

## Giving voice to children: Physical Education, Participation and Protagonism

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Physical Education is a mandatory curricular component and should highlight its importance for the integral development of children. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what meanings students attribute to this discipline, since this process will help to understand the motivating aspects for adherence to these classes.

**Materials and Methods:** Study with descriptive method and qualitative approach. The research subjects were students enrolled in the early years of an elementary public school in Garopaba/SC, aged between 9 and 11 years. 23 children were interviewed, boys and girls. For the number of interviews, the saturation criterion was used, in which enough interviews were carried out to allow a certain recurrence of information, that is, when the answers began to repeat themselves. For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used, for the analysis of the interviews content analysis was used to analyze the interviews, where the answers were framed in categories and subcategories.

**Results:** The results were transcribed in tables and the analysis of the information generated by the instrument was carried out through the identification of units of meaning and categorization based on the content analysis. The verified content generated the following categories of analysis: a) Practice of exercises; b) Fun and pranks; c) Sports practices; d) Learning about the human body and health; f) Leave the classroom.

**Conclusion:** This research had the objective of creating opportunities for the students to play a protagonist role, in order to highlight their narratives and what they think about Physical Education at school. According to the results presented, a discourse pattern was identified: the students, in their majority, showed motivation for Physical Education classes and understood the importance of movement in these classes. According to the data, the meaning of the curricular component was related to motor skills, sports and exercise by most students.

**Key Word:** Scholar Physical Education; Motivation; Perception.

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### I. Introduction

Understanding the curricular process at school is a challenging task, bearing in mind the complexity of school practices that involve, among other aspects, the different conceptions that teachers and students have about the process. Physical Education as a curricular component should mark its importance in this process, being able of generating important and necessary learning for the integral development of children. These learnings can be decisive for the adherence to the physical activity that they will practice throughout life (NAVARRO-OATÓN *et al.*, 2019).

According to the authors mentioned above, commonly, students form their opinions based on previous experiences. When marked by success, possibly the opinion will be favorable. On the contrary, if there is failure, there will be probably demotivation and, consequently, the removal of tasks in childhood, with great chances of this habit remaining in adult life. (NAVARRO-OATÓN *et al.*, 2019).

The neuroscientist Sidarta Ribeiro (2022) states that the lessons that remain are those that were apprehended through pleasure and curiosity. In this way, this research was concerned with describing the interpretations attributed to Physical Education classes made by students in the early years of elementary school, considering that children are the main protagonists of the classes. Understanding these factors is important, since the connection that students establish with the knowledge acquired in Physical Education classes is important for the course of planning and objectivity of school practices linked to the curricular component.

The literature demonstrates that the participation of children in research is not new, however the practice of research with children and not strictly about children is recent (MARCH, 2018). In this way, listening to what they have to say about the curricular process of Physical Education at school, investigating what are the

meanings they give to the discipline, listening to their predilections in the classes and the degree of dissatisfaction or not, will help to understand in a deeper way what are the motivating aspects for the practice and adherence.

In addition, a gap can be seen in the literature about what children enrolled in the initial years of fundamental education think about Physical Education at school, since over the last two decades several studies have been published, but always focusing on the point of view of children and adolescents enrolled in the final years of elementary or in high school. (BETTI e LIZ, 2003; DARIDO 2004; FOLLE, POZZOBON e BRUM, 2005; PERFEITO *et al* 2008; FOLLE e TEIXEIRA, 2012; PIZANI *et al* 2016; BADAN *et al* 2021).

## **II. Material And Methods**

This research is characterized as a study with a descriptive method that uses a qualitative approach (GAYA, 2008). The subjects were students between 9 and 11 years old, enrolled in a public school in the city of Garopaba.

To this end, 23 students were interviewed, both boys and girls. The criterion of exhaustiveness or saturation was used to delimit the number of interviews, according to which enough interviews were carried out to allow a certain recurrence of information, that is, when the answers began to be repeated. To Gaya (2016, p. 254):

This means that the number of subjects is defined during the collection of information from the moment the researcher observes the recurrence or redundancy of information, that is, when the selection of new subjects no longer adds new relevant information. A semi-structured interview was used in the field research. We chose this model because it allows the creation of a non-standard script, where the questions can be modified according to need. Thus, this script was not followed fully in all interviews, in order to be able to guide and guarantee the content of interest.

The instrument was applied at school, at a previously scheduled time and date, individually. The interviews were duly recorded using a cell phone application software and later transcribed so that the generated content could be analyzed. This research was approved by UFRGS Ethics Committee for research with human beings under n. 5.499.224.

### **Procedure methodology**

To carry out the semi-structured interview with the students, a script was prepared with questions guided by the dimension of analysis: meaning of Physical Education classes. For the analysis of the interviews, content analysis was used, where the answers were classified into categories and subcategories (BARDIN, 2011). For the author, qualitative data analysis is characterized by the frequency with which certain elements appear in the message. This analysis should take into account adaptable procedures that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production and perception of these messages.

The results of the interviews were transcribed in tables and the analysis of the information generated by the instrument was carried out through the identification of units of meaning and categorization based on content analysis. The content of this study generated the following categories: a) Practice of exercises; b) Fun and games; c) Sports practices; d) Learning about the body and health; f) Leave the classroom.

## **III. Result**

Physical Education is present in these students' lives on a weekly basis. Verifying and understanding the relevance and meaning that these subjects attribute to it is an important factor, as it is related to motivation, as much is said about children, but little is said about children, in addition to demonstrating the role of the curricular component in these students' lives. Thus, for the question: "Do you like Physical Education classes?" 100% of students say yes. The expression "I love" stood out several times. When asked about what motivates them most in these classes: 5 children said it was the practice of exercises; 8 suggested playing sports; 4 said it was fun; 5 pointed out the fact of being able to leave the classroom and 1 student reported learning about the human body.

It should be noted that the literature regarding the motivational factors for conducting Physical Education classes with children was scarce, although there are several publications on the subject carried out with high school students (SOUZA *et al*, 2020; ALPACA, TIMBÉ and ALUATINHO, 2021; LETTNIN, BATSITA and NUNES, 2022).

Some students quickly responded to the question: "Can you tell us about your experiences in Physical Education classes?" Most of the answers emphasized the taste for motor practices, sports or exercises. In order

to understand what meanings are attributed to Physical Education classes, we asked: What are Physical Education classes for? 07 students claim to have a healthy life; 09 report that the classes serve to exercise; 02 believe it is for fun and 1 student was unable to answer. In this context, students assigned these roles in their comments, as shown in Table 1.

**Table no 1:**Interview excerpts

Category	Student	Answer
Exercise	02	<i>To train, stretch and lose energy too.</i>
	08	<i>To make the body stronger.</i>
	10	<i>To warm the body.</i>
	13	<i>There is some gym class where you can stretch and become flexible. Soccer classes to improve our skills in soccer, all classes have the purpose of improving our skills in certain things.</i>
	16	<i>Hmm, for the same reason, for us to be able to move our bodies, to exercise, it's also good for us to do this a little at home, not only in Physical Education classes.</i>
	17	<i>Hmmm, exercises right, first aid, run from fire. Move the body.</i>
	20	<i>It serves to the same thing, to move around.</i>
	21	<i>To exercise ourselves</i>
	22	<i>They are for people to exercise and not just stay at home.</i>
	22	<i>To learn more about sports and exercise.</i>
Fun	03	<i>To learn and have fun.</i>
	05	<i>Like we study, copy, but sometimes we stay more on the court, and going to the court serves to do Physical Education, it's cool and fun.</i>
Health	01	<i>[...] to stay in good health, to have a lot, to have a good life.</i>
	07	<i>For us to stay healthy.</i>
	09	<i>To avoid obesity and anxiety. I think thats it.</i>
	12	<i>What is it for? Wow, I think I never thought about that question. For me it would be to get healthier, to do some physical activity.</i>
	14	<i>To lose weight and exercise.</i>
	15	<i>Study the human body, because we can know some things, know what we are feeling. Oh I'm feeling pain here! Then you know what it is.</i>
18	<i>For our body, to give it a lot of energy, not to get tired, to drink water, so that's Physical Education, right?</i>	

Still regarding the question asked above, there were students who attributed more than one meaning to the classes: for student 06 they serve: *“To have fun and exercise, to have a healthy life”*. Student 11, on the other hand, relates exercise and learning about the body: *“To exercise and learn about the human body, everything!”* and student 19 makes a connection between exercise, health and a sedentary lifestyle: *“Hmm, Physical Education? Physical Education is for us to move, right? Because sitting alone in the classroom, I think, I even think it's bad”*.

Most of the interviewees cited motor practices, whether sports or different exercises, as the main reference to give meaning to Physical Education classes.

#### IV. Discussion

Some findings in the literature support the students' responses. Cid et al (2019) verified in a group of 618 students, aged between 10 and 18, the motivational climate and student satisfaction in relation to Physical Education classes. The results suggest a relationship between motivation and the practice of sports/physical activity. Corroborating with the authors, Zhang et al (2021) in a study with 115 children enrolled in the fourth and fifth years of a primary school, found that beliefs and expectations regarding Physical Education classes were significantly associated with motor competence.

In addition to motor practices, 5 students emphasized that Physical Education classes are fun and that is what makes them cool and motivating, two preferred not to answer. Below are some of the representative speeches of these speeches:

*“They are very good, I’m always happy, I’m always playing with my friends. Because it’s fun to play, right?”*

*“Some are really good, some I don’t like, but I end up doing them all because in the end it’s good. I don’t like it when there are obstacles, these things, I even like it, but it’s just to go and play” (S4);*

*“My experience is I’m good, but a little less, but it’s pretty cool, especially for playing with my colleagues (S5)”.*

Similar results were found in the study by Santos et al (2017) where, through a narrative research, with 30 students enrolled in the 6th grade and 25 enrolled in the 9th grade, they verified that the students associated Physical Education with play and pleasure.

It was evidenced in the children's narratives, at different moments of the interview, that an important part of Physical Education classes is the fact that children leave the classroom. Of the 23 students interviewed, 12 at some point referred to this information, as shown in the interview fragments below:

*“We don’t sit down copying, we give some freedom, because normally in class we sit down copying things and it’s not funny. The Physical Education class allows us to leave the classroom (S13).”*

*“It is also something different from other classes because the other classes are all in the classroom, Physical Education, usually we go out into the street, right (S16).”*

These speeches go from finding the research carried out by Borges and Neto (2014), which aimed to present the premises of the practical argument elaborated by a Physical Education teacher about two situations experienced in a Brazilian public school, with a 4th grade class. In one of these situations, the imminent desire of the students to leave the room and the discomfort of remaining in this environment, instead of going to the sports court, is accentuated.

With regard to the above, it should be noted that it is well described in the literature that children and adolescents tend to remain awake for more than half of their time in sedentary behavior, especially during school hours (MENDONÇA et al, 2018; DA COSTA, et al, 2019). Some researches also associate a long time in sedentary behavior with the deleterious effects related to academic performance, in addition to the negative effects related to health (BUENO et al, 2022).

## **V. Conclusion**

This research had the objective of creating opportunities for the students to play a protagonist role, in order to highlight in their narratives what they think about Physical Education at school. According to the results presented, a discourse pattern was identified: the students, for the most part, showed motivation for Physical Education classes and understood the importance of movement in these classes. According to the data, the meaning of the curricular component was related to motor skills, sports and exercises by most of the students.

All of the above, between the students' narratives and the literature presented, reflects the importance of Physical Education classes where the core of learning is the cultural body movement. It was identified that motivation is an important part of the success of classes. In addition, the research demonstrated the need to break sedentary behavior. This factor was evidenced in the speech of many students when reporting the motivation for being able to leave the classroom to move around.

The findings reinforce the importance of Physical Education classes at school since childhood, as it is known that the school is the place where many of Brazilian children will have the chance to participate in pedagogically structured physical activities. These results can serve as support for the promotion of public policies to strengthen Physical Education classes throughout basic education, to defend the increase in the number of classes and to break sedentary behavior at school. New research on motivation and on what children think about Physical Education classes in the early years is suggested, since it is at this age that they begin to acquire a taste for the practices.

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