

THE CLOWN AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A SERIOUS GAME

CLOWN E EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA: A BRINCADEIRA É SÉRIA

CLOWN Y EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA: EL JUEGO ES SERIO

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Keywords

Clown.
Physical Education.
Intervention studies.

Abstract: The proposal of this study was to analyze the construction of the clown in Physical Education, in order to guide pedagogical actions in the intervention field. Action-research guided the work with students of the Physical Education course in the State University of Maringá, Paraná, Brazil, based on exercises and theater games experienced in laboratories and interventions in Maringá's schools, clubs and public spaces. The study found working with clown in Physical Education feasible and important to achieve educational activities that may improve students' experience in the fields of training and professional intervention.

Palavras-chave

Clown.
Educação Física.
Estudos de
intervenção.

Resumo: A proposta desta pesquisa foi analisar a construção do *clown* junto à Educação Física no sentido de orientar ações pedagógicas no campo de intervenção. A pesquisa-ação norteou o trabalho com estudantes do Curso de Educação Física da Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Paraná, a partir de exercícios e jogos teatrais experienciados em laboratórios e de intervenções em escola, clube e espaços públicos em Maringá. Constatou-se a viabilidade do trabalho com *clown* na Educação Física e sua importância na materialização de ações pedagógicas que refinem a experiência dos alunos nos campos da formação e da intervenção profissional.

Palabras clave

Clown.
Educación Física.
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intervención.

Resumen: El propósito de esta investigación fue analizar la construcción del clown en la Educación Física con el fin de orientar acciones pedagógicas en el campo de intervención. La investigación-acción orientó el trabajo con estudiantes de Educación Física de la Universidad Estatal de Maringá-Paraná-Brazil a partir de ejercicios y juegos teatrales realizados en laboratorios y de intervenciones en escuela, club y espacios públicos en Maringá. Se constató que es factible el trabajo con el *clown* en la Educación Física y su importancia en la realización de actividades pedagógicas que mejoren la experiencia de los alumnos en los ámbitos de la formación y de la intervención profesional.

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1 INTRODUCTION

By addressing the clown's¹ construction process, we allow reflection on how that seemingly simple moment requires involvement and dedication that goes beyond what normative standards prescribe on the theme, since becoming a clown is to awaken the eye for an imperfect body, that is, the body that exposes its weaknesses and vices and materializes them in aesthetic-artistic and expressive dimensions. This way of thinking and experiencing the body is projected as resistance to forms of life in a society that, while dichotomizing the subject, overvalues perfect bodies created in the sphere of money and power.

While there is a Physical Education that, according to common sense, is usually viewed through the cult of the body, we observed another one that is able to accept different bodies based on a work to value body education and the sensitive. That perspective led us to examine how the construction of the clown² in Physical Education can contribute to thinking about that sensitive, expressive and artistic body in order to guide pedagogical actions in the field of intervention.

Although Physical Education and clown work have their own guiding principles and constituent knowledges, they are not fragmentary or unable to dialogue. Their interrelationships become complementary and important for the formation of those who seek body experience. As much as such approaches can cause certain feelings of strangeness, this is diluted when we think of a focus on a different body in its expressive potential and the exercise of alterity provided by bodywork, able to challenge pre-established hegemonic patterns in our area, such as the strong body and the youthful appearance, linked by the media and inspired by the ideas of nineteenth century European gymnastic methods.³

By understanding that that body feels, vibrates, ecstasizes, rationalizes, sensitizes itself, plays, and needs limits and flights, we started bodily experiences with graduate students in Physical Education. As noted by Soares (2004, p. 128), "[...] perhaps the body, being this fragile screen where society projects itself, can be today's starting point to think the human, to preserve the human – that feasible, unusual human that always keeps a ray of mystery, thus breaking away from self-alienation". Furthermore, the body is also the means through which we project ourselves in society and the clown is a way of strengthening that body into its constituent differences.

Working with the clown is painful because it confronts artists themselves, that is, the clown is an arm of art that deals with the sensitive, awakens emotions and works with the expansion of ridicule, fear, weaknesses and all that people attempt to hide. The drama clown always brings us to the circus clown, regardless of how it is called, that is, they all are clowns, but with different characteristics. The creation of the clown is based on encoding meanings. Its figure transcends theatrical performances, since it captures drama knowledge in preparation exercises, coming out powerfully by not trying to represent anything and by exposing its weaknesses.

1 The word *clown* comes from *clod*, which is defined as "rustic peasant", equivalent to the *caipira* (hillbilly) in Brazilian culture. Unlike a circus clown who works with costume, makeup and voice hyperboles, the drama clown is subtle, working with sensitivity, the eye, the human, and is peculiarly built according to each individual.

2 The constitution of this clown differs in some aspects from the circus clown, as the latter results from a long work linked to circus traditions (process and family knowledge) and the former, although it is constructed from a process dynamics, is not based on family learning over generations. In addition, Burnier (2009) points out that *palhaço* (Portuguese for circus clown) and drama clown are distinct terms to describe the same thing, with differences regarding lines of work. In the circus clown's performance, the gag, the number, the idea and what the clown will do are more appreciated; drama clowns' performance, in turn, focuses on "how" they do it, based on each clown's individual logic.

3 Gymnastic methods began in late eighteenth century Europe, in countries like France, Sweden, Germany and England, and were guided by the ideals of a strong, healthy and morally constituted body that would be free of diseases and assist in the process of conquest of territories and developing nations (LANGLADE; LANGLADE, 1970).

Note that the clown work presented here is based on the French line proposed by Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) and Brazilian Luis Otávio Burnier (1957-1995). For both of them, the clown initiation process is built from each subject's individuality. As recalled by Lecoq (2010, p. 213), "[...] the clown does not exist outside the actor who plays it. We are all clowns. We think we are beautiful, intelligent and strong, but we have our weaknesses, our derisory side that makes one laugh when it is expressed". Similarly, Burnier (2009, p. 205) underscores that the clown's performance is based on the individual logic and personality – according to the line of European clowns.

Thus, to analyze the construction of the clown in Physical Education in order to guide pedagogical actions in the field of intervention, we held clown educational meetings with Physical Education students at the State University of Maringá, under action research orientation. Such meetings were organized from three perspectives: a) body technique for the actors' and actresses' education; b) clown construction techniques; c) interventions with clown in Physical Education (educational context).

To present our research, this text is organized in three stages. In the first stage we present the methodological and investigative path that supported the research. The second stage is the presentation and discussion of the clown construction process with students of Physical Education, based on thematic blocks that guide students' formative process. Finally, the third stage is based on images, participants' reports and reflections on the process, in order to guide the closing of that formative experience.

2 THE PATH TRAVELED: FROM EVERYDAY BODY TO CLOWN BODY

It is possible to think the clown as knowledge that is part of training in Physical Education, even though it is still not explored very often. Some research has been conducted to relate circus and Physical Education (AYALA, 2008; BORTOLETO, 2008; DUPRAT, 2007), and clown and health (WUO, 1999; DOUTORES DA ALEGRIA, 2009; GONTIJO, 2006). However, the relationship between clown and Physical Education still lacks research discussing educational processes guided by that dynamic.

Our study was guided by action research (THIOLLENT, 2004), since it enables joint work between the researcher and different social actors, building a process of exchanges to achieve common goals. This intense relationship between researcher and subject aims at collectively "assessing a situation, initiating an action, following it, watching it, ascribing meaning to it, evaluating it and urging it to trigger new actions" (ANDALOUSSI, 2004, p. 86).

The call to subjects for participation in the study was conducted through formal and informal conversations as well as via clowns' performances during recess from classes at the Physical Education school in the above mentioned institution, taught by one of the researchers. The first meetings provided the basis for the development of participants' body awareness and subsequent ones focused on construction of the clown, with experience in students' practicum (a school and a club) and immersions in the city's everyday life. In all, 20 meetings were held from March to September 2010, on the premises of the State University of Maringá, attended by ten female students of Physical Education that showed interest in the topic.

It is necessary to point out that the relationship between researchers and actors should be simultaneous, since there is no research without action and no action without research. The

actions of subjects involved should be based on partnership, minimizing differences to achieve common goals through continuous development. The relationship between researcher and participants defines actions toward problems or findings that emerge in the process. As Betti (2009) reminds us, based on Pereira's (1998) studies, action research is a process that changes continuously, in spirals of thought and action, and which, instead of merely using existing knowledge, seeks changes in the specific context as a consequence of conditions and the results of the experience.

The criterion for group selection was students' link with the third, fourth and fifth years of the UEM course of Physical Education, when they have to attend curricular practicum, as well as their interest in the topic. During the 20 meetings, we worked first with experiences focused on body awareness, followed by the clown construction process and interventions in the field of Physical Education. Note that this study, throughout its development, used as its theoretical and practical foundation the proposal of Lume⁴ – one of the most important centers for drama research in Brazil, linked to the State University of Campinas.

Systematization of the clown body and its relationship to daily life based on educational experiences with students constitutes the development of this research, when there is the passage from a common body to an artistic one – constructions that take place through immersion in the city's daily life, in practicum and also in the workshops of body experiences related to acting.

3 CONSTRUCTION OF THE CLOWN IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: INCORPORATING LAUGH, MASK AND COSTUMES

The process of creation of the clown in Physical Education emerges through the possibility of dialogue between those areas of knowledge, materialized in the work with students of Physical Education based on four thematic blocks: "Approaches to the clown universe"; "Re-incorporating"; "Clown construction"; and "Clown in the field."

The first block took place during the first three meetings with the group, when Ana Wuo's (2009) text *The Secret Language of Clown* and Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* were discussed. From reflections enabled by the text and the video, we requested drawings about how participants saw themselves as clowns. That experience allowed perceiving the expression of what was part of participants' lives, given that all of them represented something particular in their clowns.

Based on the text and the video, core issues were discussed to those who initiate clown work: how to be a clown; how to deal with failure and with what human beings are afraid of; and being embarrassed and laughing at oneself. Such aspects are important since "[...] the clown is the one who comes face to face with all directions of the human being and comes into contact with all nuances of being, thus revealing them and allowing us to laugh at ourselves" (PUC CETI, 2006b, p. 153).

After that reference, we reflected on criticism to the competitive society that focused on the best, on the astute, on those who deceive and stand out by humiliating

4 Lume was created in 1986 by Luis Otávio Burnier. Its works focus on actors' doing, going through the pathways of the body and its expressive and energy potential. The course "Clown and the comic sense of the body", promoted by one of the researchers and taught by Lume's actor Ricardo Pucetti, enabled academic and performance motivations that influenced the research, as well as improving work through body techniques typical of the creation process.

others. Differently, the clown seeks success in failure and weakness. As Lecoq (2010, p. 214), teaches us, “[...] actors must discover the clown that inhabits themselves by searching their own ridicule” so they arouse laughter. Such reflection on competitiveness of life and the clown’s non-competitiveness proves itself relevant in the context of Physical Education, given that dealing with sporting knowledge, especially in high performance sports, often values winning at any price. That win, for a clown, is making the audience laugh.

The second block, “Re-inCORPORating” refers to the proposal addressed from the fourth to the seventh meetings, when exercises and drama games were experienced in order to approximate participants to the acting preparation work. The exercises included: stimuli to different body segments; relaxation; concentration; look; rhythm; improvisation; sensitivity; confidence techniques; body energy; agitation; contact; and vocal work. In all, 18 exercises were conducted in the process, based on the experience of one of the researchers in the fields of drama and clown, through exercises proposed by authors such as Augusto Boal, Viola Spolin, Luis Otávio Burnier and Jacques Lecoq.

During body experiences, some group members were clearly uneasy. But as activities were conducted and discoveries were felt in their bodies, students started to develop them fluently. Always at the end of meetings or immediately after exercise, the reasons for the application of bodily experiences were explained, given the understanding that explaining the purpose of what students were doing and discussing the actions with them led to awareness of the work and broadened the field of education, which is typical of action research.

The third block, “Building the Clown”, covers the eighth to eleventh meetings, when participants started to approximate the development of their clowns. Such action occurred because every clown must be born from the individuality of each person, from his or her fears and characteristics that are often masked in everyday social life. In this block we worked: the clown’s ways of walking; the clown’s game; the clown’s eye; creation of costumes and nose; entering and exiting the stage.

Lecoq (2010, p. 214) stresses that “the less actors defend themselves and try to play a character, the more they will let themselves be surprised by their own weaknesses and the more their clowns will appear strongly”. Hence, the exercises performed with participants sought to meet this proposal, when the clown’s grotesque emerged through the work of what human beings are afraid of – uncertainty, stumbling, that which is strange and the clown makes familiar. As pointed out by Burnier (2009, p. 209):

[...] the clown is the exposure of each person’s ridicule and weaknesses. Therefore, they are a personal and unique type ... Clowns do not represent: they are – what reminds us of Middle Age fools and jesters. They are not characters, that is, external to us; they are the extension and expansion of naïve, pure and human aspects.

Improvisation is essential to clown work, since it is based on finding ways to get out of a problem situation, especially in the contact with the public. Each presentation and each public requires a different response. As noted by Puccetti (2006a, p. 138), the clown “[...] is a state of affection in the sense of “being affected”, touched, vulnerable to the moment and to different situations. Being a clown is allowing oneself to be surprised, having nothing premeditated”. It is dealing with the most different situations that appear before us.

Lecoq (2010, p. 216) states that “[...] concealing their own persons releases actors from their social masks. They have the “freedom to do whatever they want” and that freedom brings out unsuspected personal behavior”. Such behaviors gain density as the clown also comes in a costume, focusing on what each of them often tries to hide: for thin legs, tight pants; for a protruding belly, pants or blouse that show it. This happened in the work with the students in order to show what each of them had and often masked as a result of prejudice, shyness, shame, but that can and must be shown in the clown work.

Entrances and exits – entrances in the theater field for improvisation by oneself or with other clowns and immersion in the city’s daily life for interacting with space and people, respectively – allowed each clown to experience being with the public, finding solutions to respond to stimulus given or appearing along the other clown during the scene. The clown has to emerge at each entrance, action and exit. By no means should actors play a role; they should rather allow the emergence of innocence in them, which is manifested during the fiasco and the failure of their performances (LECOQ, 2010).

The last block, called “Clown in the field”, covers from the twelfth to the twentieth meetings, organized by topics such as: sound effects and makeup; creating sketches (short scenes); street performances; creation of names; and presentations at school and club. Sound effect and makeup meetings served for participants to learn to edit music and mix sounds for the scenes they created; as for makeup, each one developed the type that best combined with the clown under construction. Editions made by the group turned to the most different sounds such as door strikes, horns, animal sounds, which could be used in presentations. Training both makeup and sound effects are part of the artistic characterization of the clown.

Entrances seek to expose the clown to the public – alone or with partners, with or without the use of objects. One of the entrances performed in the research aimed at focus work was materialized with two clowns on the scene and a chair. Whoever was in the chair would have the focus and be well on the scene; the other clown should sit in the chair in several manners, finding ways to get the other one’s place. This exercise contributed to the creation that must be part of the clown’s everyday life since, even with a lot of experience, he or she cannot lose the ability for constant learning and must be always open to possibilities.

After clown training meetings ended, we found that the creative process is something that takes time, availability, patience and engagement. the person in charge of training those clowns must also open to intense and dense dialogue with students in order to wake them up to what it is to be a clown and the personal construction of the clown condition, something that gradually materializes with the completion of work and is enhanced with the outing, experiences that value solving problems through creative act and communication with others.

In this research, the street performance occurred in downtown Maringá, PR, and was a way to refine the process of formation/creation of the clown. The concept is taken from Burnier (2009, p. 231), for whom that work is “[...] the clown’s intervention in several spaces: streets, squares, markets, restaurants, bus stations, supermarkets, parties [...]” and it can be based on improvisation or previously prepared scenes.

In the city’s everyday life, when in contact with clowns, people would approach, smile, as well as walk away. Some honked as they drove by and others looked (suspicious, curious,

surprised, agreeing). Some people's tight expression, their act of using the cell phone in order not to be involved in the scene and looking the other side of the street were ways to escape from the situation causing discomfort, since the clown draws the eyes of many and causes others to leave. This freedom of the clown allows people to expand their own customs, such as their way of walking, crossing the street, simply looking to see if there are cars passing.

We decided to use pantomime rather than speech in this process because, in addition to requiring body communication, each also sought to communicate through the public's look. Lecoq (2010) defines that pantomime as "a limit technique" in which gestures replace words. While in speech we use words, in pantomime gesture is used to give meaning. According to the author, that language originated in markets' theaters where the noise was sharp and people had to be understood.

From the encounters experienced by participants and the researcher, doubts arose about the exercises as well as discomfort during production, which were essential for the construction of the clown and the phase of contact with the public. That experience allowed participants to refine their clowns and also to have a feedback on their construction. This was recollected in reflections in the group with the purpose of generating new problems that would lead to other educational experiences.

5 THE CLOWN: IMAGES, ACCOUNTS AND FINISHING

In addition to the experiments carried out in the city center, others took place in closed spaces, with children as audience. Those interventions were not focused on the number of places or the need to reach as many students as possible. They were based on situations in which subjects under training could develop their clowns. Hence, spaces were selected for supervised practicum, such as a public school and a city club.

In those presentations, the idea of Branco and Augusto was visible. They were theater characters created to identify the two figures, with their distinct modes of action – figures that kids really love, because one is successful and the other is not so much. Burnier (2009, p. 206) says that Branco "[...] is the embodiment of the boss, the intellectual, a cerebral person" and Augusto "is the silly one, the eternal loser, naïve, in good faith, emotional, and who is always subject to Branco's dominance, but who usually exceeds it, making purity triumph over malice".

In both spaces, students were able to present what they produced and realize how exercises experienced gained materiality at that time. This experience was established as a laboratory so that subjects under training could practice what they had learned during the meetings. After each scene, the clowns performed to children and interacted with them. Finally, teachers and students of the school participating in the study commented on the performances. That became an evaluation of clowns under training and the researcher, which was important to refine the proposed actions in line with the methodological approach proposed.

In order to approximate the reader of the process, we present the images below (Figure 01) with the trajectory of the study, from illustrations of the initial meetings (1), followed by physical exercises (2), the beginning of work with the clown (3), and interventions in the spaces of Physical Education (4.5) and the city (6).

Figure 1 – Process of construction of the clown with Physical Education students

Source: researcher's collection

The development of the four thematic blocks presented above was guided by action research, which enables the researcher to intervene in reality from the mobilization of the subjects through planned action (in this case, with educational purposes), in order to identify problems and their solutions. To illustrate it, we remember the first block, “Approaches to the clown universe” in which the problems presented by participants spanned curiosities about the language of the clown and the possible relations between the clown and society, breaking up with the idea that the clown serves only to make people laugh. The researcher’s role was to broker these reflections and the doubts that emerged during meetings. In the second block, “Re-inCORPORating”, the difficulties presented were related to body issues and exercises different from those known to participants. Such discomfort was diluted as experiences happened, linked to the discussions held at the end of each meeting to reflect on “displacements” (of ideas, references, experience with the body) as principles of change.

The third and fourth blocks, “Construction of the Clown” and “Clown in the field”, respectively, worked on costumes, makeup and the materialization of the clown. The first contact with the public and the difficulty of not “interpreting” were “painful” – part of the clown’s initiation process. However, the researcher was concerned at all times to find ways with the group to solve problems and difficulties in order to progress in structuring each participant’s clown.

Note that the effervescence of the path contributed to the training of those involved, something recognized by them from accounts on how the clown can assist at professional and personal levels given its educational and artistic characteristic as well as the way accounts express approximations with Physical Education, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Excerpts from participants' accounts

Subjects	Research subjects' speeches
S. 01	"I started the course wanting to learn the workshop content, but it went beyond that. I learned a lot. It helped me in different aspects of my life, both professionally and personally. Today, after the course, I no longer feel "bewildered" as I used to feel at the beginning".
S. 02	"An important factor in the clown course is respect for each person's personality, contrary to what has been on the market regarding courses that usually form robots who repeat their masters. In the clown course we were encouraged to seek an artistic ability in the essence of our personalities, without ever losing ourselves".
S. 03	"This artistic possibility to work should be included in the Physical Education curriculum, just as we have capoeira, gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics and dance, among many others, since it develops capabilities inherent to human beings that end up being lost throughout life and which should be recovered, because they are pure, simple capabilities that do not seek anything more than human interaction and its primitive feelings, with no hidden agendas".
S. 04	"I really see a possibility to include the clown in Physical Education, but as a subject for the discipline of Leisure and Recreation and for applying in mandatory practicum, because those courses do not give us any basis for intervention in leisure activities".
S. 05	"It was a unique experience, from which I will take a lot of advice, laughter, those tense moments... Not giving up, overcoming fatigue. Moreover, there is nothing better than making someone smile! I think the clown content could be included in Physical Education as an elective course".
S. 06	"The exercises and all we did have everything to do with Physical Education. Exercises that require contact with the other, whether they are physical or only eye-to-eye, really help in interpersonal relationships, especially if we analyze our reality as a society that does not relate much, that seems to have trouble even looking in other people's eyes, as well as during in Physical Education classes, for example, where students have difficulty relating. Body language is highly stressed; actually, being a clown is to express oneself bodily, all the time".

Source: reports produced by research participants.

The accounts help us to understand that the dialogue between the clown and Physical Education is a good approach to a serious game in addition to the experiences developed with the group. However, the idea of a serious game here is not in the sense of its graveness, but of the finding that the clown language, which is often seen only from the perspective of playfulness, fun and pleasure, makes up a logic that enhances this manifestation as something much broader and formative in Physical Education. The possibilities of these relationships range from the establishment of the clown, with its exercises, techniques and trials, to intervention in the fields of activity in the area, envisaging a Physical Education that is expressive, artistic and aesthetic and is built in the daily exercise of body denaturalization and in the dissemination of questioning ways that promote displacements and discomforts essential to the educational process.

6 FINAL REMARKS

This research aimed at analyzing how the construction of the clown takes place in Physical Education in order to guide pedagogical actions in the field of intervention. Specifically, we sought to understand the social construction of the clown and its educational dimension, as well as to find out how its creation happens with students of Physical Education and how such knowledge can contribute with intervening actions. Data were collected through workshops with students, presentations at a club and a school, and outings in the center of the city of Maringá,

plus field observations and students' reports. It favored the approach to the problem of this study focused on discovering how the construction of the clown happens in Physical Education and how this training can guide pedagogical actions in the field of intervention.

Working with their bodies, exposing its limits and weaknesses, discovering the theatrical game and its playful dimension in a conscious and creative way were guidelines given to participants in clown workshops. We had to work body segments, relaxation, plans, levels and directions, improvisation, skill, creative process, memory, rhythm, sketches, clown games, as well as providing orientation on costume making, sound effects and makeup. Such knowledge synthesizes elements considered essential for the formation of a clown, added of educational and pedagogical care that is necessary for teaching.

The interventions allowed us to give life to a clown still tied to body workshops. The exchange of experiences before the public was a fuel for the clown to be intensified. Looks of approval or rejection felt in the interaction with the public in the city center not only allowed the researcher to evaluate the materialization of clowns, but also allows them to evaluate themselves, noticing reactions and coming to their own conclusions to be shared later.

The presentations at students' practicum, besides serving as experiments for the initiated clowns, allowed different people to begin to know them, even when minimally spreading the art act. The absence of speech reinforces that the clown provokes critical thinking and non-linear experience through the body. That wealth – seen in the clown when it is subtle, dilates ridicule and is willing, surrendered to what will happen – has been reaching different audiences. Studies on clown or similar have increasingly contributed to spread this form of artistic expression.

Although the proposed aims were achieved, we cannot ignore limiting factors that could be improved in other studies, such as more time for interventions in different spaces, more frequent meetings, conducting the same study with groups with different profiles and also clown body techniques being applied by students themselves, in networking (students train other students who, in turn, pass the experience on to others). However, these are research possibilities to be developed at other times, and also by other interlocutors.

During the research, the importance of the clown as an unfinished process always under improvement was emphasized. The considerations outlined here as final are also similar, enabling reflections that are provisional. Therefore, investigations do not stop here and interventions can occur through an educational action focused on spreading the clown in distinct contexts. We need to understand it to intervene and improve it in everyday life, in order to refine our own human condition and our professional actions. Recognizing the clown as an ally of critical education, potentially working in the field of Physical Education, expands students' access to knowledges that make a difference in their educational process and that contribute directly or indirectly to their activities in different professional fields.

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