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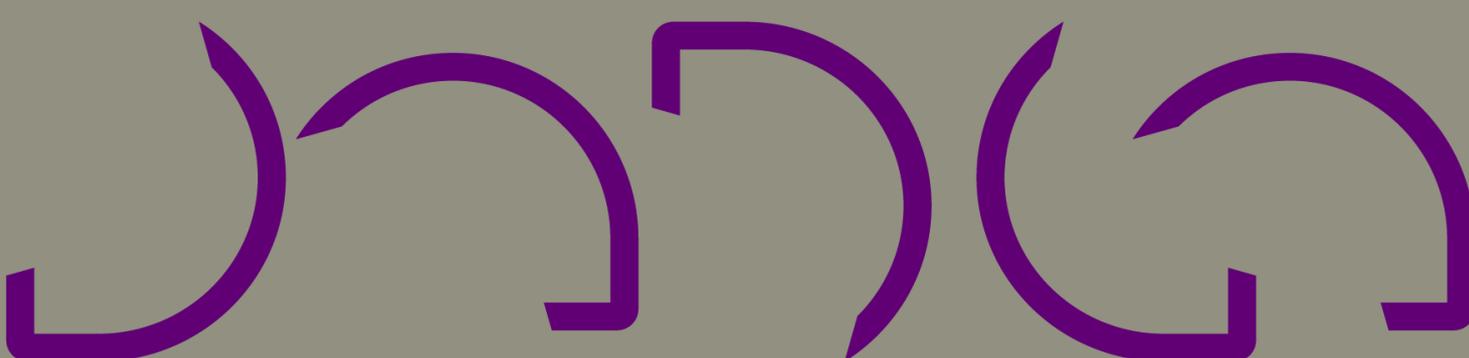


# Classical Ballet Laboratory Classes in the Dance Degree at UFPel: Remote Learning Experiences in 2021/1

*Aulas de Laboratório de Balé Clássico na graduação em  
dança da UFPel: experiências no modo remoto em 2021/1*

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## *ABSTRACT*

This text is as an experience report on the reorganization of the Classical Ballet Laboratory discipline, from the Dance Degree course at the Federal University of Pelotas, to remote mode, during the COVID-19 pandemic. As it is an eminently practical discipline, rigorous planning was necessary, involving various aspects to be considered. The preparation of the classes took place in a way not to lose the logic of teaching and, at the same time, to avoid incorrect understandings of the movements. Video tutorials were constructed to assist in the execution of the steps, the technology to be used during online classes was adjusted, and the delivery of weekly tasks in the form of videos was requested. The experience showed that it was possible to resize the offer of a practical discipline to the requirement of the remote context. The challenge of dealing with the uncertainty of the results was fundamental to find ways for making it happen.

**KEYWORDS:** classical ballet; remote mode; degree dance.

## RESUMO

Este texto se configura como um relato de experiência sobre a reorganização da disciplina Laboratório de Balé Clássico, do curso de Dança Licenciatura da Universidade Federal de Pelotas, para o modo remoto, durante a pandemia do COVID-19. Por ser uma disciplina eminentemente prática, foi necessário um planejamento rigoroso, envolvendo diversos aspectos a serem considerados. O preparo das aulas aconteceu de maneira a não perder a lógica do ensino e, ao mesmo tempo, evitar compreensões incorretas dos movimentos. Foram construídos tutoriais em vídeo para auxiliar na execução dos passos, ajustada a tecnologia a ser utilizada durante as aulas online e solicitada a entrega de tarefas semanais, em forma de vídeos. A experiência mostrou que foi possível redimensionar a oferta de uma disciplina prática para a exigência do contexto remoto. A vontade de achar formas desta oferta acontecer foi fundamental para assumirmos o desafio de desacomodar-se e lidar com a incerteza dos resultados.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** balé clássico; modo remoto; graduação em dança.

# Classical Ballet Laboratory Classes in the Dance Degree at UFPel: Remote Learning Experiences in 2021/1

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## 1. Classical Ballet Laboratory in Remote Learning: Is it Possible?

The Dance Bachelor degree course at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPEL) has in its structure a range of subjects as practical laboratories. According to the Pedagogical Project of the course (PPC, 2023), such laboratories are offered as block electives, that is, a set of subjects that belong to the same area of study and represent different conceptual, thematic and theoretical approaches to a given teaching/learning problem. The student has to attend a minimum number of classes to achieve curriculum integration. The PPC (2023) also explains that

In the case of the Dance Course, the Block is composed of twelve different Dance Laboratories, each for a dance genre. The Dance Laboratories elective Block emerged as a proposal to diversify and flexibilize the artistic and pedagogical training of the students, without creating hierarchies among the dance genres. (PPC, 2023, p. 54)

Among them<sup>5</sup> is the Classical Ballet Laboratory, which includes the introductory teaching of ballet, as a resource for technical and investigative preparation for Dance, through the recognition of individual movement possibilities. Thus, the initial understanding of the organization of ballet classes, teaching methodologies, function of exercises, and establishment of relationships among the contents, are part of its structure.

During the pandemic period, between March 2020 and December 2021, worried about continuing the education of their students, the teachers decided to conduct as many online classes as possible. The practical classes were certainly the most challenging. Despite much resistance, some allowed themselves to experiment

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<sup>5</sup> The elective subject block Dance Laboratories is composed of 12 components: Dance Laboratory: Brazilian Traditional Dances I, Dance Laboratory: International Traditional Matrix Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Classical Ballet I, Dance Laboratory: Dance for the Screen I, Dance Laboratory: Black Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Ballroom Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Modern Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Contemporary Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Urban Dances I, Dance Laboratory: Performance Art I, Dance Laboratory: Capoeira I, and Dance Laboratory: Jazz.

other teaching methods that enabled remote learning. From this perspective, the four of us, teachers responsible for this laboratory, collaborating teacher, and student monitor, challenged ourselves to think about how this could be done.

## **2. But, how to do it?**

The Ballet Laboratory's main objective is to introduce the learning of classical ballet technique. To achieve this purpose, it's necessary to: a) present classical ballet as a resource for technical and investigative preparation for Dance; b) propose the development of the student's physical bodily intelligence in relation to the technical principles of ballet - individual movement potentialities; c) introduce basic concepts of a classical technique class: methodology, logical organization, and function of exercises at the bar and center; d) foster relationships between the specific practice strategies of classical ballet and other bodily experiences, dance teaching, and performance.

Based on the objectives presented, we began to construct an idea of how the discipline could be developed, considering that we could not have face-to-face contact with the students and knowing that each one would have classes at their homes. Besides we should take into account that the university had been using an official platform still in the adjustment phase to handle the enormous demand that remote classes required. On the Other hand, we have to face another issue that few people, especially students, had access to the internet, or to an internet with good speed and a stable access. Reflecting on these issues, and planning the offering of the lab within the structure that the institution regulated for students without conditions for synchronous access to virtual platforms, we began to conceive a structure to enable learning in a virtual way. So that these students would not be harmed by the impossibility of taking courses offered remotely.

As Almeida and Farias state:

Unlike the classes usually held in face-to-face studios, where dancers socialize with their peers and teachers in a single environment, in remote classes there was a physical distancing and

consequently drastic changes in the perceptions and experiences of the dancers' sensations. (ALMEIDA and FARIAS, 2022, p. 4)

We began by planning online classes in which the exercises could be performed in small spaces and with the aid of common furniture, such as chairs and/or tables. However, right off the bat, we realized that it would not be sufficient to simply transpose the methodology used in face-to-face classes to execute it through a screen. So we created guiding strategies and tasks. Agreeing with Sá et al. (2017), the teaching planning process allows reflection on the pedagogical purposes of the class, along with the content and didactic strategies that will be used, as well as the evaluations to be carried out. In this sense, teaching planning enhances reflection on teaching practice.

To supplement the classes, we decided to organize video tutorials with the reference execution of ballet steps, so that the students could visualize and review the "ways of doing" whenever doubts arose. This material, developed before the start of the course and posted on Youtube and the official course platform, was carried out in partnership with the Dicléa Ferreira de Souza<sup>6</sup> Ballet School, which provided us with the space and the dancers to record the images capable of generating the tutorial edits. This work was coordinated by Professor Rebeca Recuero, who is affiliated with the Cinema course at UFPEL, with the assistance of scholarship monitor Daniela Souza.

The assistance of the involved student was essential, as she is a ballet teacher at a traditional school and experienced the transition from her in-person classes to the remote format, with all the necessary instrumentation for good functioning. Understanding everything from the technology needed for this practice, such as the use of a wireless microphone for the teacher's speech separate from the sound of the music, to the way to conduct the exercise, demonstrations, corrections, and perceptions of execution, greatly contributed to the planning of the Classical Ballet Laboratory. Evidence of this

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<sup>6</sup> Educational space that has been operating with classical ballet training since 1960 in the city of Pelotas-RS..

can be found in the research results of Almeida and Farias (2022), on ballet classes during the pandemic, when he states that:

The application of corrections, and the 'dictation' of exercises to students, in the class experiences, was something that at times compromised the 'listening' to the played music (Field Diary, 04/10/21). This is because in the investigated classes the teacher used the sound through the same microphone in which he spoke, causing his voice to overshadow the music, not allowing the dancers to hear it. Even though the teacher's speech was rhythmic, accompanying the played music, in the moments when the music 'jumped,' what was dictated by the teacher overshadowed the experience of musicality by the dancers. (ALMEIDA and FARIAS, 2022, p.21-22)

Before we recorded the images, a simple script was created in order to select and organize the material from the subject to be captured by the camera and later worked on by the editor. This script, understood as "the written form of any audiovisual project" (COMPARATO, 1995, p.17), focused on two fundamental points: the naming and explanation of the steps to be executed and the detailed description of the scenes (with the types of shots, angles, and camera movements<sup>7</sup>). With the script, a meeting was scheduled (respecting social distance among the collaborator dancer, teachers, videographer, and the monitor) to start the recordings. Thus, only one person performed the requested steps, while the monitor (and ballet teacher at the school) assisted remotely and the videographer recorded.

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<sup>7</sup> The shot corresponds to a certain viewpoint in relation to what is filmed, it can be "general" (wide scene, where the space in which the action takes place is shown), "full" (the person is shown in full body), "medium" (usually associated with a framing situated from the middle of the subject's body), American (the person is shown from the calf upwards), the close-up (a face is revealed, for example) and the detail shot (the camera gets even closer to the person, revealing details, such as a hand, a foot, an eye, etc.) (XAVIER, 1977). The angles can also be diverse, but we mainly use the straight "frontal" (where the person is facing the camera) and the "side" (where the person is profiled to the camera). In general, camera movement is classified into tracking (displacement of the camera where the angle between the optical axis and the trajectory of the displacement remains) and panning (rotation of the camera around its vertical or horizontal axis) (GRILLO, 2007). In this work, we chose to use a fixed camera, that is, we did not perform any camera movement.



Figure 1: Recordings of the steps to compose the audiovisual tutorial of the subject  
SOURCE: Ballet Laboratory teachers' archive

After the image collection, the process of decoupagecutting and assembly began<sup>8</sup> in the Final Cut Pro X software<sup>9</sup>. The narration of the steps (described in the script developed by the teachers) was also included, with segments of animations, intending to make the video more didactic. Thus, in addition to the demonstration made by the dancer, we used the resources of the editing process to help to understand the audiovisual content. These finished products<sup>10</sup>, were incorporated into the course material.

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<sup>8</sup> A film is made up of sequences, and each sequence is formed by scenes. From this, Xavier defines decoupage as "the process of decomposing the film (and therefore, the sequences and scenes) into shots (which will have specific camera angles and movements)" (XAVIER, 1977). The montage is the process in which the audiovisual work takes shape, juxtaposing scenes (which will form sequences), applying effects, transitions and more specific cuts, with the aim of achieving the expected final composition (EISENSTEIN, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Final Cut Pro - Apple (BR) . Available in: <https://www.apple.com/br/final-cut-pro/>.

<sup>10</sup> Here we have an example of the audiovisual material created:  
[https://youtu.be/BBJJHWcpny4?si=G1qKezjqY\\_n\\_f88J](https://youtu.be/BBJJHWcpny4?si=G1qKezjqY_n_f88J)



Figure 2: Excerpts from the video produced.  
SOURCE: Ballet Laboratory Teachers' Archive

Of extreme quality and care, the tutorials managed to transmit details of this teaching technique which in the teaching team's perception, could greatly facilitate its understanding.

Associated with the videos, we anticipated the request for tasks from the students. We decided to ask for weekly tasks in the form of simple vídeos sent to us via the institutional platform of the remote class, the execution of the worked steps, so that we could carefully view each student to provide the necessary guidance related to the technical and pedagogical learnings about the movements. These guidelines and corrections were always discussed at the beginning of the next class, with the aim that the students understood and corrected possible errors in the execution of the steps that followed. This was a positive point of the adopted methodology, since, according to Oliveira et al. cited by Almeida and Farias (2022) in a study on the subject, the lack of teacher feedback was mentioned as one of the limitations in remote learning.



Figure 3: Excerpts from the weekly tasks submitted by the students.  
SOURCE: Ballet Laboratory Teachers' Archive

With this material prepared, we structured the functioning of the classes, believing it would be possible to exchange consistent knowledge with everyone involved in the subject.

### 3. Challenges: what only experience has shown us

Our teaching plan was initially assembled based on the structure of face-to-face instruction. We intend to follow the logic of introducing content in an increasing manner, as is traditional in ballet learning, however, the methodology had to be significantly modified to accommodate the needs of the moment.

The number of classes had to be adapted, which changed drastically, considering that it is a four-credit subject, usually taught in two classes per week and, in this experience, it started to occur in only one weekly meeting, of an hour and a half, in a period of 15 weeks instead of the usual 18. Sá et al. (2017), emphasize that the social and technological changes that have occurred in recent decades have created new demands for professional training and the

teacher needs to prepare for new approaches and pedagogical intervention strategies that work, in an integrated way, the concepts, procedures, and attitudes. However, this way of acting requires from the teacher a greater effort than just transmitting information and knowledge. It was the experience that effectively showed us.

It was also necessary to devise carefully the functioning of the classes, along with the specific teaching of the technique. In this regard, tutorial videos were essential for a better understanding of the execution of the steps. The articulation between the elements that make up a ballet class, according to Sampaio (2013), becomes essential for understanding the teaching. As the author states,

[...] it is through the connections between the steps (the way the teacher choreographically sets up their class) that we can work on certain situations inherent to dance such as: speed and retraction, weight and volume alteration, fall and recovery, impulse changes. (SAMPAIO, 2013, p. 66)

It is important to remember that ballet works with a very unique movement technique and it is necessary to develop body awareness to avoid injuries in its practice. Our care was extensive and the observed results, very positive. For this, the preparation of the class needed to have a different perspective, in order not to lose the logic of teaching and, at the same time, prevent injuries or incorrect understandings of the movements.

According to Almeida and Farias (2022), any ballet classroom has common elements such as bars, wall mirrors, and a floor suitable for practice. Each of these has a specific function for learning. The bar is a support for seeking balance in the practice of exercises later developed in the center. The mirror provides visual feedback of oneself, being used for alignment correction purposes. The specialized floor with linoleum or wood associated with the use of rosin, provides the necessary friction for the practice of pirouette exercises in the center and also helps in absorbing the dancer's body weight on the impact of jumps. Therefore, radically modifying the physical space of this practice triggers different sensations that demand another level of control on the performed movement. The bodily perception of these sensations is known as proprioception.

Thus, it is important to understand that the difference in environmental factors can alter performance, as it interferes with the perception of movements previously learned by dancers.

In addition to all the organization for the Laboratory to run smoothly, we also had to think about how to assess the students, considering that it is a predominantly practical discipline and they could not be with us in person. Our choice was to do two evaluative assignments, one theoretical and one practical. In the first, they should present a written research on function, involving anatomical structures (muscles and joints), and execution mechanics of the basic steps of a ballet class, which could be done in pairs. The second was individual and requested the preparation of a video lesson containing a previously defined bar sequence with the teachers. The student should administer the exercise with the necessary explanations and teachings for understanding the indicated steps and then post it on the platform. On the agreed date, we displayed the videos, in the order of the bar, so that everyone would be performing each of the proposed exercises together. To complement the grades, we conducted a third evaluation that sought quality in participation and weekly deliveries of the requested tasks.

This method of assessment allowed us to realize that the teaching approaches previously thought out and studied for this "format" of class (classes with a slower pace, focus on the development of steps with little displacement, etc.) and the use of technologies (videos with tutorials, more than one camera for broadcasting and a meticulous organization of the material placed on the platform) contributed greatly to the excellent final result of the students' performance. From the three evaluations carried out, we were able to perceive that the students managed to reach a significant degree of understanding of classical ballet, even those who had never practiced this genre of dance before, recognizing that, in the way the discipline was planned, it was possible to carry out the practice in an inclusive and responsible manner, breaking the blockage that ballet classes would not work in remote mode.

#### **4. Achievements: what only experience has taught us**

We believe that it was precisely the specific methodological approach that allowed such an interesting development of the Classical Ballet Laboratory discipline during the COVID-19 pandemic. The classes were conducted in the following way:

Firstly, we had to consider how to make the classes productive and interesting, since they were beginner students and would be starting ballet practice from scratch. From this on, the structure of the classes was designed with the process of warming up those bodies with utmost care, working on posture, flexion and extension of the feet and knees, external rotation of the hip joint, and stretching.



Figure 4: Image of one of the warm-up exercises from the class.  
SOURCE: Files from the Ballet Laboratory teachers

In order to better observe the execution of the proposed exercises, we set up a computer connected to a large screen television, thus enabling us to see the details and make the necessary corrections. Moreover, we aimed to provide, most of the time, two shared screens of the ballerina demonstrating the steps: one from a frontal angle (front view) and another situated diagonally (or laterally) with full shots. The goal was for the students to observe the execution of each step in the best possible way. At times, the ballerina even approached the camera to show details of the technique development.



Figure 5: Example of sharing two cameras (frontal and diagonal) of the ballerina demonstrating the steps.

SOURCE: Files from the Ballet Laboratory teachers

The second stage of the class involved standing exercises. At this point, students were always guided to camera placement with the aim of capturing their entire body on screen, so that observations could be made in the most effective way.

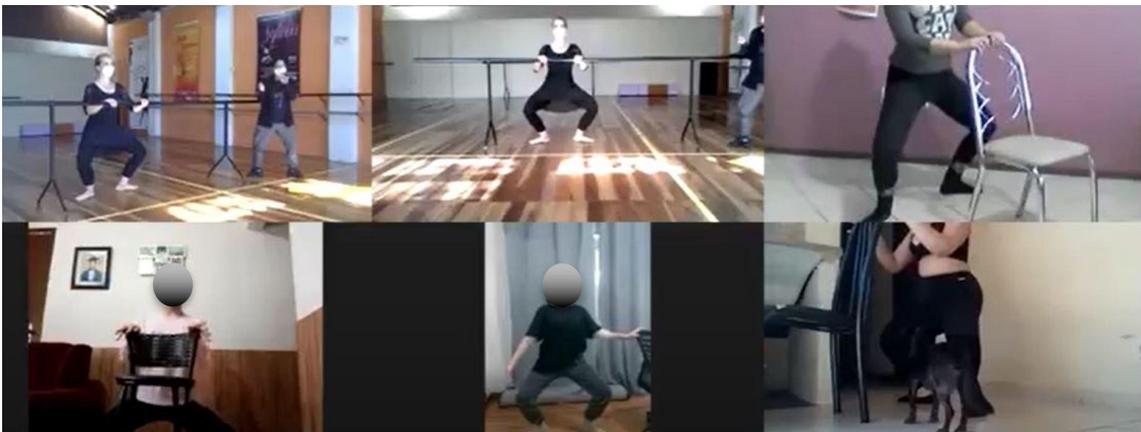


Figure 6: Image of one of the exercises using the barre.

SOURCE: Files from the Ballet Laboratory teachers

During this stage, introductory exercises of classical ballet technique were performed, such as foot, arm, and head positions, along with demi pliés, battement tendus, battement jetés, rond de jambés, dégagés en l'air, and grand battements. These were taught step by step, always with a watchful eye through the monitor, prioritizing a good understanding of the execution.

In the third stage of the class, since the students did not have a suitable floor or space for the exercises that are usually performed

in the center, that is, without the use of the bar, we decided to focus on exercising balance (adagio), footwork (tendus), and preparation for jumps (relevés). With this, we did not directly work on the jumps, thinking of preserving the students' joints, but we included in the planning the basis for the subsequent development of these steps.

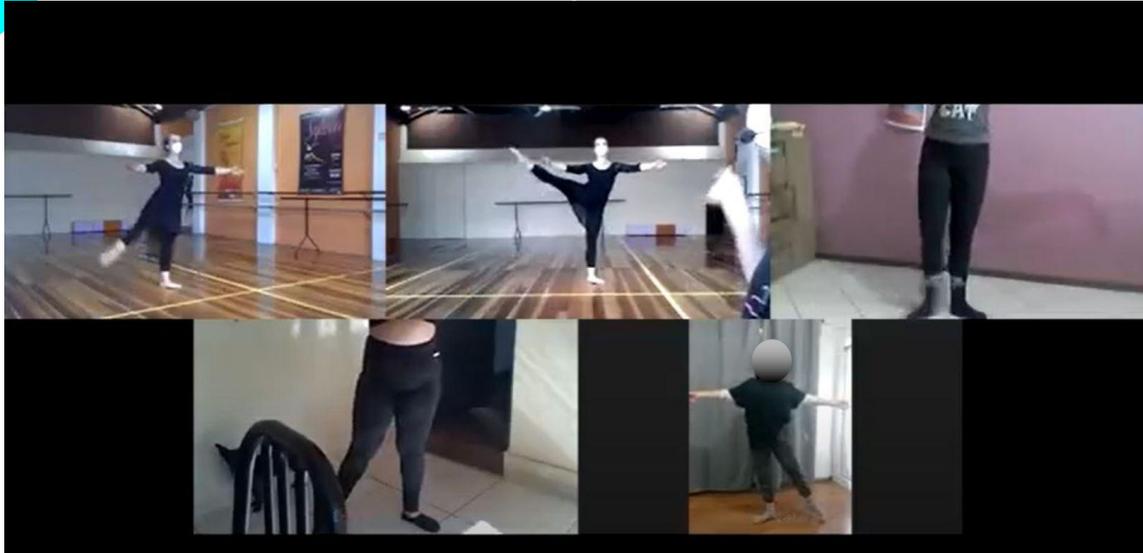


Figure 7: Image of one of the exercises performed at the center during the class.  
SOURCE: Ballet Laboratory teachers' files

Another important factor to highlight about online classes was the delay<sup>11</sup>, as each student heard the music and corrections in a different way. Therefore, we conducted a slower pace of work, without major variations in dynamics and avoiding the counting of rhythm during the execution of exercises, thus managing to develop a well-done and conscious work.

Even knowing all the disruption caused by the necessary adaptations to the continuity of ballet teaching during the aforementioned pandemic period, positive elements can also be recognized. Agreeing with Almeida and Farias (2022), the learning suffered sensory modifications that were beneficial to the students, such as ceasing to rely so much on vision and refocusing on proprioceptive

<sup>11</sup>It is the time existing between the issuance of a message mediated by the internet until its destination. That is, there is a moment of processing of capture equipment and software (of images, sounds, etc.) and the receipt of information by the receiver.

issues, as well as learning to feel and count the music without the aid of the teacher.

## 5. Final Considerations

The experience showed that, even within a challenging period such as the pandemic, it was possible to resize the offering of an eminently practical discipline to the demand of the remote context. Above all, we realized that the will to find ways to make this offering happen was fundamental. It would have been easier for us, the team, to settle on the idea of the impossibility of the offering. We were living in a time when it was necessary to react and move forward, seen that, along with the emotional difficulties that the pandemic moment imposed, the accumulation of undone actions would demand payment at some future point. Thus, driven by the commitment to the work and by the mobilizing energy of the team, which began to exercise mutual stimulation and to recognize the potential of each one to build strategies and offer the discipline, we took on the challenge of becoming unsettled and, at the same time, dealing with the uncertainty of the results. Not an easy task, we knew and felt.

As the planning unfolded, we built encouraging perceptions and, throughout the development of the subject, we realized how important it was to take on the challenge. Even though with a very large number of students, we believe it was possible to assist successfully those who participated and also fulfill our teaching commitment. Moreover, this task prompted the production of new pedagogical strategies and materials associated with the universe of ballet teaching, such as tutorial videos and the logic of video tasks, which indicate the potential to continue to be adopted even in face-to-face work offerings.

This report was constructed, as we have already mentioned, from our perception of planning and developing the Ballet Laboratory in a remote version. However, the movement to structure and share this experience at the Congress of the National Association of Dance Researchers (ANDA), listening to the considerations and questions from colleagues in the Thematic Committee, for whose

event we submitted an expanded abstract of the report, provoked a desire to explore more the perception of the experience to broaden the reflections initiated when we submitted the proposal for oral communication for the event. We hope with this expanded text to contribute both to the development of new strategies and perspectives for future offerings of the discipline and to broaden the theoretical discussion on the topic in future publications.

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