53 - SCHOOL GAMES: MERITOCRATIC OR PARTICIPATIVE POLICY?

FERNANDA GUEDES MARCOLLA;
RODRIGO ALBERTO LOPES;
ROSANE MARIA KREUSBURG MOLINA.
Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos - Unisinos - São Leopoldo, Brazil
fer.marcolla@terra.com.br

INTRODUCTION

The present paper publishes preliminarily results of a study on the social representations constructed by Middle and High School students who participate in the School Games of the Municipality located in the Metropolitan Region of Porto Alegre, Brazil. This event has been held yearly for over 18 years by the Municipal Secretariat of Education and Sports through its Sports Administration and involves approximately 2,200 Middle and High School students aged 11 to 17. The Games follow the principles that guide the perspective of sports-education and enable students to participate in the following modalities: indoor soccer, volleyball, basketball, handball, soccer, table tennis, athletics, chess, and bets.

The focus of this study is the construction of knowledge on these School Games and their impact on the formation of the youth who take part in them. The following are the objectives of the research: (a) to understand the main objectives of the Games, (b) to analyze the social representations students make of Games, and (c) to broaden knowledge on the role of Physical Education in schools and on the relation of Physical Education and the School Games of that Municipality.

STUDY CONTEXT

The exact year when the games between schools in the Municipality of our study began is unknown. According to the present Sports Administration, the games have taken place since 1989; at the time, they were called School Olympics. In that period, although the Secretariat of Education and Sports was responsible for the event, teachers were directly involved in its organization. In 1993, some changes took place. Its name was changed as well as its logo. As a result of the growth of the Municipal Network and, consequently, the increase in the number of Middle Schools, there was an increase in the number of school units participating in the Games. Presently, out of the 41 Middle and/or High Schools of the Municipality, 33 participate in the School Games.

The School Games, just as the text of its Project and Rules reads, are based on the paradigm of sports-education, that is, integration, cooperation, participation, and formation, and have as objective: a) to contribute to the socialization and the integral formation of students, b) to stimulate sports initiation and practice among students in a differentiated way and independent from one's talents, c) to contextualize sports as a means of education, and d) to awaken team spirit and bonding in students. Currently, seeking to reach its goals and foster the participation of schools, the Sports Administration organizes the School Games by means of meetings held with Physical Education teachers and evaluates the process by means of questionnaires applied to teachers, to participating students, and to the school community at the end of the event. The event takes place throughout the school year and is organized in modalities. In other words, different modalities happen in different periods of the year. Schools are organized in 4 nuclei according to the region of the city. Several groups participate in the games each year following a raffle which has these nuclei as starting points.

The coherence between the political-pedagogical guidelines of sports-education and the practice experienced at School Games is made objective by means of actions proposed by the Sports Administration. For example, awards are given to all students who participate in the event. This initiative demonstrates the concern of municipal administrators in avoiding the predominance of meritocracy and in valuing the participation of all students in the event. According to the Sports Administration, the role of the "Educator Trophy", which is a strategy that has been in place since 2006, is to incentive Physical Education teachers to commit to the principles of sports-education. The "Fair Play Trophy", which is an award that is granted to the best-behaved school, shows the care in avoiding which Tubino (2001) calls the negative social effect of modern sports, that is, violence and anti-sportism. The rules of the School Games define the participation of the maximum of 12 students per category and gender per school in most of the collective modalities and 2 students of the same age group and gender per school unit in individual modalities. This would enable for the inclusion of all Middle and High School students in the event, provided that all schools in the Municipality register in the Games and that no student participates in more than one modality and category.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sports have been a topic of great polemic due to the different manifestations they congregate; this gives the opportunity for the formation of different political-ideological stances about the social impact of sports. In the present study, our interest is turned to sports in their educational dimension; as a result, we deem justifiable to briefly review the history of sports and the relation of this manifestation with what today we call sports-education. As of the 19th century, with the advent of the so-called Modern Sports, sports took up new ways. According to Tubino (1993), modern sports appeared in England, were established by Thomas Arnold, and presented three main characteristics: (a) games; (b) competition; (c) formation. Jordão Ramos (1982, apud BARBIERI, 2001) recognizes Thomas Arnold as the pioneer of "educative games" and "sportive exercises". Ramos considers that it was through Arnold that sports were integrated to the pedagogical context and developed by educative processes in the school environment. Inspired by Arnold's concepts in the end of 19th century, aiming to alleviate world conflicts and believing in the power of sports as fostering of good human closeness, in 1896 in the city of Athens the French Pièrre de Coubertin holds the "1st Modern Olympic Games". Along with the ideas of the Olympic movement, he also consolidated the fair-play movement. Pereira (1974, apud TUBINO 2001) explains that "the need for association in sports presupposes an effort in bringing together the necessary material conditions so that a sense of internal democracy is presented in sports organization" (p.18). However, with the growth of the world of sports and with the permanent intervention of the State in many countries after the World War II, pedagogical perspectives were slowly replaced by the sense of performance attributed to sports.

The valorization of sports in the postwar period has also had an impact on school Physical Education. Thus, in the 1950s there is a progressive identification of Physical Education with sports. This influence on the school system is such that intellectuals in the field stated that in that moment one did not have sports *of* school but sports *in* school. According to the Collective Authors (1992), this indicated and still indicates the subordination of Physical Education to the codes of the sports institution. On the other hand, there was an increase in the social relevance of this phenomenon, as a result of the growing cultural implications of sports. This caused reactions that unleashed the process of reconceptualization of sports in the early 1960s based on intellectual manifestations, the construction of International Philosophical Sports Documents, and the development of the Sports for All Movement.

In Brazil, in the 1980s, after the military dictatorship, period in which the government emphasized and stimulated the practice of performance sports, Bruno Silveira takes over the Secretariat of Physical Education and Sports of MEC and begins a process of re-signification of sports in the context of education. Silveira interpreted sports as a right of all people, as a means of health

maintenance, psychomotor development, and citizenship.

In 1985, the former National Sports Council attributes three important meanings to sports. As to education, the Council defines it as: *"one of the components of the concept of sports indicated for Brazil, which happens especially at school, aims at the full development of Brazilian people as autonomous, democratic, and participant beings, contributing to citizenship"* (TUBINO,1996, apud BARBIERI 2001, p.120). In 1989, in the edition of the Brazilian School Games (JEBs in the Brazilian abbreviation), Manoel José Tubino, director of the old Secretariat of Physical Education and Sports, linked to the Ministry of Education, presented the proposal for sports event based on presuppositions of participation, cooperation, integration, coeducation, and comanagement. In 1993, conceiving sports as an essential element in the formation process of men as citizens, based on the National Sports Policy, Law n. 8.672 was passed; it establishes that Educational Sports are to avoid selectivity and hypercompetitiveness, aiming at the integral development and the formation of citizenship, and this way officially separating it from the meaning of performance sports. This concept of Educational Sports was still supported by the Law on Education Guidelines and Basis (LDB in the Brazilian abbreviation), passed in 1996, which determines that basic education curricula must promote educational sports (Art. 27, IV). During the debate on the writing of the Law, the National Sports Council sent to the National Congress Committee the contribution of teacher Vera Costa who defined Educational Sports as: "[...] *a public responsibility guaranteed by the State within or not the School, one that has as objective to democratize and generate culture through modalities that express the personality of individuals in action, that develop individuals in a structure of social relations that are reciprocal with Nature, their body formation, and their own potentialities, preparing them for leisure and the critical exercise of citizenship, avoiding selectivity, social segregation and hypercompetitiveness, aiming at a cooperative, solidarity, and freely organized society"* (TUBINO, 2001, p.38).

On his part, Paulo Freire (1996) states that as a result of his insertion in the world Man realizes a permanent process of signification. As a result, Freire states that more than a being in the world, human beings have become a "presence" *in* the world, *with* the world, and *with* others. The meanings attributed by Man to the world, to sports, and to education are in the fact that this Man is *in* the world, participates in it, constructs it, makes himself in it, and gives meaning to himself, to the phenomena, to the world, to his existence. Therefore, social representations have a constructive and imaginative feature, for they are formed by means of symbols. The creation of these symbols happens from the involvement of subjects between themselves and between them and the world. Thus, "*by mixing with the experiences of others, one's experience continually creates and recreates the experience that constitutes everyone's' reality*" (JOVCHELOVITCH, 1995, p.74 in GUARESCHI and JOVCHELOVITCH, 1995). Thus, in the present study, social representations are being recognized as common sense theories (FAAR & MOSCOVICI, 1984 apud MOLINA et al, 2004) and are being recognized as constructors and supporters of subjects' subjectivities. As for Molina et al. (2004, p.127) "*subjectivity is constructed from a series of identifications, which are not always conscious and which involve adherence, resistance, and contestation that are widely present in the ways of being of adolescents*". Therefore, schools, just as the School Games, are social spaces where students are exposed to means of communication, myths, historic-cultural inheritance, and where they meet people to talk, argue, and discuss their everyday life. Thus, schools are spaces where social representations are devised.

METHODOLOGY

This study was devised within the theoretical and methodological framework of qualitative research in a dialogue with the recommendation of the following authors: Triviños and Molina Neto (1999); Triviños (1987); Bogdan and Biklen (1994), among others. The main tools of investigation used were document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The latter were conducted both with students of the public network of schools of the municipality who have participated in the Games and one teacher of the Sports Administration. Student interviews were duly authorized by students' parents or guardians. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and returned to participants for validation. Participants' names were changed in order to preserve their true identity. Study participants were three students of each of the two schools investigated and one representative of the Sports Administration of the Municipality, totaling seven study participants. Educational institutions were chosen according to the criterion of participation in the Games, considering their expressiveness as to the number of students and modalities registered. Student participants who were indicated by the directive staff of their schools were aged between 11 and 17 and had participated in at least two editions of the Event.

The investigation started with the analysis of the official documents of the Sports Administration. As a result of this process, the following were identified: the context of the study, the objectives of the event, the processes and the strategies used to reach the objectives proposed. The first interview conducted had as participant a Physical Education teacher who integrates the Sports Administration. With the information collected, we increased our understanding of the event, its history, its objectives and methodologies. Moreover, this data provided us with the supportive elements in order to devise a script for interviews with students who participated in the Games. After all interviews were conducted, we started the analytical process. This process consists of the identification of the "units of relevant meanings" that for Ferrer Cervero (1994 apud TRIVIÑOS and MOLINA NETO, 1999) are stated, extracted from the discourses of participants, and related to the presuppositions of the study, meaningful both for those who are researched and to researchers. With the careful reading of the transcriptions of the interviews, we identified 112 speech fragments, which we placed in order and grouped forming three categories of analysis as follows: (a) identification of participants, (b) Physical Education classes, and (c) School Games. In the present paper we present the analysis and the interpretation of category "School Games" as to representations constructed in the experience lived in School Games by teachers and students, comparing them to the principles that guide sports-education: participation, integration, cooperation, and formation.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the objectives of the School Games of the Municipality studied herein, which themselves are based on the objectives of sports-education, according to the documents analyzed, we have verified from the analysis of the set of interviews with participants that especially in relation to Physical Education teachers there are positions and actions contrary to the objectives and principles of the Ideas of Educational Sports.

Analyzing the registrations of schools in the 2006 Games and interviewing student participants, we verified a constant repetition of students getting registered in several modalities. In figures, we observe that, according to the "rules" of School Games, over 18,000 students could effectively participate in the Games organized by the Sports Administration of the Municipality; however, in 2006, only around 2,200 had the opportunity to participate. In this matter, the following statements are elucidating: *"Modalities? All the years that I participated in the Games I always participated in handball, but I was also the goal keeper in indoor soccer; I played volleyball and athletics too"* (Student C, School 1, September 2007). *"This year I participated in two different age groups*. [...] *I played all: Handball, volleyball, basketball, indoor soccer, and athletics"* (Student D, School 2, September 2007).

Now, if the School Games have the role to contribute and complement School Physical Education and aim to develop the principles of sports-education, it is our understanding that schools and, above all, Physical Education teachers have an instrumental role in the planning, execution and evaluation processes, as well as in the support of the political-pedagogical ideas of the School Games of the Municipality. For Moreno and Machado (2006), school sports demand forming principles that are based on socio-educative ideals. However, it is our understanding that, despite the actions proposed by municipal administrator, there is a gap between what the guidelines of School Games proclaim and the pedagogical practice of the games in schools. Some practices supported by some teachers reproduce the ideas of sports-performance especially in its capacity to exclude, as they place great

importance to results and meritocracy. Following what some students say: "*We took a test before put our team was put together. There were many players; I guess there were around twenty people who wanted to play. Then twelve were chosen, you know"* (Student A, School 1, September 2007). *"Those who are playing better she [the teacher] asks if they want to play, if they don't, she chooses another"* (Student G, School 2, September 2007).

The text of the National Curricula Guidelines (PCN in the Brazilian abbreviation) gives School Physical Education the pedagogical responsibility of initiating and integrating students in the body culture of movement, turning them into citizens so that they are able to enjoy, among other rights, those of games, Sports, dances, fights, gymnastics, etc. on behalf of the critical exercise of citizenship and the improvement of quality of life. However, this study shows us that the approach of Physical Education contents at school is based on the School Games calendar, which renders impossible to students to have any experience in cultures of movement different from the sports and modalities included in the School Games calendar. *"Our teacher coached us during some classes here*. [...] *He only taught us soccer. Then he gave us some cones for us to do some moves with the ball. Yup, he coached us.* [...] *Then he* would *go back to indoor soccer because of the Games"* (Student B, School 1, September 2007). *"Early in the year we train mostly soccer, and then we train more handball.* [...] *After that, we have volleyball, and then there is the running thing"* (Student E, School 2, September 2007).

The historical inheritance of valorization of sports-performance, along with the excluding principles of the capitalist system and massification of sports by means of the media, are important elements in the formation of social representations of the school community about sports. In other words, the practice of signifying sports only through competitiveness, meritocracism, and victory is still frequent. However, to our surprise and delight, our student participants showed in their statements that they participate in the School Games for several reasons and that they do not prioritize victory. To them, the opportunity for socialization is what justifies and incentives their participation in the games. They like very much to play and to play for the sake of playing and to make or keep "new" and "old" friends. *"It is because we meet lot of people. I have lots of friends that study in other schools. And we play against each other"* (Student B, School 1, September 2007). *"I like it, I think it is nice. I think it is interesting because it is not like there is competition, you know, it is just a game, it is like it was just a friendly game, as if we were playing because we like it and not because we have to win anything. I think it is cool."* (Student C, School 1, September 2007). *"It is nice to play because you make friends. You meet people at the stalls. We get together with the other players, become friends, you know?"* (Student G, School 2, September 2007).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the context of School Games, which is the object of our study, sports-education is based on the principles of participation, cooperation, socialization and aims at the full formation of students, that is, at their psychomotor, social, and cognitive development. Schools strive to be a space that preserves values that favor the collective in detriment of the individual, a space that defends the commitment of solidarity, human respect, and understanding. On their part, especially on the part of municipal administrators, i.e., the Sports Administration, the School Games are considered a complement to the contribution of school Physical Education to the formation of students, for the School Games are based on the principles that guide Educational Sports. In other words, the Games are committed to giving students the opportunity to live positive experiences that enable them to acquire a critical sense of both the world of sports and the school Physical Education in its political, cultural, social, and biological spheres. However, we have verified that in the case of the School Games and, above all, school Physical Education in the Municipality studied, there is disagreement between the principles and guidelines of the Games and the pedagogical practice of Physical Education teachers, but there is coherence in the forms of signification expressed by the students. Participation, integration, and solidarity are representations constructed by students in the Games. Competition, meritocracy, and selectiveness are representations that have guided teachers who have participated in the event throughout its history.

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Endereço: Rua Dona Laura, 782/704 CEP 90430-090 Porto Alegre-RS- Brasil
Telefone: (51) 33214866
E-mail: fer.marcolla@terra.com.br

SCHOOL GAMES: MERITOCRATIC OR PARTICIPATIVE POLICY?

ABSTRACT

The present paper publishes partial results of a study that aims to construct knowledge on School Games and on the understanding of the meaning of the experience for students who participate in them. The context studied is the Municipal School Games of the Education Network of the Metropolitan Region of the City of Porto Alegre, Brazil. The Games, held yearly, are based on

the principles and on the concept of Educational Sports. The Games provide the opportunity for the participation of public and private Education Network students aged between 11 and 17 in several sports modalities. The research is devised based on the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the qualitative research and had as its main investigation tools document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Study participants were six students of two schools and one Physical Education teacher. The criteria used to choose the school units are related to the number of students and the diversity of modalities registered. Participants were indicated by the directive staffs of schools. The main results of the study show disagreement between the principles and the guidelines of the Games and the pedagogical practice of Physical Education teachers. Students integrate teams by means of selective processes, which enables that the same student participates in different modalities and categories. The School Games calendar defines the planning of school Physical Education, denying students from experiencing different cultures of movement. However, although teachers show attitudes that contradict the principles of Educational Sports, students point socialization and pleasure in playing as justifications and motivations to their participation in this event.

KEY WORDS: School Games; Meritocracy; Participation

JEUX SCOLAIRES: POLITIQUE MÉRITOCRATIQUE OU PARTICIPATIVE?

RÉSUMÉ

L'article fait paraître des résultats partiels de l'un étude qui cherche à construire de la connaissance à propos des Jeux Scolaires et à propos de la compréhension de la signification que cette expérience a entraînée aux étudiants participants. Le contexte étudié s'adresse aux Jeux Municipaux Scolaires d'un réseau de l'enseignement de la région métropolitaine de la ville de Porto Alegre. Les Jeux, à la réalisation annuelle, sont fondés sur les principes et sur la conception du sport éducatif. Ces jeux créent l'opportunité de la participation des étudiants, entre l'âge de 11 à 17 ans, qui appartiennent au réseau de l'enseignement public et privé dans plusieurs modalités sportives. Cette recherche est élaborée selon les fondements théoriques et méthodologiques de la recherche qualitative, qui a eu comme instrument d'enquête primordial l'analyse des documents et des interviews demi-structurées. Six étudiants de deux écoles et un professeur de l'Éducation Physique ont collaboré par la réalisation de cette étude. Les critères employés pour le choix des unités scolaires sont mis en rapport avec le numéro des étudiants et avec la diversité de modalité d'inscription. Les acteurs ont été indiqués par les équipes directives des écoles. Les principaux résultats de l'étude montrent un désaccord parmi les principes et les directrices des Jeux et la pratique pédagogique des professeurs de l'Éducation Physique. Les étudiants forment les équipes participatives à travers de processus sélectif qui rend possible voire un même étudiant de participer à des différentes modalités et catégories. Le calendrier des Jeux Scolaires est ce qui définit le projet de l'Éducation Physique scolaire et ce qui prive les étudiants de vivre différentes cultures du mouvement. Pendant que les professeurs présentent néanmoins attitudes qui vont à l'opposition des principes de sport éducatif, les étudiants font détaché la socialisation et le plaisir de jouer servant ceux-ci de justifications et de motivations à la participation dans cet événement.

MOTS-CLES: Jeux Scolaires, Méritocratie, Participation

COMPETICIONES ESTUDIANTILES: ¿POLITICA MERITOCRÁTICA O PARTICIPATIVA?

RESUMEN

El artículo publica resultados parciales de un estudio que busca construir conocimiento acerca de las Competiciones Estudiantiles y acerca de la comprensión del significado de la experiencia para los estudiantes que de ellas participan. El contexto estudiado son las Competiciones Estudiantiles Municipales de una Red de Enseñanza de la Región Metropolitana de Porto Alegre. Las competiciones, anuales, están cuñadas en los principios y en la concepción del deporte educacional. Confieren oportunidad a la participación de los estudiantes de la Red de Enseñanza, pública y privada, que tengan entre 11 y 17 años, en diferentes modalidades deportivas. La investigación esta diseñada en los marcos teóricos y metodológicos de la pesquisa cualitativa y tuve como principales herramientas de investigación el análisis de documentos y entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Fueron colaboradores con el estudio seis estudiantes de dos centros escolares y un Profesor de Educación Física. Los criterios utilizados para elegir las unidades escolares fueron: el número de alumnos y la diversidad de modalidades de inscripción en la competición. Los actores fueron indicados por los equipos directivos de las escuelas. Los principales resultados del estudio evidencian desacuerdo entre las directrices de las Competiciones y la práctica pedagógica de los profesores de Educación Física. Los estudiantes integran los equipos participantes a través de procesos selectivos posibilitando, por esto, que un mismo estudiante participe en diferentes modalidades y categorías. El calendario de las Competiciones Escolares se convierte en instrumento definidor de la planificación de las clases de Educación Física privando los estudiantes de vivenciaren diferentes culturas del movimiento. Sin embargo, mientras los profesores presentan actitudes que contrarían los principios del deporte educacional, los estudiantes destacan la socialización y el placer de jugar como justificativas y motivaciones para la participación en la Competición.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Competiciones Estudiantiles; Meritocrácia; Participación

JOGOS ESCOLARES: POLÍTICA MERITOCRÁTICA OU PARTICIPATIVA?

RESUMO

O artigo publica resultados parciais de um estudo que busca construir conhecimento acerca dos Jogos Escolares e acerca da compreensão do significado dessa experiência para os estudantes que deles participam. O contexto estudado são os Jogos Escolares Municipais de uma Rede de Ensino da Região Metropolitana de Porto Alegre. Os Jogos, realizados anualmente, estão alicerçados nos princípios e na concepção do esporte educacional. Oportunizam a participação dos estudantes da Rede de Ensino, pública e particular, que tenham entre 11 e 17 anos, em diversas modalidades esportivas. A pesquisa está elaborada nos marcos teóricos e metodológicos de cunho qualitativo e teve como principais instrumentos de investigação a análise de documentos e entrevistas semi-estruturadas. Foram colaboradores com o estudo seis estudantes de duas escolas e um Professor de Educação Física. Os critérios utilizados para a escolha das unidades escolares estão relacionados com o número de alunos e com a diversidade de modalidades de inscrição nos Jogos. Os atores foram indicados pelas equipes diretivas das escolas. Os principais resultados do estudo evidenciam desacordo entre as diretrizes dos Jogos e a prática pedagógica dos professores de Educação Física. Os estudantes integram as equipes participantes por meio de processos seletivos possibilitando, inclusive, que um mesmo estudante participe em diferentes modalidades e categorias. O calendário dos Jogos Escolares é definidor do planejamento das aulas de Educação Física, privando os estudantes de vivenciarem diferentes culturas do movimento. Entretanto, enquanto os professores apresentam atitudes que contrariam os princípios do esporte educacional, os estudantes destacam a socialização e o prazer de jogar como justificativas e motivações para a participação neste evento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jogos Escolares; Meritocracia; Participação.