

The term bodily practices in Brazilian scientific literature and its impact on the Physical Education field

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify which meanings / senses of the term bodily practices the Brazilian academic literature has been using, through content analysis of 260 articles and 17 dissertations / theses, which were found by means of inputting key-words in search engines and databases. The results indicate that: their use has intensified as of 2000; researchers who use it predominantly develop their research in the interface with humanities; in most documents there is no concern to conceptually define it; it has several meanings / senses. The data indicate that it has not yet reached stability as a concept, although it is accumulating evidence for it.

Keywords: Exercise and Movement Techniques. Physical Education. Concept Formation.

1 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

The configuration of Physical Education as an academic field can be considered new, when compared to other fields of

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knowledge. Its knowledge production, as well as its socialization, is to some extent dispersed, pulverized by different fields with which it interfaces. The theoretical and methodological approaches within this academic community are few, a situation which increases the need for minimum consensus around key concepts, in order to achieve greater stability in academic production.

Such stability would enable a breakthrough in the direction of increasing communication between researchers and research groups with similar goals, an intention that is starting to be felt in its internal debate. According to Fensterseifer (2008), this need only plagues our academic-professional field because we claimed majority, which seems to indicate some positivity in this process of internal dialogue, review and criticism.

One must also consider the increasing need of Physical Education to use keywords and descriptors, which are requested and, to some extent, predetermined by scientific journals and scientific events. The descriptors required are presented as a semantic network that brings difficulties, especially for the segment of the Physical Education field that works at the interface with the humanities. That is because the vast majority of the terms used, over 80% of them, in the case of the Health Sciences Descriptors (MeSH), were formed in the field of Medicine and they establish an internal hierarchical structure.

The descriptors are broadly recognized terms or areas and express an important movement towards allowing the possibility of work and dialogue within the international scientific community. Nevertheless, they tend to crystallize a conception of scientific activity and research object which would deserve further reflection. This has become a challenge, however, which fields like Physical Education cannot fail to confront, lest they see their difficulties of production and dissemination of knowledge augmented.

An initial analysis of the academic production of this field shows a wide range of terms and concepts used with different and sometimes contradictory meanings. This situation can be understood if we consider that it was initiated by the need of professional intervention, primarily as a curricular subject of the official educational system, and the various interests and institutional uses to which Physical Education is being linked.

The field of Physical Education consisted, throughout its history, of dialogue with philosophy, the humanities, social and the exact sciences, popular culture and art, although in Brazil the emphasis falls on the biological and exact sciences, a trajectory which made in the frontiers of knowledge (VAZ 2000). Perhaps, as a consequence of this process, its concepts are still in consolidation phase and need improvement in order to facilitate the communication within its academic community and the communication of the academic community with society. Here we cite proficuous initiatives that resulted in publications, such as the *Dicionário Crítico da Educação Física* (Critical Dictionary of Physical Education) (GONZÁLEZ; FENSTEN-SEIFER, 2005), the *Dicionário do Esporte* (Dictionary of Sports) (MELO, 2007) and the *Dicionário do Lazer* (Dictionary of Leisure) (GOMES, 2004), which bring some concepts for advances in the field.

A portion of this challenge which we seek to address comes from the understanding that the term bodily practices has been increasingly used both in academic research and in the official documents¹, appearing in trade magazines² of high national circulation. When we analyze the term with greater

1 We refer to the National Policy on Health Promotion (Política Nacional de Promoção da Saúde) (2006) and the National Curriculum Parameters of Physical Education for Elementary School (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais de Educação Física para o Ensino Fundamental) (1997).

2 We are referring to the magazine Nova Escola (New School), São Paulo, vol. 22, no. 213 June / July 2008.

caution, we identify its use with different meanings / senses³, which refer to different referentials or signs.

Starting with this issue, this study aimed to identify which meanings / senses of the term bodily practices the Brazilian academic literature has been using. To this end, we hypothesized that the term came to be used to contrast with the concept of physical activity and still needs more consistent elements for its conceptualization.

2 THE SPECIFICITY OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION FIELD

The specificity of Physical Education has been widely discussed since the 1990s (TANI, 1996; BETTI, 1996; LOVISOLO, 1998; BRACHT, 1999; Ferreira Neto, 2005). Due to its constitution and history, there are always new issues and developments, which, in turn, require new solutions and referrals.

Physical Education in Brazil was established essentially as a school discipline, albeit subordinate to other institutions such as medical, military and sports. But it was as a curricular component that Physical Education gained social legitimacy to consolidate itself in the academic field, even if in pursuit of autonomy (Paiva, 2004). To Bracht (2003), it was as of the 1970s that the academic field of Physical Education begins to incorporate ever more intensely scientific practices, determining the creation of its own scientific entities, conducting scientific events, creating postgraduate courses and defining programs of research support.

3 When we analyze the different operationalization processes of the term bodily practices, we understand "significance / meaning", from Smolka's (2000, p. 29) perspective, as part of "simultaneous production of signs and meanings, related to the constitution of subjects; in the dynamics of these (inter-) relations [...], different values, different meanings, different senses emerge in the diversity of these elaborations". ("produção simultânea de signos e sentidos, relacionada à constituição de sujeitos, na dinâmica dessas (inter-)relações [...], diferentes valores, diferentes significados, diferentes sentidos emergem na diversidade dessas elaborações")

Physical Education graduate programs in Brazil were established in 1977, at a Master's level, and in 1989, at the doctoral level. This was possible because of the return of professors who took their postgraduate courses in North America and Europe, as well as those who studied in Brazil, in other fields of knowledge as health and education.

Its establishment as an academic field, its entry in the postgraduate national system, its installation in CAPES area 21, which is linked to the branch of life sciences and the health field, bring new problems in the way of doing science and in establishing its specificity. Fitting Physical Education in the CAPES Health Field brings other developments, and perhaps the most significant one is the operation of knowledge production in this area, which is one of the pioneers in making science, with great accumulation and conceptual stability, which gives the new field of Physical Education a high level of quantitative and qualitative requirement, as a strict framing of scientific production and of its academic community (Silva 2007).

Within the Physical Education academic community, the problem is not considered as solved, as intends the official science policy, as there are evaluations that we "are" in the health sciences and not we "belong" to the health sciences, at least, we do not "just" belong to the health sciences. This official referral has major consequences for the field, because within the health sciences there is a broad hegemony of the logic of the biological sciences. Its way of producing knowledge disconsiders and, in a way, creates obstacles to the close relationship that this field has with the humanities and social sciences, especially with education. About this issue, Mugnaini and Población (2007), analyzing how various fields operate in the production of knowledge, reinforce the view that the ways of producing and validating this knowledge in the different areas are dissimilar.

In the academic field, where language is specialized, the concepts are fundamental to the advancement and

development of the very knowledge of the process, facilitating the dialogue from joint representations and recovery of it for the new generation.

To operate in this perspective, the concept is fundamental, as it is the unity of knowledge that arises through the synthesis of necessary predicates, which are related to a certain object and that, through linguistic signals, can be communicated to other people, which requires that the specialized language have higher accuracy than that of the common sense.

In Dahlberg's (2006 *apud* FIELDS; SOUZA; CAMPOS, 2003, p. 11) view, the concept consists of three elements: the referent (what is intended to be conceptualized), characteristics (the sum of true statements about the subject) and verbal form – which is the conceptual triangle. Thus, the concept is no longer a mere mental and abstract artifact to instrumentalize the language and be manipulated to construct vocabularies and thesauri.

A term, unlike the word, should be contextualized in the discourse, thus having a reference for interpretation. Le Guern (1989) suggests that the word, a lexical unit, is a free predicate, and the term, a discourse unit, is a bound predicate. Anyway, there is not only one definition, but various, depending on the source, which is the reason why the making of a resolution is equivalent to establishing an "equation of meaning", limiting it somehow to fix the limits of a concept or idea (DAHLBERG, 1978).

This equation is not simple, given the diversity of areas of knowledge. For Krieger (2006), the new science and technology areas, as well as the humanities and the applied social sciences, have their terminology distant from the sciences of taxonomic nature, but it often mingles with the common lexicon of language, a fact that is confirmed by the growth of the terminological meanings in the entries of the common language dictionaries.

Here we find a central dilemma of Physical Education as an academic field that establishes a relationship with both "harder" (biological sciences) and "softer" (humanities) areas. On one side, it requires a more rigorous conceptualization in terms of thesauri and descriptors, and, on the other, it extends its senses and possibilities of creating research objects.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES OF THE RESEARCH

To achieve the objectives of this research, we appropriated methodologies of the quantitative and qualitative kind, giving special attention to the content analysis. We followed the steps outlined by Bardin (1979): pre-analysis, analytical description and reference interpretation. The survey was developed by gathering the documents to be analyzed; preliminary reading; organization of data for similarities and differences; analytical description of the essential foundations found in documents and organization of a logical and dialectical procedure, and organization of explanatory categories conceived on the basis of documents analyzed in tension with the theoretical concept.

Our data collection technique was the search of the term "bodily practices" with the filter Portuguese language - Brazil on the world wide web. We chose this language because the Brazilian academic community produces and publishes massively in national journals, although it is an interesting academic exercise to perform a search using the translation of this term in other languages, notably Spanish, in which the use of this term is common, especially among Latin American countries.

The gathering of the documents and their analysis obeyed the "rule of comprehensiveness" (*regra da exaustividade*) (Bardin, 1979), in which all academic documents that mention the term "bodily practices" in scientific articles, dissertations and theses were selected and grouped into categories. This process occurred as follows:

a) For journals: first, an extensive research was done with the term "bodily practices" in the following search engines: Google scholar, Scielo; Lilacs, Medline. The articles were selected manually observing the following criteria: allow online access to full text and been published in scientific journals with editorial board.⁴

b) For dissertations and theses: the term "bodily practices" was input to the search engine of the Dissertations and Theses database (BTDT) The documents analyzed were those that allowed online access to the full text.⁵

With this procedure, we arrived at a universe of 17 dissertations and theses and 260 articles published in various journals. To systematize the data, we created a spreadsheet where each selected document had its information described in detail, as: access; nature of the document; title; author; area; year of publication; number of occurrences of the term; concept; author reference; theme / axis binder.

4 DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS

Among the analyzed material, the term "bodily practices" first appears in an article authored by Fraga (1995), and becomes more used from 1996. Checking the year of publication of the retrieved texts, we saw that 86% were published between the years 2000 and 2008, and 14%, between 1990 and 1999, showing us, with the necessary caveats, that the term is being used more frequently, and gaining greater academic relevance over the years.

67% of the 260 retrieved and analyzed articles are published in journals of the Physical Education field; 7.7% in Education; 4.6% in Anthropology; 4.2% in Health; 4.2% in

4 Procedure performed between August 8th and October 15th, 2008.

5 Procedure performed between September 20th and October 15th, 2008.

Psychology; 3.8% in multidisciplinary journals; 3% in History; 1.9% in Communication Sciences; 1.5% in Social Sciences and 1.1% in Sociology. We observed, therefore, that Physical Education is the field which uses the term more often, at least in this kind of scientific publication. We also found that the analyzed articles and the journals where they were published use the term establishing a closer relationship with the humanities and social sciences. It goes without saying that when the articles from the health field journals use this term, they link it to the humanities and social sciences in their theoretical arguments, particularly within sub-areas such as health.

Of the 260 articles analyzed, we found that the vast majority does not define the term bodily practices; only 8% do, among which we identified the following argumentative elements:

1. They are identified as cultural events that focus on body size. According to the texts analyzed, this characteristic is not present in the perspective of the researchers who use the concept of physical activity;

2. They seek to overcome the fragmentation identified in the constitution of the human being, and denote a critique to the form of organization of contemporary life and its development in the body;

3. They suggest a conceptual expansion of this term with elements of human and social sciences and are in tension with a conception of science based in the objectivity and neutrality;

4. They are exemplified primarily as sport, gymnastics, dance, fight, tai-chi, yoga, adventures, games;

5. The differences and contrasts between Eastern and Western bodily practices are highlighted;

6. They show concern with the meanings / senses attributed to bodily practices by the individuals who practice them, beyond their pragmatic usefulness;

7. Some of their purposes are health promotion, education on sensitivity, aesthetics, development of leisure and care with the body.

In the remaining articles (92%), there is no explicit conceptualization of the term bodily practices, but the meanings / senses attributed to it can be grouped in the following themes / axis:

Themes / Axis	Frequency	%
Term given	188	72.6
Different from sport	20	7.7
Alternatives	15	5.8
Other Adjectives	14	5.4
Body Culture	9	3.5
Everyday Life	6	2.3
Sport	5	1.9
Physical activity	2	0.8

Table 1 - Themes / Axis for analysis of the term bodily practices

In the theme / axis "term given", we find 72.6% of the analyzed texts, which use the term bodily practices without explaining its meaning. Most of the texts with this type of empirical material lack this explanation, and they may even use the term as if it were a stable concept, consensual and already consolidated.

The theme / axis "different from sports", where we find articles with the phrase bodily and sports practices, indicates a differentiation of one or more characteristics of bodily practices from the sport; however, this is not clear in the text.

In the theme / axis "alternative bodily practices," there is a kind of critique of modern society, especially to

Westerners', mainly regarding the exacerbation of rationality. The way out of it, according to these critiques, are alternative bodily practices, those of oriental tradition and / or substantiation, those belonging to the tradition of people or those which have a logic divergent from the formal logic. These practices are taekwondo, anti gymnastics, biodance, Reichian therapy, tai-chi-chuan, body therapy, medical gymnastics, eutony, as well as rituals, individual or collective meditations, therapies and massages.

In "many adjectives", the researchers adjectivize the bodily practices with the intention of supplementing or clarifying the meaning / sense of its use. As examples we find: active and passive, city entertainment, recreational, polymorphic and polysemic, recreational, negative, educational and child's body practices.

In "body culture", the authors define bodily practices as a synonym for culture or as an expression to designate its contents, such as exercises, dance, fights, sports and games.

The theme / axis "sport" presents sports as bodily practices, but in an isolated way and without ties with the concepts of culture or body culture indicated above.

In "everyday life", bodily practices are understood as simpler and basic gestures like ways of dressing, eating, exercising, making up, having fun, cooking, playing, cultivating the soil, fishing, hunting or hygiene practices, evoking the concept of body techniques developed by Mauss (2003).

In the theme / axis "physical activity", the terms "bodily practices" and "physical activity" are used interchangeably, with uncertainty, and are not differentiated in their use. The uncertainty can be perceived when we do not find a reference to the use of the concept, and the non differentiation can be perceived when the two terms are synonymous, separated by a slash. Some of the analyzed texts presented the two cited terms, i.e., in the same text there were times when the term

bodily practices was used, and in other times the term "physical activity" appeared, without a differentiation between them.

4.2 DISSERTATIONS AND THESES

26 dissertations and theses were retrieved, and of these, 17 were analyzed because they were available in their entirety for free access⁶. In them, the term first appears in Costa (1999)⁷. In the 1990s, the term appears in only one dissertation / thesis, and in the following decade the term appears more often in 16 dissertations and theses.

Field of origin of theses and dissertations	Frequency
Education	08
Physical Education	03
Applied Social Sciences	02
Anthropology	02
Arts	01
Psychology	01
Total	17

Table 2 – Incidence of the term "Bodily Practices" in Brazilian dissertations and theses through the BDTD of IBICT Searching

The dissertations and theses that use the concept of bodily practices are all linked to the humanities and social sciences. Most of those which use the term are in the Education field, with a total of eight works. Next comes the Physical Education field, with three works, and finally, with fewer works, Psychology, Anthropology, Social Sciences and the Arts, as can be seen in Table 2.

⁶ It is noteworthy that the analyzed theses were those in text format. The theses in image format were not analyzed due to the impossibility of applying to them the technique used in the other texts.

⁷ We refer to the doctoral dissertation in Physical Education entitled "O corpo feminino no encontro com a antiginástica" (The female body meets anti gymnastics), by Elaine Melo de Lemos Brito Costa (1999).

Of the 17 dissertations and theses, only three explicitly define the concept of bodily practices, while 14 use the "term as given" in the same direction as expressed in the themes / axis indicated in the analysis of the articles.

It is noticed that when the authors conceptualize the term, they do it in two perspectives: as a more specific term, heading in the direction of body culture, as manifestations like sport, physical activity, physical exercise, play and dance, and as a generic term, which would designate gestures and everyday activities, such as household chores.

The term bodily practices, such as was found in the journals, was used in the dissertations and theses with the intent of problematizing the concepts of physical activity and physical exercise. It is argued that these concepts are reduced to understanding the movement by classical physics, emphasizing issues such as locomotion in time and space and energy expenditure. They also emphasize the concern to incorporate subjective aspects, such as the senses and meanings attributed by the subjects and the culture to the movement of the human body.

In the analyzed dissertations and theses, the most cited author is Marcel Mauss (2003), and the authors of the Physical Education field which are referenced to explain the concept are: Sant'anna (1995), Silva and Daminani (2005) and Carvalho (2006).

Among the texts that do not explain the concept, we identified some senses for its use, such as: mime and other forms of body language; body language acquired throughout life or some which are rendered spectacular; bodily practices culturally created and expressed through body gestures; bodily representations; fitness centers bodily practices; self-care; body worship; representations and symbols expressed by the subject; systematic activity of intervention on the biological body; body exercise, body art; body care and relaxation. It is noticed that, unlike journals where the predominance of articles that make use of the term lies in the Physical

Education field, dissertations and theses are linked to other fields of the humanities, which might explain the differences in the senses and amplitude in the use of the term.

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the empirical analysis - articles, dissertations and theses - we can say that the term "bodily practices" is being used by various fields of knowledge, and among these, the Physical Education is the field which uses it most frequently. In the fields of Education, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, History and Health, its use is also relatively common, but with different meanings / senses.

Insofar as the term is related to the health care, some concerns appear with the body. Accordingly, the body practices are complementary to conventional care, bringing elements of Eastern culture, such as meditation, relaxation and ancient practices. To some extent, this is also the focus of the field of Psychology, which emphasizes the body practices, even if it sees them as engendered by tensions and personal conflicts in certain societies.

In Education, the term body practices seems to be relevant and is recurrent in this type of academic production. In the analyzed documents, we saw that part of this production comes from the researchers on Physical Education, who develop their studies on the field of Education or publish in journals of that field. This aspect deserves further investigation, especially because historically there is a close relationship between the concepts and practices of Physical Education and those of Education.

Anthropology seems to operate with the term predominantly as a synonym of body techniques, mainly based on the classic study by Mauss (2003). There is, however, mention to extremely diverse techniques, ranging from those that are most basic and part of everyday life, to those more

complex and elaborate, as body art and sport. There is also mention of body techniques specific to certain populations and social groups, as in the case of indians, street children, rural workers, among others.

In general, we note that the term "bodily practices" has been appearing in most texts as an expression that indicates different forms of bodily activity or cultural events, such as: motor activities, leisure, fitness, sports, arts, recreation, exercise, diets, cosmetic surgery, dancing, games, wrestling, *capoeira* and circus.

These movements or activities range from the more traditional ones (training practices; accurate and systematic of remarkable rational and hygienic character; competitive; remote bodily practices) to the resignified ones, indicating or not a relationship with Physical Education (daily bodily practices; of everyday; human; in maternity; of different Eastern and Western cultures).

The researchers used often some adjectives or nouns to specify their object of study. With the term body practices, we identified words such as: educational, homes, leisure, indigenous, nature adventure, entertainment, ludic, self-awareness and alternatives.

As for contributions from researchers who help conceptualize the term bodily practices, we perceive some indications from another ontological perspective and its impact on understanding the body which opposes biologicism. We also note that the expression "not only organic" is recurrent in the texts surveyed, representing a first stage characterized by denial, which is characteristic of the process of conceptualization. However, what characterizes the assertion of the concept content, the attempts to conceptualize, are not recurring in the analyzed material.

The concern with the meanings / senses attributed to bodily practices by individuals who practice them was frequent in the analyzed material, which demonstrates a

concern in considering the subjective contents put into action, beyond the pragmatism present in a causal reasoning. This concern appears coupled with another strong component, perhaps the main one, which is the consideration of the body practices as an element of culture, as cultural manifestations made explicit mainly in body size.

The amplitude of understanding bodily practices goes toward the thesis defended by Krieger (2006), in which fields, sectors and new areas of the humanities have difficulty to work with closed concepts because of the very nature of its object of reflection. The greater understanding of bodily practices and the use of the concept may be the result of that condition, which can lead to the risk of confusing the concept with its use in common sense or the assumption of different meanings / senses.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Every conceptual representation is an arbitrary demarcation, which, to some extent, indicates senses while shaping social practices, determining how subjects take ownership of them. The effort of reflection is required for a given community, which operates with terms and concepts, to be able to talk about forms of common representation.

We think that the term "bodily practices" in the analyzed texts has the potential to become a concept. However, it still needs more stability and a certain level of consensus among the academic community. An agreement among researchers on conceptual exercise, even if provisional, and even if restricted to a particular field or a significant portion of an academic community, is necessary to get common concepts that better encompass data from reality and that enable its subsequent expansion .

In the field of Physical Education, the term "bodily practices" is being valued by researchers who establish a

relationship with the humanities and social sciences. Those who dialogue with the exact sciences use the concept of physical activity. This duality seems to be a major obstacle, or perhaps it is a good thing, because Physical Education establishes an interface with the humanities and social sciences and the biological and exact sciences. This interface, while it hinders the relationships and the minimum consensus, it also requires constant creativity, reflection and self-assessment. It is precisely this search for a way out in the process of building its own specificity, beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries and the referrals of official science policy, that this text pursues. It is a challenge that we believe should be tackled collectively, especially by those who understand the impossibility of relinquishing the complexity of this field and the objects of study to be faced.

The academic majority alluded to earlier, which is sought by Physical Education, will require ongoing debate about the concepts with which it operates and through which it expresses the signifiers that it problematizes, being recognized by their peers to think Physical Education. Perhaps this majority is not linked to the conception of traditional science and its disciplinary boundaries, but it is a differentiated academic field that will build outputs within the limits and dialogues between the biological sciences, exact sciences, humanities and social sciences when tackling the problems posed by reality and by its need for social intervention.

O termo práticas corporais na literatura científica brasileira e sua repercussão no campo da Educação Física

Resumo: Objetivou-se identificar os significados/sentidos com os quais o termo práticas corporais vem sendo utilizado na literatura acadêmica brasileira, mediante análise de conteúdo de 260 artigos e 17 teses/dissertações, capturados com o uso de palavras-chave em sistemas de busca e bases de dados. Os resultados indicam que: sua utilização intensifica-se a partir do ano 2000; os pesquisadores que o utilizam, predominantemente, desenvolvem suas pesquisas na interface com as humanidades; na maioria dos documentos não há uma preocupação de definição

conceitual; apresenta vários significados/sentidos. Os dados indicam ainda não ter atingido estabilidade como conceito, apesar de estar acumulando elementos para tal.

Palavras-chave: Técnicas de Exercício e de Movimento. Educação Física. Formação de Conceito.

La expresión “Prácticas Corporales” en la literatura científica brasileña y su repercusión en el campo de la Educación Física

Resumen: Se objetivó identificar los significados/sentidos con los cuales la expresión prácticas corporales viene siendo utilizada en la literatura académica brasileña, mediante análisis de contenido de 260 artículos y 17 tesis/disertaciones que han sido capturadas con el uso de palabras claves en sistemas de busca y bases de datos. Los resultados indican que: su utilización es intensificada después del año 2000; los investigadores que lo utilizan, predominantemente, desarrollan sus investigaciones en interacción con las humanidades; en la mayoría de los documentos no hay un preocupación de definición conceptual; presenta varios significados/sentidos. Los datos indican aún no ter atingido estabilidade como concepto, aunque este acumulando elementos para tal.

Palabras clave: Técnicas por movimiento de ejercicio. Educación Física. Formación de concepto.

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