

Dances in basic education: at school parties and beyond them

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Abstract

The work investigates the relationship between dance teaching, school parties and other possibilities of happening and insertion of dance in Brazilian basic education. The investigation presents a bibliographic analysis of four academic research, which bring together different regions of Brazil, different forms of insertion of dance in the school curriculum and different times of teaching activity. It is concluded that, if we treat dance in a current, contextualized way and without reproducing historical discourses of the dance knowledge area, it is possible to perceive that it is often found in school parties consciously and through didactically justified choreographic creation processes. This is attributed to the expansion of the area, having more and more professionals licensed in the specific subject, thus increasing the diversity of teaching, as well as expanding the spaces of action in the school curriculum.

Keywords: dance teaching; scenic performance; school calendar; teaching; school.

Dances, spaces and school events

It is customary to say that dance in basic education¹ is found, mainly, in festive moments and commemorative dates: Mother's Day, June Festival, Christmas and New Years' Eve performances, for example. After all, who has never witnessed or participated in a celebration involving dance at school?

Soares (2014, p. 12) helps us to understand that this type of collective event is essential for society, since:

¹ In Brazil, "basic education" (educação básica) is equivalent to "elementary education".

Formed by unique and profound historical experiences, the popular party is the result of dynamics and interactions of individuals, groups and societies, revealing the faces of a city and a country. A space of interval, even of suspension, the party interrupts certain norms by inventing others, inverts certain meanings and entangles others, it is definitely neither free time nor available time placed in opposition to the world of work. Dynamic and illuminated, party time is a line of flight [...].

It is a popular knowledge that involves music, dance, gastronomy, clothing, rites, among others. In other words, these moments involve a wide and complex set of diverse cultural manifestations and constitute themselves as important environments to show and to exalt the culture that produces an idea of society with its own characteristics. In addition, in these moments it is possible to incite a social engagement of communities about their own culture, where know-how is experienced and updated in a collaborative way.

According to Costa (2018, p. 115-116):

The party is opposed to everyday life, however it is linked to it, transfiguring this space into a performance that, by breaking the everyday logic, opens the way for art itself. The party gains the status of performance and its festivity the dimension of performativity. In accordance with this status, the party, then, adheres to the dimension of culture, expressing ways of doing, thinking, being and existing in the world. With this description, the party can be defined as the terrain of the possible.

In this sense, what we intend with this text is not to criticize the celebrations and, consequently, these and other opportunities made available by schools, but to emphasize that dance is found at different times and in many ways in the school space. Dance is part of everyday school life, and the school is an institution that performs its activities throughout the year. Furthermore,

Dance is present in different moments of our lives, in different ways, with different meanings. We have danced since childhood, alone, on wheels, in the arms of our parents; when teenagers we dance alone imagining being with someone or someone much closer, or even with a lot of people around, but alone in the dance. In adult life, dancing is a little distant, it seems that it becomes something of youth, but we try in more social spaces, or when the radio takes us by surprise in the bath, in the living room, in the kitchen... And then we dance... (BRASILEIRO, 2009, p. 8).

In a movement contrary to texts² that approach the insertion of dance in the school institution as a decorative part of school celebrations, we intend to go beyond the criticism of the festivities and the idea that dance is valued only at school parties. This problem, in our view, can already be considered an issue in transition: we start from the hypothesis that the way dance is presented at school, as well as the different genres that are taught, substantially depends on the process of how the dance teacher who works there was inserted and on the

² We chose, due to ethical beliefs, not to name specific authors that base this finding and, therefore, we will focus on research that precisely opposes this type of narrative on the subject. We also believe in the temporality of research and in how the social events of each time and context end up defining theories and beliefs.

flexibility of the school community and the teacher, in the sense of being willing to learn together (CORRÊA, 2018).

It is important to emphasize that there is a change of perspective in the texts on dance at school over time (CORRÊA, SANTOS, 2019). There are more and more people licensed in dance working in formal education schools in Brazil, and this incites changes in the way of understanding about the role of dance teaching by the school community, which, consequently, results in new research about the subject.

It is important to return to texts from the 1990s on the subject, for example, to appropriate the historical path of the insertion of dance in the school curriculum, remembering that, in fact, in that period the role of dance within the festive moments of the educational calendar in the school environment, as well as other artistic languages, for the most part, ended up being just illustrative (PINTO, 2015). According to Pinto (2015, p. 29), the dance “[...] ends up serving for Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, Flag Day, Easter Party, etc., only as illustrative, as if the doing/thinking about dance could not be worked in relation to the significant processes of these dates”. In her criticism of this type of approach to dance in the school festive calendar, the author reinforces:

The dance, as an illustration, concerns the use of it to brighten, to adorn or even to animate the due celebrations. In this way, it is not contextualized, with a critical possibility, which interacts with the context in commemoration. It ends up serving as a prop for the event [...]. We know that dance develops and provokes different types of receptions and emotions, for those who dance and for those who watch, but we cannot restrict ourselves to using it as a cathartic. The question is not to take a stand against dance at these parties, but how it is used. (PINTO, 2015, p. 29-30).

However, from the 1990s³ until today, many strategies and alternatives have been created and, thus, it is essential to turn emphatically to practices and investigations that deal with teaching in school dance in loco and in contemporary times. Even so, we believe that moments of artistic presentation – whether festive or not – are important learning opportunities for children and young people who are in schools, and we know that a good part of school communities already value these moments. Marques and Brazil (2014), for example, mention that there is a historical emphasis on this type of experience when talking about teaching dance in the school institution.

But we also see that there are parallel movements, or crossings, that take place in everyday school life and not on specific and commemorative dates. These movements are not always witnessed by the families of the students – or even by researchers who are far from the school reality –, but they often have the support of school managers or teachers and are encouraged by the classes themselves, who, when having contact with the dance area in a

³ Considered an initial and important period of academic productions about dance in the school institution (FALKEMBACH, 2017).

diversified way, they look for ways to create dances that can be invisible to those who do not experience the school day to day.

The work presented here comes from discussions raised in the partnership between the research projects “Contemporary Teaching of Dance in Basic Education: possible pedagogies (OMEGA UFPel CNPq)”, “Dance as a curricular component at the Colégio de Aplicação da UFRGS (College of Application of UFRGS): paths of a teacher with a Degree in Dance” and “Unified Project with an Emphasis on Research: Popular Poetics in Contemporary” and intends to carry out a preliminary survey of a bibliographic study on the dance area at school regarding the relationship between dance teaching, school parties and other possibilities of happening and insertion of dance in the school routine. For this, we sought investigations carried out between the year 2016 – the year in which Law 13,278 was enacted, which makes the teaching of visual arts, dance, music and theater in Brazilian basic education (BRASIL, 2016) – and the year 2019 – year prior to the closure of schools due to the coronavirus⁴ pandemic.

As we understand that the mandatory teaching of dance in basic education is recent and that, in practice, most schools that offer this artistic activity do so in the opposite shift, we also selected research that talk about dance teaching outside the regular shift, however in the school context.

The party as a school dance villain

It is common to find, in theoretical references on dance at school, the narrative that school parties are the great villains for the development of the dance area in the school curriculum, however, as already announced, we do not intend to reproduce this discourse. For us, celebrations can become opportunities to be on stage and face the challenges of facing an audience, in addition to providing the school community with moments of appreciation, cultural and artistic experience. As Costa (2018, p. 116) exemplifies, when dealing with Brazilian popular manifestations, parties are spaces where

[...] there is complex performativity, strategies by which the updating and creation of different characters, varied sound and musical elaboration, different dances, abundant games, complex body states, games, improvisations and stagings are kept active and in constant transformation, referring to ideas from other passages, other stops. As an action in constant spiraling, these are devices that we find in these spaces and that can gain a significant pedagogical dimension in the displacement to the context of education, or rather, educations.

⁴ Coronavirus (Covid-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus is extremely contagious and, therefore, social isolation and the closing of institutions where there was significant movement of people, such as basic education schools, were necessary. In Brazil, this happened for most of 2020 and part of 2021. More information at: <https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/vacinacao/>.

Simões (2019, p. 49-50), when talking about the teaching of dance, the school calendar and its festivities, places as relevant “the act of providing students with going to the scene”, as “in union with what is worked on in advance” and also “with the reflection on what happened later”. For the author, these experiences “cannot be seen as opportunities to decorate school parties, but rather as part of a careful and conscious learning process within the basic education school” (SIMÕES, 2019, p. 49-50).

In the same perspective, Fialho (2016) states that it is necessary to question how the scenic work will be generated, especially those that are taken to moments of school celebration. For the author, it is important to reflect “[...] how these performances would be carried out at school: whether in the traditional way or through a collaborative process” (FIALHO, 2016, p. 9). The traditional way for her would be, in short, the reproduction of movements from an external model, something that Cone and Cone (2015) call “modeling”. This conduct is often criticized by professionals of the area, as Fialho (2016, p. 10) mentions: “Finding criticism about the fact that students reproduce choreographies created by teachers in the school environment is more common than finding praise.”

In the direction of overcoming the devaluation of presentations in school festivities and in the belief in the possibility of an adequate process of teaching and creation in dance, we believe that what cannot happen is that the artistic practice is developed in a lighthearted way, without the students understanding the what they are doing by being exposed to the eyes of the audience or become just decoration for events, something already much debated in texts that talk about the topic in question (MARQUES, 2007; BARRETO, 2008; STRAZZACAPPA, 2012). Addressing the school requirements for dance teachers, Soares and Barros state:

When we are in a school context, we are always scheduled to carry out the activities of the school calendar, such as Carnival, Mother’s Day, June Festival, Folklore Festival, Knowledge Fairs, Christmas and New Years’ Eve Parties, among others. Often, without realizing it, we transform our students into “dance makers”, where we disregard the entire intellectual process for learning. That is, we ended up falling into the trap of just training movements with our student for a dance presentation. We do not take into account the context of a particular dance, movement, or even the party. All for the sake of the “end result” or the product. (2021, p. 29-30).

When analyzing this passage, we can think that the biggest challenge is not to circumvent school parties, but to understand the danger of transforming, “without realizing it”, as the authors put it, students into dance makers, reducing the importance of the individual process and learning collective. After all, as Costa (2018, p. 116) states:

The party space is multiple and composite. In it, metaphors and the imaginary are powers to think about their structures and expand a sectorized vision. It is urgent to break with a petty and reductionist view of this event. This complex terrain needs to be understood beyond the “fact” party; to be understood in the “happening” party, in which questions of a sociocultural logic are involved, ranging from needs to power disputes.

An aspect that is not very present in texts that address dance in the school context is that, often, parties are the only opportunities for performances worthy of scenic structure, as happens with competitive dance festivals: stage, costume design, sound system, lighting and/or other subsidies suitable for a more conventional event of scenic exposure. Simões (2019) talks about the moments of dance performance in art teaching as part of the “pedagogy of the scene”, and adds:

When reflecting on the pedagogical function of the scenic event in dance classes, we believe that the performances (or presentations) are also part of the learning process, especially for those students who, until that moment, did not have the opportunity to go to the scene. (SIMÕES, 2019, p. 31).

Even if the school does not have all the apparatus and physical structure to put on a show on an Italian stage, for example, we are also talking about the participation of an audience made up of the communities, usually with the proud presence of family members and guardians, eager to see a part of what is done in the institution.

We believe, in this sense, that much of the research that talks about dance at school, having the party as a villain and school manager as unreceptive to processes that move away from seasonal events, “looks” at the teaching of dance in elementary education at the same place of families who attend the performance only at the end of the year. There is confusion: the party and the exhibition of dances are a showcase for the outside of the school, but this does not mean that these are the only moments of teachers and teaching dance in the school environment, nor does it mean that the products brought to the scene are always devoid of awareness of the processes of artistic creation.

Some time has passed: what can be invisible, but existing, active and potent in dance in school environments?

As dance is a young area of knowledge⁵ in the school environment, it is worth highlighting some research published after 2016, which brings descriptions and reflections on dance work carried out in specific contexts.

The search for these works is mobilized by our empirical experiences, which are not the focus of the discussion, but which are essential to mention. We remind you, on this occasion, that experience mobilizes the desire to research and through experience we understand everything that happens to us, changing our way of being in the world. “This is the knowledge of experience: what is acquired in the way someone responds to what happens to them

⁵ One of the first official documents at the national level that indicates Dance as an artistic language that constitutes the Art Teaching curricular component is called *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais – PCN* (National Curricular Parameters), launched in Brazil in 1997 (BRASIL, 1997).

throughout their lives and in the way in which we give meaning to what happens to us” (BONDÍA, 2002, p. 27).

The authors of this text are graduated in Dance, with professional experiences in the school routine and these experiences, entangled in the theoretical study, forge a knowledge about dance at school that, at this moment, induces a conversation with the four works mentioned below. There are three Master’s dissertations and a Doctoral thesis that deal with schools that have professionals with academic training in the arts and performance in dance teaching in their staff. The research also includes different regions of Brazil, ways of inserting dance in the school curriculum (curricular component of art, workshop or dance group) and the period of working time of teachers in the same institution.

The researcher Artur Garcez (2016), in his Master’s research, which investigates actions of the dance group of Colégio Marista, in Natal, RN, in which the author acts as director, speaks in his dissertation about the deconstruction of dance teaching that happened in the group over the years of working with the students. For a dance group like the Colégio Marista, which takes place in the opposite shift of the mandatory curricular components and works with popular dances, it seems even more difficult not to be at the mercy of the festivities, since they have as their principle the study of artistic manifestations. of culture, composed of dances that can be significant in rites of cultural celebration.

However, it was a concern of the director and school manager, since the creation of the group, not to relegate dance to seasonal events pre-defined by the school calendar, but rather to carry out work aimed at the collective’s learning desires. Among the expectations is the public presentation of artistic works, but in places and events selected according to the interest of the group, and to take choreographic works that are already under development in the rehearsal room. Thus, the performance ends up being the means of a process and not an end goal, something to be achieved. The author reflects:

[...] performances to attend this commemorative date (June Festival) bothered me and from these seasonal choreographic creations, especially those of the “Junino” Cycle, we began to think about choreographies that did not meet this sole purpose. [...] the choreographic works developed during the school year were reorganized based on Brazilian popular dances, so that the students, in addition to dancing them, maintained an interest in these artistic manifestations that, although present in the school space, pointed to these dates academic calendar commemorations. (GARCEZ, 2016, p. 30-31)

With his report, the researcher points out that the parties are in the midst of the activities of the dance group, but that the group is not formed to serve such festivities. The work developed throughout the year can add artistic value to the seasonal events of the school calendar, but this is a consequence of work already in progress, not an initial objective of the creations carried out by the group. Garcez (2016, p. 76) emphasizes:

Experiencing dance at school is not relegating it to commemorative parties and celebrations, or to imitating media models. It is, above all, to promote new expressive possibilities, contributing to meet a discourse present in dance itself, which is often ignored in the school context.

When reading the work of Garcez (2016) and also taking into account empirical experiences, we can say that there is a tendency to generate expectations on the part of schools towards reverse shift groups in this matter of school festivities, such as making presentations of dance in the events of the school calendar could establish a kind of accountability for the community involved. In these opportunities, family members witness, in a way, what students do outside the regular period of school activities.

On the other hand, dance teaching carried out within the art teaching curricular component may be being faced by school administrations in another way, even if still timidly. In her Doctoral research, in which Josiane Franken Corrêa (2018) maps dance teaching in public schools in Rio Grande do Sul, the author surprisingly identifies that, when analyzing the interviews of five teachers who work with teaching dance in basic education, little is mentioned by the participants about schools demanding the production of choreographies to be shown at school parties. In this sense, the author brings a reflection on the character of insertion of these teachers in the regional public teaching profession:

Unlike what used to happen ten or twenty years ago, when Dance practices were carried out, mostly, in the reverse shift of the regular curriculum, the Dance teacher currently inserted in the school as regent of Art Teaching demonstrates to have a higher status in the school context in relation to its former position, even if this status is still lower than other subjects' teachers. It gives the Dance teacher a greater power of decision and persuasion of its ideals. (CORRÊA, 2018, p. 242).

Like the teachers surveyed by Corrêa (2018), who are responsible for the discipline of art in their respective institutions, it is the case of the teacher-researcher Aline Dutra Fialho. In a dissertation published in 2016, the author reports her process as a teacher of the curricular subcomponent dance, at Escola Estadual João Walmick, located in the city of Ipatinga, Minas Gerais. Her research was intended to understand the challenges of performing artistic presentations at school and, for that, she proposed two pedagogical approaches with students. Fialho (2016, p. 4) carried out, with students from the 6th year of basic school who attended the curricular component of art, two “[...] processes of choreographic composition (one traditional and the other through collaborative groups)”, whose scenic results were presented at the school’s Literary Sarau.

In conclusion, the author points out that the dance performances in an event on the school calendar were important to make the school community see the work process in the arts discipline, in addition to the many positive considerations regarding the experience of

students in this process of creation, learning and presentation of what is understood as the final product.

It is noted that the teacher had the objective of showing a scenic work, but not with a decorative purpose, so much so that she was concerned, for example, to show one of the choreographies again at another time at school, due to the absence of some students in that event. It is also clear that the performance was seen as a consequence of the work carried out in many art classes during the school year, as the Literary Sarau had its date advanced and the teacher, together with the school coordinator, reorganized the work schedule to have all the time planned for creating and learning the choreography. That is, the performance was linked to an entire working time pre-defined by the professor.

Finally, we present the case study that took place at the Colégio Estadual Thales de Azevedo, in Salvador/Bahia. Mauricio Oliveira (2016) conducts his research in a school where dance teaching has existed for over 19 years through the teaching of Marília Nascimento Curvelo, who had, at the time, 24 years of experience as a dance teacher in the regional network. In the year that the teacher arrived at the Colégio Estadual Thales de Azevedo, in 1997, “[...] she set up a dance course with the following syllabus and/or objects of knowledge: physical conditioning, dance history, artistic appreciation, technique, and creative processes [...]” (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 55). According to Marília, her proposal for a dance class:

[...] focuses on creative processes that enable new forms of relationships, favoring self-knowledge and knowledge about the other, a kind of otherness that transforms the creation process. In it, what matters are the various dialogues that emerge from the body expression of each student, without ready-made forms or repertoires imposed by the teacher. (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 65).

Thus, from these passages and from a general reading of Oliveira’s dissertation (2016), it is possible to notice that teacher Marília does not place great emphasis in her work on performances for commemorative dates, also due to the school manager being a partner in encouraging to dance teaching. In this way, there is a relationship between the study by Oliveira (2016) and one of the questions addressed by Corrêa (2018), regarding the time of work of professionals in each school, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

From the way in which the teachers approached the subject, we found that the choreographies for school parties still appear as one of the requests of the school institution to the teacher with a Degree in Dance, however, this type of request occurs more frequently in the initial period of this teacher’s performance, when the management team and the school community itself, due to the lack of familiarity with the practices and knowledge of Dance, still do not understand the breadth and meaning of the work. (CORRÊA, 2018, p. 242).

Oliveira (2016), when addressing the topic, comments on some authoritarian attitudes of the Department of Education, which, in general, still expects dance teachers to “[...] of

parties.” (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 77), however, reports that with the respect and partnerships that the teacher has built, after so many years of working in the same school, she resists and continues to carry out the work she considers pedagogically appropriate.

Considerations

The work proposed here was intended to broaden the look at dance teaching in the territories of basic education, with a view to overcoming the devaluation of performances in school festivities. The idea is based on the belief in the possibility of carrying out a teaching and creation process in dance that integrates the moments of going to the scene as part of its development and not just as a result or final product to be enjoyed and “consumed”.

In this sense, it is considered relevant to pay attention to dance practices at school beyond what is possible to see in the parties of the school calendar. We noticed that, many times, the researches that deal with the question “look” at dance teaching in the same way as families, when they only attend the performance at the end of the year, or use works that do not correspond to the present as bibliographic references. As previously stated, there have been many changes in our area in the last decade, but still, the party and the dance show continue to be a showcase for the outside of the school. However, this does not mean that these are the only moments of dance teaching in the school environment.

We are aware that most schools overestimate the moments of exposure, however, as researchers in the area, we believe it is important to value the work of dance teachers for the effort that is made in the sense of performing many other activities beyond that moment seen “from outside”. More recent research (FIALHO, 2016; GARCEZ, 2016; OLIVEIRA, 2016; CORRÊA, 2018) has pointed to the expanding universe that is the work of dance teaching in basic education and we feel the need to highlight this.

It is important to invert the narrative that only sets the stage for the gaps in dance teaching at school, in order to illuminate the workspaces in an expanded and updated way. With a more in-depth analysis of the case studies presented in the research, it is possible to conclude that dance at school cannot be treated in a decontextualized way, nor in a way that only reproduces a historical discourse of the area, since each workplace shows different forms and possibilities of putting dance in evidence in the school environment. Some teachers continue to value the idea of performances as the main focus of teaching, after all, such events are also part of the artistic process and important spaces for learning. However, it is possible to say that the wider our area is, the greater the diversity of dance teaching present in basic education.

It is also possible to think that the socialization of educational and artistic processes in dance, which is not restricted to parties and events, is configured as a powerful and important possibility for valuing and demystifying dance in the school environment. A strategy for this,

therefore, could be to carry out open rehearsals for the school community, practical classes together with families, interventions and performances in different spaces and at different times of the year (not just on specific dates of the calendar), among other alternatives. The dance integrated daily into the routine of schools and their communities tends to contribute enormously to the breaking of paradigms and, consequently, greater appreciation of this artistic language in the school and social scenarios, as a whole.

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