



DIALOGUES BETWEEN BODY AND NATURE: OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

DIÁLOGOS ENTRE O CORPO E A NATUREZA: AS PRÁTICAS CORPORAIS AO AR LIVRE E A EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA ESCOLAR

DIÁLOGOS ENTRE EL CUERPO Y LA NATURALEZA: LAS PRÁCTICAS CORPORALES AL AIRE LIBRE Y LA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA ESCOLAR

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Keywords: Physical Education.

History. Body.

Exercise

Abstract: This paper intends to contribute with Physical Education teachers through a historical approach on the body, nature and outdoor physical activities. It analyzes the history of outdoor physical activities and their relations with school over time. It is justified by the need to define and legitimize outdoor physical activities as a content of body culture to be addressed by school Physical Education.

Palavras chave: Educação física. História.

Corpo. Exercício. Resumo: O artigo pretende oferecer uma contribuição aos professores de Educação Física por meio de uma abordagem histórica do corpo, da natureza e das práticas corporais ao ar livre. O seu objetivo é analisar a história das práticas corporais ao ar livre e as relações estabelecidas ao longo do tempo com o universo escolar. A sua justificativa está atrelada à necessidade de definirmos e legitimarmos as práticas corporais ao ar livre como um conteúdo da cultura corporal passível de ser abordado pela Educação Física Escolar.

Palabras clave: Educación Física. Historia.

Cuerpo. Ejercicio. Resumen: El artículo pretende ofrecer una contribución para los profesores de Educación Física a través de un enfoque histórico del cuerpo, de la naturaleza y de las prácticas corporales al aire libre. El objetivo es de analizar la historia de las prácticas corporales al aire libre y las relaciones establecidas, a lo largo del tiempo, con el universo de la escuela. Se justifica por la necesidad de definir y legitimar las prácticas corporales al aire libre como un contenido de la cultura corporal que puede ser abordado por la Educación Física escolar.

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Received on: 10.28. 2014 Approved on: 06.22.2015



1 INTRODUCTION: BODY, BODY PRACTICES AND NATURE IN THE HISTORIC-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Physical Education's main object of study and work is the human body. However, it is essential to note that such object is not immutable, single or unchanging. Rather, representations on the body are numerous and of various orders. Ultimately, that is to say that the main object of Physical Education is multiple. Whether seen as a poetic expression of heavenly making according to creationist mythologies; home to the soul and divine spark in religious readings; an integral and inseparable part of nature and the cosmos according to the Hippocratic theory of humors; a set of biological structures and tissue layers according to anatomy; or a set of levers and muscle actions as described by kinesiology and biomechanics, representations constructed about the body throughout history are endless (SOARES, 2001, 2007; COURBIN; COURTINE; VIGARELLO, 2008). In addition to its biological materiality, the body is as anchor point for culture as "a multifaceted reality and, above all, a historical object: mutant memory of each culture's laws and codes" (SANT'ANNA, 1995 p. 2).

According to Bracht (1999), in the 1980s Brazilian Physical Education began to employ the disciplines of the Human Sciences to understand the body as an object that is not limited to the biological sphere and the mechanical analysis of movement. Therefore, the critical-overcoming teaching methodology developed in 1992 by the so-called Authors' Collective gained high representativeness by defining body expression as language and employing the concept of body culture. Relying on studies by Leontiev, Luria and Vygotsky (1988), the authors brought a reflection on the body as a symbolic reality shaped by language to the field of Physical Education. They stated that movement that can be called human is movement with meaning, i. e., gesture rather than merely a motor act (METHODOLOGY..., 1992; MATSUMOTO, 2009). In general, the authors' main intention at the time was to oppose the view that Physical Education should work mainly with developing physical fitness, and debate the body as a symbolic reality (DAOLIO, 2004).

The relationship between body and language may also be understood according to studies of Gleyse (2007, 2010). The author says that words tell the body what is of good or bad taste, what should provoke its desire or cause its outrage and disgust, what it should consider as clean or dirty or even as lawful or unlawful. Body interdicts expressed by the words of civility manuals such as Erasmus of Rotterdam's (1466-1536), which produced, according to Norbert Elias (2011), were a progressive learning of emotions and behaviors accepted and desired according to specific interests. Words in discourses ultimately tell the body what it should monitor and punish or want and encourage. Language – fundamental matter of discourses and incorporated into us by words and gestures – builds, molds and makes the body.

In addition to the body as symbolic reality, the critical-overcoming teaching methodology also produced a reading of body practices from the Human Sciences,¹ giving more precise contours to the concept of body culture that had begun to emerge in Brazilian Physical Education in the 1980s (BRACHT, 1999; DAOLIO, 2004). According to the Authors' Collective (1992, p. 38), it is up to Physical Education:

[...] to reflect upon the collection of forms of representation of the world that man has produced throughout history, externalized by body expression: games, dances, wrestling, gymnastic exercises, sports, juggling, contortionism, mimicry and others, which can be identified as forms of symbolic representation of realities experienced by man, historically created and culturally developed.

¹ Regarding the term body practices and their interfaces with Human Sciences, see especially Lazzarotti Filho et al., 2010.



The authors take a historical-cultural approach of body practices as their reference, defining the content of School Physical Education as a collection of socially constructed and historically accumulated body practices, which have to be retraced and conveyed to students at school. Therefore, they start from the premise that school does not develop the knowledge to be worked by disciplines; it appropriates knowledge produced by societies in different times and places, giving it methodological treatment in order to facilitate its apprehension by students².

According to the Authors' Collective (1992), the selection of Brazilian Physical Education contents was linked to the very historical dynamics of conformation of the area as a field of knowledge, and different body practices received pedagogical treatment so that they could be taught to students. Gymnastics – the first name given to Physical Education – was its first school content when it departed from the circus universe and popular festivals towards the military logic and medical and scientific knowledge (SOARES, 1998). In Brazil, sport began receiving pedagogical treatment still in the early decades of the 20th century, gaining hegemony among contents taught by the discipline of Physical Education from the 1940s (SOARES, 1996; BRACHT, 1999). In the last two decades, previously marginalized fights and circus arts have been analyzed and understood as essential components of body culture, and were increasingly present in the school environment as a teaching content of Physical Education (SILVA, 2009; BORTOLETO, 2010).

As explained by the Authors' Collective (1992), the historical character of the process of systematizing Physical Education contents shows that it is inexhaustible and provisional, that is, open to new explorations and propositions. It is understood that we can add other contents to the collection described above, such as outdoor body practices. Bathing in the sea, rivers and lakes, horse riding, camping, exposing one's body to the sun, walking in the woods and parks as well as a variety of outdoor sports and games are historical constructions anchored in a new view established by humans toward nature. They are body practices linked, during the 19th century, to the world of natural medicine and villeggiature, and nature was interpreted as a healing and pleasurable element. Therefore, they share the same historical matrix, which allows us to group them as Physical Education content. The very Authors' Collective (1992) refers to those body practices when debating hiking and admits it could enrich Physical Education classes by discussing issues such as ecology. It is not about thinking the many current possibilities of working with that content, but defining and legitimizing outdoor body practices as an expression of body culture that has been codified over time and is available to be discussed, experienced, debated and reinterpreted by teachers and students in Physical Education classes.

The dialogue proposed by this paper tries to extrapolate the debates that have long dominated Human Sciences, especially Philosophy and Anthropology, about differences and oppositions between nature and culture. As Silva (2007), I consider it necessary to understand nature as an element that "[...] sets in motion a series of sensations, thoughts, images, memories, needs, drives and emotions". Therefore, I sought to focus on how many representations of nature have been built over time, how natural elements – such as plants, animals, rivers, seas, mountains and everything that might be more broadly considered as landscape³ - have been interpreted by different discourses and narratives to establish an idea of a regenerating and benevolent nature.

² Regarding the processes of construction of school contents, see especially Faria Filho et al., 2004, which provides an overview on historical research related to the topic.

³ Regarding the concept of landscape, we recommended Corbin (2001), in which the author especially discusses the history of body sensitivities in relation to nature and its elements.

The etymology of the word can be an interesting starting point to begin this conversation. Silva (1999, 2001) and Kesselring (2000) analyze the changes that the term nature (physis) has experienced throughout Western history, since classical Antiquity. Before being guided by the canons of modern science, before being an object of science and manipulation, nature was not a given. In Antiquity, it represented the cosmos, the universe and everything that existed, it was the beginning of every unique being. In Christian mythology, in turn, nature was conceived in the context of creation because it was believed that divine goodness and wisdom were manifested in it. For instance, water was a purifying element. A mystical relationship between man and nature indeed appears in different cultures, and the concept of nature is very plastic as it has followed historical changes in our societies.

In addition to its etymology, it would be appropriate for us to think, as Lenoble (1969) provokes us, about the different "ideas of nature" articulated throughout history. At each epoch/ time, nature has been rediscovered by new sensations and emotions, appropriated in different ways for new uses, constantly reinterpreted by numerous discourses and new mentalities. It is essential to consider that nature and its elements are above all historical constructs.

Thomas (1988) narrates the process of change in attitudes toward the natural world over time, which, from incessant exploitation begins to be seen as ecological concern that demanded love and desire for nature. That change, however, has not been always so linear, with a multitude of specifics as a result of economic, political, social and cultural aspects. Think, for instance, how medicine, notably climatological theories, considered tropical nature and climate during the 19th century as factors for Europeans' lack of adaptation to South American lands, allegedly responsible for physical and moral degeneration (CHALHOUB, 1996). The constructed idea about the hinterland and the rural world as hostile territory considered improper to development of life seen as civilized was also highly present in early 20th century Brazil (LIMA, HOCHMAN, 2004). Let us think also about how indigenous and African populations were seen as closer to nature, in a rather negative and stigmatizing primitivist view that legitimized slavery in Brazil since the colonial times (PIKE, 2001).

Therefore, we can see that the ideas of nature constructed over time have become multiple, polysemic, complex. The very human sensibilities towards nature and its elements, such as the sun, the air, river and sea waters, mountains and beaches have not always been the same in the long historical term (CORBIN, 1987, 1989, 2001). For a long time, the immensity of the sea and the highest mountain peaks sparked a number of fears and suspicions, and enjoying those landscapes as a desirable body experience was unthinkable. In contrast, nature seen as pleasant and full of virtues would be sung over the 16th and 17th centuries, especially by poets and artists. It would be responsible, for instance, for idealizing life in the country and in touch with nature as beneficial to urban societies, according to Williams (2011). Those discourses not only shaped a new way of thinking about nature, but also legitimized new work with the body, refining its sensitivity and emotions.

As Corbin (1987; 1989; 2001) provokes us to see, outdoor body practices established a new way to enjoy the landscape, awakening sensations that had been appreciated few times before that. The discovery of possibilities to have fun in nature was associated with increasing importance given by culture to immediate sensations. It would allow the body to come into direct contact with natural elements, to enter the sea for pleasure, to undress in order to be in contact with sunlight, to climb mountains and to appreciate the air of altitude as fresher and more invigorating. As stated by Sirost (2009, p. 7), in the 19th century, "[n]ature [was] reconfigured in mentalities and uses to become essentially a playful space - both a land of adventures and a pedagogical device". In this sense, coding of outdoor body practices that makes up the invention of that nature seen as a playful space is part, above all, of a rather unique idea of nature that would be the focus of natural medicine and *villegiature*.

2 FROM NATURAL THERAPIES TO VILLEGIATURE: THE IDEA OF A GENEROUS NATURE

At a time such as the 19th century, when the causes of several diseases were not fully known and allopathic drugs did not even exist for most of them, different therapeutic methods were conceived to ensure and promote life based on the use of resources present in nature, such as stream and sea water, sunlight and the air of altitude. Outdoor body practices such as bathing, walking and body exposure to the sun were initially employed in private medical establishments located in small villages away from urban centers. In those medical institutions, patients, especially members of European aristocracy and bourgeoisie, arrived by train in hopes of appeasing the symptoms of the diseases that took over their bodies and anguished their lives so much. Treatments were based on the principles of outdoor living in harmony with nature and its elements, and the use of light garments was always recommended so that the body would remain in contact with air, sunlight and water as long as possible. Body movements would happen in accordance with therapists' requirements, and the lives of those who looked for those establishments gained new rhythms while their bodies and gestures acquired new features. That work acted on the senses, molding the body from the resources of nature interpreted as curative and bountiful (VILLARET, 2005; BAUBÉROT, 2004).

Treatments developed during the 19th century – known as hydrotherapy, heliotherapy, climatotherapy and thalassotherapy - would draw the attention not only of professionals involved in natural medicine, but also of phthisiologists seeking ways to ensure the lives of those infected with the TB bacillus. Incorporated into sanatoriums, natural medicine treatments recommended that the energies of convalescent bodies should be saved and directed entirely toward alleged inner processes of healing, while outdoor resting was one of the techniques most often employed in sanatoriums (GUILLAUME, 1989). The success achieved by those treatments in the medical field was such that various healing villages quickly consolidated – the most renowned being those located in the mountain ranges of Central Europe.

However, scientific evidence for those treatments was limited, which caused a portion of the medical society to discourage their use or condemn their empirical foundations.⁴ That opposition, however, would not jeopardize the success they achieved among the population because, as noted by Dagognet (1998), although they were not based on laboratory confirmation, the treatments were grounded on poetic-inspired, literary-based desire for contact with nature. Outdoor life would indeed be kept for a long time as a "romantic panacea" linked both to an ancient unconscious that would understand the altitudes and the country as a manifestation of the sublime and nature's fertility, as well as a rather chimeric poetic subconscious presented in literature.

Thus, the tradition of exalting outdoor life and the refinement of new feelings towards nature preceded sanatoriums and natural medicine itself, being proclaimed above all by the writings of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and the literary movement of

⁴ Regarding the historical clashes between natural treatments and allopathic treatments, see Dalben, 2015.

German Romanticism, with writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) as one of its main representatives (BAUBÉROT, 2004). According to Villaret (2005), the popularity reached by natural medicine treatments in the 19th century can also be explained by the fact that they changed the representations of water, air of altitude and sunlight as saving elements, thus updating an entire imagery of nature as a source of vitality and rebirth. In many cases, polarizations between the natural environment and more unhealthy urban centers would also help that social rise of the desire for nature, especially when the current and crystalline water from fountains and streams as well as the pleasant scent of pine trees in the woods was compared to the foul odors emanating from open sewers and factories' chimneys (CORBIN, 1987). For travelers seeking healing establishments, the feeling that prevailed was that mountain air was cooler and allegedly free from pollution and substances that could compromise its purity. Thus, while the scientific bases for such claims could be scarce or inadequate for physicians of the time, the belief that nature was beneficent and essential for body health did not need the scrutinizing eye of the microscope to assert itself among the population, because that was certainty strongly rooted in an earlier literary and cultural tradition that extolled the benefits and pleasures of living outdoors.

In the social context of the wealthy classes, going to private healing establishments located in mountain villages or in the countryside was still an opportunity to get away, even temporarily, from the rigor of court customs or the austerity of moral codes and civility imposed in the most elegant urban areas. It is important to remember that even during the 19th century, the bodies of members of the aristocracy were sustained by corsets that kept them erect and molded their flesh and gestures according to external action. In therapeutic establishments, however, patients would have to break free from those orthopedic devices and heavier clothing in order to get in contact with water, air and sunlight. Arnold Rikli (1823-1906), one of the most celebrated therapists of his time, said: "Elegance is the plague of spas; there is nothing lower in natural medicine establishments, where a certain freedom of movement, better yet, of dressing is required" (RIKLI, 1905, p. 202). Once approved by the words of therapists, that simple gesture - undressing from elegance or suffering conferred by corsets and heavy garments - would eventually allow trips to healing establishments to become a practice much sought after by the elite in their idle time, establishing *villegiature*, i. e., travelling towards nature as a practice quite in vogue in the late 19th century and early 20th century (RAUCH, 2001; BOYER, 2008).

Therefore, temporary escape from the urban environment and court societies towards natural medicine establishments would open room for nature to be seen as essential both for body health and for new ways of entertainment and new sociabilities. Small healing-oriented villages embedded in the mountains would be transformed into sumptuous villegiatura resorts, which contained a multitude of amusements such as musical performances and dances, game sessions, sports matches, competitions and games, bucolic hiking in the woods, picnics, boat trips on lakes or horse riding through mountain slopes, among many others. Taking fresh air, swimming and climbing the mountains became increasingly recurrent expressions among wealthy families, revealing new sensitivity towards nature, which went beyond the methods recommended by natural medicine therapies. A true outdoor body education emerged, 5 guided by therapists' words and numerous body practices and amusements offered by hotels and owners of grandiose country houses built in those resorts for the practice of villegiatura (RAUCH, 2001; BOYER, 2008).

Therefore, the trip to the mountains included the idea of leaving to be reborn, either in hopes deposited by tuberculosis patients and other convalescents in outdoor rest in the gardens and balconies of sanatoriums or in discovering the pleasure offered by the entertainment practiced by villegiatura practitioners. Among many of the regulars in therapeutic establishments, the pleasure of outdoor leisure while wearing light clothing under warm sunrays and outdoors would definitely become the major motivation for those trips. It would no longer be about healing, treating pain; it would be about having fun and enjoying the adventure of outdoor living.

3 OUTDOOR BODY PRACTICES: FROM SCHOOL VACATION TO OUTDOOR SCHOOLS

All this universe of healing villages and *villegiature* did not go unnoticed by educators and school physicians, and several initiatives were set in motion to include them in the school institution in the late 19th century. In 1890, French physician and sports enthusiast Fernand Lagrange (1845-1909) was able to list a few points to the eclectic design of the new gymnastic programs of primary schools in his country, with proposals that included outdoor games among exercises recommended (VILLARET, 2005). Doctor Aimé Riant (1827-1902) also advocated the inclusion of outdoor body practices in schools in a book published in 1889. He raised the possibility of importing into French public schools some of the games that were common in high society *villegiature* in the gardens of their villas or in healing resorts. Generally, his intent can be understood as allowing the universe of villegiature, with all its own amusements, to enter the school environment. Importantly, however, democratization of outdoor body practices through school was not suggested, as it is done nowadays, because those practices were understood as cultural constructs that could and should be offered to the population, but mainly due to their hygienistic character and their function to strengthen children's bodies. Nevertheless, despite the efforts made by the two French physicians, outdoor body practices would be restricted to the sphere of discourse for a long time, not being really implemented in public schools in late 19th century, and French School Physical Education was dominated, for a long time, by scientific gymnastics teaching (SOARES, 1998; VILLARET, 2005).

Barred from entering school, outdoor body practices would find another establishment to be institutionalized: vacation camps. Directed primarily to children enrolled in the public school system, especially the poorest and most malnourished ones, those camps aimed, in their early days, at making a trip to the mountain, the countryside or the coast during school holidays. They would offer abundant food and the possibility of outdoor body practices to strengthen children's bodies and thus prevent diseases. Their goals, however, were not only medical, since vacation camps would enable their participants to acquire a lot of knowledge about outdoor living, while indulging in countless amusements and pleasures. When opening a new space for school holidays, the camps would allow body practices previously restricted to wealthy families to be offered to poorer children, many of whom had never left large urban centers and were routinely exploited as child labor (DALBEN, 2009; 2014a, 2014b).

Mostly inspired in vacation camps and the results of therapeutic properties of natural medicine on the body, German, Swiss and Belgian educators would propose not only the inclusion of outdoor body practices in school by means of Physical Education, but also complete restructuring of school based on the dictates of outdoor living, with changes ranging from schedules, teaching procedures and furniture to architecture. Established in forests near cities or in their public parks, outdoor school would be born in the first decade of the 20th century – an institution that aimed at profoundly changing the more traditional school. The idea was that if nature was an open book as stated by many educators of the time, it was necessary to learn to read it in a systematic way. School was required to keep its doors and windows open to nature to be investigated by students and the outdoors would be considered as good for teaching methods and school programs as for children's lungs, nerves and muscles. Several outdoor body practices would manifest in it, providing students with a diverse school life including games and amusements based on nature, different kinds of manual crafts such as gardening and of vegetable gardens, outdoor practical lessons where plants, animals, rocks, etc. were investigated directly by students, time for reciting, theater, music, festivals and exhibitions that took place in the woods of those institutions (DALBEN, 2009; 2014b; CHÂTELET, LERCH, LUC, 2003).

Born in the medical universe of natural therapies, outdoor body practices would be appropriate not only for curing diseases, but also for amusements characteristic of villegiature carried out by the wealthy. Barred from schools, which then focused on teaching scientific gymnastics, outdoor body practices were first worked at vacation camps, then changed school structures themselves to found the model of the outdoor school. From the 1950s on, with further development and distribution of allopathic medicines to cure most diseases, natural therapies lost their social and scientific support, being shifted to branches of alternative, unofficial medicine. Vacation camps and outdoor schools, in turn, would also lose their major medical-scientific bases and begin to gain other connotations, and the former would be seen from then on as recreational institutions linked mainly to leisure, while the latter began shutting down in many countries. Their teachings, however, persisted mainly as attempts to promote students' taste for outdoor living, that is, to incite their desire for a life in harmony with nature and its elements, thus allowing not only the body to strengthen but mainly nature to be discovered in its educational potential.

4 CONCLUSION

Based on a broader view of the body beyond its biological materiality, Brazilian Physical Education established in the 1990s, through the critical-overcoming teaching methodology, that its school contents should be understood as forms of historically constructed and culturally developed symbolic representation. Gymnastics, sports, dance, circus, games and fights were elected by the teaching methodology in question as the most classic contents of Physical Education, and could be extended to several other body practices that constituted the broad gestural collection codified and accumulated by mankind in its history. In presenting outdoor body practices, it is concluded that they might be part of the Physical Education repertoire of contents, since they were linked and brought together under the same historical framework and the same cultural dynamics. Even though they have not entered the school institution during the 19th century, outdoor body practices were appropriated by vacation camps, which were considered as extracurricular in their early times and became a definitive educational component with the advent of outdoor schools in the early 20th century. Thus, they represent a useful educational content that can be exploited by teachers and students in Physical Education classes.

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Sponsored by: Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP); Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes). Process no. 2014/11153-3.