



Reflecting on initial teacher education in Brazil: experienced teachers' perceptions

Wilson Alviano Jr ^a and Marcos Garcia Neira ^{b,c}

^aFederal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, Brazil; ^bUniversity of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; ^cGPEF – Research Group on Physical Education

ABSTRACT

This study examines initial teacher education through the experiences of experienced physical education teachers. The participants were 12 PE teachers working in primary education (grades 1–9 in Brazil) in the municipal public school systems of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, and Diadema, cities located in the São Paulo region known as the 'Greater ABC' or 'ABC paulista'. The participating teachers had also graduated from higher education institutions located in this region. This broad area was selected due to its diversity of institutions offering initial teacher education in physical education. The aim was to understand teacher's perceptions about both public school and teaching during their initial teacher education programs in physical education. Data were gathered through focus group interviews and analysed to understand how the curricula of different institutions in the same region conceptualized public schools and the teaching of physical education in their initial teacher degree programs. Although teacher education and acting in the classroom cover the same territory, teachers identify a large gap between knowledge prioritized in teacher education programs and that required in everyday school life. Attention is drawn to the lack of themes relevant to working in contemporary schools and report the privileged status given to knowledge those teachers understand as being secondary or even unnecessary in pedagogical practices. Final considerations aimed at bringing about a shift in discussing alternatives for changing and reinterpreting the curriculum of physical education teacher education, thus establishing meanings that meet perspectives in line with everyday school life, its needs, and its reality.

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Introduction

Recent studies (Alviano Jr, 2011; Nunes, 2011) have demonstrated that the teacher education curriculum in private higher education institutions (HEIs) has constrained how their graduates conceive and understand the nature of teaching physical education in primary schools. The results suggest that participation in such initial teacher education (ITE) programs did not lead to participants understanding the diversity of students they work with in schools and neither did it enable them to enact a differentiated curriculum. These studies also found that these private higher education institutions had a very similar curriculum and course syllabuses in respect to what knowledge was required for teaching physical education (for example, programs heavily oriented around bio-physical studies, sports knowledge and generic educational theory). The risk here is that the curriculum for

Teacher Education programs becomes oriented more by individual workloads, academic interests of faculty and legal guidelines and less by considering the needs of teachers working in contemporary schools. With this in mind, this paper aims to understand how PE teachers working in primary education (grades 1–9 in Brazil) in the municipal public school systems of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema, cities located in the São Paulo region known as the ‘Greater ABC’ or ‘ABC paulista’, understand the knowledge, dispositions and skills needed for teaching physical education. In particular, our aim was to ask these teachers to reflect on their teacher education in light of their experience as a teacher in order to better understand how the teaching represented in these programs and explore what changes these teachers would recommend.

Initial teacher education courses in Brazil are regulated by National Curricular Directives (DCNs, acronym in Portuguese) for the training and preparation of elementary education teachers. These directives are guiding documents for educational policy that should orient the organization and structuring of initial education courses. The documents include discussion of the competencies and knowledge needed for professional development, coherence between the training offered and the practice expected afterwards, institutional organization and the structuring of the curricular matrix, the conceptions of learning, content and evaluation, and research as an essential element in teacher education, among other topics. As stated above, such directives are not ridged and run the risk that the process of designing an ITE curriculum can become a purely bureaucratic elaboration designed to obey the law, without considering the reality of teaching in contemporary school contexts.

In an attempt to move PETE curriculum development beyond being a either a bureaucratic exercise, or one simply focused on the content knowledge of school Physical education, we argue there is a need to be sensitive to the way curriculum conveys representations of class, gender and culture, among other things. Consequently, there is a need for those developing teacher education curriculum to critically reflect on, and broaden, what their students learn about teaching and what they become enabled to do as teachers. Thus, we agree with Silva when he points out that ‘the curriculum teaches us positions, gestures, ways of addressing others (authorities, other genders, other races), and movements that assign individuals to specific social groups’ (Silva, 2008, p. 203). In other words, those learning to teach need an awareness of the socio-cultural and socio-political nature of schooling, as well as the knowledge, disposition and skills to develop PE programs that serve the interests of the young people in those schools.

In the studies investigated, we observed that the privileged status given to biological disciplines furnished the parameters for teachers’ actions by normalizing individuals, denying the existence of cultural diversity. Consequently, graduates access a monolithic representation of how this component is taught in school. Hence, diversity of body culture is strongly disregarded in favor of that which is traditionally present in most curricula. This maintains the hegemony of courses that determine implicit codes of white, European-American heterosexual sports manifestations in games with pedagogical aims or in instrumentalizing exercises for motor development. The reason for this is two-fold. First, we understand that the mechanisms involving and subjugating professors’ work at private HEIs end up doing away with ‘not only social conscience, but also social sensitivity’ (Giroux & McLaren, 2005, p. 127.). Second, what should be collective curricular construction has turned into an arena of disputes in which professors have tried to keep their area of performance in the ongoing curriculum. It is not surprising then that recognizing human dignity, addressing student diversity, developing cultural competence, and embracing democracy are ignored in curriculum developments oriented around maintaining personal issues and interests of privileged academics.

We must stress the need to denaturalize and question the curriculum for training and preparing physical education teachers in order to broaden its possibilities. Thus, we understand that democratic action is precisely the re-dimensioning of crystallized representations. After all, if we begin curricular development with a monolithic position, it will clearly culminate in an equally monolithic education.

According to Giroux (1997), the space for teacher education constitutes a 'new public sphere', precisely because of the relationship between teaching and society. This means crossing the boundaries of any private HEI's interests, turning teacher education into a cultural policy plan, educating teachers as intellectuals who will act in 'public spaces where students can debate, assimilate, and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to fight for a more humane and fair world' (Giroux & McLaren, 2005, p. 140).

Giroux (1997) leads us to look at teacher education programs with concern in order to understand pedagogical practice as a 'policy of experience' or a 'cultural field where knowledge, discourse, and power interact with each other in order to produce [...] practices of specific regulations' (pp. 141–142). This premise points to the need to conceive teacher education as cultural policy, something that should be on the horizon of any curricular construction.

Giroux's analysis reinforces the sense of curriculum as 'cultural policy', an active space for constructing and circulating social meanings. In the author's point of view, there is resistance – places of opposition to constructing meanings associated with power relations that specify inequality and difference – both in society and at school. Resistance movements represent a solution found, for example, by students to not succumb to oppression when they encounter teaching practices that insist on denying their identities and presenting meanings that are unfamiliar to them as unique and true. In addition, when rated for their likely placement in the labor market, students find themselves pressured by productivity, which neglects any expression of desire and culture itself.

Giroux proposes using this resistance in the design of a curriculum that critically views dominant beliefs and values and that works as a driving force against social inequality. The existence of mediations and actions in curricular practices favors critically examining the forms of control and regulation promoted in the school. The author suggests, for example, that this be done through historical, ethical and political analysis of the knowledge being addressed. By affirming the need to rethink the school's role in the community, Giroux turns to German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas for support and creates the concept of 'democratic public sphere' to think of school as a place where subjects can debate and question aspects of daily social relations, including those of production. This way, school, in a broader sense, and pedagogical practice itself should function as democratic public spheres, becoming places where students and teachers have the opportunity to exercise democratic skills of discussion, participation and questioning assumptions disseminated in social life.

This means exceeding the limits of any individual's or institution's interests, making teaching a cultural policy project, considering teachers as intellectuals who will work in public spaces where students can debate, assimilate, and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to struggle for a more humane and fair world (Giroux and McLaren, 2005). Giroux (1997) also teaches us to look at schools with the concern of understanding pedagogical practice as a 'policy of experience' or a 'cultural field where knowledge, discourse, and power interact in order to produce [...] specific regulatory practices' (pp. 141–142).

Thus, the premise for a process of democratically constructing curriculum should recognize the 'other', which, in this case, seems to have been forgotten, since *one of the many others* needing to be heard is the PE teacher acting in Elementary Education him- or herself. He or she is a privileged informant, someone who occupies the place for which the educational path has been planned. It seems obvious that this 'paying attention' can occur in many forms, among which we find research with graduates, invitations to participate in focus groups, and others. It is interesting to note that, despite having relevant knowledge of the process, this actor has simply been removed from the debate as a real individual and transformed into an ideal. Such *modus operandi* favors the emergence of a representation from this field that has no historical background and is decontextualized of social factors that involve physical education's pedagogical routine. Canada-Phillips (2014) explains that critical reflections are part of a time-consuming process and do not occur without a solid foundation. Therefore, it is not only desirable but essential that teacher education programs establish communication with primary education teachers in order to structure their curricula.

Upon understanding physical education teachers who work in Primary Education as concrete subjects, the agenda of elaborating any curriculum should aim at recognizing the political and social position that gives meaning to and encourages teaching. The knowledge they have about their professional work, the challenges they face every day, as well as their educational paths could be starting points for preparing degree programs' curricula.

Recognition of the other is based on understanding the diversity existing in concrete subjects' lives, their histories, their representations and conceptions of the world, because elaborating a democratic curriculum will only be possible through dialogue with this concrete subject. We can elaborate a curriculum based on a pedagogy that incorporates distinctive conceptions, with the opening of spaces for questioning, inquiries, and exposition of their contradictions. This is would be the best outcome when we defend dialogue among the subjectivities involved.

In the studies previously cited, we also verified that a lack of discussion about school was evident, understanding it as the privileged *locus* for shaping and constructing knowledge about teaching and its object. If there is no concern about understanding or taking a position with regard to the school, about confirming how teachers see themselves in their actions, it is difficult to describe a PE teacher's profile, since that task requires us to recognize the institution for which future teachers are being prepared.

In a study carried out at a private HEI, Nunes (2011) reinforces the stance that elaborating PE teacher education curricula simply disregards knowledge about working in primary education, in addition to ignoring the school itself.

Analysis of the material collected demonstrates the constant relation of exchanging interests between the parts – curriculum *versus* client. (...), curriculum predominantly guided by courses related to the health field and by the teaching of hegemonic body techniques is aligned with assumptions of consuming corporal practices. Learning that takes place within it generally treats the body in a neutral and sterile way, reinforcing a hegemonic pattern. (...) By acting professionally, the graduate has everything needed to strengthen concepts learned in the curriculum. This is done under the motto of promoting health and valuing hegemonic body techniques, which are adjusted through discourses about the benefits of practicing physical activity and the quality of life. This is evident when analyzing proposed educational objectives. (p. 259)

Neira and Nunes (2009) warn us that curricula empty themselves of meaning as cultural policy when their elaboration is based on competencies and techniques. Graduates are then mere reproducers of ready-made knowledge.

[...] distortion occurs when, for example, the professor of the course addressing 'recreation' chooses 'school recreation' as one of the teaching topics or, in the assessment and measures course, the professor suggests alternatives to using physical-motor tests at school. (...) Imagine what happens when the course that thematizes sport (if developed by someone away from school) proposes preparing lecture plans or the wrestling professor does the same, without any relation with what is discussed in pedagogical courses. (Neira, 2009, p. 130, author's parentheses)

The discourse placed into circulation by physical education teacher education program's curriculum seems to have an objective of artificial cohesion between disconnected fields and knowledge, which is maintained only by ingrained and often superficially justified tradition. Bracht et al. (2015) defend the need for a culturalist turnaround in physical education, which would mean *abandoning a model that requires universal demands for solid modernity* (p. 995). This would signify understanding that schools are not the same and require teachers prepared to understand these differences in their work. This is a proposal originating in schools that are concrete and real rather than an idealization of what the school space is.

This situation is also noted by Nunes' research (2011). We suspect this is common in most private HEIs' initial physical education teacher education programs, as the movement that began with publication of the National Curricular Guidelines for the field (Brasil, 2004) stimulated elaboration of hybrid curricula that apply basic common education for the first years of *licenciatura* (licentiate) and bachelor's degree programs¹ as a way to comply with the legal precepts and, simultaneously, attract students. Although there have been few recent studies on training curricula in private

institutions in Brazil, after the new National Curriculum Guidelines, authors who have addressed this issue offer very similar considerations.

Methodology²

The methodology in this study draws on cultural studies to analyse how physical education teachers working in Santo André's, Ribeirão Pires' and São Bernardo do Campo's municipal school systems conceive public schools, teaching physical education and the role of the initial education courses in the field. Nelson et al. (2008) define cultural studies as a term of convenience for a fairly disparate range of theoretical and political positions. Being deeply anti-disciplinary, one can say that they share a commitment to examine cultural practices from the point of view of their involvement *with* and *within* power relationships that possibly involve the connections between teacher education and teaching in primary education. By utilizing a cultural analysis of teachers' statements it allowed us to see diverse forms of social struggle. In essence, we were confronted by the 'urgency in discussing and producing curricular practices that are counter-hegemonic in the utilitarian, instrumental, and economic dimensions of neoliberal education' (Corazza, 2002, p. 107), which, based on the interpretations, leads us to try to uncover which conflicts were present in the diverse voices heard and analyzed, always 'historicizing, politicizing and culturalizing' (p. 107).

Such comprehension understands curriculum as a cultural artifact, something that is constructed from different – and at times antagonistic – perceptions that are established as areas of dispute, a space of struggles over meanings and identities, and that express conceptions of education, physical education, humanity and society. This understanding broadens the cultural studies' framework, allowing us to interpret power relationships that influence the production of knowledge, including the scope of the academic environment, permitting discussion about the way in which they structure and shape the teaching process. Understanding which discourses are legitimized and which are excluded can generate the necessary shift to discuss alternatives of resistance, change and reinterpretation of the curriculum for the education of physical education teachers, aiming, therefore, for meanings that meet perspectives aligned with justice and social equality.

The research was situated in the region known as Greater ABCD.³ The choice of this *locus* for our research was due to the high prevalence of physical education teacher education programs at private higher education institutions with distinctive characteristics, located near these cities. These cities were chosen because they were the only ones in São Paulo's ABC region that held civil service exams for physical education teachers during the last decade. The cities of São Bernardo do Campo and Santo André held exams in 2011 and Ribeirão Pires did so in 2015.

The research process involved working with 12 teachers who both taught in the education systems of the Greater ABCD and were also graduates of HEIs located in the region. They were chosen based on their education, which should have been completed after 2005. This date was selected due to changes in Brazilian legislation that modified teacher education in physical education programs, dividing it into *Licenciatura* (teacher certification) and *Bacharelado* (bachelor's degree). It also reduced the course load and the training time for physical education teachers to three years and a course load of at least 2800 classroom hours. Thus, the objective was to research teachers trained according to these new regulations. Another factor that determined our choices was to seek graduates from different higher education courses to participate in these focus groups. The group of participants had graduates from four higher education institutions with different characteristics: a religious institution maintained by a church, another was a publicly-traded private institution, the third was an autarchy, and the last an isolated faculty, that is, an institution which offers some higher education courses but is not characterized as a university or university center. Thus, we attempted to understand the perspective of educators who work in different school systems and who have also pursued their teacher education in different institutions, even though they are from and are teaching in a rather small geographical region.

Research data were obtained through interviews with three focus groups, each made up of four teachers. The focus groups each met three times during the research process. The interviews were conducted with the objective of generating discussions and in relation to the participants' conception of public schools, their conception of physical education in public schools and their perception of the efficiency of their initial preparation and training in how to work with physical education in public schools. Because each meeting followed an unstructured interview format, it was possible to move on to other issues that complemented those initially asked about.

Each meeting was moderated by the researcher, who also recorded the interviews on audio and video in order to avoid doubts about who said what when those interviews were transcribed. The first meeting allowed us to ask questions about their work as teachers and their perceptions of their teacher education; the second meeting was based on the themes that emerged from the previous meeting. Specifically, we sought to better understand the positionality shared by the participants and also clarify any comments that were seen as vague or difficult to interpret. The third meeting served to encourage participants to expand on and further clarify the emerging themes, particularly where contradictions or different views were expressed. Answers that were not clear enough or that, even after three meetings, were fragile or vague, were discarded. A consensus was reached in the groups through collective dialogue (Gatti, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2006).

In the following discussion, we use quotations from the focus group interviews to help represent the findings. While these quotations are attributed to individuals, they were chosen because they represent a position upon which the group had agreed or were part of a conversation during the construction of a conclusion or of a common, group position.

Teachers' perspectives

The focus groups provided a means for participants' to share, discuss, confirm and clarify their conceptions and experiences of teaching physical education in primary schools in the greater ABCD region. What emerged was a rich set of discussions that help illustrate the oppositions, contradictions, differences and divergences between the teacher education that the participants experienced and their daily work and life as teachers.

Regarding the education of and teaching by physical education professionals in the public school, one of the teachers stated the following:

So ... I came with an education.. college education, right? With a prejudice that the public system is worse than the private system but after some time ... After five years working mainly in the public system I believe that many things done in the public system, we ... the teachers cannot do in the private system due to the goals that many private schools have regarding physical education; on the other hand in the public system, in part because of bureaucratic reasons, I believe that access to spaces and to some materials are a little bit scarce compared with the private system. However, I believe the place where I work today is at the same level as a private school because of activities students develop in school and also activities I try to provide for students in physical education lessons. (P1)

This teacher reveals that the training he received outlined a public-school profile that, according to his experience, does not correspond to reality. It is important to note that Brazil has been going through a process of devaluing public service in general, based on neoliberal economic policy and also from a process of increasing vacancies in public schools, accomplished by reducing funds for the sector. This movement has made public education more precarious and enabled the private sector to expand. This duality is a feature of Brazilian education. However, discussion of teaching conditions and analyses of democratization of not only vacancies, but also of teaching conditions, were expected. What was reported was a generalized comparison of public and private schools. In Apple's (2007) view, the proliferation of negative and unfounded representations of the public school system during the initial teacher education only limits and reduces understanding this institution. This practice helps socialize the perspective that education should be the responsibility of private institutions because they are effective, modern and have well-trained and motivated

professionals. Furthermore, according to the author, what lies behind this is the attempt to disqualify public schools.

Neira (2009) identified the after effects of this among beginning physical education teachers. According to his study, hoping to escape being identified with 'incompetent' and lazy teachers, new graduates dream of teaching in private schools, even if this implies lower salaries and poorer working conditions, considering that conditions in private educational institutions are mostly less advantageous, according to research carried out by the author.

Another participant presented a pedagogical experience that serves as a counterexample and deconstructs the above representation:

That's why, although we work in public schools, we try to offer everything our students would have in private schools, even when there is a lack of material or something. I'm coming from a project with my students about rhythmic and expressive activities that, for me, was sensational. I thought they were going to hate it afterwards and, in the end, when they had a talent show presentation, this year my students presented *carimbó* at the talent show, which was an activity I had given them. So sometimes I think what's missing in public schools is for some teachers to present students with different topics. It was what I needed, I just needed a radio and sometimes I played some part. In the beginning we didn't use the radio because it was only the walking part of the *carimbó* so it we didn't need any material. A delightful activity and I included it in my Brazilian culture class. It's something that some people will never see. (P2)

The quote above attests to the diverse conditions in public schools in different systems. It is also important to note that, contradicting the probability of negative effects expected in relation to physical education teacher education programs, the teachers interviewed see their work as a commitment, and also highlight the necessary care that some observations about their teaching call for:

Just muddling through is a very old thing in state public schools. It's been talked about for many years in various systems. That teachers in the state system just muddle along, but we must look at the significance of these teachers, why they're muddling along, someone has to go to them and ask why they're always doing that. You muddle along with the students, maybe it means something to him, in the view of a person who is just starting or in the view of another teacher, they're just piddling around with the class. You have to find out what's really going on. (P3)

The observations also deal with the training itself and the relation with work developed in the city. Positive aspects and limits on preparation and training are highlighted. As one participant commented about their education,

I think that no University is going to succeed in preparing us for what we're doing here. Today, I realize that a lot of the things we develop with our students weren't taught at the university, but I think what I took the most from the university was ... to develop beyond what was available in our bibliography and all. It wasn't about learning how to kick in soccer or throw a basketball, it was about learning how to look for information about that. It's about comparing actions that have already been done and to build on them, I think this was the big differential in my education because even we who have worked there three, four years with the same students, we can't manage to pass all of this on to our students. On the other hand, I thought what lacked, and is lacking in education at the university ... is to go beyond the supervised field experience program because it doesn't always favor conditions for you to really learn, it depends a lot on the institution where you went for your field experience, the teacher who's there at that moment having the ability to know you're learning, so I thought it lacked greater integration with the university and it's this practical training, to go to places where you have a university professor supervising you in the field experience and not to pass this responsibility on to another professional who's not from the university and sometimes doesn't care about the trainee's education. (P2)

We note that the teacher sees his or her field experience as a privileged moment in teacher education, but that it is emptied of meaning by the distance separating the university from the school. Despite being a discourse showing that some learning will be constructed only by teaching in their everyday school experience, testimony also states explicitly that the field experience should have a greater link between the university and school. Currently, field experiences in Brazil are very bureaucratic, where the need to fill out documents and to gather signatures from teachers and administrators makes that documentation become a priority. This leaves the experience in the background. It is also a characteristic of teacher education courses in Brazil that there is little coordination

between the field experience sites and teacher education courses. We note the critique of transferring responsibility from one professional to another. A previous study (Alviano Jr, 2011) has already pointed out that private HEI professors are, as a rule, paid by the hour, making it impossible to establish a time for interchange and involvement with schools. The field experience is, thus, transformed into a merely bureaucratic function which depends only on the students. Deepening these considerations about teacher education, interviewees presented their views of the curriculum and the courses that make it up.

Something you only see things in practice! Like, you have some practice courses that you even get to use some stuff, but, for example, in a teacher education program, for me to have, for example, not that it isn't important, a year of anatomy, a year of kinesiology, a year of things I won't use very much in school and to have nothing about democratic management, PPP (Pedagogical Policy Plan), CAS (Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute). I didn't see anything about CAS at school, I just learned about it afterwards, studying for a civil service exam. I think what we are offered in college is completely different from what we see in schools, regardless of whether the school is bad or not. In a private school, you even use some practical things that you see in practical courses, there you now use what's involved outside of class.. Even so, we see nothing at college, at least I didn't. (P1)

It really isn't offered ... I myself, all that I have, I was lucky to have attended teacher's college. There in the teacher's college, we had a course that was only about this, only about the laws that structure teaching. (P3)

Evaluation ... we had nothing about evaluation (P4)

We don't have it, really, I had it in teacher's education, so when I got to the university, I really got to learn the part of ... yeah, the practical part of classes ... I got to the part about how to prepare physical education classes from other things I had in teacher's training. (P2)

... Didactics for physical education. (P3)

The practical part you learn afterwards. (P2)

These different teachers' comments converge on the lack of courses that deal with the universe of the school, delve deeply into the law, and promote the study of the institution's everyday life. It is surprising to note that all groups pointed out that discussions about educational policies, school management, evaluation, teaching methodology and didactics were vague or nonexistent. They question the time set aside for biological disciplines and their role in teacher education. Meanwhile, the knowledge they find necessary for primary education teachers' everyday life is acquired through experience and have little or no depth during their initial training, according to Neira, Nunes.

The teachers interviewed also advanced discussion of the relationship professors who train teachers have with primary education. The topic generated an interesting dialogue among participants.

Yes, some things you learn in practice itself, because, in theory, since you've spent four years at college, like, me for example, when you have forty percent of the professors not teaching, not working at schools, and they pass on some theories to us that they don't have personal experience with, so, you leave thinking of it as a dream. In fact, when you have a class of thirty children, you see that all of that is outside of reality, so, for me, I had a good theoretical base and I think what I also had is essential. It's the field, both the paid one and the one you do to pass at the university, the field experience, it's essential. There's no way you can leave a physical education program without having a base, because you're going to feel unprepared and then you're going to get discouraged. (P2)

When I talk about professors who train teachers ... They have to have a base, a nice theoretical base and a practical one too ... Experience, that's it! Working only with theory is no use; you have to take the student to the ball court. The students I'm talking about are the adults who'll be teachers and do the same activity ... They're going to work with children on the court, because I believe that, with this base, they're going to be prepared, they're not going to give up at the first challenge they face. Without this base, they're gone! (P3)

The professor has to have experience to know precisely what goes on in public schools; and college professors don't have that base; they don't work at a school! (P1)

An interesting fact that happened when I studied at teacher's college, even before college, my educational psychology teacher passed a civil service exam and went on to teach. She only gave three classes and couldn't handle it. And she was the person teaching me how to teach! (P3)

In college, I used to mess around ... my professor, he was even my friend ... but I'm telling you something ... The professor that taught us physical education for school ... I used to tell the guys that professor had never taught in a school in his life, I'm sure of it! And then I looked it up, he really never had taught at a school! He graduated, went to graduate school, and that's where he stayed! And he was teaching physical education for teachers! He'd never stepped into a classroom. I don't know to what extent this is viable. (P1)

The statements by participants in our study support Vieira's findings (2013) when he researched teachers who work in the training of physical education teachers programs and confirmed the predominance of an uncritical formation. The study also denounced training with confusing and superficial speeches about physical education in schools.

From the interviewees' statements, we found criticism related to exalting certain attitudes that are not part of everyday pedagogical routine in contrast to lauding other spaces and people. They understand these traits to be common in physical education programs' curricula in all the different higher education institutions they had attended. In their view, school and its problems are dealt with in practical terms, which leads future teachers to construct confusing representations about what teaching is.

Finally, the 'policy' for assigning courses to professors acting in HEIs was also noted. This occurred in one isolated but important example by highlighting a situation already denounced by Alviano Jr (2011), Nunes (2011) and Vieira (2013). According to the aforementioned authors, course assignments having nothing to do with the field of knowledge of professors working in private HEIs is commonplace. Based on the studies cited, we suspect this practice is done mainly to attend to the institutions' financial issues, as they usually prefer assigning a broader workload and reducing their teaching staff over hiring more teachers. The studies indicate that this situation will tend to last as long as hiring policies maintain a correspondence between the number of classes and remuneration.

I think one of the problems in elaborating teacher education curriculum today ... I think it is the infinity of possibilities physical education has. What I commented, that the most valuable asset I had was the teachers' attitude of pursuing this, because the curriculum alone wouldn't be enough, those semester courses wouldn't be enough. Last year I had the opportunity to monitor a professor who worked in a university here in ABC. We realized that the institution itself favors encouraging professors to work in an area they're not specialized in. So ... To fulfill the workload required for the professor to be hired ... He teaches volleyball, for example, in which he is a specialist, he teaches rhythmic activities, in which he is a specialist, but he has to teach didactics as well, in which he may not be so specialized and I've already seen professionals themselves commenting on this feeling of unease. So I think there are even market issues! (P1)

In interviewee's remarks, we have observed that HEI professors are largely aware that their initial education does not allow for minimally satisfactory performance in primary education, a position reinforced by this collaborator:

In fact I think this is it ... Since I graduated, since I started working in education, I've been thinking about it. How my education was weak regarding really knowing what we'll do when we pass a civil service exam ... They take you and they toss you and say – do the best you can! You have no training. (P4)

It is common for early-career teachers to experience what Tardif (2005) termed 'reality shock'. According to Freire et al. (2018) and Neira (2014), they will likely try to bypass the problems they face in everyday life with the support of those closest to them or by appealing to common sense. They are unlikely to critically analyze their own educational background to the point of questioning why they have been taught certain knowledge that seems useless once they have graduated rather than what they need to know to work in a real school.

The feeling of having weak experience in primary education classes puts everything they have learned in jeopardy, given the gap between the satisfaction of having a diploma and suffering in their everyday professional life.

While a large portion of college professors work to maintain current conditions, preserving the inviolability of disciplinary territory at all costs (Alviano Jr, 2011), students, pursuing academic survival, put program completion first. In other words, they try to appropriate its contents and to master the practices adopted in order to obtain the grades they need to graduate.

Considerations

We must stress relevance in relation to critical education, especially during this historical moment through which Brazil is now passing. In a recent article, Knijnik and Luguetti (2020) very emphatically highlighted this issue:

As we write this paper, Brazilian education is suffering an unprecedented attack. In addition to an increase of funding withdrawal for public education that threatens the very existence of public schools and universities, right-wing political parties and movements have been making persistent attempts to demonize teachers and teaching. Their educational policies and practices are based on an eradication of Freirean ideas and any critical thinking from Brazilian schools. For example, teachers who teach anything related to gender, social justice or diversity are being filmed and harassed online by the 'anti-Freirean' patrols. Teachers and teacher educators feel that they do not have any power to deliver their classes without risking their professional positions. (p. 11)

Giroux (1997) understands the space for teacher education as a 'new public sphere', precisely because of the relationship between teaching and society. When we situate teacher education curriculum as constituting this space, we must understand that such construction must (or at least should) consider the variety of manifestations in which power produces inequality and differences. By embracing monolithic discourses and assigning static meanings to public education, converging upon a representation of school, primary education and physical education at school that is also monolithic, the initial teacher education curriculum presents social relations as givens. It thus excludes the possibility of different interpretations and offers a finished 'truth'.

The pedagogical discourse given during teacher education courses contributes to disqualifying both actions developed by working teachers and the community that attends those institutions. Popkewitz (2008) found that the discourse proffered during teacher education sessions ends up forming a logic that belittles students and the pedagogical work performed. Such speech, internalized by future teachers, tends to generalize all educational workers. When university professors say, for example, that 'school teachers should do this, that and the other, because this way the results would be X', they are saying that all teachers do not do this and, therefore, they do not achieve the expected results, which they, the professors, consider ideal. Even though this generalization implies mistakes and injustices, the uncritical view supporting it is socialized, which, in turn, inhibits recognizing the limits of axioms expressed by academic culture. Contrary to this disqualifying discourse, we must open a parenthesis and confirm the existence of various studies stressing that many primary education teachers develop didactic activities in an attentive and collective manner linked to the school population's characteristics, desires and needs. Many teachers know exactly what they are doing, understand their profession and the school's current political and pedagogical function, and constantly reflect on their experiences. Committed to their students and recognizing existing differences, they plan appropriate teaching activities and also record and evaluate the process and reorganize their actions in response to the reaction of those being taught. Many schools organize their pedagogical projects based on a wider community (technical-pedagogical staff, employees, faculty, student body, family members and neighborhood). They elaborate feasible teaching objectives, good activities, parallel projects; coexist democratically and evaluate themselves. As noted, an ethical and scientific lapse is made by those who generalize schools, teaching and teachers. Another argument that contradicts the distorted view of physical education in schools taking place within the curricula we researched is the fact that not all university professors have working conditions, options and experience in the study of educational problems, a fact confirmed by careful analysis of their résumés and working hours in those institutions. What we

can note is that many people talk about the school and its actors based on their own experiences as primary education students or from notions acquired through neoliberal and conservative media. The bureaucratic and administrative problems afflicting schools and the personal needs that sometimes lead professors to take on a large teaching load in different institutions, educational levels or even more than one discipline are also common in the teaching programs researched. For reasons unrelated to educational issues, many courses assign pedagogical disciplines to teachers specialized in other areas of knowledge who have only a tangential interest in and link to the educational issue at hand (Neira, 2009).

Evidently, we need to narrow the dialogue with the school's complexity, thus making teacher education a cultural policy project, educating teachers as intellectuals who will work in 'public spaces where students can debate, assimilate, and acquire the knowledge and the skills needed to struggle to achieve a more humane and just world' (Giroux & McLaren, 2005, p. 140).

We confirmed that economic issues possibly hamper the project advocated by Giroux (1997), where the author argues about teacher restructuring based on categorization as an intellectual. For this author, viewing teachers as intellectuals means to dignify their teaching capacity, making it possible to overcome the division of labor. This implies thinking about teaching practices in the direction of reflecting on the technocratic and instrumental ideologies that separate the times and responsibilities for planning, organizing and executing everyday teaching tasks.

Educating teachers as intellectuals also means recognizing schools as social and cultural sites that represent a way of viewing the world and establishing particular languages, exclusions and selections, present in society as a whole. Thinking about this, Giroux highlights the need to make the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical. After all,

[...] schools represent both an effort to define themselves and a struggle in terms of power relations. Within this perspective, critical reflection and action become part of a fundamental social project to help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome economic, political, and social injustices, and to further humanize themselves as part of this struggle. (p. 163)

Once we have accepted the proposal to make pedagogy more social and political, it will be impossible to think about teacher education that is detached from the school, since it is a dynamic space in terms of social and cultural relations. Thus, it is up to teachers and teacher educators to reflect on relationships that permeate educational institutions, based on ethics committed to overcoming inequality, defending democracy, and accepting a conscious option for life in its broadest sense.

As for making the political more pedagogical, we clearly see the importance of the critically educating future teachers by adopting dialogue as a starting point for understanding and reflecting on the act of teaching itself, in addition to making it possible to wonder about and to denaturalize the teaching of contents. In a certain way, by questioning the reasons why some disciplines are given privileged spaces to the detriment of other topics considered relevant by those who do the actual work, the teachers interviewed have sent a message to physical education teacher programs: we must urgently discuss what we have been teaching.

Reconstructing curriculum based on these premises means recognizing that discursive production is linked to the specific social sites where they are produced. In other words, the academic community theorizes based upon contexts distinct from those of the school community – distinct, but just as important. However, this possibility can only be seen when teacher education programs accept the school as a space for civic education and the construction of knowledge. This forces them to engage in dialogue and establish an intimate relationship with the institution – a relationship that will project it as a real protagonist in teacher education. This is the place that it must occupy if we intend to effectively train teachers. Thus, this research defends the need for a connection between physical education teacher education programs and public schools, something that does not currently exist in Brazil, the lack of which has brought consequences such as those observed in conversations with teachers in the focus groups.

Notes

1. Despite the fact that the Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines for physical education mention *licenciatura* and graduate programs, we have adopted the common terminology of 'bachelor's degree'.
2. The methodological approach and instruments used in this research adhered to established ethical procedures for scientific research in social science in accordance with the University of São Paulo's resolutions 4871/2001 and 7197/2016.
3. ABCD is a geopolitical area made up of seven cities – Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, Diadema, Mauá, Ribeirão Pires and Rio Grande da Serra – which, alongside others, constitute the city of São Paulo's metropolitan region.

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ORCID

Wilson Alviano Jr  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5599-9865>

Marcos Garcia Neira  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1054-8224>

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