.). *Decolonising thought. Transformation in dance training in higher education institutions (HEIs): a critique of theory and practice* (pp. 57-65). Mexico, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.
- Hickman, M., G. (2023) *The configuration of the artistic field of contemporary dance in Guadalajara*. Mexico, University of Guadalajara.
- Otálvaro, S. J. (2014). Reading and writing "More than just letters" [Electronic version]. *Journal of education and thought*, 21(21), 73-82.
- Tortajada, M. (2021). Order out of chaos: dance in Mexico. *Fractal*, (94). <https://www.mxfractal.org/articulos/RevistaFractal94Tortajada.php>
- Yatir, K. (2023). "A brief critique of the BUAP dance degree programme from the perspective of my dancing body." In: Estay Reyno, P. L., Ramírez Macip, R. C. and Rivera Hernández, K. M. (Eds.), *Decolonising thought. Transformation in dance training in higher education institutions (HEIs): a critique of theory and practice* (pp. 97-104). Mexico, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.