

Dancing at school: possible mobilizations in body relations

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Abstract

The article investigates a project that was prepared based on the definitions of Brazilian Law 13278/2016, specifically for an educational institution that establishes dance as a mandatory curricular component of the fifth year of elementary school. Its theoretical contribution is studies on dance with Mônica Dantas, emancipation with Jacques Rancière, dance in the school context with Isabel Marques, education of the senses with João Francisco Duarte Junior, and autonomy with Paulo Freire. The study occurred in a Vale do Itajaí, Santa Catarina private school. This research was developed from an *A/r/tographic* methodological perspective. The information was generated through diaries that were analyzed based on content analysis. The results indicate that different relationships between the body and time and space, as well as other ways of dealing with and recognizing the body and possibilities for creation, emerged in students during dance classes in basic education.

Keywords: dance at school; art; education.

1. Dance in basic education: experiences in a school in the state of Santa Catarina

Dealing¹ with the presence of dance at school is dealing with art and education. Figure 1, which opens this text, is a dance class record in the Art curricular component at a basic education school in the city of Blumenau (Santa Catarina, Brazil). The teacher is a graduate of the first group of undergraduate degree dance course at the Regional University of Blumenau – FURB,

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which began in 2017 and is the first and the only undergraduate course that gives habilitation for dance teachers to work in the dance area in basic education in the state of Santa Catarina.



Figure 1. Recording Arts classes with fifth-year students. Source: Stefanie Muller archive.
 Audio description of the image: Photo in a horizontal plane. In a classroom, from left to right, two standing students and two lower-level students, one with the body facing upwards, the other with the body facing the floor. They wear dark pants, white shirts, and coats. One is wearing sneakers, and the others are wearing socks. The desk leg appears in the upper right corner, and elastic bands are crossed horizontally and diagonally between the students. In the lower-left corner, there are beams of sunbeams.

This class aimed for students to explore and find ways to navigate through a maze of elastic bands created among the classroom desks and chairs spread throughout the space. No form of movement was proposed as a model to be followed, and no delimited starting spatial level or requested time either. The teacher only indicated they could not touch the rubber bands or another classmate. They, therefore, needed to perceive their bodies in relation to the created spatiality and their colleagues. Little by little, everyone entered the labyrinth and moved together without pre-established forms of movement, and they experienced different possibilities of moving and perceiving their bodies in movement.

This dance class, developed as part of the Art curricular component, helps students to establish integrally because “[...] it makes us employ our most subtle forms of perception and

contributes to the development of some of our most complex skills cognitive” (Eisner, 1997, p. 90). Souza, Brisola, and Ricobon (2022) tell us that through art classes developed in basic education in an educational context, “it is possible for the students to communicate with themselves, with others and the world around them. From non-verbal language, Art allows communication; consequently, when communicating, meaning is attributed, and by attributing meaning, meanings are also constructed” (p. 2). It was noticeable when everyone was moving together in the maze.

This brief description provides some clues as to how dance at school is understood in this research. Dance in this study escapes from socially established conventions about dance² or the search for forms arranged in systematized and structured techniques. Therefore, dance is understood here as an area of knowledge, and it is necessary to perceive the body in which the dance takes place as a fundamental element in the cognitive and sensitive construction of knowledge in art that occurs in the relationship with oneself, with the context and with each other. We understand that perception is necessary to develop thought, and to understand, it is required to feel it.

The methodology used to create the classes held at this school was designed so that students could activate their multiple senses to use them actively in executing their movements and perceiving what happens in space. Dantas (2020, not paged), in her studies on dance, mentions that it “has been asserting itself as an area of knowledge in which doing, knowing and thinking are inseparable,” and Greiner (2012) contributes by pointing out that the perception of the world is already thought.

Dancing at school is, in this way, a possibility of building knowledge that permeates and happens in the body in movement. Duarte Júnior (2000, p. 136), in his studies on the senses, writes that “Our body (and all the sensitivity it carries) consists of the primary source of the meanings that we lend to the world, throughout our lives” experiences with dance can mobilize different meanings and help re-signify world views based on the cognitive value of movement.

It is essential to highlight that in Brazil, the arrival of dance in formal education contexts happened after many years of tensions and discussions in the arts and dance itself. There was a path of struggle on the part of teachers, researchers, and art and dance associations until the area of knowledge was included in official national documents regarding basic education. It was no different at this school in the city of Blumenau, Santa Catarina, that only in 2021, after the graduation of the first group of graduates from the FURB undergraduate dance course degree, did the movement to hire a dance teacher with specific training to work as a dance teacher in art classes.

² In the state of Santa Catarina, dancing is recognized by most people solely as a hobby or entertainment.

In his book *Histories of the Ideas of Teaching Dance in Brazilian Education*, Vieira (2019) deals with the teaching of art, focusing mainly on teaching dance in basic education, bringing several events over the years since the Jesuit school. The author points out that the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) 4.024/61³ of 1961 and LDB 5.692/71⁴ of 1971 were the first documents to deal with the teaching of art, and more specifically, the second law that included art in the basic education curriculum as a mandatory component, being called, at that time, Artistic Education. LDB 5.692/71 states, “Dance appears thematized together with Theater, as artistic activities with therapeutic and educational purposes or as an appendix to other curricular components” (Vieira, 2019, p.60).

Vieira (2019) points out that it was the LDB 9394/96⁵ of 1996 that brought the mandatory teaching of Art in basic education schools and the National Curricular Parameters⁶ (PCN) of 1997, which pointed to dance as an artistic language with specificities to be taught in basic education schools. In this context, it is vital to highlight the role played by dance researcher Isabel Marques⁷, who is responsible for the proposed elaboration of the dance within the art PCN.

In 2016, Law 13278/16⁸ was approved, which made it clear that the four areas of art were mandatory: Visual Arts, Theater, Music, and Dance as curricular components of basic education, from early childhood education to high school. Many discussions around dance at school have intensified, both within the scope of the country's undergraduate dance degree courses (which doubled with the policy of the Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities, REUNI, in the years 2008) and in entities related to the area, such as the National Association of Dance Researchers (ANDA) and the Brazilian Association of Performing Arts (ABRACE), which participated in meaningful discussions about the importance of dance being at school within the curriculum formal. It is necessary to highlight the political role of art educators and art teachers who actively participated in this movement, highlighting the importance of teaching art and dance specifically in basic education and seeking to ensure that this was provided for by law.

Due to the movement of art teachers and to comply with legal adjustments, this private school in Blumenau, Vale do Itajaí, Santa Catarina, hired professionals with undergraduate degrees courses in each of the artistic areas (Visual Arts, Dance, Music, and Theater) to develop the institution's new Art curriculum. This movement gave rise to the document entitled “Training Path in Art,” adopted from the 2022 academic year at the institution. The document

³ Brasil, 1961.

⁴ Brasil, 1996.

⁵ Brasil, 1971.

⁶ Brasil, 1997.

⁷ Section 3 presents some of the researcher's notes about dance at school.

⁸ Brasil, 2016.

provides that throughout basic training, students will have access to and the opportunity to interact with all four artistic languages in the area of Art.

Dance was the only area that, until the beginning of 2022, did not have any professionals working at the institution, and the main reason is that the first undergraduate dance course in the state of Santa Catarina was created just in 2017 at the Universidade Regional de Blumenau (FURB) and graduated in the first group of professionals in 2021. Only after the region had the first group of dance teachers graduate did the schools from Blumenau start the possibility of hiring professionals with specific training to work in institutions.

Based on these premises, this study sought to understand which body relations can be mobilized in dance classes by a group of fifth-year elementary school students from a private basic education school in a city in the Itajaí Valley.

2. Paths taken

To meet the objective of this study, we defined some methodological paths. Thus, this research was developed from an a/r/tographic methodological perspective, in which the artist, researcher, and teacher triad are intertwined and affect each other constantly in the relationships experienced by the students who carry out the research. In his studies on this methodology, Dias (2013, p. 25) writes that “A/R/T is a metaphor for Artist, Researcher, Teacher, and graph. In a/r/tography, knowing, doing and achieving merge. They merge and disperse, creating a mixed-race, hybrid language”.

In this way, artistic practice, teaching, and research are intertwined throughout the study. Irwin (2013, p. 28) states that when dealing with a/r/tography.

[...] practices of educators and artists become sites of investigation. Furthermore, as investigators, they constitute researchers. Here, research is no longer perceived from a traditional scientific perspective but rather from an alternative point of view, where investigating is a living practice closely linked to the arts and education.

Thus, the preparation of the classes was influenced by the teacher's artistic creations and research, which merged and fed constantly. Sometimes, the experiences lived in the classroom with the students became part of the teacher's artistic propositions and investigations beyond the school environment. Given the objective of the research: to understand which body relations can be mobilized in dance classes, by a group of fifth-year elementary school students from a private basic education school in a city in the Itajaí Valley, we initially investigated the “Training Path in Art,” inserted in the formal education institution⁹ and what emerged from these dance classes at school.

⁹ The institution's name will be preserved due to the confidentiality of the research. However, it is a private school with a confessional nature. It is located in the city center, there is a lot of commercial activity and movement of

We identified that this training path provides that in each year of primary education, an artistic area is taught and that it is in line with the provisions of the official documents of formal education, namely: National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), Territorial Base Curriculum Catarinense, Basic Education Curriculum of the Municipal Education System, and the Content Map used by the school until that moment (2020-2021).

According to the educational institution that was researched, dance was defined as a curricular component of the fifth year of elementary school. It is worth noting that the choice for the fifth year was motivated by the fact that it is considered in the school as a year of transition between elementary school I and elementary school II, so much so that from the fifth year onwards, the coordination of the class becomes the responsibility of the pedagogical coordination and pedagogical guidance for elementary education II.

An important aspect to be highlighted, as we verified in the document analysis, is that dance is the only area of knowledge developed in only one year of the training course in the curriculum, while the visual arts are designed in four years throughout the course, and theater and music in two years. According to information generated by the school, this is justified because the project is in the implementation phase, thus passing the phase of insertion of the training path entirely in the institution, and based on the institution's assessment of this process, it will be relevant to review the distribution of times of the areas of knowledge in art within the developed path. To better meet the objective of this investigation, the reports produced by fifth-year students during the first quarter of the academic period of the year 2023 were analyzed. A process diary was used to record the experiences that took place and the time allocated within the class. Sometimes, the student's comments at the end of the activities, such as "This class was difficult" or "That was very different," became stimuli for these reports.

At the end of the semester, students handed in their process diaries to the dance teacher for reading, reflection, and replanning classes for the second semester. The material analysis began with all the information made available by the students participating in the research¹⁰. To this end, content analysis was used, which Bardin (2000, p. 19) mentions, "Content analysis is a research technique whose purpose is the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." Initially, the first contact with the material was made in a floating reading to get closer to the texts and general understanding of the students' writings.

Afterward, a description of these materials was made, in which the relationships evidenced in the students' reports and their similarities with each other and distances were

people around the institution. Furthermore, it is close to one of the most privileged regions in the city, as well as the city's main theater and art museum.

¹⁰ Research approved under opinion no. 5,845,076 on 01/05/2023 by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Regional de Blumenau (FURB). All information was generated based on written acceptance by the institution and with the authorization of those responsible in the Free and Informed Consent Form and the students in the Assent Form.

identified, which allowed the structuring of categories, selection, and grouping of these reports, as well as the verification of its incidences. From this organization, the information was processed and inferred for subsequent reflection and analysis. Bardin (2000) reminds us that content analysis is an empirical method and that even though the procedure has steps to follow, one must always be aware of the type of speech dedicated to analyzing. Because of this, it is essential to highlight that in a/r/tography, the processes of teaching, artistic creation, and research are articulated and related because, in these relationships, new knowledge is constituted and made alive in the context of art at school.

Thus, all the information analyzed here reveals, to some extent, traces of this way of being, doing, and thinking about art, research, and teaching. In this text, in particular, the focus is on analyzing the teaching dimension in a research process at school; however, these aspects can be evoked, woven, and woven.

3. Students and their relationship with dance

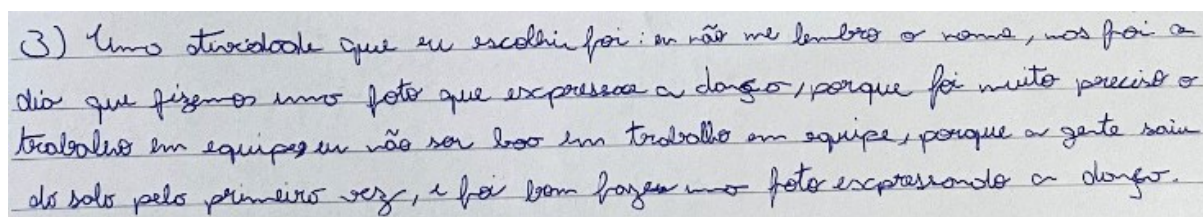
When discussing dance teaching at school, Marques (2011, p. 67) highlights that “[...] the educational space deserves to be rethought today so that it does not inhibit, frustrate, automate, fragment or school dance and the dancer.” As already mentioned in the first section of this text, the conception of dance at school that guides the classes taught at the school in which we are developing this research is in line with Marques' thinking and in line with what Rancière (2017, p. 71) writes when dealing with the reason of equals, when he states that “[...] those who do not know the truth seek it, and there are many discoveries to be made along the way. The only mistake would be to take our opinions as true.” Dance at this school has become a training possibility that escapes the more traditional forms of construction of knowledge with and by bodies of teachers and students in the relationship with oneself and others. This way of acting with dance teaching goes in the direction of what Freire (2019, p. 28) quotes about teaching: “In the conditions of true learning, students become real subjects of the construction and reconstruction of the knowledge taught, by the side of the educator, equally subject to the process.”

After reading the process diaries, we organized the information to prepare Table 1 to highlight the categories in the students' perceptions, the activities taught, and their impacts.

Categories	Incidence
Challenges	11
Times and spaces	7
Body and new perspectives	6
Creation	2

Table 1 – Analyses categories. Table prepared by authors based on student's reports, 2023.

Concerning the “Challenges,” the students created different situations and relationships based on the activities. Some reports refer to personal discoveries, others to dealing with colleagues’ bodies, and others to developing solutions for the proposed activities. Some denote satisfaction from a completed challenge, and others concerns generated from experiences in class. We realized that these divergences are directly related to the group’s age group, which is entering pre-adolescence, and their previous experiences with dance and art. In excerpts from the students’ reports in which they talk about the activities carried out, statements appear such as: “It was not easy at all, because it was difficult not to touch the elastic bands and at the same time change the levels” and “I thought the class was perfect, but doing the triangle wasn’t very good, because it was difficult.” The difficulties encountered when perceived by the teacher and if mediated, stimulated, and contextualized can become a stimulus and intrinsic motivational factor for completing the task, as indicated by Souza (2019). It can also be extrinsic when students see the need to pass the year, to please the teacher and parents, and to compete with colleagues, among others. The teacher realized that the problematization of the tasks to be performed and awareness had become fundamental elements for developing dance classes at this school. In a report, the writing of another student points out the difficulty of working as a team, of carrying out an activity outside of the classroom (another environment), and the issue of creation itself as indicators of challenges that arose during an activity carried out in the second week of class, as shown in figure 2.



3) Uma atividade que eu escolhi foi: eu não me lembro o nome, mas foi o dia que fizemos uma foto que expressava a dança, porque foi muito preciso o trabalho em equipe eu não sou bom em trabalho em equipe, porque a gente saiu do sala pelo primeiro vez, e foi bom fazer uma foto expressando a dança.

Figure 2. Student report 1. Source: Stefanie Muller's archive.

Audio description of the image: photo in a horizontal plane, made from a notebook sheet with lines and writing with a blue pen. Read the following sentence: One activity I chose was, I don't remember the name, but it was the day we took a photo that expressed dancing because teamwork was essential. I'm not good at teamwork because we left the room for the first time, and taking a picture describing the dance was good.

From the student's report, it is possible to perceive some signs that relate to personal challenges, such as socialization and relationships with others. Working as a team and developing personal listening and listening to others is fundamental for developing relationships between students, their recognition as part of a collective, and the elaboration of knowledge by the group. Leaving the classroom for the first time indicates a possible difficulty or a very different relationship for the student than being in-class activities, which can be

carried out in other school spaces. To a certain extent, inhabiting other spaces suggests a break with the logic of organizing physical school space.

Another activity that encouraged finding different paths in one's own body (a type of body cartography) to alternate between levels of movement at other times is told by a student. In addition to the relationships highlighted in the category of time and space, the student chooses to write about this activity because of the fun that the activity brought to him. In this class, students show enthusiasm, firstly because they can go barefoot and lie down on the room floor, and secondly, because they are in a space they usually do not occupy.

The room used for dance classes on that day is generally used for Karate and Judo classes, which are extracurricular activities offered to after-school students, so students who do not practice these disciplines do not usually visit this space. Again, the student highlights the relationship with the school space.

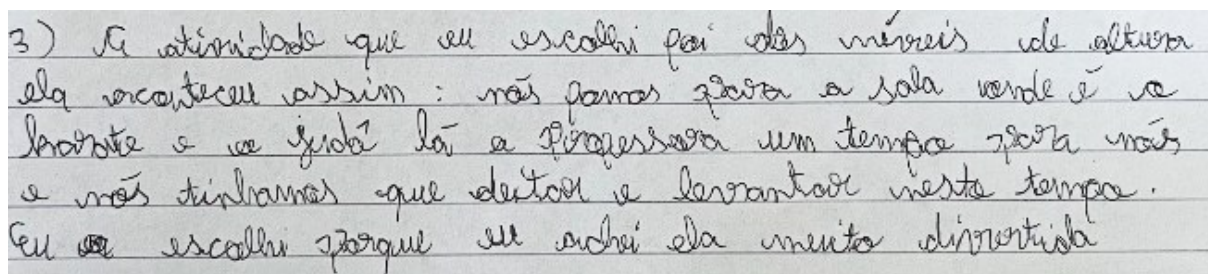


Figure 3. Student report 3. Source: Stefanie Muller archive.

Audio description of the image: Photo in a horizontal plane, taken from notebook pages.

At the top of the image in Photo on a horizontal plane, made from a notebook sheet with lines and written with a black pen, the following sentence: The activity I chose was one of the height levels, it happened like this: we went to the room where karate and judo are held. The teacher had time for us there, and we had to go to bed and get up. I chose it because I found it very fun.

It is worth mentioning that the institution has a dance room in its structure. However, it could only be used in art classes when physical education teachers were not using it. During the research period, using the room for any activity was impossible, which raised questions about school dance spaces.

During art classes, being barefoot, being at other levels of movement, occupying different spaces, dancing without music, and creating their movements became naturalized with this fifth-year class, as their bodies began to feel like protagonists of their actions. They became creators of new forms and knowledge and enjoyed each discovery. Duarte Junior (2000, p. 133) says that “[...] knowledge implies savoring elements of the world and incorporating them into us (that is, bringing them into the body so that they become part of it)”. In this sense, figure 4 presents excerpts from two reports highlighting these issues related to body recognition and exploration.

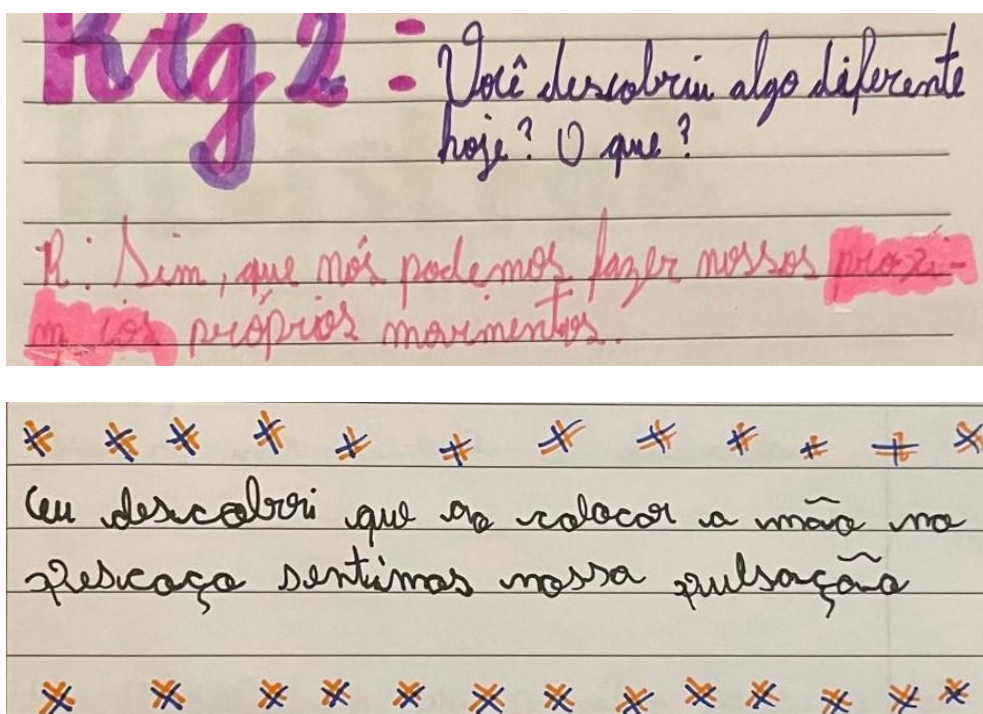


Figure 4. Student report 2. Source: Stefanie Muller archive. Audio description of the image: Photo in a horizontal plane, taken from notebook pages. At the top of the image in blue pen is written: Did you discover anything different today? What? In pink pen, the answer: Yes, that we can make our moves. At the bottom, drawings of the letter

The writings bring evidence of discoveries and new understandings about the body and its autonomous movement. The body is understood as “the place where everything happened,” as Dantas (2020, p. 38) mentioned. These discoveries and experiments are possibilities for building knowledge that crosses and permeates the body, which can be mobilized by dance in relationships with others. In this age group, it was evident that students realized over the course of the classes that they can make their movements, as we depend on them all the time to be in the world, but when this phrase appears in their statements, they have a relationship with the processes of authorship, with the possibility of creating. Souza, Brisola, and Ricobom (2022) state that the dance teacher must try to mediate the process in an attempt “to promote a meaningful education, capable of involving students in their entirety, in a dynamic of discoveries in the body, which is desired to be autonomous, critical, full and happy with their choices” (p. 13).

In one of the classes, in a conversation about body memory, the attribution of memory to the brain was very clear in the students' statements, almost as if the organ were separated from the rest of the body and not related to the whole of it. A student in the class stated that “memory was in the brain.” In this sense, a fundamental issue to be considered regarding dance at school is understanding the body in its entirety.

From the students' reports, we realize that they understand the prioritization of training and work of the mind to the detriment of knowledge arising from cognitive experiences experienced

by the body, which generate knowledge by moving sensitively. These are children aged 10 and 11, with no training in dance, having their first contact with this manifestation in these classes, and the body is taboo for many. Several researchers highlight the body-mind dualism identified in school contexts. In this sense, we are provoked by Pinto (2021, p. 154) about the ideal in the formation of concepts in basic education schools: “It will never be that of a 'mental idea' as in cognitivism, but of the formation of cognitive concepts, where the entire body communicates, expresses and understands in the symbiosis of the world, without dualisms, without borders, that is, in the liquidity of processes,” because this is how we understand dance.

The body is action, it is thought, it is dance. Dantas (2020, p. 25) suggests that “Dance – the possibility of art inscribed on the body – is a metaphor for the thought and reality of that same body.” In this sense, during dance classes, in some way leaving the desks, seeking and trying new movements with other colleagues, there is a particular exposure of the body that deserves attention during the planning and development processes of classes so that students can relate to themselves and be active agents in the learning processes and in the context in which they are socially inserted. Marques (2011, p. 84), when dealing with the relationship between text and subtext and society, writes about the “relationships that can be established between it, the student and dance.” In this experience with dance as a curricular component, phrases from students like “I don’t know how to dance” were replaced by “Look what I can do.” As the classes passed, the students began to realize dance and relationships that until then were very distant to them, and they mainly began to notice their bodies and the countless possibilities of movement that they did not recognize because they had never experienced them.

Having as premises the educational dance that breaks with the stereotypes of movements and goes beyond the conceptions of systematized dance techniques, the classes were planned to provide students with experiences that brought new possibilities of movement and creation of movements and promoted their sensitivity and autonomy during pedagogical processes. Duarte Junior (2000, p. 210), when talking about the importance of rethinking the teaching methods used in the classroom that focus only on the accumulation of data, highlights that “the commitment to allow a sensitive discovery of life is urgent, followed by a broadening of its vision beyond the narrow focus of specialties.” Rancière (2017, p. 83), when dealing with what he calls the turnaround in the definition of man, states that

In this sense, the Cartesian equality of the cogito must also be specified. There will be opposition to this thinking subject who only knew himself as such by divorcing himself from all senses and bodies, a new thinking subject who experiences himself in action exerts on himself and his bodies.

Duarte Júnior and Rancière point out the perspective that the teacher must give students as people capable of creating and experimenting, of making their readings of the world. It's about not wanting to deliver something ready and closed in the classroom, as that would be

underestimating the other person. Freire (2019, p. 25) says, “Whoever teaches learns by teaching and whoever learns by learning. Whoever teaches teaches something to someone.” In this way, the analysis brought evidence of relationships created by students with different spaces or other ways of relating to the school's physical space, exploring variations in temporalities such as slowness, agility, etc. They highlighted the autonomous possibility of creating matrices and movements in dance, highlighting body recognition and exploration issues, as well as different qualities of movements.

4. Final mobilizations



Figure 5. *Union*. Source: Stefanie Muller archive.

Audio description of the image: Photo in a vertical plane. In the picture's background is a grayish transparent awning structure on aluminum beams. Leaves and small tree branches appear behind the awning. In front, four bodies, visible only from the elbow to the ends of the hands, form a chain. Everyone wears gray coats, and the hands on the upper right diagonal have pink and black striped gloves.

União (figure 5) is a photograph created by the students with mediation from the teacher. They proposed the conception of the image, the name, the angle at which the photo should be taken, what should appear in the photo, and justified its creation. The teacher was responsible

for the photographic record, as they could not use electronic devices and technical guidelines (possible angles, lighting). We chose this image to open this section, as we believe that, in a certain way, it represents and contemplates a little of the journey taken with these students, in addition to highlighting aspects highlighted in the content analysis categories.

Returning to the initial question: understand what body relations can be mobilized in dance classes by a group of fifth-year students from a private basic education school in a city in the Itajaí Valley? It is understood from the research presented that dance, as a mandatory curricular component, can promote ruptures in thinking about body relations at school. As we saw in the students' testimonies, which dialogues with what Dantas (2020, p. 26) writes: "Dance is an indication of art in the body because it shows that a body is capable of being art, of making itself, as a body and movement, artistic incarnation. Dance is the possibility of art embodied in the body." Starting from Dantas' thought and based on the premises of Rancière's emancipation, the dance classes in the school also followed the dance context of Marques, the Duarte Junior's meanings, and Freire's autonomy.

When students in their reports highlight moments of exploration of different relationships between the body and the times and spaces of the school environment, other ways of dealing with and recognizing the body, possibilities for creation, and challenges encountered in dance classes, these indicate mobilizations made by they can be carried out in the curricular component and enable other forms of relationships with the body. We found that the indicated principles of movement and dance are rarely practiced daily in basic education, reserved for specific moments such as festivities and presentations—school routine as a curricular component in developing a curriculum suitable for art. Even so, as previously mentioned, it is essential to review the layout of the areas on the route and the structure so that the Art Training Route can be developed.

We hope that the public authorities will develop similar initiatives, following what national legislation proposes, and that more students can take dance classes in Brazilian schools. To learn to walk, we need to go through different experiences to expand our motor repertoire. To understand and challenge ourselves to other movements, we must move through the most diverse experiences to complex cognitive capacity in search of creativity, autonomy, and criticism from an emancipatory perspective.

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