

In search of the autonomous and critical individual: a philosophical and pedagogical analysis of the physical education curriculum of São Paulo (Brazil)

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Background: Academics, teachers and policy-makers across the world have discussed how to develop a relevant physical education (PE) curriculum that addresses the ‘body education’ needs and interests of twenty-first-century students. In Brazil, after the launch of the national curricular parameters (PCNs) in the late 1990s, many new PE curricula have emerged, some, such as the curriculum of the state of São Paulo (SP), claiming to be truly innovative in the promotion of the autonomous and critical individual. In 2006, SP, as the richest and most populous Brazilian State, convened several groups of specialists to design new curricula in all school areas, including PE. Curricula proposals always have a set of underpinning values and philosophies and the PE curriculum in SP seems to have enhanced its school function to beyond the sports restricted interests.

Purpose: This article aims to examine the philosophical and pedagogical directions that support the new PE curriculum in SP. It asks on what concepts of *culture*, *body* and *movement* the São Paulo physical education (SP/PE) curriculum is based; how the education of the autonomous individual is conceptualised and how the curriculum enhances the teaching of students’ *body* practices. It also considers the ways in which autonomy is lived in an environment historically marked by social inequality.

Research design: In reflecting on these questions this paper adopts the notion of one’s own body as a ‘unit of meaning’). It also draws on concept of education as the development of a critique of reality as the basis for transforming it. It discusses *movement culture* (MC), a central idea in the SP/PE curriculum derived from these practices of critique and transformation, as well as the concept of *Sich-Bewegen*, which emphasises *movement* as a proper expression of the individual.

Conclusions: The traditional notion of being ‘physically educated’ as proposed by Corbin has been superseded in the new curriculum. It appears that the SP/PE curriculum is challenging educators to address new key issues in their educational practices: to foster critical thinking about both the content and themes addressed by the PE curriculum; to consider cultural diversity whilst teaching; to move away from standardised proposals; and to enhance, in students, critical views of the MC content presented in the media, and thereby to encourage students to take into account the media thematic axis as a starting and an ending point for their educational practices.

Keywords: physical education curriculum; phenomenology; emancipatory pedagogy; dialogic pedagogy; Brazilian physical education

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Introduction

During the 1990s, the Brazilian Government assembled educators and academics to write the national curricular parameters (PCNs)¹ for all educational fields in order to offer theoretical and practical guidelines to support the states and cities of Brazil to write their own curricula, looking to develop new comprehensive curricula to the twenty-first-century school. More recently (2006), the state of São Paulo (SP) convened several educational specialists to write new curricula in all school areas. As a result of this process, many innovative curricula proposals are at present being implemented across the State. The aim of this paper is to discuss the pedagogical values and philosophy that underlie the conceptual framework of the new physical education (PE) curriculum in SP (Brazil).

In recent decades, academics, teachers and policy-makers have discussed, in different countries as well as in diverse social contexts, the future of PE (Kirk 2010). More specifically, they have taken on board the mission to develop new curriculum proposals which can address the central issues of a meaningful 'body education' in the twenty-first century (Penney and Chandler 2000).

A substantial part of these reflections is connected with the notion that historically PE has considered 'the body in nature (the biological and mechanical body)' rather than the body as a cultural and social construct (Kirk 2010, 99). Kirk (2010) suggests, though, that new PE curricula must incorporate a notion of physical culture in which 'the human body is in nature and culture simultaneously'. Therefore, if body is to be regarded as part of the cultural domain, a meaningful PE curriculum has to have a cultural approach to the students' body education as well. As highlighted by Jewett, Bain, and Ennis (1995, 89), a significant curriculum should help students not only to understand but also to value the cultural diversity that is present in their school lives. According to the authors, the increase in student diversity challenges physical educators to develop curricula with meaningful contents that value cultural pluralism and 'respect each individual's culture', which includes students' own physical culture too. Adding to this idea, Timken and Watson (2010) believe that physical educators face a huge challenge when trying to build up inclusive curricula and contents in an area which has been dominated by 'athletic privilege' (124). The authors' concept of inclusive PE goes beyond the notion of 'disabled body', and aims to construct a 'culturally responsive teaching (. . .) in which teachers are responsive to the culture, needs, interests, learning preferences and abilities of each student' (126).

The need to consider innovative curriculum and novel approaches for PE, aligned with the new international trends, has had its impact on Brazilian PE thinking. The claims for a more cultural- and social-focused PE curriculum (Kirk 2010; Metzler 2011) are clearly present in the new São Paulo physical education (SP/PE) curriculum.

SP has a very large and diverse public education programme, with 5.5 million students in public elementary and high schools and over 14,000 PE teachers. In the past few years, there have been significant and innovative changes in the SP/PE curriculum, which have been magnified by the political and economic power of this state within the Brazilian context.

SP is the richest and most populous state in Brazil, with over 41 million inhabitants. It has high social, economic and political status in Brazil. As a result, all sorts of policies and changes that take place in SP resonate across the entire country. This is also true for educational policies and pioneering school programmes.

Every educational curriculum has its set of values and a philosophy that underpins its proposals (Evans and Penney 1995). The SP/PE curriculum reflects the principles of movement culture (MC) through its claim to develop autonomous citizens. This claim is a

significant innovation for a field traditionally based on the teaching of games, sports, gymnastics, martial arts, dance and the development of physical skills by individuals. Given the ambitions of the new PE curriculum, it is important to ask what philosophical and pedagogical principles make it possible to conceive of PE as capable of producing critical and autonomous individuals. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's approach to phenomenology, we carry out an analysis of the concepts of body, movement and culture that support the curricular proposal, its contents and themes. This analysis will also draw on Kunz's (1991, 1994) work in the area of Brazilian PE, which was developed from the phenomenologically inspired work of Tamboer (1979) and Trebels (2003). In addition, Freire's (2000, 2002) arguments for the education of autonomous and critical individuals within structural situations of adversity and oppression will be used to analyse the SP/PE curriculum. The guiding questions are:

- (1) On what concepts of *body*, *movement* and *culture* is the new PE curriculum in the state of SP based?
- (2) On what basis is it claimed that critical *body* education practices can result in the autonomous and critical individuals?
- (3) How is the belief in autonomy 'lived' in an environment historically marked by social inequality?

As part of our reflection on the philosophical and pedagogical trends that underpin the new SP/PE curriculum, we first examine successive pedagogic ideologies within Brazilian PE history. Next, we analyse the philosophical principles behind the ideas of *body*, *movement* and *culture* that underpin the SP/PE curriculum to identify their relation to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1978, 2000, 2002). Then we draw upon the ideas of Freire (2000, 2002) in order to look at the ways in which the education of autonomous and critical individuals takes place.

This paper discusses the importance of making clear the philosophy that drives curriculum writers when developing their educational proposals. It contributes to current conversations that are being conducted internationally over the educational foundations of a contemporary body education that takes into account twenty-first-century students' needs and interests (Hardmann and Joe 2005). It also suggests further directions that the SP/PE curriculum could take to build on the innovations and embrace the demands of the cultural and social diversity of the SP student population.

A brief glance at Brazilian PE pedagogical history

The aim of this section is to give to the reader a brief synopsis of the ideas that have successively influenced Brazilian PE since the start of last century. This overview is not intended to be exhaustive; on the contrary, its main purpose is to place the pedagogies that have influenced Brazilian PE in a historical context.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, Brazilian PE was under the influence of concepts such as health-oriented 'hygienism' (Ghiraldelli Junior 1997; Betti 2009). The concept of hygienism/eugenics, held mainly by the army, proposed PE as an agent of public sanitation, and favoured the organic strengthening of the Brazilian people. The military thought that Brazilians were physically weak and therefore more likely to become ill. Hygienist ideals also preached the formation of moral qualities such as discipline, tenacity and patriotism, all leading to the 'soldier-citizen' preparation (Ghiraldelli Junior 1997, 18).

As the twentieth century progressed, the military actively continued to influence school PE. From the end of the 1930s till mid-1940s, Brazil was under the control of the Vargas dictatorship (1937–1945), which was supported by the army. PE was included in the school curriculum during that period, with a strong emphasis on military exercises and gymnastics (Betti 2009).

World War II outcomes favoured the liberal democracies and Brazil was pushed to elect a democratic government. The democratic atmosphere opened room for new pedagogies. ‘The New School’ movement, mainly shaped by the ideas of John Dewey (1859–1952), helped to introduce renewed perspectives on PE in schools. Even with a few remaining aspects of the hygienic ideology, PE began to incorporate the social and educational facets of games and sports rather than gymnastics and individual exercising. Sports and games began to be seen as tools to reach the whole human being in not only biological but also psychological and social domains. PE was leaving behind the one-dimensional physiological hygienist concepts (Betti 2009). However, in the 1960s, the military returned, this time to assume government themselves.

During the military dictatorship (1964–1984), school PE was associated with sports and with producing student athletes capable of projecting Brazil’s achievements internationally (Del Priore and Melo 2009). Biology and sports training were emphasised in teacher education, with slogans such as ‘sport is education’ because ‘it teaches you to play by the rules’. Opportunities in the classroom were given to students who performed best in terms of sporting prowess.

After this period, PE was based on the notion of the ‘physically educated’ individual. This emerged out of the model proposed by Corbin (1987), and was taken up by Brazilian researchers in the area of health (Nahas and Corbin 1992). However, these researchers did not have a pedagogical approach to the teaching and learning of PE, and failed to take into consideration the multi-faceted nature of health and its many determining factors (Ferreira 2001).

A ‘developmental’ proposal that emphasised motor behaviour (Tani, Manoel, Kokubun, and Proença 1988) also had a significant influence on the PE curriculum at the time. It focused on the categorisation of human movements, but was criticised because it reduced the complexity of human movement to measurable behavioural characteristics (Freire da Silva 1989). The ‘sportification’ of PE was also criticised because it subordinated pedagogical proposals to the sporting system (Betti 2009) and to the commercial interests of sport as a television spectacle (Betti 1998). Next we look at how the democratisation of the country led to changes in school curricula that influenced the revitalisation of Brazilian PE.

Democracy, the PCNs and PE renewal

With the return of Brazil to democracy in the early 1980s, emerging civil liberties promoted new ideas for achieving social justice. They also led to a revival of interest in critical proposals in the academic sector, with significant implications for school education. This democratisation process favoured the creation of propositions for the renewal of PE in the country.

At the end of the 1980s, humanistic theories found their way into Brazilian PE. Since this period, critical theories and emancipatory ideologies have slowly replaced the previous emphasis in PE pedagogy on the biological and behavioural sciences. A key theme of these approaches, underpinned by Marxist theoretical frameworks, was social transformation (Saviani 1985).

Other theories such as phenomenology, ethnography and systemic sociology also informed the proposed changes in the PE curriculum. The phenomenologically related approach of Kunz (1991, 1994) presented both new perspectives for analysing the ‘body in movement’ and didactic references for the teaching–learning process. Ethnographic studies attributed value to the cultural dynamic that characterises PE classes, celebrating cultural diversity and individual differences based on the notion of alterity (Daolio 1995). Owing to these influences, the predominant theoretical orientation in Brazilian PE over the last decades has been towards critical and emancipatory theories (Daolio 2004). These theories propose persuasive arguments that are contrary to the notion of a ‘physically educated person’, to ‘motor development’ and to the ‘sportification’ of PE.

The changes in Brazilian education policies contributed to the renewal of the pedagogical bases for PE. In a democratic scenario, new parameters (such as the PCNs mentioned above) and federal laws^{2,3} were based on constructions of citizenship and proposed discussion of relevant social issues, such as work, sexuality, ethics, cultural diversity and the environment (Brazil 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000).

The PCNs were very significant to PE. The PCNs incorporated several cornerstones of the critical pedagogical theoretical framework that was being formulated within the Brazilian academic community from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The PCNs featured concepts such as movement culture (MC) and pedagogical principles like inclusion and diversity, with the aim of reversing past PE pedagogies that had devalued the less physically capable students. With the enlargement of both learning objectives and contents, the PCNs were also aiming to increase the learning possibilities of all students.

These parameters also granted autonomy to the states and cities to develop their own curricula based on general guidelines. Currently, several Brazilian states and cities have curricula that incorporate these humanistic pedagogical advances in PE, although aspects of the biological and behavioural sciences can also be observed. The new SP/PE curriculum has magnified as well as reframed the critical and humanistic concepts of the PCNs; it has expanded the potential for students to embody their movement culture (MC), with a critical-emancipatory approach that makes students the central actors in their body education.

The new PE curriculum in the state of SP

Two specific concepts underpin the curriculum of SP: MC and *Sich-Bewegen*⁴ (São Paulo 2008). MC is understood as the meanings, symbols and codes that are dynamically (re)produced in games, sports, dance, martial arts, gymnastics and that influence, dynamise and/or constrain the *Sich-Bewegen* of human beings. *Sich-Bewegen* is the basis of human beings’ expressive dialogue with the world and with others and is an individual and/or group expression within the scope of MC (São Paulo 2008). *Sich-Bewegen* refers to the relationship that subjects establish with culture based on ‘their repertoire of information/knowledge, movements and behaviors; their life histories; their sociocultural alliances; and their desires’ (43).

The interplay of *Sich-Bewegen* and MC occurs in the new SP/PE curriculum through the encounter of a content axis and a thematic axis. Figure 1 presents the dynamic interrelationships between the content (*games, sports, gymnastics, martial arts, rhythmic activities*) and contemporary social themes (*Human Organism, Movement and Health; Body, Health and Aesthetics; Contemporariness; Media; and Leisure and Work*). For example, from the relationships between the content *Sports* and the theme *Media*, a sub-theme *Spectacularisation of Sport* may emerge; between *Rhythm* and *Contemporariness*, the sub-theme *Gender*; between *Games* and *Leisure*, *The Presence of Games/Play in Free Time* and so on.

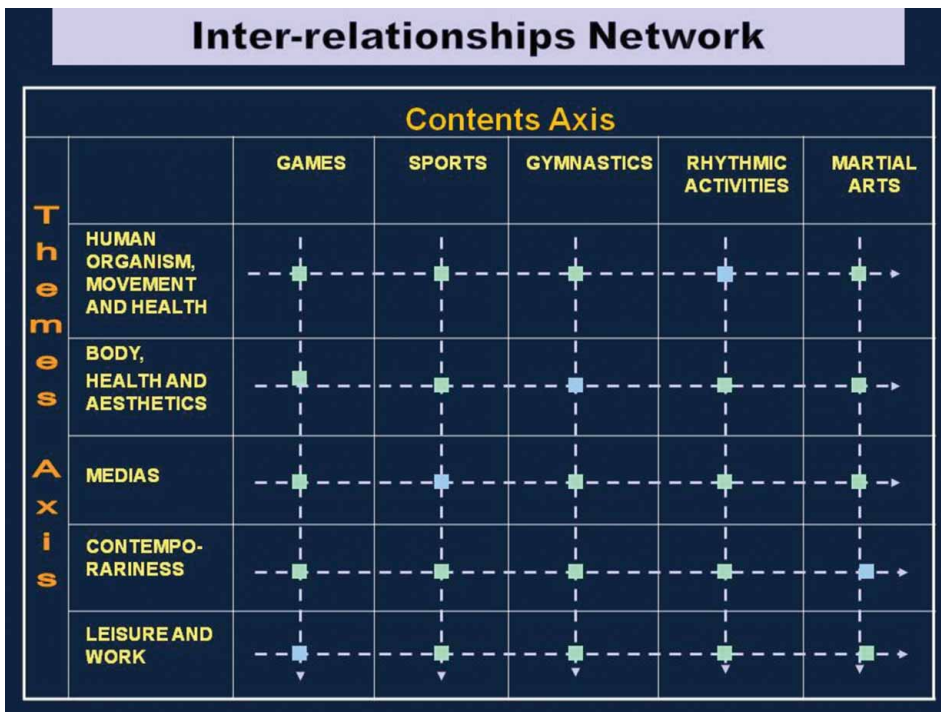


Figure 1. Inter-relationships between the themes and the contents (Figure adapted from Betti et al. 2010, 113).

As Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology constitutes the basis for the theory of human movement developed by Tamboer (1979), Trebels (2003) and Kunz (1991, 1994, 2006) – and for the Sich-Bewegen concept that underpins the SP/PE curriculum – in the next section, we turn to Merleau-Ponty's key ideas about body and movement; following that, we try to make clear the rapport between these ideas and the philosophical concepts that underpin the SP/PE curriculum.

Phenomenological underpinnings of the new curriculum

Merleau-Ponty (1978, 2000, 2002) discusses perception, body, movement and signification as a system of totality – a *gestalt*. For Merleau-Ponty, the human being's immersion in the world is fundamentally corporeal. It is, he says, *in* and *with* the body that I relate to the world and to other human beings, that I perceive and am perceived – because I both *am* and *have* a body; the world is not 'what I think it is, but what I live through' (1978, xvi–xvii).

Merleau-Ponty discusses an ambiguity between one's *own body* and the *objective body*: the objective body is the body as an object like any other in the world, which the sciences attempt to explain, and which only exists conceptually. Merleau-Ponty understands that *movement* is the key element that gives to one's own body its dimension of *transcendence*. It is only in the course of body movement and self-reflection that a human being can develop a real consciousness of their body *in* the world.

Merleau-Ponty situates the human condition in an indeterminate place between nature and culture, hence indicating the constitutive ambiguity of one's own body. If the body is not an object, then 'my awareness of it is not a thought' and therefore 'its unit is always implicit and vague'; it is 'rooted in nature at the very moment when it is transformed by cultural influences' (Merleau-Ponty 1978, 198). This account of the body re-opens a space for studying it as a physiological organism by situating it simultaneously on the planes of nature and culture, without it being subject to the reductionism of the traditional biological sciences.

Following Merleau-Ponty's understandings of the body, we suggest, along with Tamboer (1979), that corporeality can be recognised in one's own movement – *Sich-Bewegen*.

The concept of *Sich-Bewegen* emphasises *movement* as an expression of the individual themselves, and not as part of pre-determined mechanical models, as in the biomechanical and behaviourist models of human movement that separate movement from the subject-that-moves.

Tamboer (1979), in order to formulate the concept of *Sich - Bewegen*, returns to the 'dialogical concept of movement' of Gordijn (1968) and Gordijn et al. (1975), whereby movement is one of the ways in which the original relationship between the human/world is manifested, and action is a way of understanding the world. Based on this ontological precept, Gordijn formulates *Sich-Bewegen* as a dialogue between the human and the world, in which both participate in the constitution of movement, and therefore are not isolated from each other.

In *Sich-Bewegen* the human being relates to something outside her/himself – another person or thing. The meaning of this 'Other' is questioned – a ball, for example, may be questioned regarding its properties of rolling or bouncing: I can talk about the ball and watch it closely, but it is only when I make it roll or bounce that I question it as to its meaning, and it answers me. *Sich-Bewegen* is therefore born out of an inter-relationship of totality (a *Gestalt*) between the human and the world; the person and the concrete situation, which cannot be conceptualised as a sum of isolated factors. Consequently, as a dialogical event, this is a personal-situational form of meaning. As Kunz (2006) explains, *Sich-Bewegen* is always directed at something, shows something or does something; it is filled with intentionality and meaning.

In the next section, we explain how the phenomenological views of the human body are presented in the SP/PE curriculum. We show how – through the interrelationships between themes and content that are displayed in the thematic and content network of the SP/PE curriculum – it is possible to understand both thematic intentionality and operative intentionality. We will make clear that the connections appear exactly where the student's needs and interests are: in the content axis, the cultural forms of movement. There, the main issue is to identify the physiological organism in movement, the body that moves *with* other bodies *in* the world.

Merleau-Ponty, *Sich-Bewegen* and MC in the new SP/PE curriculum

A relationship between one's own body and the world is embedded in the new SP/PE curriculum. When we look at the thematic axis (Figure 1), we can observe how a broad theme such as *Body, Health and Aesthetics* has an 'organic' interface with all PE content. Such interfaces allow the students to, through the PE content, live their corporeality whilst acknowledging the transcendence of the body. The body is no longer an object: it is an 'identifiable being projected outwards'. As an example, between the theme *Body, Health and Aesthetics* and the content *Rhythmic Activities*, sub-themes such as local and global

dances can surface, bringing to students not only the experience of different dance styles, but also the understanding of how dance can impact on their embodied aesthetics.

It is therefore in the relationship *with* the world that the human being expresses her/his existence. In PE, it is not enough to merely analyse the movement of a body within a given space; it is also necessary to understand how the subject confronts the world and her/his own existence in acting and expressing the meaning of her/his own movement *with* others and *in* the world.

The philosophical principle of ‘the meaningful body’ is evident in the purposes of the SP/PE curriculum for Basic Education:

To diversify, systematize and deepen the experiences of *Sich-Bewegen* within the areas of play, games, sports, gymnastic, martial arts, and rhythmic cultures, to provide the students with new experiences of movement, opening up the possibility for ‘new significations’, which also includes the ‘re-signification’ of experiences already lived. (São Paulo 2008, 45)

The SP/PE curriculum is explicit about the significance of team games and sports in developing the students’ *inter-subjectivity*. Indeed, this is a fundamental dimension in team games and sports (Betti et al. 2007; Knijnik 2009). It is in the relationship *with* the other that I open myself up to the world; I perceive the presence of this other in me and at the same time, I find myself limited by it, thereby opening up the possibility of becoming unique (Merleau-Ponty 2000). For example, in team games involving a ball, the rapport between the player and the ball is not a ‘direct’ and ‘pure’ connection, but one that occurs through the movements that constantly rearrange the relationships between the players and the ball. Since the ball is perceived by me as a player, it is also perceived by the other players – it is *universal*. Therefore, we ‘rehearse’ the play of the other, experiencing ourselves within the body of the other. However, if the other player makes an unexpected gesture, I soon perceive that I have no control over her/him. Thus, I create a sign (i.e., I signify) in order to fill the gap that has formed between us. From this perspective, there is a signification that is being remade in accordance with the situations in the game.

The new significations which are made explicit in every lesson of the new SP/PE curriculum find echo in Merleau-Ponty’s words (1978, 183): ‘the new sense-giving intention knows itself only by donning already available meanings, the outcome of previous acts of expression’; what exists are the relationships that make it possible to create significations or re-significations regarding any given thing in the world – and the SP/PE curriculum, within its lessons underpinned by the dialectical rapport between the contents and values of MC and each student’s *Sich-Bewegen*, puts emphasis on these rapports. As Merleau-Ponty (2000) suggests, if I can transcend myself towards the world and towards the other, I have possibilities, and the possibilities of the world are also mine, since we are made of the same *flesh*.

It is important to recognise that the SP/PE curriculum highlights the social relationships amongst students within PE classes. For Merleau-Ponty (2000, 2002), while the Other is also a thing among the other things in the world, it is also a special ‘thing’, and since it never reveals itself fully to the ‘own person’, there always remains a trace of mystery.

The concept of MC elaborated by Kunz (1991, 1994) is constituted in the dialectic between the phenomenological world of movements (derived from the notion of the ‘experienced world’ – *Lebenswelt* – (formulated by Husserl⁵) and the cultural meanings of movement arising from several actors, especially the media. This last creates hegemonic values that condition and restrict the *Sich-Bewegen* of individuals. That is the reason why

the SP/PE curriculum proposes as central the relationship between the content of PE classes and the flow of information in the contemporary world.

Based on the concepts of *Sich-Bewegen* and MC, and supported by the ideas of Freire (2000, 2002), Kunz draws up a proposal for PE that he calls 'critical-emancipatory'. This proposal considers the social-cultural context and the need to emancipate subjects *via* critical questioning of the meanings of the movements in all PE content and practices.

It is within this scenario that we should comprehend one of the purposes of the SP/PE curriculum for High School: to 'understand sports, gymnastics, martial arts, and rhythmic activities as social-cultural phenomena, in tune with the themes of our time and the lives of the students, expanding knowledge within the scope of the MC' (São Paulo 2008, 46). The SP/PE curriculum stands as an example of a theoretical-methodological proposal that contributes to breaking down the limits of linearity, by explaining and making the connection between 'body', 'movement' and 'culture', 'subject' and 'world'.

Autonomy, critical reflection and *body* practices

The SP/PE curriculum aims to enable students to become more critical (and self-critical) in the decision-making processes that impact on the conditions of their existence. The curriculum emphasises that it is not enough for the student to know about the PE content such as sport, martial arts and dance; nor is it enough to know about the body and its movement. This type of knowledge would be, in Merleau-Ponty's language, merely *conceptual significations*.

Rather, it proposes that students elaborate their knowledge *through* the corporeal experiences of PE classes, towards a critical consciousness of the MC. The critical-emancipatory proposition of Kunz (1994, 2006), also based on the concepts of *Sich-Bewegen* and MC, points to didactic principles in PE that support the quest for preparation aimed at autonomy and critique:

- Identifying the central meaning of movements, which can be made easier by showing the original intentionality of the movement; for example, the intention of the long jump is to leap as far as possible, and not to jump further than anyone else, as in the case of a sporting competition.
- Finding alternative ways of successfully performing the movements.
- Sharing discoveries and meanings, using verbal language and/or the language of movement.
- Questioning the cultural meaning of the movements, with special attention to the values spread by the several media channels.

The contribution to human emancipation is based on an understanding of the intentionality of the process of signification of the movement by the subject, a subject who perceives their own body in movement within the cultural context in which relationships with people and things occur. However, it is also necessary to remain attentive to the fact that school practices 'constrain' the possible experiences of students when they seek to 'translate' everything that is experienced into words. This way of 'reading the world' may constitute a barrier to understanding and attributing value to dialogical experiences in PE that are not easily communicated through words. In this case, they are not considered to be under the authorship of the subjects, who create other forms of expression, but they need to become cognisable to the students, given the educational purposes of the school.

However, for Merleau-Ponty, speech is a special gesture because it enables a return to significations available within a linguistic community: speech is the only one among all the expressive operations capable of settling and constituting inter-subjective knowledge. Inter-subjectivity is also manifest here, because ‘there is, then, a taking up of others’ thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think according to others which enriches our own thoughts’ (Merleau-Ponty 1978, 179).

But if we recognise, as Merleau-Ponty does (2002, 106), that it is a characteristic of human gestures ‘to signify beyond the simple existence of fact, to inaugurate a meaning’, then the result is that all gestures are *comparable*; all gestures are ‘allied to, or complicit with, all other attempts at expression’. Therefore, as Betti et al. (2007) conclude, one’s own movement, the confrontation of experiences and forms of *Sich-Bewegen* with one’s own self or with another by means of speech or other languages in order to think *about* movement are all means of expressing existence.

In line with this understanding, the learning situations proposed in the SP/PE curriculum seek to avoid dissociating the ‘cognitive’ from the ‘motor’ and verbal/written language from the language of movement. Neither do they dissociate operant intentionalities and thematic intentionalities, nor existential significations and conceptual significations. For this reason, the paths of learning suggested in the curriculum always propose a return, through a variety of languages, to previously constituted significations in order to transcend them. This transcendence is made possible through a reflexive and critical effort, made both individually and collectively, that generates new significations and re-significations.

It is in this context that we can understand the intentions behind the SP/PE curriculum for high school: enabling students to ‘broaden the possibilities of *Sich-Bewegen* and the meanings/senses of movement in games, sports, gymnastics, martial arts and rhythmic activities, moving towards the construction of critical and self-critical autonomy’ (São Paulo 2008, 46).

As represented in Figure 2, the curriculum emphasises identification, recognition, analysis, elaboration, appreciation and intervention in relation to the various levels and types of practices within the scope of the MC. It aims for students to attain, in their individual and collective lives, an autonomy that is both *critical* (capable of distinguishing and attributing value to criteria) and *self-critical* (capable of evaluation of the self within relationships experienced with things and other humans). However, the SP/PE curriculum also acknowledges that autonomy cannot be an individual project; it must be embedded in the social lives of students. Hence, Freire’s concepts of social oppression, autonomy and emancipation are essential to fully understand the SP/PE curriculum philosophy.

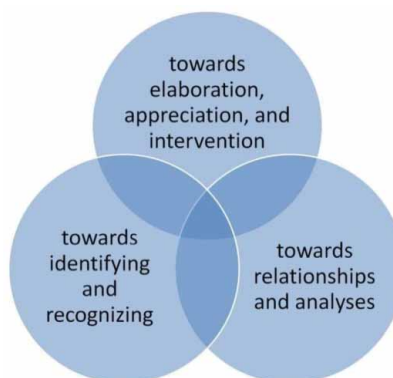


Figure 2. Senses for critical and self-critical autonomy.

Becoming autonomous in an environment marked by social inequality

In this section we use a Freirean approach to analyse how the curriculum addresses the needs of students living in poor social conditions – those called by Freire (2002) ‘the oppressed’.

According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), social inequality is prevalent around the world. The authors sustain that this situation is a challenge for educational systems. They emphasise the need for school curricula which address social justice issues and make students conscious of the necessity of social change.

While comparing social indicators around the globe, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) provide data that place Brazil amongst the world’s most socially inequitable countries. At the same time, in what may be seen as a contradiction, the authors affirm that the Brazilian population is one of the ‘happiest’ in the world⁶ (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, 9).

Despite being the richest state in Brazil, social inequality is also widespread in SP; according to official data of the Brazilian Federal Government, in SP there are a number of wealthier cities and others that are among the poorest in the country (Brazil/IBGE 2011). Usually, upper- and middle-class students attend private schools while students belonging to lower social classes attend public schools (Brazil/IBGE 2011).

Freire (2002) states that the oppressed, in order to seek emancipation, need to recognise themselves as human beings in an existential situation of oppression. For Freire (2000) becoming aware of both individual and social conditions is fundamental to our understanding of the world around us.

Using Freire’s concept as a basis, in the SP/PE curriculum it is expected that students will recognise that they live in a world that reinforces the homogenisation of cultural and social practices, a world that imposes standards of aesthetics, behaviours and sexual codes that oppress individuals. As students develop the awareness of their oppressed situation, they can seek autonomy (Figure 2).

Autonomy has come to be used to defend social participation and provide opportunities for students to face their social problems in PE classes. Gifted with their capacities for reflection and action, they are able to critically discern in favour of a common ideal, within a collective perspective rather than an individualised one. The term autonomy bears a direct relation to the unfinished nature of the human being and her/his own existence (Freire 2002). Autonomy is based on the principle of ethics, freedom and respect for the other. To be autonomous is to value the dialogue between different elements, without authoritarianism:

I may know pedagogy, biology and astronomy, I may till the earth or I may navigate. I am a person. I know what I don’t know and I know what I know. For this reason, I can know what I don’t yet know and know better that which I already know. And I will know that much better and more authentically, and will construct my autonomy with regard to that of others that much more efficiently. (Freire, 106)

For Freire, autonomy ties in with the capacity to act for oneself with others, to make choices through pronouncing one’s ideas. We understand, therefore, that autonomy overlaps with the subject’s capacity to take decisions; to know *in* and *with* the world in critical and ethical ways.

In this sense, being autonomous in PE involves identifying the other as a being who exists both before and with the world. This existence becomes concrete through the lived and shared experience of the manifestations of culture that involve the subject’s own body. In this context, *Sich-Bewegen* expresses one’s own body existence in relation to her/himself and to the other. This forms an articulated network of dynamic inter-relationships between themes that relate to the media – *Leisure and Work; Body, Health and Aesthetics; Contemporariness* – and the functioning of the human organism (Figure 1).

Freire (2002, 46) draws our attention to the most essential aspect of critical-educational practice: to provide conditions that will enable students to rehearse the profound experience of manifesting themselves in their relationships with each other and the teacher. This notion of ‘manifesting oneself’ pertains only to the sentient being who communicates, transforms, creates and fulfils dreams, and who is capable of feeling anger because s/he loves. Furthermore, this manifestation is of oneself as a subject who recognises her or himself, *in* and *with* the world, as an object. When this manifestation unveils itself, we no longer permit the exclusion of the other, because, if exclusion occurs, I also exclude myself from the world. According to Freire (2002)

The issue of cultural identity, which includes the individual dimension and the perspective from the social class of the students whose respect is absolutely fundamental in progressive educational practice, is a problem that cannot be treated lightly. It is directly related to the manifestation of ourselves by ourselves. This is what the pure training of the teacher does not do, losing itself and losing the teacher in the narrow and pragmatic vision of the process. (46–47)

If autonomy relates to acting, this action must be carried out with meaning. The subject must be touched by the need to act, and that presupposes placing oneself before the world based on one’s own needs. How am I within this world? How does the world act with regard to others and to me? These questions prompt the critical reasoning necessary to select the criteria with which the world will be faced. The capacity to criticise demands epistemological curiosity and rigour (Freire 2000).

Merleau-Ponty (1978, 456) shares this perspective in relation to the theme of *freedom*, without which it makes no sense to talk about autonomy and critique. Because we are beings who are open to the world, we have everything we need to go beyond ourselves, and for this reason ‘we need have no fear that our choices or actions restrict our liberty, since choice and action alone cut us loose from our anchorage’ (456). Therefore, the oppression, injustice and violence that face us oblige us to want not *our* freedom, but freedom. There is no external determination regarding the subject; what exists is choice and action in the world.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1978, 456), freedom only escapes us if we refuse to assume our natural and social situation, rather than finding the natural and human world through that situation. It is the task of (Physical) Education to support students to go beyond their own conditions of existence through their choices and actions, and to give them dominion in that situation, even if never complete, over their own possibilities. The ‘self-critical autonomy’ (Figure 2) is the way proposed by the SP/PE curriculum to develop in and with the students’ consciousness of their situation in the world.

Conclusions

The traditional notion of being ‘physically educated’ as proposed by Corbin (1987), along with the ‘motor’ dimension of the human being (Tani et al. 1988), has been both addressed and superseded in the new curriculum. The SP/PE curriculum reflects those aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology that do not reside in dichotomies, as well as Freire’s emphasis on critique and transformation, which is, we argue, compatible with a phenomenological approach.

In a country marked by social inequality, such as Brazil (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), raising questions of critical awareness and emancipation through PE can only take place if we seek to ensure conditions that will enable students not only to experience but also to

pronounce themselves in this world with regard to others. Such pronouncements could be made through experience of the PE content (Figure 1), when there is a clear educational purpose to make transparent the intersections of that content with themes of the contemporary world (Figure 1) and simultaneously with a self-critical autonomy (Figure 2).

In the SP/PE curriculum it is understood that the forthcoming challenges for PE are how to embed the thematic network in the social lives of the students, taking into account the challenges of contemporary society with regard to ethics, diversity and communication. Based on the analysis, it appears that the SP/PE curriculum is challenging PE teachers to address, through their daily practice, three key issues:

- (1) Educating students for ethical and political dimensions: fostering the inter-relation between contents pertaining to PE and themes such as 'leisure and work', thereby providing incentive for *Sich-Bewegen* and the critical and autonomous manifestations of the MC;
- (2) Teaching in ways that consider students' cultural diversity: diverse personal meanings must be taken into consideration, and even promoted in the sense of fostering criticism and autonomy given the homogenising cultural standards that limit *Sich-Bewegen*; and
- (3) Enhancing students' learning amidst the overwhelming presence of information and communication technologies, and all forms of social media: critical analysis of the different types of media therefore constitutes a key component in planning the pedagogical actions and contents of PE. The curriculum holds a critical view of the influence of the media on perception, attribution of value and the construction of manifestations of the MC. Accordingly the media thematic axis and its relationships with the whole content network should be emphasised in the course of the teachers' work.

The SP/PE curriculum, based on the concepts of *Sich-Bewegen* and MC, suggests possibilities for the development of communication *via* different forms of language. It is not enough to be 'physically' educated or to have 'normal' motor development; rather it is necessary to develop full personal experiences and the capacity to live and communicate critically and autonomously with others. The experience of stress and the effort to learn and perform that are common in PE may reveal possibilities in myself and in others, which were unknown to me. It is the role of PE to make them known and valued through reflection, criticism and self-criticism. This is the philosophical view held by the SP/PE curriculum and with which it intends to make pedagogical advances and a difference in the lives of students of SPstate.

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Notes

1. PCNs (Brazil 1997, 1998, 2000) are documents issued by the Brazilian Federal Government designed to ensure, in the light of regional and cultural diversity, a single referential for

- educational processes in this country. Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br> (accessed November 21, 2011).
2. LDBEN (Brazil 1996) restates the right to education guaranteed in the Federal Constitution; it regulates the public and private systems and re-establishes the educational principles and duties of the state in ensuring the right to public school education. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Leis/L9394.htm (accessed November 21, 2011).
 3. DCEN (Brazil/CNE 2002) constitute a set of principles, fundamentals and procedures that govern the professional development of teachers at all school levels and that must be considered in the organisation and definition of curricula. Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br> (accessed November 21, 2011).
 4. *Se-Movimentar*, in accordance with the Portuguese translation proposed by Kunz (1991, 1994). By analogy with the expression ‘one’s own body’ by Merleau-Ponty (1978), a possible translation to English would be ‘one’s own movement’. Here we use the original German expression of *Sich-Bewegen*.
 5. According to Thiele (1990), Husserl characterises the *Lebenswelt* as a ‘global style’ that distinguishes people in the daily world; it therefore represents the phenomenological reduction of this world and is, at the same time, an unknown horizon for every individual.
 6. However, while we finalised this paper (July/2013) millions of Brazilians were demonstrating on the nation’s streets where they faced violent police repression to show their dissatisfaction with the social conditions under which they live. The protesters demanded social justice and better public services (education, health and transport). Brazilians also protested against the corruption and the amount of public money spent on mega sports events, such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

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