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The importance of physical education in schooling

A importância da Educação Física na formação escolar

La importancia de la educación física en la formación escolar

Mauri Werner de Mattos – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Social Work from Faculdade Anhanguera, 2022.
Jeronimo Hoffmann – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Business Administration from IESA (Instituto de Ensino Superior de Santo Ângelo), 2012.
Rodrigo Carloto Fruet – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Law from IESA (Instituto de Ensino Superior de Santo Ângelo), 2002.
Marcia Estela Taborda Valeski – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Criminology from UNIASSELVI, 2015.
Heliton André Lunardi – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Business Administration from IESA (Instituto de Ensino Superior de Santo Ângelo), 2013.
Raquel Lisiane Engel – State civil servant in public security. Degree in Law from IESA (Instituto de Ensino Superior de Santo Ângelo), 2012.

Abstract:
This article aims to analyze the importance of physical education in students' holistic development, considering the physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects involved in education. School physical education is more than a space for motor development: it provides a field for building values, attitudes and knowledge that contribute to the overall development of the individual. The research consisted of a literature review drawing on authors who discuss the pedagogical relevance of physical education. The findings indicate that physical education fosters autonomy, cooperation and citizenship, while contributing to students' health and quality of life. The study concludes that physical education is an essential component of contemporary schooling because it promotes holistic development and meaningful learning, connecting body, mind and society.

Keywords: Physical education. Holistic development. Elementary education. School. Learning.

Resumo:
O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a importância da Educação Física na formação integral do aluno, considerando os aspectos físicos, cognitivos, sociais e emocionais envolvidos no processo educativo. A Educação Física escolar, mais do que um espaço para o desenvolvimento motor, representa um campo de construção de valores, atitudes e conhecimentos que contribuem para a formação global do indivíduo. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio de revisão bibliográfica, com base em autores que discutem a relevância pedagógica da Educação Física. Os resultados apontam que a prática da Educação Física favorece o desenvolvimento da autonomia, da cooperação e da cidadania, além de contribuir para a saúde e qualidade de vida dos alunos. Conclui-se que a Educação Física é componente essencial na escola contemporânea, pois promove o desenvolvimento integral e o aprendizado significativo, articulando corpo, mente e sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física. Formação integral. Ensino fundamental. Escola. Aprendizagem.

Resumen:

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Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la importancia de la educación física en la formación integral del alumno, considerando los aspectos físicos, cognitivos, sociales y emocionales implicados en el proceso educativo. La educación física escolar, más que un espacio para el desarrollo motor, constituye un ámbito de construcción de valores, actitudes y conocimientos que contribuyen a la formación global del individuo. La investigación se realizó mediante una revisión bibliográfica basada en autores que analizan la relevancia pedagógica de la educación física. Los resultados indican que su práctica favorece el desarrollo de la autonomía, la cooperación y la ciudadanía, además de contribuir a la salud y calidad de vida de los alumnos. Se concluye que la educación física es un componente esencial de la escuela contemporánea, pues promueve el desarrollo integral y el aprendizaje significativo, articulando cuerpo, mente y sociedad.

Palabras clave: Educación física. Formación integral. Educación primaria. Escuela. Aprendizaje.

Introduction

The discipline of Physical Education is a comprehensive field of teaching and learning that, according to the National Curriculum Parameters (NCP) and other educational guidelines, aims to contribute to the integral and social formation of the student. Through its practices and contents, Physical Education seeks to develop values such as respect, dignity and solidarity, fundamental for the formation of character and for the coexistence in society (BRASIL, 1997). Thus, the discipline acts in an interdisciplinary way, approaching body and mind in the educational process and collaborating with the full development of the student.

Despite its pedagogical relevance, Physical Education is still, in many school contexts, treated in a secondary way. It is often associated only with moments of leisure or competition, without due recognition of its formative value. However, according to Betti:

> The function of Physical Education is much broader: it must form the citizen capable of producing, reproducing and transforming the body culture of movement, appropriating practices such as sports, games, dances, fights and gymnastics in a critical, conscious and participatory way. Thus, its contribution goes beyond the physical dimension, reaching cognitive, affective and social aspects. (Betti, 1992)

In the contemporary context, Physical Education assumes an increasingly relevant role in school, by providing experiences that stimulate cooperation, respect for differences and inclusion. According to Darido:

> The classes must ensure the participation of all students, without distinction of skills, physical conditions or limitations, promoting equal learning opportunities. Thus, the discipline favors collective coexistence and the construction of a more just and democratic society, in which everyone can express their potential and learn to respect the other. (Darido, 1999)

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In addition to contributing to motor and physical development, Physical Education complements the intellectual and moral formation of students by stimulating critical thinking about the manifestations of body culture. According to Falkenbach:

> The pedagogical practice should arouse interest in bodily activities and encourage harmonious experiences, based on mutual respect and appreciation of differences. This approach broadens the understanding that the body is also space of expression, identity and social construction. (Falkenbach, 2002)

In moments of recreation, games and sports, it is essential that the teacher stimulates attitudes of solidarity, cooperation and empathy. The diversity of body and cultural practices should be recognized as a means of integration and not exclusion (SPORTS JOB, 2018). Thus, the teaching of Physical Education goes beyond simple physical exercise, becoming an instrument of social transformation. In this sense, Barbosa (2004) points out that the fundamental role of school Physical Education is to form critical, autonomous and conscious citizens, capable of acting responsibly and participatively in society.

Therefore, this study aims to review the literature on the importance of Physical Education in the integral education of the individual. It seeks to understand how its contents and pedagogical strategies (in particular the role of the teacher) can contribute to the critical, reflective and citizen development of children and adolescents in elementary school, strengthening the role of the discipline as an essential component of the educational process.

Physical education and students' holistic development

In addressing School Physical Education, it is necessary to understand that it represents a field of broad knowledge and of extreme relevance in the educational process. Although, in some contexts, it is still treated as mere recreational activity, its function goes far beyond leisure. Physical Education has a training role, contributing to the physical, motor, cognitive and social development of the student, in addition to favoring socialization and the construction of individual and collective identity.

In this sense, the discipline acts as an important instrument of integration, as it helps the student to understand himself as a unique subject, endowed with its own characteristics, inserted in a plural and diversified society. This singularity is not related to exclusivity, but to the awareness of oneself and of the other, an essential aspect for harmonious coexistence in a social context composed of multiple layers and realities. Thus, when well conducted, Physical Education can promote the development of personal and social competencies fundamental to the holistic development of the individual.

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The teaching of Physical Education has undergone profound changes over the decades. The traditional model, centered on the authoritarian figure of the teacher, gave way to a more dialogic and participatory approach. In the past, the hierarchy in the classroom placed the teacher as absolute holder of knowledge, distant from the reality of the students (OLIVEIRA, 1968–1984). Over the years and under the influence of critical pedagogical perspectives, this relationship has been re-signified. Currently, the teacher is understood as a mediator of knowledge, responsible for guiding and building, together with the students, knowledge that favors social training and critical thinking (FREIRE, 1996).

However, it is observed that, in some cases, the balance between authority and dialogue has been lost. Excessive flexibility of roles can generate a scenario in which the figure of the teacher is devalued, and the educational process loses its intentionality. The phenomenon popularly known as “just let them play” — in which students determine the activities and the teacher only observes — shows an inversion of roles and a distancing from the true pedagogical purpose of the discipline. As Freire points out:

> The educational practice should be aligned with the historical context and social needs, maintaining the awareness that education is an act of commitment and mutual responsibility between teacher and student. (Freire, 1996)

Currently, many challenges are still imposed on School Physical Education. The lack of motivation of students and teachers, the lack of institutional recognition and the scarcity of pedagogical resources compromise the quality of practices and the achievement of their objectives. However, it is necessary to understand that the educational process is a collective endeavor: only with the engagement of both parties — educators and students — it is possible to achieve significant results. Thus, Physical Education reaffirms its role as an essential component of the integral education of the student, contributing to the physical, emotional, social and ethical development, and to the construction of a more conscious and participatory society.

The role of the Physical Education teacher in school

The physical education teacher is a mediator of knowledge, responsible for planning, guiding and evaluating movement practices that encourage students’ holistic development. Their work goes beyond implementing motor activities and encompasses the development of values and attitudes.

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In the school environment, Physical Education offers children and adolescents the opportunity to socialize, express emotions and develop skills through games, play and directed body activities. In this context, the Physical Education teacher plays a central role in the formation of the student, because he is responsible for creating experiences that promote self-confidence, interaction and motor and social development. The teaching activity must go beyond technical education, stimulating coexistence, mutual respect and the valorization of differences (CARDOSO, 1991; DARIDO, 2003).

Physical Education, after many studies and reformulations, was consolidated as a mandatory component of basic education, with the main objective of contributing to the formation of critical and conscious citizens through the body culture of the movement. This change also transformed the profile of the teacher, who ceased to be the former professional of military or hygienist focus and became a mediator of knowledge, with autonomy to adapt the contents to the needs and contexts of the students (BRASIL, 1997).

According to the National Curriculum Parameters, Physical Education provides learning experiences that mobilize affective, ethical, social and bodily dimensions in an intense and explicit way, which requires from the teacher comprehensive knowledge about their students and pedagogical sensitivity to conduct the educational process (BRASIL, 1997). Thus, the teacher assumes the role of facilitator of learning, responsible for awakening values, attitudes and reflections that contribute to the social and citizen formation of the student.

Teachers therefore need to understand that their work encompasses more than physical activities: it contributes to students' holistic development. Classes develop empathy, respect for one's own and others' limitations, and appreciation of the diversity present at school. This awareness should be encouraged so that students carry these lessons into their lives, developing attitudes of coexistence and respect in their social relationships (FALKENBACH, 2002).

According to Palma Filho:

> It is from these experiences that the balance between citizenship and education is established, allowing the student to build a critical and reflective position. Physical Education, alongside other areas of knowledge, contributes to the formation of character and to the development of an individual and collective identity based on social and ethical values (Palma Filho, 1998).

Araújo and Santos (2009) point out that the Physical Education teacher has a fundamental role in the formation of values, because the situations experienced in the classes allow working cooperation, solidarity and respect. However, if the teacher does not exercise his pedagogical autonomy, the discipline tends to lose meaning and reduce itself to mere

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recreational activity. For learning to be effective, it is necessary for the teacher to plan his actions based on inclusive principles, stimulating the participation of all students and the collective construction of knowledge.

According to Piaget (1996), knowledge is progressively formed through the interaction between the subject, the physical environment and the social environment. Thus, the school environment should promote this interaction and promote challenging situations that stimulate reasoning and autonomy. The pedagogical project of the school, therefore, should be based on dynamic and interactive practices that promote the integral development of students.

To achieve this goal, it is essential that Physical Education classes be planned with a focus on cooperation, inclusion and solidarity. Catunda, Sartori and Laurindo (2013) state that the culture of the movement is committed to values such as tolerance, empathy and respect, which are indispensable to human formation. The teaching action must be based on scientific knowledge, technical quality, ethics and social commitment, in order to contribute to the development of the school community.

When analyzing the role of Physical Education teacher, Araújo and Santos (2010) emphasize that most educators recognize the importance of discipline in the overall education of students. Darido's studies (1999) reinforce that, when the teacher works on contents that address physical activity, citizenship, values and respect for diversity, contributes to the development of critical sense and the formation of participatory citizens. Falkenbach (2002) also advocates the adoption of inclusive practices that stimulate students' autonomy in the choice of activities and in the resolution of conflicts, strengthening cooperative learning.

Vasconcelos (1995) complements that the good relationship between teachers and students is essential for the learning process and for the strengthening of positive social bonds. When the student experiences pleasurable and significant activities, learning becomes more effective, and the values worked in class begin to integrate their behavior inside and outside the school. Thus, Physical Education acts as an agent of personal and collective transformation, promoting inclusion, empathy and sense of social responsibility.

The role of the Physical Education teacher within the school is fundamental for the integral education of the student, because it goes far beyond the simple sports practice. The teacher is the mediator of the educational process that uses the body and the movement as languages of learning, expression and socialization. It is in Physical Education classes that children have the opportunity to experience collective living, develop motor and cognitive skills, and understand the importance of values such as respect, empathy and cooperation.

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According to Silva (2002), the objectives of Physical Education are not limited to improving motor skills — such as strength, speed, endurance, balance and coordination — but also aim to cultivate attitudes of cordiality and mutual help among students, strengthening human development in its entirety.

The Physical Education teacher must understand that his pedagogical practice is also a space of ethical and social formation. When planning his classes, he must consider the diversity of the students, respecting their physical, cultural and emotional differences. The class must be an environment of inclusion and welcoming, where each student feels able to participate and learn. As Betti and Zulian (1992) observes, Physical Education must awaken in the student the pleasure in moving and the interest in understanding the meaning of bodily practices. This understanding broadens the student's gaze on the body, transforming him into a subject who not only performs movements, but who thinks, reflects and expresses himself through them.

In recent decades, Physical Education has taken a central role in the formation of critical and conscious citizens. Recast from the new educational guidelines, the discipline aims not only to develop the body, but also to promote reflection on the body culture and the role of the movement in society. Barbosa (2004) highlights that Physical Education classes should contribute to the exercise of citizenship, teaching students to live with differences, respect rules and work as a team. When activities are well conducted, they become pedagogical tools that help in the construction of responsible and supportive attitudes, fundamental to social coexistence.

> Contemporary renovating education constantly seeks new methodologies and tools that diversify collective work. Thus, the student is inserted as the main subject of this work, transforming his/her reality. Rather than stimulating the practice of a sport, physical education has the function of allowing students to experience other cultures. It is necessary to understand it as a manifestation of culture, where the student besides knowing how to practice bodily movements correctly must also understand the importance of notorious culture (SPORTSJOB, 2022).

The human movement, according to Santin (2003), is a form of language and expression, and must be recognized as such within the school. Each gesture, posture or displacement of the body carries an intention and communicates something about the subject and its surroundings. For Da Silva Machado et al. (2012), the body speaks and expresses feelings, emotions and thoughts, being, therefore, an instrument of communication as important as verbal language. In this perspective, the Physical Education teacher must value the body as a means of expression and knowledge, encouraging the student to understand and respect the body manifestations of his or her own and others.

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The teacher, due to his closeness and constant dialogue with the students, occupies a privileged position in the process of values formation. Necyk (2012) notes that students usually resort to the Physical Education teacher to discuss their difficulties, feelings and limits, which reinforces the importance of the affective and pedagogical relationship between both. This relationship of trust should be used to promote reflections on ethics, citizenship and mutual respect. The teacher, therefore, needs to understand that his/her performance goes far beyond sports practice: he/she is a transformation agent, responsible for guiding the students in their personal and social training.

However, the reality of Brazilian schools still presents significant challenges for the teaching of Physical Education. The scarcity of materials, the lack of adequate structure and the devaluation of the discipline often limit the teacher's work. In view of these difficulties, the teacher needs to be creative and committed, seeking strategies to make the most of the available spaces and resources. Neira (2006) points out that the movement is something natural in the child, and it is up to the teacher to use it intentionally and pedagogically, promoting motor, social and emotional development in each stage of learning.

Even in adverse contexts, the Physical Education teacher can develop meaningful classes, capable of motivating and inspiring students. This requires critical reflection, sensitivity and constant professional updating. Classes must go beyond the simple repetition of gestures and sports techniques: it is necessary to propose debates, cooperative activities and challenges that stimulate the reasoning, creativity and autonomy of students. When the teacher stimulates dialogue and active participation, he transforms Physical Education into a space for collective construction of knowledge, where learning arises from the interaction and exchange of experiences.

Teacher training, therefore, is an essential element for the strengthening of Physical Education in school. It is essential that the teacher develop pedagogical, communicative and emotional skills that enable him to deal with diversity and promote inclusive education. According to Araújo and Santos (2009), Physical Education plays a relevant role in the formation of values, because in classes situations that allow him to work solidarity, cooperation and respect are experienced. If the teacher does not exercise his autonomy and pedagogical role, there is a risk of reducing the discipline to a recreational practice without training purpose.

In addition, the teacher must be clear that his pedagogical action needs to dialogue with the historical and social context in which he is inserted. The educational process must accompany the transformations of society, responding to the new cultural and behavioral

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demands of the students. Physical education, in this sense, is a privileged space to address topics such as diversity, inclusion, gender and body, favoring critical reflection on the role of the individual in the contemporary world.

When working consciously and critically, the Physical Education teacher transforms the class into an active and reflective learning environment. The movement ceases to be just a physical exercise and becomes an educational and emancipating practice. It is in this space that the student learns to value group work, to recognize its limitations, to respect the other and to understand the body as part of his identity.

Thus, the role of the Physical Education teacher is, first of all, that of a educator of citizens. More than teaching sports techniques, it teaches values, promotes inclusion and stimulates autonomy. Its commitment goes beyond the classroom: it is a commitment to social transformation. By uniting theory, practice and pedagogical sensitivity, the teacher becomes the link between knowledge and life, helping his students to understand that true learning is in coexistence, respect and collective construction of knowledge.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, it was perceived that Physical Education plays a much more comprehensive and profound role than the simple practice of physical activities or the improvement of basic motor skills. Although the development of strength, endurance, speed, agility, coordination and balance is one of the pillars of the discipline, it is perceived that the true impact of Physical Education lies in the promotion of an integral development, involving physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects. Therefore, the discipline presents itself as a multifaceted learning space, capable of contributing to the formation of complete individuals, aware of themselves and of the relationships they establish with the world around them.

During the analysis and reflection on the pedagogical texts and practices, it was observed that Physical Education is a privileged environment for the development of values and attitudes essential to life in society. Through activities, students have the opportunity to learn to work as a team, to respect rules, to deal with diversity and to face challenges in an ethical and responsible way. These experiences not only influence behavior in the school context, but also contribute to the construction of more conscious, empathetic and collaborative citizens. The practice of the discipline, therefore, goes far beyond the body; it promotes social skills, strengthens interpersonal bonds and prepares students for situations of cooperation, leadership and resolution of conflicts in different spheres of life.

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The role of the Physical Education teacher is also fundamental in this process. The teacher's work goes beyond technical instruction; he is a mediator, advisor and facilitator of the integral development of the student. When planning diversified, inclusive and challenging activities, the teacher allows each student to explore their potential, face their limitations and develop not only physical skills, but also emotional and social skills. This pedagogical practice promotes self-knowledge, self-esteem, resilience and trust, preparing students to face challenges and to interact constructively with colleagues and the community in general. The bond established between teacher and student, combined with a reflective and planned practice, makes Physical Education a discipline capable of promoting significant changes in the personal and social training of students.

When reflecting on all these aspects, it becomes clear that Physical Education should be valued not only as a curricular component, but as a strategic tool for the holistic development of the human being. It integrates body, mind and social relations, promoting a balance that contributes to the full development of students. By providing moments of meaningful learning, social interaction, overcoming challenges and building healthy habits, the discipline reaffirms its importance as an agent of personal and social transformation.

The analysis carried out throughout this study shows that Physical Education is not limited to technical instruction or the development of motor skills; it constitutes a space for learning and integral development, capable of forming conscious, healthy, ethical and socially responsible individuals. The physical, emotional and social benefits provided by the discipline consolidate their indispensable role in the educational process. Investing in Physical Education of quality means investing in the formation of complete citizens, able to relate in a balanced way to themselves and to others, facing challenges with resilience and building a life guided by health, respect and continuous development.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Physical Education plays a transforming role in the lives of students, promoting not only physical improvement, but also the formation of values, attitudes, socio-emotional skills and cognitive skills essential to life in society. This discipline, when well planned and executed, becomes a powerful instrument of integral development, capable of contributing to the construction of more conscious, healthy, collaborative and prepared individuals to face the challenges of the present and future. Thus, Physical Education reaffirms its relevance as an essential component of education, whose contribution exceeds the limits of the school and positively influences the personal, social and citizen trajectory of each student.

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