Debeeddings or Deembedding? A Discussion about Physical Education and Proposals for High School

Encaixes ou Desencaixes? Um debate sobre a educação física escolar e as propostas para o ensino médio gaúcho

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Abstract

In addition to discussing Physical Education and its curricula from the advent of recent educational policies, this article also proposes to move an important debate on the last stage of Basic Education, High School. This article presents analyses developed from the research that aimed to reflect on the inclusion of Physical Education in the Languages Area, discussing the relationship between the curricular proposals for Basic Education and the pedagogical practice of Physical Education teachers in High School. The methodology was based on Foucault’s studies. We intend to show that projects for training and formatting individuals have been placed in society and the current Brazilian reality, especially in the case of secondary education. We understand that these training projects are transposed with other discourses in order to gain the empathy and compliance of the population, which had long been questioning the organization and the teaching model. However, this is in fact a setback because, instead of reformulating methodologies and allowing knowledge to make sense for students, it causes them to remove from their formation that which does not seem interesting or useful to them, and, if in the future these individuals identify those gaps, they will be solely responsible for solving them.

Keywords: Curriculum. High school. Physical education.

Scenario

The current neoliberal political and economic context has brought about a set of measures that extend to the educational sphere. We have been noticing a growth in legal measures that have come to constitute education, especially public, as well as schools, their curricula and the individuals that move across such spaces. We refer, for instance, to the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education¹, to Law 12.796 of 2013, to Provisional Measure 746/2016, to Law 13.415 of 2017, and to the versions of the National Common Curricular Base of 2016, for Elementary Education, and of 2018, for High School.

We feel that we live in a time when educational public policies, though expanding, are weakening actions and investments in the intended goal of providing a quality education to all different individuals. From this perspective, we see a need for investigating such relations, mainly when it comes to school Physical Education, which, in many of these documents, has been undervalued. To do so, we focus on discussions around Physical Education and
Curriculum, as we understand that, in times of changes characterized by legislative and pedagogical impositions in a neoliberal scenario, this discussion is also a major challenge to be faced. Moreover, in addition to debating school Physical Education and its curricula from the advent of recent educational policies, this article also seeks to move an important debate concerning the final stage of Basic Education – High School – a period which, in recent years, has been the target of investments from the State. Such a fact can be seen, for instance, with the Brazilian Education Ministry broadcasting an advertisement about the “New High School”. This proposal, by aiming to make school programs more flexible within a so-called new model gives students the idea that they can choose a field of knowledge. This new education implies the existence of a common and mandatory portion in all institutions, which is in the BNCC, while the other one is flexible.

Guided by such questions, this article, while proposing the abovementioned discussion, presents analyses developed from a research that aimed to foster reflections about the inclusion of Physical Education in the Languages Area, with discussions on the relationship between curricular proposals for Basic Education and the pedagogical practice of Physical Education teachers in High School. Our focus is on the effects of these changes on the Physical Education curricula of Rio Grande do Sul’s state schools, especially at the High School stage. Some questions guide the study focus: What transformations and displacements has Physical Education had from its insertion in the Languages Area and from recent National Curricular Guidelines? What is the relationship between the pedagogical practice of Physical Education teachers in High School and curricular proposals? What are the implications of the latest legislative changes from Law 13.415/2017, as well as of the publishing of the latest version of the BNCC, on the pedagogical practice of High School Physical Education?

It is worth noting that the mobilization toward this research started when the 2011-2014 Pedagogical Proposal for Polytechnical High School and High-School-Integrated Professional Education was being implemented in Rio Grande do Sul, seeking to consolidate this schooling period as the final stage of Basic Education, reinforcing the comprehensiveness character present in the legislation as of LDB 9394/96. At that time, during the establishment of a policy that effectively sought to put into action a curriculum by areas of knowledge, teachers from Rio Grande do Sul’s schools and school communities manifested several doubts as to the paths of Physical Education as part of the Languages Area, along with Portuguese, Literature, Modern Foreign Languages, and Arts. Ever since, we have dedicated ourselves to the Physical Education theme in the Languages Area and its effects on individuals, schools and curricula.

**Methodological Paths**

From the abovementioned questions, we state that the main objective of this research, approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, under No 1.123.640, is to analyze and problematize the relationship between recent legislations on Physical Education in High School, and Physical Education curriculum in the state’s schools. For such a purpose, we rely on the theoretical-methodological input of Foucauldian studies on Education, along with the authors that share a post-structuralist view of analysis about educational matters, in a qualitative character of research. Thus, and understanding that individuals and truths are not fixed, but rather constituted in and by discourses, we see how useful it is to base our discussions around Physical Education, High School and curriculum on this view. That is, it seems more powerful to us to look into these issues from a perspective that, instead of seeking the truth, is vigilant about the effects, the discursivities and the forms of subjectivation that are engendered from the constitution of certain truths.
Focus on Rio Grande do Sul’s High School Physical Education

The National Education Guidelines and Framework Law/LDB, 9394/96, states in article 26, § 3, that Physical Education is a mandatory curricular component of Basic Education. However, Law 13.415/2017 brings significant amendments to the LDB, including changes in High School, as addressed in Article 35A, § 2, which sets forth that the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), referring to High School, will mandatorily have something called studies and practices on Physical Education, Arts, Sociology and Philosophy. In this sense, we understand that, at this schooling stage, Physical Education does not have its conditions as curricular component guaranteed, as it no longer counts with its permanent workload in all High School years. Furthermore, the National Common Curricular Base proposal for High School, disclosed by the Education Ministry on April 3rd, 2018, reinforces this legal determination, which establishes that only the Portuguese and Math curricular components will be mandatory. In said BNCC, Physical Education composes the Languages Area, just as in previous orientations such as the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education/DCNEB¹, but has its proposal fragilized due to very broad competences and lightened skills, which do not encompass the richness of contents and learning possibilities that emerge from the bodily culture of movement. About the Languages Area, the
BNCC does not deepen its theoretical bases, providing orientations in a realm that does not contribute to a better understanding of the insertion of Physical Education in said area. Additionally, it does not advance in relation to other documents that, when addressing the theme of languages, deepen concepts that better elucidate the dimension of the proposal.

It is understood that the organization of subjects through areas of knowledge shows the intentionality of searching for an ever-interdisciplinary education, through the interweaving of pieces of knowledge, whether in the contents of one same area, or involving more than one field of knowledge, including activities that take into account the student's context. In the LDB, it is possible to see that education must be linked to the world of labor and to social practice. In the same sense, the DCNEB advocates for a comprehensive education geared toward transformation and formation of ethical and moral values for the development of citizenship involving the world of labor, in addition to experiences and interactions in educational environments. From this perspective, article 3 of the LDB also reinforces a clear stimulus for students to reach their full intellectual, ethical and esthetic development.

Besides, in order to resume the historical process that was established at the High School stage in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, we recall that the then-Governor Tarso Genro launched, in the last quarter of 2011, the Pedagogical Proposal for Polytechnical High School and High-School-Integrated Professional Education, already mentioned, having its implementation completed in 2014. According to the Proposal, “the new educative principle of labor, by pointing out the intellectualization of competences as a central category of training, overcoming the Tayloristic/Fordistic proposal that suggested distinct paths to form leaders and workers, resumes the classic conception of Polytechnic education, understood as intellectual domain of technique”. Such a proposal aimed to constitute a High School based on the conception of Polytechnic education, on the articulation of areas of knowledge and their technologies with the culture, science, technology and labor axes, in the sense that the appropriation and construction of knowledge founds and promotes social insertion and citizenship. This Project, in consonance with the DCNEM, brought interdisciplinarity as one of its principles, advocating that the relationship between fields of study and knowledge relies on the epistemological view that conceives the object of knowledge as totality, with interference of multiple factors, in the context of contemporary scientific and technological advances.

In this same temporal context, at national level, the National Pact for Strengthening High School is instituted by means of Decree No 1.140 of November 22nd, 2013. Said project aimed to qualify High School in its different modalities and boost the ongoing training of teachers through articulated strategies, such as the Innovative High School Program – ProEMI – and Ongoing Teaching Training, in consonance with Resolution No 2/2012, which constituted the National Curricular Guidelines for High School – DCNEM.

To better support this whole proposal, the Federal Government established the National Education Plan/PNE, through Law 13.005 of 2014, which, as of the Constitutional Amendment No 59/2009, went from the condition of transitional provision of LDB 9.394/1996 to a constitutional requirement with decennial frequency, meant as a reference for pluriannual state, district and municipal plans, by means of budgetary resources for its execution. Said document has the goal of solving several counterproductive aspects related to the right of youths to education and to the search for a higher quality in the latter. For the government to be successful in this broad planning, initiated as of the 1996 LDB, 20 goals were set in the attempt of achieving the best structure possible for students, in all aspects, from Childhood Education to Higher Education, for the participation and qualification of young individuals from all social contexts. Among said goals, the third one referred to the
universalization of High School until 2016, in order to raise the net rate of enrollments in High School to 85% (eighty-five percent), until the final period of duration of said PNE.

This process, as well as others, came to an end with the legislative package formed, among other arbitrary acts, by MP 746/2016, legitimized by Law 13.415 of February 2017, as well as by the publishing of the BNCC on April 2018, mentioned earlier. In Rio Grande do Sul, the current document valid for the schools of the state network is the Curricular Restructuring of Elementary and Secondary Education, published by Rio Grande do Sul’s Education Secretariat in 2016. The document reinforces and evidences some assumptions that were being presented on the documents referred to in the beginning of this paragraph. For the Languages Area, for instance, the focus is on reading and writing, to the detriment of other skills. Moreover, the document organizes the Languages Area in High School by structuring concepts and, secondly, emphasizing reading and writing, problem solving, understanding, and being and interacting. However, this is something quite vague and does not at all guarantee the presence of contents and learnings that students need at this stage of Basic Education.

In this situation, we stress our suspicions about recent proposed changes, as they move further from the possibility of a High School whose curricular organization is intended for a comprehensive training, perspective which seems to be mistaken, in the new legislation, for full-time education. We also have curricular flexibilization through the so-called formative itineraries that substantiate the proposal of different and constant curricular arrangements in article No 36 of LDB, as of Law 13.415/2017. This flexibilization is introduced as a possibility of choosing and deepening for students. However, Veiga-Neto invites us to think about such devices to the extent that curricular organizations, by being made more flexible, model knowledge and practices sub-surreptitiously, extrapolating established epistemological and political dimensions. On the other hand, the changes introduced and labeled as a new High School bring at their core the requirement of Portuguese and Math as subjects. How to interpret a curriculum founded on this determination? Which purposes mobilize it? We reiterate it is not our intention to indicate linear relations of cause and effect, agreeing with Veiga-Neto, who states that the phenomena and relations that span the social world do not occur linearly nor unidirectionally, but promote a discussion on the possible effects of such actions.

Thus, the array of policies that set paths to High School substantiate the guidelines that have been shaping current school projects and now challenge us to think about the course of school Physical Education and curriculum. It is worth pointing out that we do not believe in a savior curriculum nor that there may be a best curriculum for school Physical Education, but we defend the need for analyzing how certain practices emerge and become truths that constitute students and teachers. Veiga-Neto, when considering curriculum, argues that the point is to look into how the “school machinery is instituting new subjectivation processes and producing new individuals”12. We believe that this “look” into curriculum and Physical Education might help us understand how some truths are configured in this field and, at the same time, understand which types of individuals and of Physical Education are being constituted.

**Curriculum as artifact of disembedding**

The discussions brought herein about the curriculum theme are aligned with the reasoning of authors that problematize from a post-structuralist bias of thinking education. Specifically concerning the understanding of curriculum, we highlight researches conducted by Veiga-Neto and Silva. According to Veiga-Neto, curriculum was an invention of Modernity in order to orient the emerging school education toward an emphasis on
disciplining individuals. With that same understanding, Silva takes curriculum as an invention of our society.18

It is worth noting that such an understanding of curriculum helps us problematize the contingencies in which certain curricular conceptions are being engendered for school Physical Education. They concern arrangements and deliberations invented at this time and serve a certain political-economic-social logic tuned with neoliberalism. With Veiga-Neto, we learned that, at these times, curriculum operates by control and by normalization and standardization practices, acting in the constitution of flexible, liquid, unfinished, performative, cosmopolitan individuals.16

We have been seeing current Brazilian legislative practices serving the neoliberal precepts and forms of exercise of power. Concepts supposed to envision a flexible, contemporary individual, who is their own entrepreneur, autonomous and responsible for their own success, but that, more than ever, converge into modes of subjectivation turned to the constitution of a neoliberal subject. That is, one who, for instance, believes it to be their responsibility to be successful, even in disadvantaged educational conditions. According to Foucault,19 the neoliberal exercise of power requires individuals to make themselves governable, but this will only be possible if they become homo economicus, "entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings." Combined with this, we have the idea of the Human Capital Theory, which would be the non-separation between capital and labor, in which one considers the investments, of various types, that constitute the individual. About this theory, Costa20 states that the object of this idea of political economy is the behavior of individuals. Thus, we have less State and more individual accountability, that is, it is the individual who must invest in themselves to become a competitive, successful person, corroborating to a State that put their actions at the service of neoliberalism.

Bearing in mind these conditions, we highlight the discussion on the interweaving of neoliberalism, State, curriculum and school. One point is the emphasis given to curricula by competence, as exemplified by the recent National Common Curricular Base, which brings the competences of each curricular component. Nonetheless, in Rio Grande do Sul, the document published in 2016 states: "curriculum is understood as a broad network of knowledge that transforms school experiences into meaningful, collectively constructed learning. Thus, the school must structure it in the form of competences." Authors such as Costa question this arrangement stating that competences are connected to the idea of human capital development, measuring and comparing what is valuable to the market. Additionally, Veiga-Neto21 drew our attention to the fact that the role of the school in neoliberalism is to mold an individual-client of neoliberalism itself. Someone that is stimulated to wanting to be in the game and stay in the game.

Well, this is what we have been seeing happening in the Physical Education context; as Physical Education knowledge and space are given less relevance in the school curriculum, we have also seen the emergence of a series of encouragements for one to learn, for example, how to know their own body, to learn about culture and to take care of their health in different private spaces. There is a shift of the State's accountability to the individual and private realm.

Recent documents include a number of deliberations affirming the space and competences of Physical Education in the current school setting. The space is that of the Languages Area, a place that, for more than 15 years, has been engendered for Physical Education. At this limit – when several current documents highlight Writing and Math as the core of the Brazilian population's education –, Physical Education composes a field along with Portuguese, Arts, Literature and Modern Foreign Language. In schools, such determinations have caused an immense discomfort in Physical Education teachers, who, somehow, have doubts about the knowledge they should work on with their students, thus
leaving many questions at the margin of the learning process by understanding that the focus would be on working with a quite restricting bodily language, besides noting that, within the Languages Area, Portuguese is oftentimes given more value, to the detriment of other subjects. Nevertheless, as we have already addressed, when we analyze the competences targeting the Languages Area in the current BNCC of High School, there is no explicit mention of Physical Education. What we can do is, within a more consistent analysis, try to identify the following competence for Physical Education: "Understand the multiple aspects that involve the production of meanings in the social practices of the bodily culture of movement, recognizing them and experiencing them as means for expression of values and identities, from a perspective of democracy and respect to diversity." Our identification with Physical Education as to this competence is based on the reference to the bodily culture of movement, which, for years, has been taken as object of study in school Physical Education, because there is no explicit reference to Physical Education. A quite vague and negligent stance with respect to what many teachers and scholars in the field expected – had as ideal – for this component at the last stage of Basic Education.

When we think about what is expected for the Physical Education curriculum in High School and that which is being determined for said curriculum, we propose, from Anthony Giddens' book The Consequences of Modernity, in which the author develops an institutional analysis of Modernity, a reflection on disembedding. In his piece of work on Modernity, the author speaks of disembedding as "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space". The author, when speaking of the development of modern social institutions, brings as example two situations he calls "disembedding mechanisms": symbolic tokens (money) and experts (expert professionals). Situations which were not present in other moments, but that are instituted as part of modern time. Transversini, from that author's contributions, when approaching the disembbeding of the contemporary school, considers that this is a form of existence of today's school. In the shift from discipline to flexibility, the school reconfigures itself and takes on other roles, such as that of protecting children against the risk of social vulnerability, or even the role of developing individuals that learn to be healthy and ecologically conscious. From this perspective, the school would be disembbeded for being operating according to the logic of another order, different from what was expected from it. The emphasis is on guiding individuals, not on learning, hence the disembbeding.

Nonetheless, considering the relationship among educational policies, curricula and school Physical Education, some researchers in the Physical Education field have highlighted quite pertinent points. Borges, for instance, when debating how curricular policies for Physical Education have been constituting certain types of individuals, warns us that, although the subjects of education may be effects of different relations, "Physical Education teachers have a field of possibilities to adopt a variety of discourses and attitudes, which may cause one to fail to identify with or even object these discourses conveyed on the investigated documents." Oliveira and Neira, in their turn, when analyzing documents concerning Bahia's elementary education, show that this document indicates a hybridization by trying to converge different discourses and, in this sense, stress that "a hybrid curriculum does not dissolve tensions among the different voices in dispute, because they are not subject to the same conditions of enunciation." From the considerations of these authors, who have also investigated legislative orientations for school Physical Education, it is possible to apprehend that, although the documents analyzed in this research contain few considerations on the work to be developed in High School Physical Education and an emphasis on guiding conducts, there is still a possibility for seeking to constitute curricula and developing a work committed to learning.
Final Note

From the analyses and remarks herein presented, we intended to evidence that projects for forming and formatting individuals are being established in the current Brazilian society and reality, especially when it comes to High School. Stating "With the New High School you can choose your future" as slogan, the government makes use of a discourse in which youths are the protagonists by choosing the subjects and sorts of knowledge that most appeal to them, thus making the individuals themselves accountable for their own formative paths and courses, as entrepreneurs of themselves, as autonomous individuals responsible for their own success, but also for their own failure, that is, they aim at the formation and construction of neoliberal individuals, using a discursivity that convinces, that captures them.

As we have presented along this text, we understand that every and any teaching project intends to form some type of individual from the convictions and intents that guide and sustain them. Still, what we herein emphasize is that this project, just as many others that are being subtly making their way into curricular disputes, transfers to society and to individuals the commitment to their training and professional future. Youths at the ages of 15 and 16 are then expected to be capable of making the best decisions about their professional future, to have an entrepreneurial vision. In this way, individuals start to believe that they have control over means and processes to achieve their success and may even convince themselves that they are making their own decisions freely while, in reality, said choices are not fully autonomous. When a young individual "chooses" to pursue a technical career instead of "choosing" to pursue academic studies, what are their conditions of choosing? What are the possibilities for them to choose another path? What discourses and narratives have already been produced and legitimized as to their possibilities of professional activity?

In this sense, we understand that such formative projects are concealed with other discourses in order to gain the empathy and compliance of the population, which, from long ago, was already questioning the teaching organization and model. However, this is in fact a setback, as, instead of reformulating methodologies and allowing knowledge to make sense for students, allows removing from their formation that which, for them, does not seem interesting or useful, and if in the future these individuals identify these gaps, they will be the only ones responsible for solving them.

In Rio Grande do Sul's current curricular proposals, including the Curricular Restructuring of Elementary and Secondary Education, we reiterate that Physical Education knowledge and space are being undervalued in the school curriculum, moving accountability away from the State to the individual. Finally, by bringing these reflections about disembedding to shed light on the Physical Education curriculum we can consider that, although we are highlighting a disembedding between what is expected from High School Physical Education and what is being proposed by a new curricular logic – such as the BNCC of High School –, we are also witnessing a disembedding of this curriculum with the insidious neoliberal logic.

References

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