

CIRCUS PRACTICES IN THE “LOOM” OF INITIAL TRAINING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: NEW THREADS BEYOND THE CANVAS

AS PRÁTICAS CIRCENSES NO “TEAR” DA FORMAÇÃO INICIAL EM EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA: NOVAS TESSITURAS PARA ALÉM DA LONA

LAS PRÁCTICAS CIRCENSES EN EL “TELAR” DE LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL EN EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA: NUEVAS TEXTURAS MÁS ALLÁ DE LA CARPA

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Keywords:
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Abstract: This paper analyzes the processes of implementation of circus practices in initial training in Physical Education at higher education institutions in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. The document analysis of the political-pedagogic projects of the institutions and programs of disciplines related to the subject of circus were interwoven to narrative interviews with teachers, managers and students. The processes investigated were found to be based on intense stories of mobilizations and clashes, on research trajectories seeking to build solid knowledge beyond the limits imposed by institutional times and spaces.

Palavras chave:
Educação Física.
Currículo.
Circo.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa os processos de implementação das práticas circenses na formação inicial em Educação Física em duas Instituições de Ensino Superior do Estado de São Paulo. Para isso, entrelaçou-se a análise documental dos projetos político-pedagógicos das instituições e dos programas das disciplinas relacionadas à temática circense às entrevistas narrativas com professores, gestores e alunos. Constatou-se que os processos investigados foram sedimentados no contexto de intensas histórias de mobilizações e embates, de trajetórias de pesquisa na busca pela construção de sólidos conhecimentos para além dos limites que os tempos e espaços institucionais impõem.

Palabras clave:
Educación Física.
Currículo.
Circo.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza los procesos de implementación de las prácticas circenses en la formación inicial en Educación Física en dos instituciones de educación superior del Estado de São Paulo, en Brasil. Para ello, se entrelazaron el análisis documental del proyecto político pedagógico de las instituciones y los programas de las disciplinas relacionadas con la temática circense y las entrevistas narrativas con profesores, administradores y alumnos. Se constató que los procesos investigados resultan de intensas historias de movilizaciones y enfrentamientos, de trayectorias de investigación en buscando construir sólidos conocimientos más allá de los límites que imponen los tiempos y espacios institucionales.

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1 STARTING OUR “NUMBER”

The polysemy of circus practices¹ in their different expressions throughout history leads to a reflection about different educational possibilities still little studied. In contemporary times, specifically in Physical Education, a wide pedagogical potential is opened and it encourages us to conduct further investigations. Similarly, by observing relations between these areas more carefully, we find intense dialogue as well as numerous tensions and contradictions historically constituted over the 19th and 20th centuries (SOARES, 2002, 2009, HAUFFE; GÓIS JUNIOR, 2014), a set of body and gesture meanings that are unique to circus practices debated in Physical Education, in addition to the plurality of those manifestations in different scenarios.

Increasing academic production on circus practices in the context of Physical Education, especially from the 1990s on (BORTOLETO, 2011, ONTANÓN; DUPRAT; BORTOLETO, 2012), shows multiple forms of approximation to the circus universe. In the school scenario, circus practices were analyzed by Duprat (2007) and Ontañón (2012) and were also part of the curriculum guidelines of the State of Paraná's Basic Education (PARANÁ, 2008). In the social field, different proposals address their development in the socio-educational sphere for youth at social risk (MCCUTCHEON, 2003, BOLTON, 2004), in health promotion (SANTOS *et al.*, 2012, TUCUNDUVA; PELANDA, 2012), in the context of leisure, games inspired by circus practices promoting playfulness (SILVA, C. L., 2009, BORTOLETO; PINHEIRO; PRODÓCIMO, 2011; initial training in Physical Education composing the curriculum of some courses (BORTOLETO; CELANTE, 2011, FERNANDES, 2014) and, finally, in continuing education and university community outreach programs² (ABRAHÃO, 2011).

In addition to these examples, at least two federal programs – one under the Ministry of Sport, called “Program Second Half”,³ and the other under the Ministry of Education known as “Program More Education”⁴ – have been fostering several educational activities with pedagogical support. Circus practices are among them, which led some companies to market materials and equipment in the form of a “circus kit” already assembled for the development of educational activities under those programs.

In spite of the suggested possibilities, the work of Duprat and Darido (2011) found, through a survey of elementary school curriculum proposals in nine Brazilian states, that only two of them include circus practices as curriculum content. Now, the expansion of this knowledge is seen in different contexts, but Brazilian curricular proposals do not address them. A significant amount of

1 Despite the prevalence of the term “circus activities” in the field, we prefer to treat them as “circus practices”, which, of course, are not those transferred linearly in the professional circus sphere to other educational settings, but rather demonstrations that can be debated considering different goals. We were inspired by Silva and Damiani (2005) on “physical activity” and “body practice” to draw this parallel between “circus activities” and “circus practices.” According to the authors, “body practice” appears as an expression that “[...] properly shows the sense of cultural construction and language present in different forms of body expression” (SILVA; DAMIANI, 2005, p. 24).

2 COSTA, Ana C. P.; TIAEN, Marcos S.; SAMBUGARI, Marcia R. N. O circo na UFMS/CPAN: a formação de professores e acadêmicos como multiplicadores de arte circense nas instituições escolares e não escolares. In: ENCONTRO DE EXTENSÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA DA UFMS, 3. Campo Grande, 2008. Anais... p. 83.

3 Considered strategic by the Federal Government, “Program Second Half” aims to democratize access to the practice and the culture of educational sport in order to promote the whole development of children, adolescents and youth as a factor for building citizenship and improving quality of life, primarily for those living in socially vulnerable areas (BRASIL, 2011).

4 “Program More Education” integrates actions of the Education Development Plan (EDP) and is the Ministry of Education's strategy to encourage expansion of the school day and curriculum organization under the perspective of Whole Education. State, municipal and Federal District public schools may join the program and choose diverse activities with pedagogical support. For further information: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16690&Itemid=1115>.

experience accounts focus on school, but universities rarely debate the topic and contribute little to contextualize it, especially initial training in Physical Education. Does that indicate mismatch between official documents and daily life in different areas of activity of Physical Education? Works such as Fodella (2000), Invernó (2003) and Price (2012) allow us to assume that. How has this been happening abroad?

Previous studies, (FERNANDES, 2013, FERNANDES; EHREBERG, 2014,⁵ FERNANDES, 2014) found that only a small number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) seem to pay more attention to the situation above. In the cases investigated in the state of São Paulo, professors' and students' active and effective participation in community outreach, teaching and research actions provided visibility and opportunities for building knowledge from circus practices, thus contributing to their legitimacy.

In this scenario, we find a topic that is relevant for the field, but little didactic/pedagogical and methodological guidance on its development in initial training. There is a risk of treating them in a fragmented, unsystematic and instrumental way. The problem might influence issues ranging from lack of safety procedures in the classroom to the use of circus techniques inconsistently with their principles and objectives. Therefore, we advocate the relevance of proposals that discuss the presence of circus practices in curricula in order to cover the several possibilities of the universe of body culture as heritage of humanity to be recognized, appreciated and reframed.

However, power relations that establish knowledge hierarchies, valuing some of them while concealing others, are not ignored (SILVA, T. T., 2007). The problem exposed by the author suggests, once again, the territory for disputes established by the curriculum, which should be built collectively based on deep analysis about the specificities of professional fields, and therefore continuously rebuilt and evaluated by its actors.

Any curricular decision is always a political action that teaches also through what it silences and neglects, thus positioning subjects within cultures and setting different discourses in motion. Therefore, we question society models aimed at by current curricula of initial training in Physical Education. Moreover, which interests are behind the knowledge included in curricula?

Some higher education courses in Physical Education are beginning to pay attention to circus knowledge that is actually based on the very historical roots of the field – an argument that is relevant to justify their inclusion in curricula (INVERNÓ, 2003, BORTOLETO, 2011).

Focusing on curriculum development processes in initial education in which protagonists are respected, their voices are heard and minorities are accepted, our proposal is to consider the distinct knowledges of the community of which the educational institution is part. Nevertheless, “like many other practices, the curriculum is a practice that assigns significances, a discourse that makes meanings. It is therefore a cultural practice” (LOPES; MACEDO, 2011, p. 203).

In the midst of these debates, this research focuses on the analysis of the implementation process of circus practices in initial training in Physical Education, based on concrete curricular experiences in teaching, research and community outreach in two state HEIs in São Paulo.

⁵ FERNANDES, Rita de C.; EHREBERG, Monica C. As práticas corporais circenses na formação inicial em educação física: gestualidade, expressividade e inovação curricular em foco. In: ENCONTRO NACIONAL DE DIDÁTICA E PRÁTICA DE ENSINO, 17. 2014, Fortaleza. Anais...

2 CIRCUS PRACTICES HERE AND THERE: PATHS TRODDEN IN THE RESEARCH

This qualitative-descriptive study was conducted in two HEIs in the state of São Paulo – a state public university (Institution A) and a local authority with administrative autonomy (Institution B). Both gave their permission for the study.⁶

We chose to further look into the meanings of the implementation of circus practices in those institutions because we identified pedagogical practices addressing those manifestations in the curriculum of these courses since 2006 at Institution A and from 2009 on at institution B, as shown by Bortoleto and Celante (2011). That led us to critical reflection on the processes of implementation of those body practices.

Document analysis (LUDKE; ANDRÉ, 1986) of the political-pedagogical project (PPP) of Institution A,⁷ the Institutional Report (RI) for the period 2010 to 2012 of institution B⁸ and syllabus of disciplines related to circus themes were entwined to narrative interviews (FLICK 2009, JOVCHELOVITCH; BAUER, 2012). Institution B did not provide its PPP for the research arguing that it was under restructuring. It provided only the report prepared for the course's re-certification purposes.

Following the recommendations of Kincheloe (2006) and Denzin and Lincoln (2006), the choice of participants was not random. We sought quantitative balance, establishing the best proportion possible of subjects located at different levels of the administrative and pedagogical hierarchy of the HEIs surveyed, so that different voices would be represented.

For Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2012, p. 104), "direct and immediate involvement in the core activities of the event being described seems to be an important factor in narrative production". Therefore, we focused on subjects who somehow had more close contact with the topic through community outreach projects, tutoring or similar activities.

Complementing the scenario, some details of students and professors were obtained from professors and courses' coordinators, and we sought their acceptance and inclusion as research participants based on the criteria mentioned above. The interviews were previously scheduled and conducted between August and October 2013, and were recorded with subjects' permission and transcribed to be analyzed by researchers. At the beginning of each interview, the Free and Informed Consent Form was introduced while maintaining confidentiality as to the identities of participants, who were ascribed fictitious names of their own choice.

Therefore, we interviewed 13 participants, including:

- Two coordinators of Physical Education courses – a professor from Institution A and one from Institution B;
- Two professors, one from Institution A and one from Institution B, who were in charge of the discipline related to circus practices in the Physical Education courses surveyed;
- A professor from Institution A who is a former course coordinator that accompanied the first community outreach projects and final course works related to the topic;

6 The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of UNICAMP's School of Medical Sciences (Report 374524). The institutions' mandatory letters of permission were sent.

7 INSTITUIÇÃO A. **Projeto Político-Pedagógico**. São Paulo, 2012.

8 INSTITUIÇÃO B. **Relatório Institucional de 2010-2012**. São Paulo, 2012.

- Two guest professors who are professional artists and have taught classes in the disciplines, and who have followed that work for more than two years – one from each institution;
- Three former students of both sexes, of legal age, who attended the disciplines linked to circus practices at the HEIs;
- Three regular students of both sexes, of legal age, who were enrolled in the last semester of Physical Education courses surveyed at the time of data collection – two from Institution A and one from Institution B.

Three participants were women and ten were men. Professors and management staff were aged 22-47 and regular students and graduates were 22-33. In addition, the group of professors and staff included only one guest professor working in initial training, while the others held masters' degrees and PhDs. When the interviews were conducted, most had taught in higher education for significant lengths of time – over five years.

The interviews were conducted as an enunciation situation that reiterates “the need to seek process, movement, meaning in discursive practices, causing the interview to be the place where possible versions of reality are built” (ROCHA; DAHER; SANT'ANNA, 2004). After they were transcribed, the transcripts were emailed to subjects so they could evaluate them and add or change any part. Only one interview with a student from Institution A was carried out remotely via voice software, which favored a different form of interaction through new communication technologies, but ended up somehow hampering the dynamics due to problems of connection speed, interruption of the call or network issues.

Another matter of concern was the implications of previous relationships between researchers and some subjects, when they shared relatively close spaces for initial and continuing education. Under this dynamic, we chose to consider such materials of analysis as part of a research that is neither aseptic or neutral, since it embraces that proximity between researchers and subjects, casting light on the different worldviews that are at stake in the analyzes carried out and their production conditions (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006).

3 PERSPECTIVES FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND DOCUMENTS: FROM INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS TO COLLECTIVE TRAJECTORIES

Throughout the interviews and document analysis, soaked by the meanings and significances set in motion through the voices of distinct subjects, themes and issues emerged from the findings, without, however, being established in advance. Thus, this article will analyze the following question: how and under which practical conditions have circus practices been implemented at those institutions?

While both processes occurred virtually at the same time, they happen in different ways, with very specific objectives and characteristics. We are not proposing to establish arbitrary comparisons, but to analyze the experiences lived in those contexts, sometimes identifying their potential, sometimes learning from their limitations, sometimes comparing those experiences with the views of the authors in dialogue, sometimes being surprised by those professors' ways of working – creative landscapes that the subjects were building along their paths.

It may be interesting to think about those processes by situating two moments or movements, which are of course interconnected and unfold into several others, but pointing

them out is relevant. The first moment was non-institutionalized inclusion driven mainly by the demand coming from groups of students interested in circus practices or even because they are already artists with experiences built outside the college context. Those very subjects mobilized to “be seen”, seeking support in professors to experience and reflect on those body practices in higher education, initially through community outreach projects.

[...] The first tissues that were placed were from girls who practiced circus activities; they were not from the college. And sometimes we'd see a rope there and a girl up and down, and that would draw a lot of attention. Then this possibility was made official. Today we have several jumps. (Rogério, professor in charge of the discipline at Institution B)

Teacher E., who was a teacher here at F. and who came in the early 2000s, supported a number of projects of students who went to study, some final works on circus [...]. At that moment, they (teachers J. and B.) support students to develop extracurricular activities of their interest. (Willybaldo, guest teacher, Institution A)

A second moment suggested more specific insertion, institutionalized through the professors in charge of the disciplines who, sensible to the topic and impacted by their own professional and academic experiences, and for considering the relevance and the lack of a contextualized discussion on such knowledge in the courses' curriculum matrix, presented projects for its implementation. In both cases research lines and study groups were created to cover the topic, contributing to actions related to education and community outreach.

According to the professors interviewed there would be a “gap to be filled” in curricula, particularly regarding issues of expression, art and gesture as forms of language that were often not addressed or were diluted in other disciplines that at best dealt with some folklore manifestations related to dance or capoeira.

According to professor Rogério's view, an elective course seemed to supply that demand at Institution B. However, both professors in charge of disciplines thought that certain knowledges were absent from the curriculum, although the determinants of that non-institutionalized place were not examined in depth by subjects. With its strong symbolic potential, those knowledges end up winning the academic community as a possibility for “feeding that Physical Education further” (José, professor in charge, Institution A).

Circus practices are enriching, transversal skills with high educational potential and which enable us to aim at a critical project for educating sensibilities – an aesthetic education (BORTOLETO, 2011). Consequently, it is possible and desirable that the pedagogical practice of Physical Education actually embrace those knowledges, considering their potential and encouraging the strengthening of its foundations, its characteristics and its social, historical, cultural and political determinants.

Interestingly, we found that initiatives at the two institutions were nourished by the approach to other contexts of artistic production and the fact that students who were beginning to become professional in the circus scene used to transit in those spaces, encouraging interchanges among these institutions and the exchange of knowledge, in an extremely rich process that was exciting for both professors and students. It should be noted that the very region where Institution A is located has many groups of circus artists and families.

Professor José's speech reveals this situation by clearly identifying that such integration did not occur at random.

For a long time, for several years, the circus visited the college. Some students took part in workshops, they came to practice. I was part of a stilt group here myself, that is, there were several processes. G. G. was a group that always did some activity with circus because of people in the group, of acrobatics, clown. Some people took the course with L. (José, professor in charge of the discipline, Institution A).

Those “first cracks” were very fruitful in opening it for such contexts to start to be gradually bathed in the creative power and dynamism that constantly permeate and update the circus universe. Those are plural and heterogeneous knowledges (TARDIF, 2002) that have long been invisible for Physical Education, but nowadays, as already explained, they have allowed a reflection on their interfaces.

Specifically at Institution A, there were already some openness and approximation to circus practices through Gymnastics for All, a research group in gymnastics that was established and is still active. This process seems to have fostered experimentation and the mixture of gymnastic elements and other body practices – something that is part of the very goals and characteristics of GPT as shown by Ayoub (2007). In this case, circus practices are even topics in some compositions prepared by this group, despite the still incipient approach.

Although incorporation and legitimation of those knowledges have been gradual at both HEIs, such implementation processes seem to have close ties to a wider movement of opening and renewal of the field of Brazilian Physical Education that has occurred since the 1980s (SILVA; BRACHT, 2012). Thus, different knowledges of body culture, as the case of capoeira and many other body practices, begin to be looked at more thoroughly and deeply through historicizing of knowledge (METODOLOGIA..., 1992).

As pointed out by Bortoleto and Celante (2011), initial training courses in Physical Education have several body practices in their curricula with different methodological proposals, considering the variety of professional areas of activity (schools, fitness centers, sports centers, social projects, among others). The same authors argue that the manifestations in question are part of a process of re-approximation of circus arts to Physical Education, although such initiatives are still incipient.

However, specifically at Institution A, there was a relevant moment, which, considering subjects’ discourse, was the culmination of the circus topic, giving visibility to the debates. It was a research seminar occurred a few years ago – an interesting opportunity to exchange knowledge in a dialogue between subjects with various backgrounds, thus promoting actions in teaching, research and community outreach.

Something mentioned by Professor Dori from institution A and a graduate from the same institution could not go unnoticed: the change in the name of the discipline that started within a set of electives called “Special Topics”. Those subjects were included in the curriculum precisely to account for innovative themes, students’ demands or even for each professor to give a different approach to their research. Later, that group of subjects gained a specific name: “Circus Activities and Physical Education”. As the professor narrates:

It’s very interesting, because this discipline began here at the School as an elective, without the specific name of circus activities. It started as Special Topics, which is a list of disciplines that the undergraduate department opened so that each professor could apply their focus to these disciplines without actually marking it with a specific title. [...] So, I think it was very important to institutionalize this discipline with a name because it marks a space that has been growing every day here at the

School, that is, the question of circus in a more formal context (Dori, professor and former coordinator course at Institution A).

It is evident that the curriculum itself is not something neutral, closed, but rather the result of its contextual production and therefore subject to reconfigurations, of negotiations that obviously do not occur without tensions. Therefore, “the curriculum is not a transcendent and timeless element – it has a history linked to specific and contingent forms of organizing society and education” (MOREIRA; TADEU 2011, p. 14).

At least four aspects converged for circus practices to be actually present in courses’ curricular matrices and, as already explained, gained their legitimate space in the curriculum structure, which are:

- Sensibility to the topic nuanced by the previous educational and artistic experiences of professors in charge of the disciplines;
- Investments of different kinds, institutional openness and incentives to research;
- Proximity and knowledge exchange with other academic or artistic production contexts, and interchange between HEIs surveyed;
- Students’ demand for emerging issues in Physical Education.

Different respondents referred specifically to such opening to this knowledge by the two HEI and their professors. Research findings indicate that this aspect was important because it contributed for circus practices to be seen as relevant to appear in the curriculum.

4 BETWEEN CIRCUS PRACTICES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION: OTHER THREADS FOR INITIAL EDUCATION

The challenges we faced enabled us to map some specific demands of initial training in Physical Education that arose predominantly from the outside, i. e. impacting the university walls and resulting in different developments. Similarly, they signaled that circus practices are gaining legitimacy in the courses researched and in so many others we have heard from in Brazil and abroad.

Such expansion has been taking place through the offer of specific disciplines, which are peculiar spaces for their experimentation, critical analysis and reinterpretation, by recent publications by study groups formed within those HEIs, by community outreach projects, seminars, artistic meetings, workshops, among others.

Despite such nuanced picture, it would be wise to say that different levels of understanding still coexist both in professors’ and students’ discourses, reaffirming the urgency of conducting research and searching for alternatives to facilitate appropriation of theoretical and epistemological advances in the area for the context of pedagogical intervention. Those discourses are crossed by many logics, impregnated by different perspectives, interests, values and contradictions, processes where there are doubts about the interconnection of disciplines with the documents examined (PPP and RI), specifically at Institution B, whose document was not accessed.

The relatively fast expansion and appropriation of those knowledges by the university comes with shortcomings in its emphasis on technical and procedural aspects, thus materializing

some pedagogical mistakes, despite interesting systematizations. Analyzes point out that knowledge produced outside academic environments cannot be downplayed as if they did not carry their own methodology and a consistent systematization in teaching-learning processes.

In the cases investigated, effective participation of professors and students in community outreach, teaching and research actions has contributed to their consolidation, which can be seen in managers' sympathetic speeches. This scenario seems to encourage even graduates to incorporate those practices in schools, projects, fitness centers and many other contexts where circus practices now inhabit and transit.

We noted the impossibility of separating the individual careers of professors investigated, especially those in charge of circus disciplines, from their teaching practices. They are incarnated subjects who have established their own networks of knowledges and updating, causing dislocations of meanings crystallized by Physical Education through attitudes committed to their students in a shared relationship, choosing inclusive and innovative methodologies that go beyond the limits and organization imposed by institutionalized times and spaces.

Similarly, knowledge was shared between HEIs and other countries, interweaving multiple educational contexts and partnerships with professional artists, approximating realities in search of a Physical Education that is more sensitive to subjects there. Therefore, the professors surveyed were not stuck in practice routine. They dared, they exchanged experiences and they put aside the authority of academic knowledge in order to bathe in experiential knowledge, in the daily life of circus people, for whom tradition does not necessarily mean immobility. They are historical subjects who had their voices heard and their memories valued at the university, building new trajectories and updating “circus language in its rhizomatic mode – multiple, polysemic and polyphonic” (SILVA; ABREU, 2009, p. 181).

The processes investigated were not fortuitous, but settled by rich mobilization histories, research paths, and the search for building solid knowledges. They were achieved in a movement of dialogue, but also of tough resistance on arid soil of sports-based tradition of Physical Education which is not very open to change.

Therefore, all body practices have their educational potential. Some may have more while others may have less because of their obviously different historical roots and philosophical assumptions that do not agree. We insist again that the aspects mentioned are not exclusive to circus practices. Risk, boldness and contradiction shaped in the ability to support the spectacular in the human through symbolism that favors pedagogical work. Of course, everything will depend on the subjects who operate such processes.

Finally, we hope that this study will contribute to processes to establish curricula of circus practices, without placing them as a solution to the unbalanced distribution of knowledges that make up the curriculum. It would be fruitless to replace one knowledge with other; we have to value productions of different cultures that enter educational spaces. Perhaps a dynamic notion of curriculum that favors powerful encounters guided by other forms of organization of knowledge beyond isolated disciplines, subverting the rational model of discipline areas, contemplates the multiplicity, transversalism and boldness of circus language.

More than explaining, our purpose was to reflect on these possibilities of individualization that mixed wealth, the symbolism of colors, sounds, gestures, the expressiveness and the poetics of circus practices – something that seems to have reinvented approximations between

education, art and body – dynamics and plurality always present in the texture produced by the body, or perhaps through those multiple “looms” of initial training in Physical Education.

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