

# E-LEARNING AND DANCE EDUCATION: INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN FOR PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN BALLET

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## Abstract

This paper describes instructional design for the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* and explores the initial challenges of its implementation in classical ballet education for secondary students aged 16 to 18 in Croatia. Duration of the course is six weeks, and its successful completion requires approximately five hours per week or an hour per day. The course is developed using Croatian localization of Moodle Learning System hosted at Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNet) Public Server (<https://moodle.carnet.hr>), and can be accessed via AAI electronic identity used by employees in most Croatian educational institutions. The course is designed with the goal to instruct ballet students about everyday challenges faced by professional dancers. Ballet dancers' careers are relatively short: after reaching certain age, physical functions of human body decline and prevent dancers from successfully carrying out their profession. For this reason, dancers tend to enter employment during or immediately after completing ballet schools and their professional training usually begins in theatres. By filling the gap between education and work, online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* provides a valuable opportunity for professional development prior to entering the workplace. Course curriculum encompasses classical ballet skills, wide knowledge about the art of ballet and problem solving. The course is designed for blended mode of instruction. Online instruction is supervised by online tutor – ballet teacher trained in e-learning – who leads the course, assesses student skills and knowledge, facilitates student discussions and answers their questions. Instruction is based on constructivist approach and dialogical method, and tailored for small groups of six to ten students. The course heavily utilizes multimedia (primarily video and audio), which was specifically produced for the purpose. The first part of the paper exposes challenges pertaining to curriculum and course design, with a special accent to specific challenges posted by the performing character of ballet dancing. The second part of the paper explores the initial challenges pertaining to implementation of the online course in secondary classical ballet education in Croatia. Given the performing nature of ballet, authors are convinced that this case study can provide useful guidelines for implementation of e-learning in ballet education regardless language and/or cultural differences. Following the same line of reasoning, authors are convinced that the results of this case study can be generalized to related fields such as modern dance.

Keywords: online ballet, online dance, ballet e-learning, dance e-learning, dance education, ballet education, professional development, professional dancers, professional ballet.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ballet is an art form with a long tradition. Ballet skills are taught slowly, step by step, and require strict discipline. The gradual introduction of increasingly challenging and demanding exercises develops the muscles, and the body is becoming physically fit [1]. Skipping some of the necessary stages in the classical ballet curriculum can cause physical injury and have serious consequences [2]. Therefore, achieving results in ballet takes a lot of time.

Contemporary students are accustomed to receiving information quickly over the Internet and video games; they prefer to see the images before the text and they are more prone to games than serious work. As a result of the environment in which technology is an integral part of their lives, they process information differently than their predecessors. Marc Prensky calls them Digital Natives [3].

Online course for ballet training is a form of learning that digital native ballet students could find refreshing and interesting since it is accessed over the Internet and requires the use of tools of the digital age. The online course could enrich the traditional ballet curriculum in a vivid way using visual

media, Internet, audio and video. Online course enables students to choose the time of learning, problem solving and communication with other participants. Ballet training course could adapt to students' way of learning and fit into their busy daily schedules. Participants could access the system when it suits them, even on weekends when there are no regular ballet classes. Furthermore, course would be held as a supplement to teaching face to face in a dancing hall, so students could apply what they have learned on a daily basis.

Such a course is also useful for ballet teachers who are learning to accept the new digital environment because in the process of learning they still partly remain in the past and retain their old frames of mind. Ballet teachers should learn how to communicate in a language of Digital Natives and to adapt to their way of thinking. They should welcome new contents in the process of learning that could be engaging for the students [4].

## **2 TECHNICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COURSE**

The first step in creating one's own online course is to select a Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS). It was necessary to choose a system for creating and teaching online courses via the Internet that is stable, flexible, and easy to use and access. CARNet is a government institution under the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, which develops information and communication infrastructure, as well as a fast and secure computer network for its users. It develops and implements online courses since 2004, allowing users in Croatia a new and flexible form of learning and lifelong education. CARNet online courses are implemented in the Moodle system. The name Moodle is released under the *GNU Public License*, the name is an acronym for the English term *Modular Object Oriented Developmental Learning Environment*. Moodle is an online application installed on the server, and it can be accessed from any networked PC using a web browser.

### **Why Moodle?**

- Moodle is available as an open source, so it is allowed to use it for free, copy and modify it.
- Moodle allows users to easily manage user accounts and provides security from unauthorized access because tutors can "lock" their courses and send the key by electronic mail to participants of a particular course.
- Tutors can easily and at any time deny access to some of the course participants.
- Users can choose the language they want to use in the Moodle interface.
- Moodle provides a wide range of different activities and resources that tutors can add to the course, including integrated communication tools and tools for knowledge assessment.
- Moodle can display different forms of electronic content such as Word, PowerPoint, Flash, audio and video. It also helps to easily store and manage files on the server.
- Moodle works equally well on operating systems Linux, Mac OS-X, as well as Microsoft Windows.
- Moodle is "highly available" which means that it must be robust enough to serve simultaneously a large number of students, administrators and online mentors [7].

## **3 COURSE CURRICULUM**

- Objectives of the course - specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners can achieve through the program.
- Methods of instruction - these are the methods that the course will use to help a learner achieve defined goals and objectives.
- Evaluation - how to measure if objectives were achieved.
- Implementation of the course - there are expected challenges and issues in implementation of any new educational program. Planning ahead for all the tasks in the course content that will need to be done is crucial for the final objective.

### 3.1 Objectives of the course

Rapid technological development affects profound changes in our surroundings, including education. The overall objective of the course is to adapt ballet curriculum to technological changes and improve the quality of ballet education.

Specific objectives of the course are:

- Adopt a certain way of doing the exercises by which students can improve flexibility, learn how to self-stretch and prepare the body for a ballet lesson.
- Perceive the importance of placing the body in a proper ballet position.
- Learn how to correctly sew ballet slippers.
- Learn how to deal with risks and problems of the profession such as injuries and eating disorders and learn how to minimize the risks of a ballet profession.
- Learn how to adapt diet to great efforts in order to preserve health.
- Understand and apply the rules of dancing in pairs (partnering).
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the profession of classical ballet dancers and have a peek into their lives behind the scenes.
- Be able to improve relations and cooperation with ballet teachers.
- Understand complexity of the profession to help students find their place in the world of ballet and enable them to use their potential to the fullest.

### 3.2 Blended mode of instruction

The course is designed for blended mode of instruction. The goal of blended learning is to join the best aspects of both face to face and online instruction. Classroom time can be used to familiarize students with the Moodle system and to provide guidance on specific questions they may have. In this way students will not be afraid to use online communication tools and will manage the system more easily. Also, a tutor can be introduced to a group of participants in order to observe a ballet class and learn about the level of ballet technique of the students.

Meanwhile, students can access the online part at any time of day, from any place with Internet access. This allows an increase in scheduling flexibility for students. While attending online part of the course students must be more self motivated than in the classroom and they need to stick to deadlines set by tutors. This issue requires help of an online tutor. Tutor encourages communication between students, as well as animates, motivates, and gradually adapts students to the new environment and a new way of learning. In this way tutor can help students to go through the classes more easily and maintain a high level of interest until the end of the course.

E-communication tools used in the course are:

- e-mail
- communication tools integrated in Moodle:
  - forum and private messages

Combined online teaching and teaching face to face can provide an opportunity for participants to express themselves in the ballet hall and solve problems that cannot be solved in online communication. Tutor should encourage communication regularly, approach each participant with equal amount of attention and answer questions with patience. During the course, students can communicate with the tutor and other students by using a tool for discussions - the course forum. Forums save information posted on a particular topic for other people to see at any time. This creates a new discussion environment for participants of the online course. The fact that the discussion is not a real-time activity means that people have enough time to research and consider their comments before replying.

Furthermore, the discussion format encourages participants to analyze new ways of thinking. By doing so, the students improve the process of understanding the material that is taught in the course and they express their own experiences among participants. The online course uses forums in which tutors

should interfere minimally in order to help students to become better critical thinkers. However, if participants want to send a private message to a particular person, they can do this by using the Messages tool located on the homepage of the course. This tool is preferable when a student needs individual support of a tutor or another student.

### 3.3 Evaluation and Feedback

The final success of the participants is influenced by the results of assignments, assessment tests and debates in the discussions. The total score is 100 points. To pass the course students have to collect a minimum of 60 credits (at least 30 points from the assignments and discussions, and the remaining 30 in the final test).

Exercise 1	10 points
Balance - Test	10 points
Discussion 1	10 points
Discussion 2	10 points
Exercise 2	10 points
Final Test	50 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	100 points

Table 1: Score Table

During the course, students are required to participate in two thematic discussions which will be initiated by a tutor and which will be evaluated. When writing messages in the discussions, students should adhere to the guidelines specified by the tutor. These guidelines are based on *Netiquette* (short for Internet Etiquette) and they cover rules to maintain civility in online discussions. An online tutor explains the rules of behaviour and how to communicate in online courses publishes the rules on the home page of the system and warns students that they must adhere to those rules. Tutor can not change the rules after publishing them because it could confuse participants. Basic guidelines for discussions in the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* are:

- The content of the messages should be related to the topic of a discussion listed in the forum description and explained in more detail in the initial message in the forum.
- The message should be divided in 1 to 2 sections with a maximum of 150 to 200 words per message.
- Student's agreement/disagreement with the commentary of another student should be explained and substantiated with the student's own example or experience.
- Students should use language appropriate for communication in the academic community and respect the opinions, ideas and work of other students.
- Students should also follow the rules of conduct on the Internet which can be examined by clicking on the link *Code of Conduct on the Internet* in the block *Instructions for students*, on the home page of the system.
- Discussions will be conducted under the supervision and guidance of tutors, and will allow participants to express their own views and to come to conclusions and answers to questions by themselves. In the last week of the course participants will be able to ask real professional classical ballet dancers questions on the forum *Learn at first hand*.

It is very important that students receive feedback on their work, both personally and publicly, on the group level. This can reinforce the connection between group members and encourage them to

communicate publicly, especially those who are withdrawn and quiet in the ballet hall and rarely express their opinion. A tutor evaluates the communication among the participants which includes the exchange of experiences, ideas and solutions regarding assignments and exams. Students thus learn how to perceive the problem, define it and successfully resolve it. Tutor's replies must be serious, but they should be personally directed towards a particular student. That can encourage students to ask some new questions and in the same way help other students. Tutors are expected to allow participants to choose their own area of interest to which special attention should be paid.

### 3.4 Structure of the course content

The course is divided into 6 weeks; a week is divided into resources and activities. Each week consists of an introductory lesson with a review of content and activities followed by two or three lessons with materials for learning. After that follows the conclusion of a lesson in the form of a summary of a chapter, and at the end, one of the activities to verify acquired knowledge: assignment, test or discussion.

First week: Flexibility - the participants learn about the critical parts of the body on which they need to concentrate in order to achieve maximum flexibility as much as they can.

- Overview of contents and activities in the first chapter
- Necessary predispositions
- Exercises for improvement
- Summary of the first chapter
- Task 1

Second week: Balance - how to achieve and control better balance in *demi pointe*, standing on the balls of the feet, and for girls in *pointe* work, standing on their toes.

- Overview of content and activities in the second chapter
- The perfect balance
- Getting in shape
- Summary of the second chapter
- Quiz *Balance*

Third week: Advanced part of a ballet class - such as dancing on tiptoes for women, big jumps and turns for men.

- Overview of content and activities in the third chapter
- *Pointe* shoes, big jumps
- How to correctly sew ballet slippers
- Summary of the third chapter
- Discussion 1

Fourth week: Risks in a ballet career - participants will learn how to avoid injuries, strengthen the muscles and tendons, how to adjust the diet to physical efforts.

- Overview of content and activities in the fourth chapter
- Injuries
- Diet of professional dancers
- Short career of professional dancers
- Summary of the fourth chapter
- Discussion 2

Fifth week: *Pas de deux* - participants will discover the secrets of dancing in pairs (*pas de deux*).

- Overview of content and activities in the fifth chapter
- *Pas de deux*
- Questions and answers
- Summary of the fifth chapter
- Discussion *Pas de deux*

Sixth week: Working Day - description of a working day of a professional ballet dancer.

- Overview of content and activities in the sixth chapter
- Ballet performance
- Summary of the sixth chapter
- Discussion *Learn at first hand*
- Final test

Picture 1: Home page of the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet*

#### 4 MULTIMEDIA IN THE COURSE

Ballet is an art form that involves movement, acting, and is accompanied by music; that is why video and audio has the task of getting students interested further and increasing the course dynamics. It was necessary to ensure that film clips are not too long in order to keep the attention of the participants all the way. That is why ten short films, up to two minutes in length, were recorded. It is necessary to install the *Flash Player* version 9 or a newer version to be able to show the film clips in the course. In case students do not have this program installed on the computer from which they access the course, it can be easily downloaded from the Internet. On the home page of the course there is a *Block Instruction for users* that contains a link to the official page in order to download this program.

##### Production process:

- Recording films with a digital camera.
  - Films are a flexible online teaching tool that provides students with a visual model of ballet principles, steps and exercises that are explained in the lessons of the online course. All movements are presented step by step by a professional ballet dancer.

Participants of the online course are able to watch as many times as needed how to correctly perform given assignments, which is an excellent method to reinforce proper ballet technique.

- Processing films in *Nero Vision* (version 5).
  - Cutting some components, merging several films in a whole and deleting the sound.
- Sound recording
  - The *Audacity* voice recorder was used, a program for processing audio files with support for many formats. In addition to the exceptional ease of processing audio, the program is completely free. Voice that follows the video film was recorded after a short time spent in reading the user manual and the method of trial and error.
- Adding sound to the films - With the *Ulead VideoStudio* (version 8), sound and music was added to films; parts from the classical ballets by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (one of the greatest composers of Romanticism) were selected for the background music.
- Converting films to flash format (converting from .mpeg format to .swf) was made by *Eltima SWF Converter*.

In the end it was necessary to use *Sothink SWF Quicker* to change the "code" in any final version of a Flash film so that it does not repeat itself, but to finish at the end. Otherwise, all Flash films and animations would repeat themselves until they are stopped which would not be acceptable for the course. The constant repetition of films can confuse students who do not have much experience in working with a computer and cause displeasure.

## 5 QUALITY ASSESSMENT

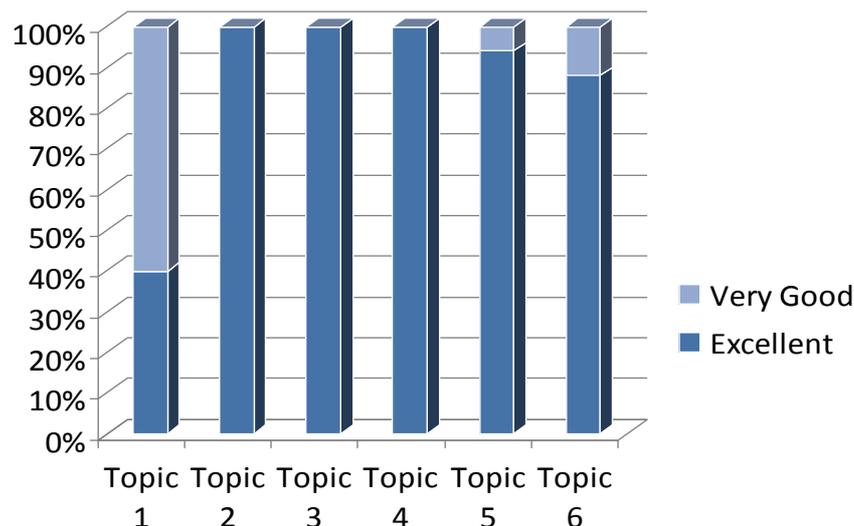
Given the numerous obligations students are loaded with, it was questionable how the students would accept this form of learning as a part of ballet school curriculum, or how would they accept the implementation of the online course, combined with the regular ballet classes. It was therefore necessary to conduct a survey and have a discussion with the students of a secondary ballet school. A small sample can be studied in a limited time and total cost of sample study is very small. Because of these advantages, with the permission of the Director of The School of Classical Ballet in Zagreb, 16 students were selected from the first, third and fourth grade of the secondary ballet school. Among those students a survey was conducted about the course content, a discussion was held about related topics and a presentation of a demo version of the course was given on a laptop. People are more comfortable responding honestly to a survey when they know that other people cannot see their answers. That is why survey was completely anonymous. By analysing ratings from the first part of a survey, the students' opinions on the proposed topics of the course were determined. From the second part of the survey, in which students freely expressed their suggestions, it was learned which topics they would add to the course.

The aim of the survey was:

- To determine how the students would grade each topic that is planned in the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet*.
- Get the students' suggestions for additional topics they would like to learn.
- Get guidelines to improve the content of the course.

The aim of the discussion was to learn about students' ambitions, their goals and plans for the future ballet career.

The results show that the surveyed students gave only the highest grades to the topics of the course - very good and excellent. We can conclude that the surveyed students really liked the offered topics, but no guidance to improve the course was received which was one of the objectives of the survey. In the second part of the survey a proposal for an additional topic was given only by one student from the sample: the strength of ballet dancers and how to develop it. Strength has not been selected as a separate topic because it is covered through the entire content in the course. In almost every chapter of the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet*, students are given tips how to develop strong muscles and get fit.



Picture 2: Results of the Survey

Possible reasons why obtained results are not sufficiently objective:

- A small number of students in the surveyed sample.
- Students filled out a survey in the dressing rooms so it is possible that in this way the anonymity of the survey has been compromised.

Before creating the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* it is necessary to make any needed modifications to the content of the survey and repeat the survey on a new sample of students. Demo version of the course may be used for the test group of participants. The results of that test group can provide guidelines for improving the course.

## 6 POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* is closely related to the ballet profession and it is necessary to consider whether the selected target group is large enough to make the project of implementing a real course sustainable and profitable. It is important to determine whether it is possible to create groups of students in which students will be of mixed age, from 16 to 18 years old. Students at the age of 16 have a different level of professional ballet skills and general education from students at the age of 18. There is also a difference in maturity and attitudes of students of different ages within the target group of participants. It would be better if there would be a special group of students from each ballet class. The problem is that in some secondary schools for classical ballet there are less than six students which may not be enough for one group of participants.

The next problem of the target group is working with minors. This raises the issue of safety in the online course environment. Moodle is a safe and stable support system for distance learning but work on the online course still takes place through the Internet, which makes safety of the students under 18 dubious. Students access the course by entering a user name and password so identity theft can easily happen as well as unauthorized access to the course. Unauthorized access can be prevented if students are instructed about the importance to maintaining the confidentiality of user data in a face to face meeting before the course begins.

On the occasion of implementing the distance learning in ballet education, a special attention should be paid to the knowledge and skills of tutors in the process of shaping the curriculum and in communication with the participants. Online tutors must have expert knowledge in ballet. Furthermore, if the course is introduced as a mandatory part of the ballet classes, following things should be taken into account: the level of computer literacy among students and the possible need for further education of students who do not know how to use the technologies required for the course. If the course is introduced as an elective course, a sufficient number of interested participants should be provided and engaged.

Ballet teachers are burdened with demanding ballet syllabus and it is hard for them to find time and interest for introducing changes in ballet training. The advantages of this form of learning should be pointed out to the teachers. They should also be motivated to become more interested in

improvements that the online course may bring to classes in a ballet hall. Time is essential in providing human and material resources to make this project possible, so it is important to assess its profitability before creating and launching the online course.

In order for an online course for ballet training to be implemented as a part of the curriculum of secondary ballet education it is necessary to make a new survey among students of a ballet school.

The survey can be changed by:

- Increasing the scope of grades from which students can choose.
- Extending the second part of the survey in which students feel free to express their opinions and attitudes.
- Enabling students to fill out surveys anonymously, in a special classroom.
- Providing students sufficient time for evaluation and descriptive answers.

On the Internet students can find websites that offer downloadable e-books, PDF guides [6] and instructional ballet videos on DVD [7] for beginner, intermediate and advanced dancers. Similarly as the online course *Professional Issues in Ballet*, instructional ballet videos can teach students about ballet concepts which will help them improve their dance technique. On the other hand, the course can offer students more comprehensive approach to professional ballet training than ballet videos and guides. The online course is designed for combination of online and face-to-face learning so students can be prepared for new online environment, and online instruction is supervised by online tutor who can help confused students at any time. E-books and ballet videos cannot offer students the same level of support.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Within the current educational system classical ballet is independent. However, it is closely linked with other art forms such as other forms of dance and music. The online course *Professional Issues in Ballet* is designed to help students to easily navigate in the world of classical ballet, so that after completing the course, they could make the right decision for the future more easily. Students who do not opt for a professional ballet career may continue with another dance form, become teachers or remain ballet lovers and faithful ballet audience. Students that succeed in becoming professional ballet dancers will get valuable form of improvement.

However, there is a long way from an idea to realization. In order to implement the course at a larger scale, it is necessary to introduce changes in ballet training. Realization of the course requires the cooperation of ballet teachers, students and experts in online learning. Ballet teachers first have to accept the introduction of a completely new learning concept in a ballet hall. They should ask themselves why so few students finish ballet education and obtain the title of a classical ballet dancer and how to attract and motivate the boys to opt for this profession. Most importantly, ballet teachers should accept that we all live in the digital age, embrace technologies in their daily work, and constantly improve their teaching skills in order to keep up with the demands of their Digital Native students.

Given the performing nature of ballet, authors are convinced that this case study can provide useful guidelines for implementation of e-learning in ballet education regardless language and/or cultural differences. Following the same line of reasoning, authors are convinced that the results of this case study can be generalized to related fields such as modern dance.

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