DEVELOPING PEDAGOGIES OF AFFECT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A RESPONSE TO THE CORONOVIRUS PANDEMIC

LO SVILUPPO DELLA PEDAGOGIA DEGLI AFFETTI IN EDUCAZIONE FISICA: UNA RISPOSTA ALLA PANDEMIA DA CORONAVIRUS

Abstract

The article seeks to understand what the reduction in mobility brought about by the pandemic severely affected the possibilities of bodily well-being. Due to the focus of our text, we will refer here to those people who for the most part was not infected by the virus, but who also suffer from the pandemic, seeking to focus on the effects on their body. These bodies, largely prevented from moving, even without viruses, also undergo disease processes, and have to deal with a lot of instability, which leads to very important problems. The scenario of uncertainty, fear, even violence, affects students, children, so that they develop mental illnesses. That is why [redacted] proposes work with Pedagogies of affect, where teachers have a fundamental role in offering support and some kind of stability to these children. Finally, we remind that Outdoor Education is recognized as a very effective approach for both counterbalance the pandemic restrictions, and reconnecting people to their places and lives, too.

L'articolo cerca di comprendere com'è stata ridotta la mobilità provocata dalla pandemia, la quale ha notevolmente colpito le opportunità di benessere corporeo. Tenendo presente il focus del contributo, faremo riferimento a persone che per la maggior parte non sono state infettate dal virus, ma che soffrono ugualmente a causa della pandemia, cercando di concentrare il discorso sugli effetti provocati a livello corporeo. Si tratta di corpi in gran parte impossibilitati a muoversi, ma che anche se non vengono infettati dal virus, subiscono anch'essi le limitazioni provocate dalla malattia e devono affrontare una grande instabilità, che porta ad ulteriori problemi piuttosto importanti. Si aprono scenari d'incertezza, paura, persino violenza, che colpiscono gli studenti, i bambini, in modo tale da sviluppare problematiche perlopiù mentali. Per questo Kirk propone di lavorare con la pedagogia dell'affetto, in cui gli insegnanti svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nell'offrire sostegno e una sorta di stabilità ai bambini in difficoltà. Infine, ricordiamo che pure che l'Outdoor Education viene riconosciuto come un approccio molto efficace sia per controbilanciare le restrizioni pandemiche, sia per riconnettere le persone ai loro luoghi e alle loro vite.

Keywords

Bodily movement; Uncertainty; Pedagogy of Affect; Physical Education; Outdoor education.

Movimento corporeo; Incertezza; Pedagogia degli affetti; Educazione Fisica; Educazione all'aria aperta.

1. Introduction

We think it is not unreasonable to speculate that the need for confinement and the extreme reduction in mobility brought about by the pandemic has severely affected the possibility of bodily well-being for many people around the world. We understand the person holistically, as an embodied human being, and so this confinement of the moving body has physical, mental, social and spiritual detriments. Thus, the well-being and health of people is put in check from the pandemic, even when the virus is not contracted. We are obviously empathetic with all those people who contracted it, *overcoming* the virus or, tragically, not. We also understand the real need for confinements and mobility restrictions in order to reduce contagions and ultimately minimize deaths. However, this experienced situation, which may not unreasonably be compared to periods of war, seems to have consequences for many people beyond those directly affected.

Due to the focus of our text, we will refer here to those people who for the most part were not infected by the virus, but who also suffer from the pandemic. Of course, it is necessary to submit to confinement due to the various reasons that simply require it. However, this same need also served to highlight social differences, by showing, for example, that people without enough or minimally adequate space to take some sun, get fresh air or move around in their backyard, are, as always, doomed to something like constant suffering. That is, if these people could, imaginatively, enjoy a period at home, without having to work hard, their enjoyment is unreal, as their conditions are inadequate. Perhaps this is one of the reasons, among others possible, to justify so many problems of coexistence that have arisen, either between couples, within whole families, or among neighbours. In addition, we are aware of all the economic problems that have been accentuated by the pandemic, another point that we will not go in to, seeking to focus on the effects on embodiment.

These bodies, largely prevented from moving, even without viral infection, also undergo disease processes. We believe that in times like this, where so many people suffer, it is difficult to find great pleasures or something like complete happiness. In general, one lives stressfully. When we look to the side and notice the situation of so many who *fall*; or when one thinks about oneself and sees what theoretically has been said many times, that nothing is certain in life. Yes, nothing is definitely guaranteed, even in good times. But some stability is necessary for health, and right now there are many uncertainties that surround people's lives. In summary, the active leisure possibilities, fundamental to health, are restricted, not only by the lack of options, but also by the hardness of the moment. We are making a kind of addicted use of technologies, working remotely and when we look for an option to relax it is not uncommon for the idea to see a movie to come to mind. Again, the consumption of images; the possibilities of movement, related to physical activities and sports, from our point of view a remedy to not only act on the disease, are strongly restricted. The list could be very long, but we leave it here because we would like to address the recently mentioned point of the movement.

2. Coping with uncertainty and precarious times.

We are at the height of a moment to fight the disease. Talking about prevention and work in promoting health now is something that may sound out of place. However, Antonovsky (1996) in his theory of Salutogenesis proposed exactly that. In agreement with him is also Kirk (2020), who even before the emergence of the pandemic, already commented on the emergence and growth of a new social reality, precarity, and its

implications for human movement cultures. This social reality has an extremely intriguing characteristic. The fact that many families live in social difficulties and have to deal with a lot of instability, whether or not parents are going to have work, for example, leads to very significant problems. The scenario of uncertainty, fear, sometimes also impacted by types of violence, affects children and young people, so that they develop mental illnesses. That is why [redacted] proposes work within Physical Education with 'pedagogies of affect', where teachers have a fundamental role in offering support and some kind of stability to children. The author refers to affect in Physical Education classes, since it is his area of interest and also because, as we see it, contact with the body and the possibilities of movement have the power of care and, perhaps, even of cure. We are reminded too in this connection of Freire's powerful concept of a pedagogy of love (Luguetti et al., 2019).

There are many ways to exert violence on the body. Sports training is sometimes considered as a violence on the body in the sense of enhancing it technically while repressing it in its spontaneity (Vaz, 1999). Sport, especially of high performance, transits border between *control-repression* (Foucault, 1984), using dressage, disciplining, and, more recently moving to the *control-stimulation* sphere (Preciado, 2008). They are pedagogies of bodies (Gonçalves et al., 2012), conceiving them as mere material, flesh, rather than a global set, cultural construction, which synthesizes a person. As Horkheimer and Adorno (1985, p. 219) put it,

> We cannot get rid of the body and we praise it when we cannot strike it. (...) Those in Germany who praised the body, gymnasts and excursionists, always had the most intimate affinity with homicide, as well as nature lovers with hunting. They see the body as a mobile mechanism, in its joints the different parts of that mechanism, and in the flesh the simple covering of the skeleton. They deal with the body, handle its members as if they are already separated. Jewish tradition has retained the aversion to measuring people with a meter, because it is from the dead that the measures are taken – for the coffin. It is in this that the manipulators of the body find pleasure. They measure the other, without knowing it, with the look of the coffin maker, and betray themselves when they announce the result, saying, for example, that the person is long, small, fat, heavy. They are interested in the disease, at the table they are already watching for the death of the messmate, and their interest in all of this is only very superficially rationalized as an interest in health.[1]

Although a broad criticism could be developed from this undoubtedly provocative statement, we want to emphasize the theme of corporal pedagogies (Aartun et al., 2020). With an objectified view of the body, separated, broken, it loses relevance. Although much is done, contradictorily, to value it, at the same time, it is liable to destruction. This aggression against the body, which ends up being an aggression against the person, evidently takes its toll. Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) have already described this process using the mythological figure of Ulysses. In the passage of the sirens' song in the *Odyssey*, the hero uses his cunning to partially participate in and enjoy the pleasure of listening to the mermaids sing. He is inebriated by the singing, but he does not launch himself into the sea after them, which is done by all the unwary who do not prepare themselves like Ulysses. He ties himself to the boat's mast to avoid the victory of his instincts over his reason. He recognizes himself as weak, so he overcomes himself

[1] Our translation from the Portuguese edition.

through reason. However, later on this attempted resistance to his deceived intimate nature will take its toll. Some authors of psychoanalysis will refer to this dissatisfaction of the desires presented by nature as presence of melancholy (Matos, 1987). In the case of the hero, he experiences a certain amount of singing, but he cannot own the song or the mermaids for himself. His nature is left unsatisfied.

We put this passage here because, although it is often associated with the dynamics of sports training (Gonçalves and Vaz, 2016), it seems to us to have a certain fit in the current pandemic scenario. By a certain capacity for discernment, we know that we need to confine ourselves. Out of respect, out of basic need to maintain life, out of law, out of conscience: each person at the level that corresponds. But the fact is that we submit and when there is no such submission, especially in cases of disregard for the rules for the common good, of people who, for example, hold parties in the midst of the pandemic, it occurs like all sailors who set out in search of the mermaids, inebriated by their singing. They do not master the instinctual nature. And neither do they return from their plunge. We submit to the rules for the common good and for our ability, in general, to control, to dominate certain needs, and also to repress them, even if only momentarily. Which does not mean that at some point they will not charge for their postponed satisfaction. There are different ways of collecting this debt to the body: melancholy, depression, malaise, sadness, loneliness, lack, suffering, aggression, violence, fear, resentment, euphoria, bipolarity, tension, madness, somatizations in various pains... Everything is circumscribed in our bodies.

This stagnation and perhaps lack of *circulation of life*, that is why we emphasize movement so much, has very negative effects for many people. Hence, we think, that so many people have reacted badly in several situations that would be just a case of some tolerance for the best coexistence. For example, the constant life at home, at a certain moment of the pandemic, and even now with some flexibility, which differs according to countries or regions, but still much more homely than in other times, has generated stressful situations. The need to deal with being at home and not disturbing neighbours, which is completely pertinent, and at the same time wanting to move, required astuteness, or has led to conflicts. Some architectural constructions definitely do not help because they do not promote good sound insulation. The noise produced disturbs, certainly, generating a type of permanent noise pollution that leads to angry outbursts. However, not being able to train at home or preventing children from moving, and playing, was also something to lead to an appeal for understanding or again to result in inevitable conflict. It is difficult to educate the body, of oneself and of children, to contain itself, when it is so used to being stimulated.

So, if we think of the dimensions that the Greeks left us when talking about psychosomatics, we have a mind and psyche extremely agitated by social networks, technologies, information, virtualities, whereas we have its stagnant somatical equivalent, metaphorically tied to a chair or sofa. And, returning to the point of this example, perhaps to promote some circulation of life, as we said, and to avoid so many side effects to the central problem, some governments have chosen to maintain a daily period destined to some type of physical activity outdoors, even in most critical moments of confinement.

Another intriguing situation concerns possible gender conflicts. If we just think in terms of conventional binary gender scenarios, the use of space that each gender usually makes is not equal (see the different use of space in sport in Maclean, 2019) and this is especially due to the education we receive. Culturally we learn to be and build ourselves conventionally as women or men. We are taught and widely accept that a characteristic of some forms of masculinity is that men are very expansive in their movements, while

women are modest and restrained. This is easily seen in sports. In the current context it is also quickly seen at home. In general, man is expansive and seems to have a tendency to mark territory, perhaps either by historical memory of territorial domain, or by instinctual memory. In the scenario we are in now, it is really easy to see how man feels entitled, or does not even think about it, to leave objects scattered throughout all rooms, all out of place, demarcating that he occupies all environments at the same time. In addition, in some cases, there is a negative relaxation, in the sense of feeling too comfortable to be at home, and then it seems that he abandons himself, falling into carelessness and even disrespect towards others.

Evidently these are things that can be classified as of minor importance, however, at a time when tempers are already on edge, these small things can contribute to disaffection. And perhaps with a certain emphasis on Italian culture, where the "donna" (word which comes from the Latin *domina*) is the one who dominates the space of the house, something that would fit another discussion, and which, again, is a cultural construction, from our point of view, outdated. Having to share this space continuously with who, due to this same culture, should be *dominating* the space outside the house, can represent a change in the dynamics of everyday life that is quite undesired. For both, at first. The issue of domination is a problem in itself, but we cannot fail to mention Pierre Bourdieu (2007) when dealing with the issue of masculine domination. As this is an internalized part of the culture, the man feels the right to dominate, and the woman often sees submission as natural. However, it seems to be that this encounters certain barriers when the man wants to invade the intimate or internal space of the house, which is, in the education of the woman, her proper domain.

In this gender theme, we could go on, since there are many factors that should be taken into account for a truly comprehensive analysis. The gendered embodiment is not as straightforward as it is being addressed here, we are considering that. And certainly all non-binary identities faced challenges in their embodiment with the restrictions, valid for all moving bodies. It might be worth investigating the implications of mobility restrictions for different genders, not just in binary terms. Just as it would be relevant to take into account other elements that intersect with gender, such as social class, ethnicity, religious, age and generational factors, to name a few examples. To go a step further, what would it have been like for people with different disabilities to go through confinement? Probably even a body that already has mobility restrictions due to some kind of physical disability will have felt the effects of the pandemic. In other words, there were implications for all orders, for issues that we had not thought about. Perhaps the current context is showing us that we need to think and prepare better in relation to several of these points. On the other hand, it may also be worth the effort to think of strategies to recover something from what life was before, without deliberately accepting that everything will now be different and virtual. Our focus on moving bodies requires a certain degree of human contact, as well as possibilities to move in spaces wider than the restricted area in front of the computer. Physical Education classes or virtual sports practices are not big projects, from our point of view.

3. Supporting personal empowerment with *Pedagogies of Affect*: activist approaches in *Physical Education* and *Outdoor Education*.

Saramago's (1995) fiction work entitled "Blindness" portrays a process of reclusion to treat the disease. White blindness, in this novel a disease that spread rapidly and required isolation, allows an analogy with our current scenario. In seclusion, there

was an aggravation of the disease, not of the blindness itself, but of other diseases that ended up being evident given the extreme and adverse scenario. Perhaps the fear of the inevitable, metaphorical darkness, death, loss of resources and several other factors led the sick people to a kind of madness, to a certain permissive despair, seeking urgently to perform irrational acts with the intention of enjoying what was left of life. Certainly, this way of acting acquired lethality and led to death even before the disease itself. However, the triggering factor of the problems was white blindness, in fact, a symbol possibly of states of selfishness achieved by the human being, as we can interpret from the work of Saramago. His writings also portray something that we now see repeated, that in times of crisis the best and worst of human beings appear. The author shows this and we realize in the present circumstances how undeniable it is that there are also many people who can work in groups, help each other, care about others. And its opposite, as a certain blindness of reason, with the emergence, for example, of several theories that oppose science, ending up worsening the scenario through negativity and negation. This is definitely not a time for fights but, rather for solidarity. At the end of the day, the author gives options from which each one must choose.

In general summary, we believe that we can speak of bodies subjected to a pedagogy of fear, perhaps also of uncertainty, restriction and deprivation. These bodies end up incorporating the fear and suffering itself and express this embodiment through a traumatized, withdrawn, tense, sick, strident body, which seeks ways to express itself and, when it cannot, explodes through unrestrained instincts. The considerable increase in suicides during the pandemic could be an indication that this pedagogy to which we are submitted, without so many possibilities of choice or alternatives, has truly led us to despair, to the loss of hope. There is a collective loss of meaning, added to the loss of something like an identity or subjectivity, since bodies are objectified, treated as infected or *clean* flesh. When faced with reification (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1985) naked and raw, it is a fact that it is very difficult for us to deal with this.

We think, however, that we need to take a deep breath, pull some patience from the bottom of our consciences to remain tied to the mast of the boat a little longer. We also need commitment and some efficiency from governments. And perhaps the most positive thing we can point out is that we need more pedagogies of affect to combat the pedagogies of fear. Affect cures, possibly more than medicines, certain diseases that we are suffering from collectively. Probably, affect has a positive action on the *injured* and tired body, in pain and suffering, as well as on those who find expression through anger and irritation. If affect can be combined with pedagogy and have an efficient action in combating precarity, without a doubt it can help us to cross this hopefully final moment of trial to our capacity for resilience. Thus, we resort to the theme of the pedagogies of affect, as they could act, perhaps, as a method for survival and for flourishing.

All the points that we have been exposing here are part of a complex and difficult to be lived context, undeniably. We want to overcome this scenario, however it is necessary to cross it, live it as a route until reaching the other bank. Thus, according to [redacted] (2020), we understand that the current circumstances have put us collectively to live and share a period of precarity, which presents very important challenges. And as the author suggests, pedagogies of affect can act as an alternative to tradition practice, we understand that an analogy can be established and serve us as new possibilities. Our point here has centered on the importance of the movement. So the adapted idea of Physical Education is adequate. In addition, the pedagogies of affect as critical pedagogies are relevant and seem to fit the moment that requires both the capacity for reflection and the search for alternatives, as well as understanding and mutual help. In objective terms, [redacted]

(2020, p.152) says that “it is insufficient to merely *be* critical, and essential to also *do* critical.” He defines critical pedagogies as coherent forms of education that lead to physical practices that are “inclusive, fair, and equitable as an embodied experience for young people, in order to empower them” (p.151). The author refers to young people in the context of the book, aimed at school Physical Education practices. However, as our proposal is to adapt the concept and expand it to life itself, the age groups and types of physical practices encompassed become more flexible, of course. In relation to the pedagogies of affect, most generally, they target explicitly learning in relation to emotions, motivation, resilience, perseverance, responsibility and so on, elements that we need now, in the final sprint, perhaps, of our moving bodies prevented from completely free movements.

In order to contribute something more in this direction, we provide succinctly two examples of critical pedagogies of affect, Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) and the activist approach to Physical Education. These are interesting examples because although they will not necessarily solve our problems at all, they can promote “small wins”, an expression that [redacted] (2020) uses in his book citing other authors. In addition, “When faced with uncertainty, instability, and insecurity on a daily basis, this is learning that is valuable and productive, it becomes part of making sense of self and sense of life” (p.178).

TPSR has been practiced as a pedagogy since the 1970s and [redacted] highlights the approach used in the United States especially by Don Hellison, who already sought to develop a sense of empowerment in his students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The approach shows that “physical competence remains important in forming the self-body-world connection, as does the competence of the teacher” (p.178). By the teacher's competence, we clearly understand the need for human contact, the mediation through which affect is transmitted. And this affect is what will establish the self-body-world connection, fundamental in terms of sanity and, therefore, contrary to the isolation of the world. As we have been reinforcing, we obviously understand the needs of the moment, however, we have also pointed out that after a certain overcoming of problems, we will not be able to remain in isolated or virtual life. The *connection* with the world and other human beings, in person, is irreplaceable. Hellison developed levels of awareness and his “goal was for the young people he worked with to internalize this structure of personal and social responsibility” (p.155).

The activist approach also has human contact as central, and helps to think and transform reality itself from the awareness of it. This type of approach was developed in the 1990s. It is not an external action that corrects problems. But of a joint work, of awakening, in favor of achieving better conditions in relation to the inadequate ones that existed. The reflexive process, therefore, is simply indispensable as well as the sociocultural criticism of the lived reality. In other words, it is a completely active attitude towards the transformation of adverse, unequal scenarios, which contain prejudice, discrimination and abuse. [redacted] (2020), when exposing this form of critical pedagogy of affect, mentions different works carried out in different countries, focusing, however, on the work carried out over many years by Kim Oliver with school-age girls. Her general focus was, through an action and listening process, with insertion in the field with the students for months, to help the girls to understand their own embodiment, appropriating space, for example, to make themselves physically more active.

It would certainly be necessary to explain these pedagogical proposals in more detail, however, we only introduce them here now, understanding that they can be useful once adaptations have been made. From our point of view, they are possibilities, but as

[redacted] points out (2020, p.178), the authors cited by him did not intend (nor do we intend) "to impose their own solutions on other people's problems". However, these possibilities seem applicable to be able to start to resume something of contact with the body, of the other and our own, which we had and were deprived of, or even to start something renewed, perhaps a little more correctly or at least, reflected and critical. In this sense, "a focus on affect may be important, in particular to build and maintain the salutogenic concept of Sense of Coherence" (p.177).

Last but not least we think that another seminal contribution for contrasting the poverty of bodily movements and holistic development is *Outdoor Education (*[redacted], 2019; Magnanini & [redacted], 2020), especially within so called Southern Countries, where it is possible to easily combine it with the Pedagogy of affect. This blended approach could then lead to activities such as, e.g., Capoeira, Freerunning, and even Traditional Games (De Martini Ugolotti, 2017), that are recognized as effective tools for reconnecting personal and social development as Placed-based learning (Sobel, 2004), both in urban and natural spaces.

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