

The body culture and mediation of the Physical Education teacher in Early Childhood Education

A Cultura Corporal e a mediação do professor de Educação Física na Educação Infantil

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to discuss the relevance of the Physical Education teacher for the young child's learning in Early Childhood Education. Through Body Culture activities (such as games, sports, gymnastics, fights etc.), this professional contributes to the integral development of the child by prioritizing the relationships between body, nature, and culture, overcoming biological concepts, such as physical fitness, motor learning, and motor development. The methodology was a bibliographic research, based on the Cultural-Historical Theory, the Historical-Critical Pedagogy, and the Critical-Superior approach, based on the historical and dialectical materialism in defense of teaching and humanization through planned, systematized teaching mediated by the teacher. The aim is to seek elements to advance and understand the relationship of pedagogical praxis and Physical Education learning of young children. Through this study, it was possible to infer the importance of the

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo é discutir a relevância do professor de Educação Física para o aprendizado da criança pequena na Educação Infantil. Por meio das atividades da Cultura Corporal (jogos, brincadeiras, esportes, ginásticas, lutas etc.), esse profissional contribui para o desenvolvimento integral da criança ao priorizar as relações entre corpo, natureza e cultura, superando os conceitos biologicistas, como os discursos da aptidão física, da aprendizagem motora e do desenvolvimento motor. Como metodologia, optou-se pela pesquisa bibliográfica, tomando por base a Teoria Histórico-Cultural, a Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica e a abordagem Crítico-Superadora, fundamentando-se no materialismo histórico e dialético, em defesa do ensino e da humanização por meio do ensino planejado, sistematizado e mediado pelo professor. O intuito é buscar elementos para avançar e compreender a relação da práxis pedagógica e a aprendizagem dos conteúdos da disciplina de Educação Física para as crianças pequenas. Mediante este estudo, foi possível inferir a importância do professor especialista

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specialist teacher in the act of planning his or her pedagogical actions, effecting the socialization of scientific knowledge of this discipline in Early Childhood Education.

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no ato de planejar suas ações pedagógicas, efetivando a socialização de conhecimentos científicos da referida disciplina na Educação Infantil.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física. Educação Infantil. Cultura Corporal.

1 Introduction

Physical education in schools has made significant progress throughout its history, but there is still a lack of legitimacy for specialist teachers when it comes to teaching young children in schools, daycare centers, and preschools. What generally prevails is work on body movement issues with classroom teachers, guided by a biological approach, aimed at reading and writing and decharacterizing the specificity of physical education in schools.

The main objective of this work is to present the relevance of the specialist Physical Education teacher, taking as a theoretical reference the Critical-Overcoming Approach to Physical Education, in defense of humanization through teaching planned and systematized by the specialist teacher. In addition, through bibliographic research based on historical and dialectical materialism, elements were sought to advance and understand the relationship between pedagogical praxis and the right to learning of young children through Body Culture activities, the object of study in Physical Education.

The study benefited from contributions from authors who have written on the subject, such as Arce (2013), Bracht (1992), Castellani Filho et al. (2009), Martins and Marsiglia (2015), Saviani (1991), and Taffarel (2016), among others.

The National Education Guidelines and Baselines Law (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional - LDB*) of 1996 included Early Childhood Education in the education system; in Article 29, it establishes that the objective of this educational stage is “[...] to promote the integral development of children up to five years of age, in their physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and society” (BRAZIL, 1996).

With regard to Physical Education, Article 26 of the LBD (1996) establishes that “Physical Education, integrated into the school's pedagogical proposal, is a mandatory component of basic education [...]” (BRAZIL, 1996). Even with all these advances in Early Childhood Education being recognized as the first stage of Basic Education, and specifically Physical Education, the discipline is still not legitimized as an area of knowledge for young children, which has led to reflections and concerns, the initial reason for this work.

In both private and public early childhood education schools, the prevalence of institutions lacking a specialist physical education teacher remains a pervasive issue. Consequently, the responsibility for instruction in movement falls upon the professors, as delineated in the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education (BRAZIL, 1998); broad movement, as articulated in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRAZIL, 2010); and body, gestures, and movements, as defined by the National Common Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (BRAZIL, 2017).

According to the official documents RCNEI (Brazil, 1998), DCNEI (Brazil, 2010), and BNCC (Brazil, 2017), play and interaction are identified as the primary axes for pedagogical work in early childhood education. However, the texts under review present body language in a generic way, without a clear definition and without a theoretical basis for physical education issues in the school context. This theoretical absence has the effect of leading to the emptying of the teaching of the discipline. Consequently, children often engage in movement devoid of the expert guidance and deliberate intention characteristic of a specialized educator.

In contrast to the aforementioned issues, researchers in the fields of Childhood and Historical-Cultural Theory have identified that teaching should occur through play and interaction. This triad is considered a fundamental element for enhancing the integral development of young children. Moreover, this theoretical contribution expands the concept of school physical education beyond its traditional focus on motor growth and development.

Thus, it is possible to understand the relevance of Physical Education in line with other areas of knowledge; to this end, there is no hierarchically more important area in the school environment, as all areas expand knowledge in relation to the conception of the world, society, and the individual.

Physical Education in schools cannot be understood solely from a biological perspective, since humans are constituted “based on sociological, philosophical, political, anthropological, psychological, biological, and other foundations, expressing the political direction of the curriculum” (CASTELLANI FILHO et al., 2009, p. 29). Thus, reducing the discipline solely to biological characteristics compromises its understanding of a broader conception of the world around it.

According to Saviani (1991, p. 26), the curriculum:

It is the set of core activities distributed across the school's space and time, for which systematic knowledge alone is not enough. It is essential to create the conditions for its transmission and assimilation. This means measuring and sequencing this knowledge so that students can master it.

Consequently, in addition to the systematization of teaching methods, it is imperative that educators furnish and cultivate the requisite conditions for children to access scientific knowledge and the most sophisticated aspects of all domains of knowledge. It is imperative that pedagogical planning and actions encompass the content (the subject matter to be imparted), the method (the pedagogical approach to be employed), and the recipient (the intended learners).

As Castellani Filho et al. (2009, p. 36) assert, school physical education is situated within the initial cycle, "it is the cycle of organizing the identity of reality data. In it, the student is at the moment of synchresis. They hold a syncretic view of reality." For the authors, the data manifests in a diffuse and mixed form. The onus falls on the educational institution, most notably the instructor, to meticulously organize this experiential data, thereby empowering the child to establish systems and relationships between phenomena, discerning their commonalities and divergences.

Accordingly, the authors emphasize that, within this paradigm, students are engrossed in the moment of sensory experience, with sensory references predominating. As Castellano Filho et al. (2009) note, students make a qualitative leap in this cycle when they begin to categorize, classify, and associate objects (p. 36). As the authors emphasize, the provision of substantial developmental experiences through school physical education has the potential to significantly contribute to the holistic development of young children.

Consequently, the scientific content of the subject should be taught by specialist professors who have specific training in the area and not by regular or generalist professors.

2 Physical Culture in the Context of Physical Education in Schools

School Physical Education, based on the theme of Body Culture and from the perspective of the Critical-Overcoming approach, defends the concept of omnilateral education, that is, integral development, seeking to break with biological aspects, which carry a unilateral view. From this perspective, the main objective of Physical Education is to relate physical activities to a specific goal, such as psychomotor skills, in which mechanical movement activities enhance writing, reading, and logical-mathematical operations.

Castellani Filho et al. (2009) define, within the scope of Physical Education, the perspective of reflection on Body Culture, the curricular dynamics:

It seeks to develop a pedagogical reflection on the collection of forms of representation of the world that man has produced throughout history, externalized through bodily expression: games, dances, fights, gymnastic exercises, sports, juggling, contortionism, mime, and others, which can be identified as forms of symbolic representation of realities experienced by man, historically created and culturally developed (CASTELLANI FILHO et al., 2009, p. 39).

For the authors, it is extremely important that, from this perspective of physical education, children understand that “humans were not born jumping, leaping, throwing, swinging, playing, etc. All these physical activities were

developed at certain times in history [...]" (CASTELLANI FILHO et al., 2009, p. 40). In this approach, the discipline goes beyond the understanding of an area of knowledge from a biological perspective and begins to broaden knowledge to include historical and social issues relating to humans.

As the authors state, Physical Education in schools, as an area of knowledge within the school environment, is called Body Culture and will be configured with themes or "forms of activities such as: games, sports, gymnastics, dance, or others, which will constitute its content. The study of this knowledge aims to understand bodily expression as language" (CASTELLANO FILHO et al., 2009, pp. 61-62).

Thus, it is the teacher's responsibility to systematize the teaching of these bodily manifestations produced historically by humanity, as advocated by the Critical-Overcoming approach. This approach understands the discipline as going far beyond children simply moving without intention and without clear objectives, as advocated by other non-critical pedagogical currents in Physical Education, such as developmental, Psychomotor, and Renewed Health.

Taffarel (2016, p. 16) points out that the Critical-Overcoming approach is based on

[...] in Historical-Cultural Theory, which explains how we become human beings, how the human psyche develops, in Historical-Critical Pedagogical Theory, which scientifically explains education based on criticism of educational trends, the way schools face major social challenges, the social function attributed to schools, and the didactic proposition that values a positive conception of the act of teaching (socialization and transmission of knowledge in its most developed forms, that is, science, art, philosophy, etc.).

The author considers the Marxist foundation of historical-dialectical materialism when she states that "the precepts conveyed by Historical-Cultural Psychology and Historical-Critical Pedagogy are aligned with the Critical-Overcoming teaching methodology of Physical Education [...]" (TAFFAREL, 2016, p. 18). For her, these actions contribute to those who fight in defense of quality public education.

As pointed out by Rodrigues et al. (2019, p. 19), from this perspective, teaching the different manifestations of Body Culture

It implies understanding it beyond appearances, in the multiple dimensions that constitute it: conceptual, historical, aesthetic, technical, philosophical, environmental, cultural, and scientific. So that the teaching-learning process can, to a large extent, break with the empty appearance of the manifestations that ultimately express the current social organization and the chaotic and fragmented reality in which we find ourselves.

Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to list the content to be taught to young children, organizing time and space through play and interaction, in which activities should bring meaning and significance to the objects and peers that surround them. Thus, “the purpose of Early Childhood Education is to provide the conditions for children to seize the knowledge produced and accumulated historically in all its dimensions” (RODRIGUES et al., 2019, p. 19).

Thus, school Physical Education as an area of knowledge encompasses pedagogical activities and the theme of Body Culture, and has a reason for being in the school context, in order to expand the universe of motor skills in their objective conditions, seeking the integral development of the child beyond biological and physiological issues.

According to Bracht (1992, p. 30), the development of a “theoretical body of Physical Education, which mediates its relationship with the ‘environment,’ is our task, that is, the task of the subjects that constitute Physical Education.” Thus, the author advocates the mediation of the specialist teacher in the teaching and learning process of school Physical Education, in order to maximize the child's human capacities.

Unfortunately, today, private schools offer extra classes in swimming, judo, ballet, taekwondo, indoor soccer, and others, to the detriment of school Physical Education classes. Without a doubt, these activities make excellent contributions to children, but they do not replace the structuring of the discipline as an area of

knowledge; and, in the public school system, when the discipline is included in the curriculum, it does not serve very young children, from zero to three years old, guaranteeing education only for children aged four and five.

According to Bracht (2005, p. 99), we need to overcome a certain ‘naturalism’ that has historically been present in our field:

Everything in our field was (and still is, in part) considered natural: the body is something natural, the sciences that underpin us are those of nature, the very existence and/or necessity of Physical Education is natural. Understanding our knowledge as a dimension of culture does not eliminate its natural dimension, but rather resizes it and opens our field to other knowledge, other sciences (other interpretations), and broadens our view of the knowledge to be addressed.

It is imperative to diverge from the nature-based concerns that pervade child development and physical education in schools. Only when educators assimilate theoretical and scientific concepts can they anchor their pedagogical practice, thereby fostering optimal conditions for children to flourish.

As Arce (2013) asserts, it is imperative for educators to possess a comprehensive understanding of child development and the quotidian concepts that emerge from their socio-historical and cultural contexts. This profound understanding enables educators to leverage play and interaction as effective tools to broaden the scope of children's knowledge, particularly in domains that have yet to be fully mastered.

The author posits that the activities to be implemented by the instructor are those that embody the various domains of knowledge, including "science, Portuguese language (the processes of literacy and literacy), mathematics, knowledge derived from geography, history, physical education, music, etc." (ARCE, 2013, p. 9). The author posits that educators must possess a comprehensive understanding of the developmental stages of children and the intellectual, physical, and emotional capacities that accompany them.

According to Lima and Hunger (2019, p. 7), pedagogical practices related to the body in motion

They must understand the body in all its forms of movement and expression, aiming for intentional, systematic work in Physical Education in Early Childhood Education, in order to make children reflective, critical, and autonomous. To this end, it is necessary to understand the body as it has been constructed historically and the subtle transformations that have occurred [...] in its conceptions (biological, philosophical, social, cultural) for the development of its potential, learning, and humanization.

The authors reinforce the need for teachers to understand the specific characteristics of pedagogical practice in relation to issues of the body and movement in early childhood education and to understand children and their biological and social characteristics. Therefore, it is up to teachers to seek intentionality and a theoretical foundation that is meaningful to children, with the aim of leveraging maximum human capabilities, unlike naturalizing conceptions of development.

2.1 Teaching in Early Childhood Education

Historical-Cultural Theory and Historical-Critical Pedagogy have superseded other pedagogical determinants, pointing out that teacher mediation is harmful to children and over-schooling them at this stage, preparing them for elementary school or overloading them with content.

According to Arce (2013, p. 10), we must leave behind the idea that teaching is reduced to lectures:

Teaching is the intentional production of the need to know, explore, and discover, and for that, transmission, reproduction, and imitation are essential. Teaching in Early Childhood Education is the moment when the teacher leads the child to form concepts and confront knowledge. It transmits to this child all the knowledge accumulated by humanity and present in the objects that surround us.

The author points out that teaching is an act of intentional planning, and it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the child's work. Thus, "by manipulating the child's body, by thinking together with them, seeking to introduce new knowledge. By exploring the world we live in with them, the teacher is interacting" (ARCE,

2013, p. 10). For the author, this teaching is intentional, helping the child to accomplish on their own what they are not yet able to understand, thus encouraging them to go further, thinking, imagining, and creating based on their constitution as a human being.

According to Arce (2013, p. 11), teachers teach all the time in various ways, for example:

By encouraging children to express themselves and take initiative, you create new motives and interests for them, leading them to think. This requires careful planning on the part of the teacher to balance structured activities with activities that stimulate children's free initiative, thinking with them, supporting and sharing ideas and concepts. This intentionality, which is so necessary and dear to child development, can only be understood if we dispel these myths, but above all if we dispel the idea that there is such a thing as natural child development [...].

In the domain of early childhood education, the absence of adult supervision and guidance in activities such as hygiene, nutrition, object interaction, and peer interaction can hinder the optimal development of children. This lack of structured guidance can potentially diminish the efficacy of the teacher's efforts, underscoring the importance of adult supervision in nurturing children's holistic development. As the author notes, the cultivation of these concepts is crucial for the optimal development of children, ensuring their well-being and future success. The prevailing "romantic idea of childhood" has, regrettably, deprived numerous children in our nation of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and undergo comprehensive development. Generating imbalances in the schooling process [...]" (ARCE, 2013, p. 11).

Early childhood education is the field dedicated to the instruction of children as historical subjects with the right to learn. As such, early childhood education is tasked with providing infants and young children with the cultural objectives that have been achieved historically (MARTINS; MARSIGLIA, 2015, p. 18). Consequently, teachers must assume a central role in this teaching and learning process. They must receive quality initial

training and continuing education to equip them with the necessary resources to plan the most appropriate pedagogical actions.

The central theme of planning in Early Childhood Education, as in other levels of education,

It takes place in the recipient-content-form triad, when pedagogical work is guided by knowledge about the characteristics that the child already possesses in contrast to those that do not yet exist—but which we aim to develop; it takes as its starting point the knowledge that the child already possesses and links it to what they do not yet master—but should master—choosing procedures and resources that are established as educational praxis, that is, as an ineliminable articulation between theory and practice (MARTINS; MARSIGLIA, 2015, p. 19).

To this end, this triad should be the guiding principle for all pedagogical work: what the child already knows should not be disregarded, but it is necessary to advance the content in a spiral fashion, that is, advancing and revisiting the content to be taught, so that the child can acquire new knowledge.

Thus, school physical education should be part of the Political-Pedagogical Project of the Early Childhood Education program, starting with the reality of very young children, creating situations and needs that involve motor skills in a general and non-fragmented way. This broadens the relationships between the teacher and their peers and what bodily movement is in a social context, improving locomotor skills, manipulative skills, and stabilization skills, as well as the development of higher mental functions: attention, memory, language, and behavioral control.

3 Final considerations

A review of seminal works on historical-dialectical materialism reveals that education is a privileged space for the socialization of systematized knowledge and the appropriation of sophisticated culture. Teachers thus serve as mediators in the process of teaching and learning for children. Despite the advancements in public policies concerning physical education, a decline in teaching in early childhood education persists, wherein the teacher assumes a passive role.

The dearth of specialists in the field of Physical Education within the context of Early Childhood Education does not ensure that children will acquire the conventional curriculum of the discipline, encompassing physical culture activities such as games, play, combat, gymnastics, and sports. Consequently, movement is regarded as a mere adjunct to reading and writing skills, rather than as an independent entity with its own merits.

This study underscores the significance of specialized physical education teachers in early childhood education, emphasizing their role in facilitating the optimal development of young children.

This study has the potential to expand the range of reflections and concerns among physical education teachers at this educational level. It aims to promote quality public education and legitimize the discipline as a curricular component. The objective is to enable children in daycare centers and preschools to acquire the knowledge systematized by humanity.

It is imperative to advance and consolidate the close relationship between physical culture and learning as constituent elements in the teaching and learning process in early childhood education, beyond mechanical and standardized physical knowledge. Consequently, the onus falls upon educational institutions and physical education instructors to nurture the holistic development of young learners by incorporating Karl Marx's Social Theory, Historical-Cultural Theory, Historical-Critical Pedagogy, and the Critical-Overcoming Approach into their pedagogical practices.

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