

114 - POSSIBILITIES OF CIRCUS ACTIVITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES¹RONALDO CESAR SANTOS DE OLIVEIRA²MARILSON DA COSTA SIMÕES³RAFAEL FREISLEBEM GOMES⁴KEFREN CALEGARI DOS SANTOS¹Secretaria Estadual de Educação (SEDU), Vitória, Espírito Santo - Brasil²Escola Superior São Francisco de Assis (ESFA), Santa Teresa, Espírito Santo - Brasil³Prefeitura Municipal de Afonso Cláudio (PMAC), Afonso Cláudio, Espírito Santo - Brasil⁴Instituto Federal Espírito Santo (IFES), Vitória, Espírito Santo - Brasil¹ronaldoesfa@yahoo.com.br²marilsongu@hotmail.com³rafaell_gomes@hotmail.com⁴kefren@terra.com.br**INTRODUCTION**

Ladies and gentlemen step right up to the greatest shown at school: the circus activities (CA)!

This study⁶ discusses the CA aiming at understanding it as a component of the School Physical Education (SPE) curriculum.

The interest in carrying out this study derived from the experience in an Extension Program in Circus Activities (CA) focusing on the physical education (PE) program of Escola São Francisco de Assis –ESFA (São Francisco de Assis School), in Santa Teresa, Espírito Santo - Brazil, in 2007. Soon, we realized the great opportunity of dealing with this curricular content in SPE classrooms, so as to incorporate it into the set of school pedagogical practices, systematizing its relevant knowledge as a teaching method. However, despite being interesting and exciting to work with these activities in EF classes, they are little exploited in the school sphere (DUPRAT, 2007; BORTOLETO; DUPRAT, 2007; BORTOLETO; MACHADO, 2003). Therefore, the wish to develop these activities in the school was added to the interest in investigating the limitations and possibilities of teaching CA in SPE.

One can say that CA involve and fascinate children, adolescents and adults. These activities can also represent a differential when inserted in the SPE curricular content. Thus, a study of this nature is an opportunity to investigate, present and discuss the possibility of incorporating these activities in SPE, and perhaps to provide clues to teachers who wish to develop this curricular content in their classes⁷.

As far as methodology is concerned, this is qualitative study because it has the natural environment as a direct source of data, and the researcher as an instrument with direct and prolonged contact with the environment and situation investigated (LUDKE; ANDRÉ, 1986). Although it can be characterized as an experience report, we were guided by some action research elements. It connected to an action or practice, in a situation in which the researcher's active involvement is required along all the research process, as well as the collective action by all the ones involved in the problem, so as to search practical relevance to the study (ENGEL, 2000).

Data production and collection took place during our intervention in the Phys Ed (PF) classes in the Estágio Supervisionado Escolar III (Supervised Student-Teaching Program III), at ESFA Elementary School⁸. The subjects in this study were sixth and eighth grade students, the EF teacher and the authors of this study. The classes took place from April to June 2008, a total of 24 classes per group. The data produced were collected through systematic observations (noted in a descriptive-reflective journal), questionnaires administered to students and teacher, as well as photographic records and filming of some of the classes.

Based on reflection and discussions about these data produced/collected with the school subjects, the Supervised Student-Teaching Program III professor, and the Final Paper advisor we were able to achieve the results of this study. Our reflection process has been continuous, it has no deadline. By presenting this study, for example, we aim at proposing the continuity of our reflections and discussions.

EDUCATION, SCHOOL, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND CIRCUS ACTIVITIES

By dealing with CA in SPE, as well as the limitations and possibilities of inserting them, we sought to reflect on education, the role of the school in a society, PE at schools and CA as a Phys Ed teaching content.

We see education as something essential to the human development process because it permeates social, economic, political and cultural relations of individuals in a society, and it suggests world conceptions, ideals, values, attitudes, which are translated into ideological convictions, in face of real situations and life challenges (LIBÂNEO, 1994).

From this perspective, we thought of education as a large process because several groups in a society play the role of educating: the family, church, work, entertainment, media, even if the educational actions performed by these groups are informal (because they neither follow explicit rules, nor are subject to strict external control). However, it is in the schools that formal education takes place. The school environment, in its time and space, spreads the necessary knowledge to the individuals and their culture. Thus, education developed in schools is formal (organization) and continuous (pedagogical processes), and it presupposes a pedagogical team of qualified and prepared professionals to perform specific tasks to meet the internal and external requirements of the school.

When reflecting on education and the school, it is important to highlight the role of the school curriculum subjects in the school environment in students' development/knowledge. Among these, PE has an important role in the student's formation as humans when it is pedagogically connected to body culture practices aiming at democratizing them, and critically reflecting on them in the process of experience, construction, reconstruction and systematization of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values by the students (SOARES et al., 1992).

⁶This is a summary of the Physical Education Licensure Program Final Paper carried out at ESFA and advised by teacher Kefren Calegari dos Santos in 2008.

⁷The clues we intend to give do not disregard the knowledge/information that many teachers build everyday at school. This study aims at being a humble contribution to all who wish to critically reflect on innovative curriculums in SPE.

⁸At the same place, but at different times, ESFA offers elementary, secondary and higher education programs. It is an educational institution linked to Serviço Social Educacional Beneficente (Charitable Educational Social Work) – SESEBE, and The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. It is a private faith, philanthropic school that has operated in the county of Santa Teresa, Espírito Santo for over a century.

In this study, some elements of the theoretical-methodological proposal for PE, named “critical-overcoming” proposal or “body culture” proposal (SOARES et al, 1992), are considered fundamental for legitimizing SPE, and a reference to this study. First of all, we considered that PE is configured with themes and forms of activities, particularly corporal such as games, sports, gymnastics, dancing or others that will compose its curricular content – we added body practices related to CA to the list. The study of this knowledge aims at understanding body expression as a language leaning towards playful, artistic and other aspects. Therefore, the body culture elements are part of this cultural diversity built by man, which has historically been incorporated to PE as teaching content, enabling understanding, rescuing, formulating and reformulating. Within the body culture universe, among so many other types of knowledge, CA has caused fascination and enchantment for centuries. These activities are a very rich content to be potentially developed in SPE classes.

When dealing with CA, one should consider the following contexts: historical, social and cultural, in which CA appear and are organized. Several circus manifestations have randomly emerged in different societies and cultures, many times they were linked to religious, festive and war-training manifestations. These activities promoted varied possibilities such as: challenges to one's own body limits, ways to oppose ideologies at that time, constitution of a form of entertainment and socialization to communities (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO apud BORTOLETO; MACHADO, 2003). Throughout the years, part of the peoples of these societies migrated to other locations, in their own continent or others. Mainly in Europe, these immigrants performed their skills publicly as entertainment, in which the body was the center of the show, and the multifaceted performance of these artists served several social classes, many times as the artist's self-support. In many places this kind of show did not find suitable spaces so it was performed outdoors. In others, covered arenas (tents) started to arise along with the show's prominence. They began to spread all over the world, especially the traveling circuses and large circuses. Between the 18th and 19th centuries, the circus actually "stood out", and was structured as a form of art with its own identity, even though much of this knowledge had been developed throughout thousands of years (BORTOLETO; DUPRAT, 2007).

The circus culture underwent deep changes. It was opened to other artistic expressions such as music, dance, theater, gestural theater, miming, etc., which allowed inserting and teaching circus activities in specialized schools. Consequently, the transmission of the circus knowledge, its systematization and application enabled us to consider the circus a possible content to be developed in the educational context, as it had been done with other types of body art (BORTOLETO; DUPRAT, 2007).

Moreover, some circus manifestations have certain evidence in our society, and gradually grew in several environments: parties, parks, nightclubs, children parties, gyms, NGOs and social work institutions, hospitals and clinics (DUPRAT, 2007). However, we cannot forget that CA have been appropriated and dealt with as consumer goods, and very often taken over by the media⁹.

All these artistic expressions are part of culture. Since the school is the place for transmitting, producing and reproducing knowledge, information, and culture, CA are part of cultural heritage of humanity. Thus, it is necessary to consider the school as an environment in which students are able to learn, experience, and “savor” cultural experiences that contribute to their formation and that enable diversifying and signifying knowledge in these educational environments.

BRIEF REPORT/REFLECTION ON THE EXPERIENCE WITH CIRCUS ACTIVITIES AT ESFA

At this school, we were enthusiastically welcomed by the PE teacher and by the students. We focused the planning on the CA cultural diversity and blended juggling, gymnastics, equilibration and ropes. We used the school's sports court, the fight room and patio to develop the classes.

At first, we showed the schedule of activities to students and diagnosed their knowledge and experience concerning these activities. After we showed Cirque du Soleil videos, students were very interested. We stressed that the experience would involve from freer, spontaneous and playful movements to more technical ones.

We approached some gymnastic moves present in the circus: rolling (back, forward side, etc.), handstand, cartwheel, pyramids, acrobatic formation and somersaults, emphasizing the existing approaches and the differences between these moves and sports gymnastics.

In the following classes, we made the necessary objects for juggling. We used low-cost and even recycled materials. Several objects were made: handkerchief, balls, hoops, devil sticks, swing, swing poi, etc. These activities revealed and stimulated companionship, creativity, and ingenuity among the ones involved in the process.

We introduced the practice with juggling tools: handkerchiefs, balls and hoops, from the easiest to the most complex feats. We started from handkerchiefs: they allow higher motor control and understanding of the movement mechanics because they have higher their floatability. With the balls, we approached more technical elements because of the complexity of movements (cascade and circular), but also because we believed that most students would be able to perform them. They had already been successful with the handkerchiefs, now we could pose more challenges. With the hoops, however, few students were successful. With the devil stick, few students understood the basic moves when they were presented in a more technical way. Then, we suggested playful activities and games, so that students could be successful, we also highlighted their persistence and dedication.

When working with swing / swing poi, we exploited students' creativity and let them free to handle the objects and come up with moves, and then transmit these moves to peers. Finally, we approached and demonstrated simple moves so as to stimulate new ideas. We noticed students' creativity and autonomy development, as well as content learning.

We also worked on balance (with stilts, ball-rolling, and other objects) in a circuit. Each one of the interns was responsible for one “base” between which the students, organized in three groups, moved from and to. Their interest in the activities increased each time they exchanged places, they showed to be excited and stimulated to learn more. One more time, the playful characteristics stood out, and everyone was successful in the activities.

The last part of our intervention was working with ropes. We varied the activities using one, two, three, and up to four ropes during the games. Then we reflected on and discussed the classes in a general context and suggested that the students prepare a choreography summarizing their development and what they had learned during the classes. They agreed, and then we explained that they could use all the curricular content and materials employed during the intervention. They were let free to create the presentations and we offered to help them at alternative times (different from their class schedule).

We requested the school director to schedule a date and time at which all the school and community (family, friends, etc.) could watch the performance. On the “grand day”, the students arrived early and surprised us – we expected simple presentations. But they soon got dressed, put on makeup and warmed up like authentic circus artists.

⁹For example: Cirque du Soleil, a show that fascinates audiences all over the world and that involves several types of art such music, dancing, and theater through mega-performances.

The stage was set, the audience took their seats, and the artists were ready. Everyone was anxious. The announcer was also there: "Ladies and gentlemen! Good morning! Welcome to the great show: the artists of ESFA!" There were six presentations with a lot of fun, happiness, enthusiasm and esthetic-symmetric quality (it was not the purpose, but they did it). The groups included music, dances, theater (comic), and miming in their presentations and moved the audiences, who applauded, photographed and filmed it, with cheers. After the performances, we highlighted the effort and dedication of the students and the PE teacher to everyone present. We also stressed the importance of SPE to be opened to "new" body culture contents. We also noticed: many warm hugs, proud parents and children, school board of directors asking for our intervention again (now in high school), and very thankful students and PE teacher. We were really happy about having contributed to this circus party.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Although the experience was considered overall successful, it was not easily achieved, both to the school students and to us, student-teachers.

All along the process, more or less separately and frequently, some attitudes were noticed in every moment. In short, we can point out that these attitudes usually referred to: no participation of some students in some activities proposed, and a little indifference when making the material needed in the classes; apprehensiveness, fear, and inhibition for participating in activities that highlighted students' own body movements; distraction during individual activities; some prejudice and resistance to this curricular content. On the other hand, we also felt some difficulties in stimulating and guiding the students who were unable to perform these activities, especially in face of the complexity of some moves; difficulties in attracting the attention of the prejudiced and resistant ones; or even difficulties in systematizing and organizing the curricular content by means of a lesson plan.

Apart from these difficulties, however, we identified several possibilities in the teaching-learning process of these activities in PE classes: the making of materials seemed very interesting and rich in terms of knowledge concerning CA. The contextualization and articulation of this knowledge/information was also noticed by means of reflections on and relationships between street artists, traveling circuses, mega-shows, etc. We also noticed the progressive development of team work and peer collaboration among the students, as well as autonomy, creativity, responsibility, and persistence. In each class, fears and individualism were overcome, as well as unity, joy and expressiveness increased through moments of encouragement and collaboration. We believed a continuous teaching-learning process took place. A process in which, despite our several doubts and questioning, student-teacher dialogue prevailed.

The studies, discussions and reflections carried out continuously and collectively in the different moments of this action research enabled us to systematize and better understand what had been experienced, and also question students' resistance to "innovative"¹⁰ contents, which, up to certain extent, were also present in the beginning of our classes.

Sentences showing students' resistance to the curricular content proposed were common: "Why do we have to do it?", "I won't be an artist", "I won't work in a circus!" We believe that resistance is something common throughout new processes. Considering these students, this resistance also brought different feelings, tensions, and underlying prejudice and limitations that, in a certain way, have been constructed along these students' lives. This is also because some students do not see these types of activities as part of the PE curriculum. Concerning this, the PE teacher said: "[...] the resistance we faced is (was) normal, as it happens whenever anything new is proposed. This is a result of the belief 'physical education equals ball game', still present among students".

We noticed an ambiguous process in which students' resistance and predisposition to "innovative" contents emerged at the same time. Poor repertoire of possible body culture contents may cause discontentment, dissatisfaction, and resistance. A research of the Physical Education Study Laboratory - LESEF at CEFD/UFES, carried out between 1997 and 1998 in the public state schools of Espírito Santo State, verified that

[...] Among elementary school students, 42.7% do not think any change is necessary, whereas the other 57.3% wish for changes in the physical education (PE) classes. Among the high-school students, satisfaction rate is a little lower (37.3%), against 62.7% who claim to be unhappy about their classes. The main reason for dissatisfaction is the curricular content (21.7%), that is, there should fundamentally be a larger variety of activities [...] This aspect is interesting because it shows students' interest in acquiring a broader sporting repertoire or dominating more practices in the body culture sphere, which is many times denied by the teachers (DIAS et al., 1999, free translation).

¹⁰We call "innovative" curricular contents that are not commonly dealt with in PE classes (e.g. circus activities, adventure sports, racket sports, etc.) Mazoni (2001) uses this term referring to political-pedagogical proposals suggesting significant changes in the pedagogical work organization and in dealing with knowledge in schools.

The students clearly show their saturation, tiredness concerning the traditional sporting (with repetitive practices) and hegemonic model, which, until today, causes resistance and dissatisfaction inside schools (OLIVEIRA, 1999). Thus, we believe it is the teacher's responsibility to know and approach different curricular body culture contents. This would demand initial and continued qualification that takes students and teachers into account as subjects in the action/reflection process, and that contributes to their protagonist role within this culture. When this happens, we believe that students become more than mere participants, and once they have their thoughts and actions respected and welcomed, the challenges arising from the learning process and the initial resistance become potential moments of growth, both to students and teachers. It worth considering that

Physical education classes do not happen in abstract places. They take place and are carried out by concrete, real individuals who have a life history, and above all, a body. It is in this concrete, real life that students' individual and collective identity is grounded (BRAZIL, 2006, p. 220-221).

We think that PE knowledge socialization should start from a significant set of possible ways to experience the body culture that can be a means of learning new curricular content, as seen in CA implementation. Physical education is based on knowledge-action composed of corporal experience and skills, but also on knowledge-action permeated by different types of knowledge (BRAZIL, 2006).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even among difficulties and limitations, we discovered that it is possible to incorporate CA as curricular content in PE classes, as an integrating part of the body culture. The limitations and challenges of this curricular content can be overcome by the teacher's studies, planning and creativity, but above all, by everyday dialoguing and learning.

The biggest contributions of this curricular content are related to students' opening to welcome other body culture practices (if they are made available); understanding the teacher as a mediator and challenger who "destabilizes" students so that

they are subject to their own learning; the joy and playfulness in the classes; and the development of creativity.

This action research, besides promoting the study and development of this new curricular content, is also an opportunity to stimulate the spread and democratization of other curricular contents that are part of the body culture but many times are not developed in our pedagogical practices.

In the historical process of self-affirmation which PE has been through, we need to change our class time and space into moments of creativity, joy, affection, body expression, and knowledge, a place for forming individuals aware of their contribution within their environments.

We hope you have enjoyed the show! Come back soon! Invest in CA whenever you can!

REFERÊNCIAS

BORTOLETO, Marco Antônio Coelho; DUPRAT, Rodrigo Mallet. Educação física escolar: pedagogia e didática das atividades circenses. **Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte**, Campinas, v. 28, n. 2, p. 171-189, jan. 2007.

_____; MACHADO, Gustavo de Arruda. Reflexões sobre o circo e a educação física. **Revista Corpoconsciência**. Santo André, n. 12, p. 41-69, 2003.

BRASIL. Secretaria de Educação Básica. **Orientações curriculares para o ensino médio. Linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias**. Brasília: MEC/SEB, 2006. v 1, p. 211-239.

DIAS, Andréia et al. Diagnóstico da educação física escolar no estado do Espírito Santo condições e comportamentos: o imaginário social dos alunos. In: CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE CIÊNCIAS DO ESPORTE, 11., 1999, Florianópolis. **Anais...** Florianópolis: Colégio Brasileiro de Ciências do Esporte, 1999.

DUPRAT, Rodrigo. Mallet. **Atividades circenses: possibilidades e perspectivas para a educação física escolar**. 2007. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação Física) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação Física, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2007. ENGEL, Guido Irineu. Pesquisa-ação. **Educar em Revista**, Curitiba, n. 16. p. 181-191, 2000.

LUDKE, Menga; ANDRÉ, Marli Eliza Dalmazo Afonso de. **Pesquisa em educação: abordagens qualitativas**. São Paulo: EPU, 1986. LIBÂNEO, José Carlos. **Didática**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1994.

MAZONI, Anna Rachel. A educação física no contexto de um projeto pedagógico inovador: o caso da escola plural. In: CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE CIÊNCIAS DO ESPORTE, 12., 2001, Caxambu. Sociedade, ciência e ética: desafios para a educação física/ciências do esporte. **Anais...** Campinas: Colégio Brasileiro de Ciências do Esporte, 2001.

OLIVEIRA, Marcus Aurélio Taborda de. Existe espaço para o ensino de educação física na escola básica? **Revista pensar a prática**, Goiânia, v. 2, p. 119-135, 1999.

SOARES, Carmen Lúcia et al. **Metodologia do ensino de Educação Física**. São Paulo: Cortez, 1992.

Ronaldo Cesar Santos de Oliveira Rua Arapuê, 191, Residencial Centro da Serra – 29179-190 – Serra, Espírito Santo/ Brasil Telefones: (27) 32915220/ (27) 98497661 – E-mail: ronaldoesfa@yahoo.com.br

POSSIBILITIES OF CIRCUS ACTIVITIES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

ABSTRACT:

This study aimed at investigating the limitations and possibilities of teaching circus activities in school physical education classes with 6th and 8th graders of Escola São Francisco de Assis, in Santa Teresa – Espírito Santo, Brazil. It is a qualitative study guided by some action research elements. We reflected on the role of the school in society, physical education in the school, and circus activities as physical education curricular content. We reported the experience acquired with these groups, pointed out difficulties/limitations and possibilities witnessed, and questioned students' resistance to curricular contents considered "innovative".

KEY-WORDS: physical education; school; circus activities.

LES POSSIBILITÉS DES ACTIVITÉS DES ARTS DU CIRQUE DANS LES CLASSES D'ÉDUCATION PHYSIQUE ET SPORTIVE

RÉSUMÉ:

On a comme but de chercher les limites et les possibilités de l'enseignement des activités du cirque dans les classes d'EPS, avec les classes de 4e et de 3e de l'école São Francisco de Assis, à Santa Teresa – Espírito Santo, Brésil. Ce travail est de nature qualitative et a été orienté par les certains éléments de la recherche-action. On réfléchit sur le rôle de l'école dans la société, l'EPS dans l'école et les activités du cirque comme un de ses contenus d'enseignement. On raconte l'expérience développée avec ces classes et les difficultés/limites et les possibilités vécues et on met en doute la très connue résistance des élèves face à des contenus considérés «innovateurs».

MOTS CLÉS : éducation physique et sportive ; école ; activités du cirque.

POSIBILIDADES DE LAS ACTIVIDADES CIRCENSES EN LAS CLASES DE EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA

RESUMEN:

El objetivo fue investigar los límites y las posibilidades de la enseñanza de las actividades circenses en las clases de Educación Física Escolar, en el sexto y octavo grado de la Escuela São Francisco de Assis, en Santa Teresa – Espírito Santo, Brasil. Este trabajo es de naturaleza cualitativa y se orientó por medio de algunos elementos de investigación-acción. Reflexionamos sobre el papel de la escuela en la sociedad, la Educación Física en la escuela y las actividades circenses como uno de sus contenidos de enseñanza. Relatamos la experiencia desarrollada en esos grados señalando las dificultades/limites y posibilidades vivenciadas y cuestionamos la divulgada resistencia de los alumnos a contenidos considerados "innovadores".

PALABRAS CLAVES: educación física; escuela; actividades circense.

POSSIBILIDADES DAS ATIVIDADES CIRCENSES NAS AULAS DE EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA

RESUMO:

Objetivamos investigar os limites e as possibilidades do ensino das atividades circenses nas aulas de Educação Física Escolar, com as turmas da 6ª e 8ª séries da Escola São Francisco de Assis, em Santa Teresa – Espírito Santo, Brasil. Este trabalho é de natureza qualitativa e se orientou por meio de alguns elementos da pesquisa-ação. Refletimos sobre o papel da escola na sociedade, a Educação Física na escola e as atividades circenses como um de seus conteúdos de ensino. Relatamos a experiência desenvolvida com essas turmas apontando para dificuldades/limites e possibilidades vivenciados e questionamos a propalada resistência dos alunos a conteúdos considerados "inovadores".

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: educação física; escola; atividades circenses.

PUBLICAÇÃO NO FIEP BULLETIN ON-LINE: <http://www.fiepbulletin.net/80/a1/114>