The appreciation of the disciplinary area of Physical Education by Basic Education teachers

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze how the disciplinary field of Physical Education is valued by Basic Education teachers, seeking to assess the knowledge that teachers possess regarding the contents of Physical Education, perceive how they integrate them into their pedagogical practices, identify the obstacles that teachers face in teaching Physical Education, and verify whether Curricular Enrichment Activities (Physical and Sports Activities) have implications on the (de)valorization of Physical Education. A semi-structured individual interview approach was adopted, organized around a set of 16 questions conducted with 10 Basic Education teachers from 2 school clusters in Viseu's district. Teachers acknowledge Physical Education's importance for children holistic development; however, from a teaching perspective, they do not value it, citing as main causes the lack of material and spatial resources, insufficient personal preparation, and a perceived lack of security in their training; teachers advocate for adjuvated models by a specialized teacher in the field. Despite the concern expressed by teachers, as they consider Physical Education extremely important for children's holistic development and essential for practice in the school context, they do not teach it significantly, ultimately leading to its devaluation in practice.

Keywords: Children;

Essential Learnings; Physical Education; Physical and Sports Activities; School.

A valorização da área disciplinar de Educação Física pelos docentes do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico

Resumo: O presente estudo assenta na problemática referente à valorização da Educação Física pelos professores do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico e visou apurar os conhecimentos que os docentes possuem acerca dos conteúdos de Educação Física e percecionar de que forma os desenvolvem nas suas práticas pedagógicas, assim como identificar os entraves com que os professores se deparam no ensino da Educação Física e verificar se as Atividades de Enriquecimento Curricular (Atividades Físicas e Desportivas) e a componente de coadjuvação possuem implicações na (des)valorização da Educação Física curricular. Recorreu-se à entrevista individual semiestruturada, organizada a partir de um conjunto de 16 questões efetuadas a 10 professores do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, de 2 agrupamentos de escolas do distrito de Viseu. Os docentes reconhecem a importância da Educação Física para o desenvolvimento integral da criança; do ponto de vista da sua lecionação, não a valorizam apontando, como principais causas, a falta de recursos materiais e espaciais e a formação pessoal insuficiente, assim como a falta de segurança sentida na sua formação; os docentes defendem modelos de coadjuvação por um professor especializado na área. Apesar da preocupação depositada pelos docentes neste contexto, pois consideram a Educação Física de extrema importância para o desenvolvimento integral da criança, sendo indispensável a sua prática em contexto escolar, não a lecionam de forma significativa acabando por, na prática, a desvalorizar.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagens Essenciais; Atividades Físicas e Desportivas; Crianças; Educação Física; Escola.

La valorisation du domaine disciplinaire de l'Éducation Physique par les enseignants du premier cycle de l'enseignement de base

Résumé: Cette étude visait à analyser la manière dont le domaine disciplinaire de l'Éducation Physique est valorisé par les enseignants de l'Enseignement Fondamental, en cherchant à évaluer les connaissances que les enseignants possèdent concernant les contenus de l'Éducation Physique, à comprendre comment ils les intègrent dans leurs pratiques pédagogiques, à identifier les obstacles auxquels ils sont confrontés dans l'enseignement de l'Éducation Physique, et à vérifier si les Activités d'Enrichissement Curriculaire (Activités Physiques et Sportives) ont des implications sur la (dé)valorisation de l'Éducation Physique. Une approche par entretiens individuels semi-directifs a été adoptée, organisée autour d'un ensemble de 16 questions menées auprès de 10 enseignants de l'Enseignement Fondamental appartenant à deux groupements scolaires du district de Viseu. Les enseignants reconnaissent l'importance de l'Éducation Physique pour le développement holistique des enfants ; toutefois, d'un point de vue pédagogique, ils ne la valorisent pas, en invoquant comme principales causes le manque de ressources matérielles et spatiales, une préparation personnelle insuffisante et un sentiment d'insécurité lié à leur formation ; ils préconisent des modèles d'enseignement accompagnés par un enseignant spécialisé dans le domaine. Malgré la préoccupation exprimée par les enseignants, qui considèrent l'Éducation Physique comme extrêmement importante pour le développement global des enfants et essentielle pour la pratique en contexte scolaire, ils ne l'enseignent pas de manière significative, ce qui conduit finalement à sa dévalorisation dans la pratique.

Mots-clés : Activités Physiques et Sportives ; Apprentissages essentiels ; École ; Éducation Physique ; Enfants.

La valorización del área de Educación Física por parte de los docentes del Primer Ciclo de Educación Básica

Resumen: El presente estudio se basa en la problemática relativa a la valorización de la Educación Física por parte de los docentes del Primer Ciclo de Educación Básica y tuvo como objetivo averiguar los conocimientos que poseen sobre los contenidos de Educación Física y percibir de qué manera los desarrollan en sus prácticas pedagógicas. Asimismo, pretende identificar los obstáculos con los que se encuentran los profesores en la enseñanza de la Educación Física y verificar si las Actividades de Enriquecimiento Curricular (Actividades Físicas y Deportivas) y la componente de coadyuvancia tienen implicaciones en la (des)valorización de la Educación Física curricular. Se utilizó una entrevista individual semiestructurada, basada en un conjunto de 16 preguntas realizadas a 10 profesores de Educación Básica (1.º CEB) de 2 agrupaciones escolares en el distrito de Viseu. Los docentes reconocen la importancia de la Educación Física para el desarrollo integral del niño; sin embargo, desde el punto de vista de la enseñanza, no la valoran debido a la falta de recursos materiales y espaciales, la formación personal insuficiente y la percepción de falta de seguridad en su formación; los docentes abogan por modelos de colaboración con profesionales especializados en el área. A pesar de la importancia que los docentes otorgan a la Educación Física para el desarrollo integral del niño y su carácter indispensable en el entorno escolar, no la enseñan de manera significativa, lo que conduce en la práctica a su desvalorización.

Palabras clave: Actividades Físicas y Deportivas; Aprendizajes Esenciales; Educación Física; Escuela; Niños.

Introduction

School and Education

Discussion on education refers to a series of issues that go far beyond what is considered desirable for educational systems to achieve. In this sense, we seek to address the following questions: (i) What is taught? How is it taught? By whom? Under what circumstances? (ii) Through what structures, institutions, and processes are they organized and managed? (iii) What are the social and individual consequences of these structures and processes? (Eira, 2014).

Quality in education is a fundamental condition for a cohesive and progressive society. In Portugal, the pursuit of quality in teaching children and youth constitutes the main challenge, but also the main focus guiding the priorities defined in educational policy, in order to respond to and keep pace with societal developments.

Therefore, schools should foster personalized education, respect individual freedoms, reinforcing formal equality, combining fragmentation with shared culture, and defining identity and difference in relation to others (Hessel & Morin, 2012; Rocha, 2000; Serpa, 2016). Teaching and learning should transcend space and time limits (Eira, 2014).

The 1st Cycle of Basic Education (1.º CBE) curriculum sets learning goals for all students and teaching-learning guides. Dispatch No. 6604-A/2021 (2021) defines curriculum development, including external assessment. Three documents orient this process: the Students' Profile at the end of Compulsory Education (SPCE), Essential Learnings (EL), and the National Strategy for Education for Citizenship (NSEC). Education policy seeks equal opportunities and success throughout compulsory schooling, emphasizing quality education. Dispatch No. 6944-A/2018 (2018) states that such quality entails "effective and meaningful learning… applied in concrete situations."

This led to curriculum reorganization through a new document aligned with SPCE (Dispatch No. 6478/2017, 2017) and Decree-Law No. 54/2018 (2018), aiming at inclusion. EL, approved in 2018 (Dispatch No. 6944-A/2018), define essential disciplinary knowledge and mandatory skills and attitudes for each subject and schooling stage.

EL express a curriculum ideology for Basic and Secondary Education, indicating what and how to teach and suggesting pedagogical strategies for meaningful learning. "Essential" does not mean minimal content but "dimensions that no student should fail to learn" (Dispatch No. 6944-A/2018, 2018). In Physical Education (PE), EL develop SPCE competencies, especially "body awareness and mastery," "well-being, health, and the environment," and "interpersonal relationships" (Dispatch No. 6478/2017, 2017), aiming to ensure "fundamental psychomotor skills" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 1).

For 1st and 2nd grades, the blocks are Skills and Manipulations, Movements and Balances, and Games. For 3rd and 4th grades: Gymnastics, Games, and one of the following: Rhythmic Activities, Skating, Nature Trails, or Swimming.

Thus, EL define key developmental acquisitions. Although distinct, the blocks complement each other, guiding teachers to progressively address the full curriculum and promote core competencies. Teachers must select and organize activities according to EL, respecting curricular goals, students' abilities and interests, group dynamics, and available school resources.

Physical Education's importance in children's development

Considering that movement is an important dimension of both human and culture development, physical activity should be encouraged, especially during childhood and adolescence, as physical activity patterns are mostly assimilated in life's early years.

PE allows the body's development, establishing a relationship with thinking, affection, and intelligence. In other words, movement education complements the cognitive functions' development (Martins et al., 2011) through physical activity, making children dynamic, creative, responsible, and independent (Lopes & Silva, 2015).

Regardless of the content being taught, teachers should consider, in the teaching-learning process, students' characteristics in all their dimensions, specifically cognitive, physical, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, interpersonal relationships, and social integration (Lima, 2012).

It is a space where children, using their bodies, and through social interaction, can discover their own limits, understand the origin of movement, express feelings through body language, face challenges, understand and value their own bodies, interact with others, locate themselves in space, and ultimately develop their intellectual and emotional capacities in a conscious and critical manner.

When experiencing PE with children, playfulness and games should not be overlooked, as it is through these activities that children experience and learn significantly (Lopes & Silva, 2015).

Methods

Study design

The present research is qualitative/interpretative and aims to produce an understanding of the social world within natural contexts, emphasizing the meanings, experiences, practices, and viewpoints of those involved (Creswell, 1998; Guba, 1990; Mertens, 1998; Silva et al., 2014; Tuckman, 2012). Interviewees' selection was considered during the research design's phase, specifically in the study's initial structuring stage. It is crucial to select participants from whom we can "learn the most" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12) or whom we can consider as "privileged witnesses" (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2008, p. 71) of the situations under investigation.

Participants and Instrument

Semi-structured individual interview was carefully chosen as research instrument, organized around a set of sixteen questions posed to ten teachers from the 1.º CBE in two school clusters of Viseu's district.

An interview guide was created, organized by a tripartite system of categories or dimensions: representations, practices, and resources (personal, material, and spatial). The categorization was performed to reduce the complexity of the data corpus, stabilizing, and organizing it in a way that assigns meaning to it, making the discussion and reflection clear (Bardin, 2009; Vala, 2009).

This data collection technique allows for a higher degree of spontaneous responses, without being subject to a pre-established questioning model, with the aim of understanding, in the teachers' discourses and representations, the meaning they attribute to playful activity in the playground space. It facilitates, with greater ease, the understanding through the subjects' own opinions about the phenomena in which they are involved and implicated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994; Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2008; Ruquoy, 2005; Silverman, 2000).

In defining the study group criteria, the intention was to identify and understand how social, cultural, and political relations of society are organized. The number of interviewees was kept small to allow the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the study object, and therefore the issue of representativeness in the statistical sense was not a concern.

Procedures

For data processing, analysis, and transcription of formal documents and interviewees' discourses, a content analysis was conducted in three phases (Bardin, 2009): (i) Pre-analysis: this phase involves organization and preparation of the material before the actual analysis begins. It typically starts with the initial contact with the documents, preparing the material for subsequent analysis. (ii) Exploration of the material: this phase systematically applies the decisions made during pre-analysis; it primarily involves tasks such as coding, which includes selection of units, enumeration (choosing counting rules), and classification (choosing categories). (iii) Data processing, inference, and interpretation of interview results: aiming to make the results valid and meaningful; the goal was to maintain a descriptive dimension of the narrated contents while not neglecting the interpretative dimension that arises from the analyst's inquiries into the study object (Guerra, 2006).

Regarding the methodological aspects that led to data's organization and acquisition, contact information including phone numbers and email addresses of school clusters was obtained through research on their institutional websites. Subsequently, contact was made with organizational authorities via email and phone to explain the

study objectives and request permission to reach out to the respective schools and teachers. After obtaining the necessary authorization, all participants signed an informed consent form containing pertinent details of their involvement, enabling them to make an informed decision before agreeing to participate in the study.

Results analysis and discussion

From the analysis of the interviewees' perceptions, it was observed that all teachers value PE and recognize its importance on children's overall development, consistent with the findings by Ascensão (2013) in their theoretical framework regarding the values conveyed by this discipline. In a similar context, Freire (2002) had already concluded that physical activity is as essential as nutrition, constituting a basic need from the learning of writing and reading. The basic needs are "play" and "games," provided and guided by PE classes, through an efficient and knowledgeable teacher.

Negrine (2002) highlights the complementary relationship between a child's learning ability and the possibilities of neuromuscular performance. Neto (2020) supports this idea, mentioning that "psychological life's construction becomes possible through the dynamic and lived action of the body in various contrasts that surround the individual in their daily life" (p. 117). Therefore, motor activity is one of the main driving factors of child development, with a close connection between motor skills and cognition (Tojal, 2024). Consistent with various researchers, we highlight Brandl and Neto (2015), who add that PE in the early years, when "well-oriented, progressive, and systematic, contributes emphatically to human development" (p. 101).

Regarding the attitudes, values, and personal development most frequently mentioned by teachers, there is a focus on mutual aid, sharing, respect, autonomy, and camaraderie. In this line of thinking, Lourenço (2018, p. 17) states that "sports practice is a transmitter of social values par excellence, due to the social relations it allows." The author highlights values such as tolerance, introversion and extroversion, companionship, assistance, cooperation, fair play, aggressiveness, autonomy, hygiene, responsibility, among others, which align with many of those mentioned by the surveyed teachers. PE curriculum goes beyond teaching gymnastics, rhythmic activities, and games, also encompassing the values and attitudes underlying them. Therefore, the curriculum contents are "the means by which the student should analyze and approach reality in such a way that a network of meanings can be constructed around what is learned in school and what is experienced" (Darido, 2012, p. 57).

Regarding the blocks defined in the EL, respondents indicate that they are aware of most of them but only refer to them as needed. However, in practice, they do not cover all blocks equally, giving more importance to the "Skills and Manipulations" block. These blocks group major themes and can facilitate teachers' contents

organization, presenting a set of essential motor skills to be developed for learning. They serve as PE's development basis curriculum; however, schools and teachers should implement a flexible, contextualized, and adapted curriculum management approach tailored to the year, class, and each individual student (Ministry of Education, 2018).

According to Freire (2009), it is important to thoroughly understand all blocks in their conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal dimensions. Although these three dimensions are interconnected, the learning process for each of them is differentiated and does not occur automatically. Therefore, teachers must possess a detailed knowledge of the content dimensions in order to select the most efficient and meaningful teaching procedures. Regarding the importance of each block, overall, teachers state that all blocks are equally important, still, in both schools, there is a teacher who considers some to be more important than others, adding that "Skills and Manipulations" block is the most important while the "Skating" block is considered less important.

When asked if they follow any logical sequence to work on the different blocks, most respondents reveal that they do not follow a specific sequence. They mention following monthly group plans, with one teacher stating that they seek guidance and support from a specialized teacher when planning. It is important to note that there is no single sequence or curriculum that fits all students and schools. Therefore, each school must develop its own pedagogical project to guide teachers' work. Planning learning stages is essential for teaching work, which should involve a practice with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end, naturally subject to changes and reorganizations according to the local reality (Freire, 2009).

Concerning the context of conditions, materials, and spaces, our respondents expressed dissatisfaction and demotivation with schools' provided resources, emphasizing the lack of suitable materials and spaces, especially covered areas for practicing when weather conditions are unfavorable. Conversely (in both entities), teachers state that the schools where they work have suitable conditions, materials, and spaces for practice.

Analyzing other studies, we find that the lack of materials and spaces justifies the undervaluation of PE, as exemplified in the study by Benetti et al. (2015), where interviewed teachers considered that the available physical spaces for their classes were not fully conducive to PE practice, highlighting that this condition interferes with the discipline's pedagogical work. Similarly, in Freitas's study (2014), it is perceived that school physical spaces do not meet student's needs and tend to make classes demotivating, leading to students seeking to relieve their motor and affective restlessness in other spaces.

From Matos' perspective (2005), school physical space extends beyond sports fields or gymnasiums, it is much broader. It is a facilitative space for "the pursuit of

critical thinking and bodily autonomy, capable of enabling students to express their culture and social, affective, and motor experiences, whether these spaces are sports courts, swimming pools, classrooms or playgrounds" (Matos, 2005, p. 15). Teachers need to possess the ability to adapt spaces to the school's educational needs, specifically when it comes to PE (Tojal, 2024), while also reflecting on the child's developmental needs (physical, psychological, intellectual, and social), which are essential for formulating spaces/places designated for PE practice (Freitas, 2014).

In Silva and Damazio's study (2008), a positive correlation was established between the (suitable) conditions of the physical environment, material resources, and the quality of pedagogical and social work of PE teachers. This leads to the inference that the facilities' conditions, instructional materials, and physical space significantly impact pedagogical work, although teachers must hold the capability to adapt and make the most of available conditions for the benefit of student learning and success.

Despite the aforementioned constraints, it became evident that all interviewed teachers affirm they develop PE in their practices (question: "Do you usually develop the discipline of Physical Education in your practices?"), indicating that pedagogical action is not entirely dependent on schools' lack of suitable materials and spaces. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that eight out of the ten respondents use motor skills resources and practices to develop competencies in other disciplinary areas, mentioning, for example, using games to promote interdisciplinary learning regularly.

The articulation of PE domains with those of other content areas supports the perception that children should be viewed as a whole, therefore, learning holistically (Tojal, 2024). Consequently, it is important to highlight that PE teachers can and should rely on the discipline's pedagogical specificity as an area of knowledge that deals with bodily movement practices, fostering an interdisciplinary approach (Souza & Rojas, 2008).

From an interdisciplinary perspective, if the goal is to cross boundaries between disciplinary areas and merge their methods in pursuit of a common purpose, "interdisciplinarity requires collaboration, dialogue, and cooperation between two or more disciplinary areas" (Oliveira, 2021, p. 11).

Observing training implementation in PE's environment, it is noted that a relevant percentage of teachers from school B have already participated in training sessions in this field of work. On the other hand, in school A, no teacher has undergone such training, but they consider it pertinent. It was perceived that in school A, no teacher has undergone specific training, but all consider it "very pertinent and enriching", highlighting topics they deem relevant, including: "The importance of Physical Education for child development; Approaches to Essential Learning in Physical Education and its Blocks; Sports Psychology; Inclusion and diversity in Physical Education; Nutrition and Health; New methodologies in pedagogical practice of Physical Education."

In school B, only one teacher mentions not having undergone any training in the field, emphasizing the topic's relevance related to "the development of Physical Education in 1.º CBE". The others have undergone training in the following thematic areas: "Team Sports; Dance; Physical Education's importance in schools: a predominantly practical approach; Physical Education for all: adapted and inclusive; The value of games as a recreational space; The importance of promoting inclusion through games; Nature trails: promoting motor skills, orientation, and environmental education; Games for boys and girls? – Promoting gender equality through cooperative games". It is significant that one teacher from school B mentions actively seeking updates in this area every year, highlighting four of the training sessions they have already attended.

In comparison to Figueiredo's study (1998), nearly half of the teacher population (47%) had never attended any training related to PE. In Alves's study (2013), it was highlighted that 58.8% of respondents had undertaken one or more trainings in the area, showing that teachers, in more recent times, have shown greater interest in staying informed and acquiring new knowledge, seeking to update and complement their knowledge and skills through training sessions.

It can be inferred that the lack of specific training in PE leads to the search and completion of training sessions that provide new knowledge and skills related to this curricular component's domains. Teaching focuses on continuous education throughout one's professional career, thus, it is essential to seek new knowledge in various areas of expertise, especially in those where one feels weaker.

Involving the difficulties or obstacles to PE's teaching, all interviewees feel that their training is not sufficient, highlighting lack of confidence. Only one of the ten interviewees mentions not feeling any difficulty or obstacle, while the others feel more comfortable teaching other disciplinary areas. They state feeling that they lack specific knowledge of the area and cite the quantity of content in various subjects as a challenge. They again highlight the lack of material and spatial resources in school institutions.

Moreira (2000) found that, despite recognizing physical activity's development benefits, there are factors that prevent the ideal development of PE discipline. When questioned, the study revealed that 81.2% of teachers stated they do not feel prepared to effectively teach this area, 75% mentioned that the school lacks materials and those that exist are in poor condition, and 68.7% noted that the institution does not have adequate infrastructure.

Concerning the developed projects to prepare/support teachers' PE practice, two respondents from school A mentioned not having knowledge of any developed projects but considered it pertinent because they feel the need for more specific training in the analyzed disciplinary area. Two teachers stated that projects have been developed, noting the "Active School" project. One teacher stated that they do not know

whether projects have been developed or not. In school B, two teachers mentioned not having enough knowledge to confirm whether projects have been developed or not, meaning they answered, "don't know," and three teachers responded affirmatively, highlighting the "Active Viseu" project, which, according to respondents, involved collaboration with a PE's specialized teacher.

Finally, regarding the last dimension under analysis, responsibility for PE's development, opinions in school A vary between assigning it to the class teacher, a specialist, or both. In school B, most teachers attribute responsibility to a specialist, with only one supporting co-teaching. Figueiredo (1998) found similar results: 51% favored replacing the class teacher, 8% supported autonomous teaching, and 41% preferred co-teaching, "not completely relinquishing responsibility for this teaching" (p. 83).

Salvador (2009) likewise reported disengagement from PE's pedagogical practice, with 79.2% stating that specialists should teach it. Alves (2013) found that 50.9% of teachers supported co-teaching, 25.5% favored specialist-only teaching, 21.8% preferred the class teacher assisted by a specialist, and 1.8% (one respondent) supported teaching by the class teacher alone.

Since teachers do not feel prepared to teach PE without professional support, they favor substitution or co-teaching, diverging from the monodocence model proposed by Figueiredo (1998).

The introduction of Curricular Enrichment Activities (CEA) could devalue PE in favor of Physical and Sporting Activities (PSA). However, teachers still value PE; only one reported valuing it "slightly less." Seven out of ten consider it important to develop both PE and CEA-PSA as complementary. The others prefer allocating more hours to PE, making CEA-PSA unnecessary.

These results align with Ascensão's study (2013), where 67.6% said CEA-PSA is not a "repetition" of PE, and 70.6% deemed both areas important. They contrast with Constante (2011), who found that CEA reduced teachers' sense of responsibility toward PE.

According to Soares and Antunes (2020), consistent with our findings, both curricular and enrichment components should be developed, as they complement each other. Enrichment projects (including CEA), clubs, or other initiatives, enhance curricular activities beyond class time and foster skills aligned with students' characteristics and learning levels.

Conclusion

Continuous learning and updating should be a fundamental aspect of teaching to keep pace with societal evolution. Investing in professional development enables educators to acquire, understand, and present new knowledge. The refinement of

teaching practices and the construction of one's own identity should occur in an engaging context focused on the child, promoting innovative and meaningful learning experiences. Children are motivated to engage in physical activity through various socializing agents, with schools being primary drivers. Therefore, schools play a crucial role in promoting physical activity by fostering and maintaining lifelong habits. Despite the recognized importance of PE conceptually by 1.º CBE teachers, its implementation falls short of desired levels. Many teachers lack awareness of the outlined blocks for developing this disciplinary area based on existing curriculum documents.

Studies conducted over time yield similar results, as educators consistently regard PE as crucial for holistic child development. However, in practice, it is not consistently prioritized, leading to its undervaluation. Education professionals should equally emphasize all curriculum components due to the increasing challenges posed by modern technologies that discourage active and healthy lifestyles. Schools represent a critical environment for fostering engagement, interesting, and enriching PE pedagogy for children.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)

I declare that GenAI tools were not used. The authors are solely responsible for the content of their manuscripts.

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