# 25 - PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS A LANGUAGE: BASIS FOR REPOSITIONING IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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**1. Introduction**

The object of study in school Physical Education is understood as the body culture of movement. Due to this, in this text, we refer to a group of knowledge content that involve all human manifestations in which movement transport and guide cultural meanings: the play, the sport, the dance, the fight and the gymnastics. Here we mention the ludic appropriation (in the meaning of *ludere*, form Latin, illusion) and gesturing. In this path, therefore, the intrinsic gesturing and characteristic to body cultural manifestations are constituted by real texts (Neira and Nunes, 2006), so it is possible to state that such texts offer the proper support to body language.

Body language involves logic or Semiotic, in other words, the symbolic formations that each person develops while internalizing slowly an infinity of gestures with their respective meanings in front of an intense dialog with cultural environment. This fact is easily observed, for example, when comparing "body language" of two basketball teams, one belonging to the Professional North American League and the other belonging to a Brazilian one. Besides the grammatical dimensions of this text, that is, the rules being the same, its connotative dimension, that is, subjective, might be much different.

Symbolic development is the human ability of changing reality giving meanings/senses that only humans are able of perceiving. Although, culture is not only a symbolic universe, but it is also mediation. Geertz (1989) based himself on the philosophical archeology of the semioticist Pierce to analyze the symbolic construction of different society groups and to develop an interpretative conception of culture. This way, we believe that Semiotic provides the instruments to a deep immersion in implicit gesture dimension of body culture manifestations to propose a coherent educative intervention.

The communicative characteristics of body practices are not finished in the possible gesture differences. We can also remember that determined body culture manifestations, although highly recurrent in some social groups, almost do not exist in others: samba, badminton, videogame, fresbee, motocross, etc.

Such aspects lead us to notice that, in fact, it is the culture that permits the emerging acceptation, incorporation, socialization etc. of the body manifestations. Therefore, it is through cultural products that we establish a communicative relation with society. This implies the understanding of the interpretative culture.

To become a human is to become an individual, and we become individuals under cultural standard direction, systems of signification created historically in terms of which we give form, order, objective and direction to our lives. (GEERTZ, 1989, p. 37)

In this perspective body manifestations are understood as ways of communication with the world, parts and constructors of culture, but, also by itseslf possible. It is a language, with proper specificity, but while a culture belongs to the symbolic world, that is, human. According to Bracht (1999), what qualifies movement as human is the meaning/sense of moving itself, meaning/sense mediated by symbols that places it in the cultural plan. The cultural analysis understood as the study of symbolic forms mediated by human relations must therefore, consider the context in which these symbolic forms are produced, transmitted and received.

In this field it is possible to turn to the Semiotic of Pierce or "language science" due to language conception while symbolic formation immersed in a melting pot that will permit the interpretation of signs present in body language manifestations searching for an explanation and forms of intervention in the education context.

On the other side, it is possible to notice that some Physical Education curriculum proposals impose to students a language already produced and standardized, that is, through lessons, and depends on the students to reproduce gestures sometimes without sense and in the same way, the signs impressed in body practices of groups that go to school and are not noticed or are disqualified. Such posture drives a performance ideology, because it is mainly interested with determined products and marginalizes other processes of cultural production.

Opposing to this pedagogy, the critical theories of Education offer us resources to think of pedagogic actions that propose to work starting from social practices of groups that enter school, through mediation, socialization and growth of knowledge, offering them a better understanding of the web that involve social products, its conditions and production forms, necessary to social emancipation and change.

Once the body culture movement gathered general themes to be worked in school, their curriculums could, initially, involve itself with body language created by children and young people, working to understand, explain and develop them.

School is one of the institutions responsible for culture socialization that means, responsible for the symbolic development and mediation occurred in human interactions. "Culture is the substantial content of education, its source and justification. A cultural theory of education sees education, pedagogy and curriculum as symbolic battle and conflict fields, as arenas contested in search of the imposition of meanings and of cultural hegemony" (SILVA, 2005, p.122).

Language is one of the aspects of culture and therefore, body language is one of the aspects of the body culture movement, knowledge to be treated by Physical Education in school environment. To problematize body language themes as one of the body culture movement aspects it is necessary to make clear that it is not enough to elect knowledge produced by many social groups, and that the challenge is presented in critical reading of reality, that is, of its ideological contexts of production, maintenance, changing etc. Exemplifying, once choosing volleyball as theme in school curriculum, the didactic activities could preview study situations and historic analysis of the modality, the reasons of its transformations, the understanding of its meaning in social context of origin and, finally, the students could be invited to discover and suggest their own forms of playing volleyball, because, if we consider what was mentioned above, the formal practice of this sport is product of another social group, whose practitioners in little or nothing are similar to the public school.

Body language inserted in games, sports, dances, gymnastics and fights involve ludicrous manifestation, given its communicative aim of emotions, feelings and ideas that overflow through movements full of meaning. Human beings relate with the social world, demonstrate what he feels and, for that reason, have in body expression a powerful interaction way. Body expression is, therefore, "the capacity that allows the expression ideas, thoughts, emotions and affective states with the body. Therefore, it is a capacity of synthesis that gathers all other capacities in the relation with the environment". (PÉREZ GALLARDO, 1997, p. 45).

It is possible to infer a great communicative potential in body expression, because we understand that it is placed in the emotional field, and its intention is to manifest feelings. In the moment that a person experiences the possibilities of his body, he explores forms of actions and gestures, occurs a confluence of feelings of the individual related to the group and to all body language historically and socially constructed that configures the human being, at the same time individually and collectively, immersed in a melting pot deeply related to the society to which he belongs and to the languages of many groups that constitute it with his own traits.

To Neira and Nunes (2006) when the Physical Education approach applied in school conceives the movement while body language, the gesture is studied without naming it right or wrong, without focusing its quantity or quality, without the intention of improving the income, or the health maintenance, of happiness or pleasure. In this approach, the gesture foments the dialog through

cultural production, through the representation of each culture. The gesture transmits a cultural meaning expressed in games, dances, gymnastics, fights, sports, circus arts, etc.

We believe that a better understanding of the Semiotic theoretical *corpus* can involve intense contributions for the school Physical Education field. Otherwise limited by the dimensions presented in this article, we will present some principles that mainly will allow an incidence on pedagogic practice.

**2. Body language in light of Semiotic**

The 20th Century saw the birth and witnessed the growth of language science - the Linguistic, verbal language science and the Semiotic or science of each and every language. Mainly, we are not aware that our being-in-the-world, as social individuals that we are, is mediated by a complicated and plural web of languages, that is, that we also communicate through the reading and production of images, texts, objects, gestures, expressions, through the look, feeling and palpation, body language etc.

The Semiotic, the youngest science to point out to the horizon of human sciences had, actually, three origins or seeds thrown almost simultaneously in time, but distinct in space and paternity: one in the Soviet Union, another in Eastern Europe and the third in the United States.

According to Santaella (2004) the theoretical soviet model privileges the study of verbal language. Considering as basis the theoretical concepts created by structural language for the description of language as a system, linking this concept to the contact points that they present with the theory of information. It is not about the construction of the Semiotic science as it is, but about a series of rich contributions headed to the problematic of signs in its relation with social life, more emphasized in the linguistic and poetic signs, revealing, however in most of these studies, specially the ones from the Circle of Bahkitin, an accentuated tendency to a globalized culture vision, that is, the investigation of language in its relation with culture and society.

The second tendency originated in Eastern Europe is represented by the Saussureana matrix, represented by Ferdinand Saussure of the University of Genebra. His theory involves general linguistic mechanisms that is, a group of rules and functional principles that are common to all languages. The explicit interest of this thinker was to create a verbal language science. As it happens in Russian Semiotic, the linguistic model is, most of the times, filled with theoretical display deriving from other fields, such as the theories of Communication and Information, Semantic (branch of Linguistics), Anthropology, Symbolism, Literature Theory etc. This tendency broke many questioning paths of the relations that language maintains with thinking, the minds operations, the action and with a complicated problem of world representation. This lack or lacuna, lead Saussure to create Semiology, that is, a science of signs and signal systems which methodology could be provided by structural linguistic. Later, in the United States, such science was baptized the semiotic.

The North-American tendency originated from the studies of the logic-philosophical scientist Charles Sanders Pierce. In it, the Semiotic can be understood as a field of study that analyzes systems, codes, and sign conventions of all types: from slang forms to the lexicon of the source, from the popular narratives to the ones that compose the phonological systems, from architectural and medicine codes to literature myth conventions.

To claim the theory of Pierce, it is convenient to mention that his reflections remit to the fields of Phenomenology, Normative Science (Esthetics, Ethic and Semiotic) and Metaphysics (PIERCE, 1990).

In Pierce's archeology, Phenomenology is the science that studies the elements universally present in every phenomenon; Normative Sciences investigate the mind's conducts that learns from experience the basis of Esthetics, Ethic and Semiotic and Metaphysics, the science that searches the reality of the world.

Phenomenology observes the phenomena and, through analysis, postulates forms or universal properties of these phenomena. This must be were the complete universal categories of any evaluative judgment emerge.

It provides us subsides to read the reality of our students. To state that the pedagogic practice must provide the construction of new knowledge implies the understanding that the student will learn from what he brings, therefore, once entering a class the professor must consider the repertory of the student's body language to develop the Physical Education curriculum. It is through didactic actions that part from the world lived by students that will make possible the understanding and increase of his cultural patrimony.

Normative Science constitutes the second great class of Pierce's Philosophy. His studies focus on laws of desirable behavior to reach a determined objective. To permit the phenomena to stimulate a norm of conduct that permits mental representation, it must before anything present itself as something remarkable. This is about a last ideal, which feelings qualities emerge in mind as potentially lovable. It is Esthetics, the first of the Normative Sciences that will establish the conditions of this lovability (PIRES, 1999).

Esthetics investigates the remarkable ideal for a mind that learns from experience, determining what must be deliberately admired for itself. Ethics is the one that will define which ideal is possible to be retrieved, it is the study about what are the purpose of the actions that we are prepared to adopt. Semiotic as a Normative Science will establish the signs way of being, not only the symbols, as the representation of an object that presents to be admirable to a mind, but a study of the general conditions of the cognitive processes and the nature of the thoughts.

The understanding of the normative sciences will allow the opening of windows to the understanding of how our educative practices will be put in practice. Learning will only occur if the students are interested in knowledge; this way it is the investigation of an esthetic appropriation that will guide us to the participation of the student in the teaching-learning process. Ethic as a Normative Science will help on the construction of relationship forms between the students and between them and the world. Finally, Semiotic will elucidate body language, in other words, the knowledge about symbolic development and its mediations built in the world lived by our students.

Defining reality or real as being something independent from our fantasies, once we live in a world of forces that determine us in what believe, after all, Pierce chooses the Metaphysics resultant and not preceeding of all his philosophy.

Metaphysics will consolidate in the dialectic connection established during the comfort of cultural differences of a social group. Once each student brings to school his baggage of knowledge relative to body culture constituted in many places/moments (at home, at the streets, in contact with communication means, at church, at parks, at clubs, at skate courses, at dance floors etc.), at school socialization spaces, public for nature, this diversity of knowledge enters in contact with those offered by the institution or brought by other colleagues.

It is through Physical Education classes that such socialization may happen in a democratic way (in the best meaning of the term), potentializing the voice and gestures of the many subgroups that characterize the school population. Therefore, in the world of ideas, each body practice must be confronted, discussed and elucidated so that each student understands his development context, the reality in which that manifestation of body language is inserted and what allows or made difficult its origin and continuity. At last, it is possible to observe that the practice of body culture reflects the infinite relations of power-knowledge of society.

If we consider that the manifestations to be studied in Physical Education are cultural phenomena and body language, they aim the communication of ideas, principles, values, beliefs etc. It can be concluded that all body culture manifestations involve significant practices, that is, practices of language and meaning production.

Such statement was previously presented by Betti (194) that at the time evidenced the importance of Semiotic mediation for the understanding of human movement and the need to make deeper studies and researches in this field, and even after more than a decade few studies persecuted this line.

The invention of the signs system, specially the linguistic are, without any question, the most important of all human

inventions, due to the role they perform on the social constitution and evolution of humans. The function of representation of signs allow us to recreate the material reality attributing it a new form of existence, the symbolic existence.

On the other hand the representation can be understood as mental function and object. As mental object is the unfolding of reality in its symbolic equivalent and as function is the quality of substituting some elements and evoking others. To represent is the main function of the sign. In representation the sign is placed related to its object in function of a third, the interpreter that is the reason or relation principle.

What defines the signs is their representative function. They were created by human beings to represent reality and communicate experiences. They result from a social convention that attributes to certain things the function of representing or meaning others. One of the characteristics of the signs is that, for its own nature, admits multiple meanings that makes them not guarantee only one interpretation and does not secure the reality of what they mean. It depends on the individuals to interpret them according to the context in which they appear, always taking the risk of changing the interpretations. (PINO, 1991).

**3. Implications for the educative process**

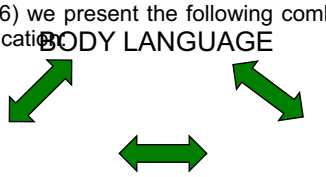
We believe that the acquisition of knowledge is conceived as a result of confront between searching practice by the student and the cultural mediation initiating from didactic activities organized by the teacher. Beneath this conception is the idea that knowledge is a product of social work and that its acquisition is due to the investigation and (re)elaboration with collaboration of others of what is offered. This conception attributes the term "teaching", properly, the semiotic component inherent to the Latin word "*insignare*": make signs, leave signs, indicate or point out.

The human knowledge is a type of activity that implies a relation and involves three elements: the subject that knows, the thing to know and the mediator element that turns possible the knowledge. Knowledges emerges from and for social work, for which men, at the same time, change nature, conferring it a human aspect, and change themselves, humanizing them.

The production of ideas, representations and awareness is, before all, directly and intimately mixed with material activity and with material commercial of men, it is the real life language. This means that human knowledge (ideas, representations etc.) of the world and of itself, as it presents itself in real life language, is patrimony accumulated by men throughout his history. It does not emerge spontaneously in individuals as a product of its biological development or as simple result of behavioral answers to the environments stimulation and progressively learned.

On the other hand, knowledge does not exist initially in the individual, but it is in society in form of social practices. It is here that each one goes, step by step, discovering what a long time ago was discovered and elaborated by others, making yours what is already part of social existence. Here relies the fundamental role of language among its many forms, to, through communication, appropriate his knowledge, once language conceives the double function of communication and of constitutive representation of thinking.

Inspired on the thoughts of Pino (2006) we present the following combination of elements that, to our understanding, characterize the pedagogic relation in Physical Education:




The investigation and elaboration are conditions necessary to speak about reproduction of knowledge, or in more appropriate terms, the constitution of knowledge in the knowing subject. The investigation of the knowledge object (ideas, events, phenomena etc.) produce, logically questions and interrogations that expect to be answered with the help of explanations already available (given by other researchers) or, even searching for a new explanation when those do not seem to be available in such way that possibilitates the constitution of an arsenal of knowledge that develops the knowing subject. The most important aspect is that the didactic activity can help students to interpret the signs present in body practices, that is, identify a Semiotic nature of that knowledge, in other words, the elements that allow the explaining of reality.

This activity of knowing, continuing a personal activity can occur in a solitary or solidary form, both involved by investigation and elaboration with other colleagues.

Only with illustrations we suppose that a determined school is inserted in a community with some groups involved with "Street Dance". When choosing the street dance theme with the eighth grade of middle school, the students can, with direct contact with social practice (reporting his own experiences), be invited to perform a reading of the manifestation through questions such as: To you, what does it express? What do you feel when you watch or dance? Does somebody know other forms? With other songs? Etc. In that way, the teacher and the students initiate a research (with textual supports, reports, interviews), with the objective of revealing that manifestation - its story, its intentions and its changes throughout time. From here, the students may be invited to express their feelings/knowledge about a determined aspect of life through dances elaborated by them. The final product of the project will be, for example, a presentation for other classes involving dramatizing and daily lives through the dance.

This didactic sequence permits the elaboration of textual readings and interpretations of many dances, as also, its development and socio-historical contextualization. The students may bring new meanings to these body practices for its group, its school or any other life dimensions, taking as basis its reality and meaning appropriation of the content but increasing it and discovering other dimensions of the other contents. It is believed that such action will provide the critical understanding and increased social context. This way, a better understanding of that "body language" is searched as adequate for its social space and production, but also how to deal with that language.

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**PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS A LANGUAGE: BASIS FOR REPOSITIONING IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

**Abstract:** Some proposals of Physical Education curriculum impose to students the appropriation of a certain body language already produced and standardized. In this vision, teachers do not concern themselves in performing a reading of the linguistic repertory of the social group with which he works. This way, transmits a performance ideology, due to the predominant interest with an expression incorporation considered ideal and disqualifies any cultural production processes of other groups. Once the body culture of movement embraced general themes to be worked in school, their curriculums could, initially, involve itself with a body language deriving from children in school and try to understand, explain and systemize them. The purpose of this study was to analyze body language systemizing through the Semiotic comprehension, searching to present basis for its repositioning in school curriculum. The reasons that guided to the Semiotic study are related to the understanding that school Physical Education, in its cultural approach, can search for basis in language science, considering that critical theories of Education promote school as the meeting place of cultures and Physical Education as a space of recognition, to give new meanings and increasing of the motor culture. The methodological guiding was based on an exploratory study and data analysis allow us to infer that Semiotic philosophical archeology provide the basis to understand body language as one of the body culture manifestation characteristics. Therefore, the contribution of the investigations imply in a reorganization of the critic Physical Education educative process and provides subsides for a reorganization in school practice.

Key-words: Physical Education; Body Language; Curriculum.

**EDUCATION PHYSIQUE AUTANT QUE LANGAGE: FONDEMENTS POUR UNE REMISE EN PLACE DANS LE PROGRAMME SCOLAIRE**

**Résumé :** Quelques propositions des programmes de l'Éducation Physique imposent aux étudiants l'appropriation d'un langage corporel donné déjà produit et standardisé. Dans cette vision, les enseignants ne s'inquiètent pas à faire une lecture du répertoire linguistique du groupe social avec lequel ils travaillent. De cette façon, ils véhiculent une idéologie performative, car ils s'intéressent plutôt à une incorporation gestuelle considérée idéale et ils déqualifient n'importe quel processus de production culturelle d'autres groupes. Dès que la culture corporelle de mouvement a agréé des thèmes généraux pour être développés dans les écoles, leurs programmes doivent, d'abord, s'engager au langage corporel issu des enfants dans l'école et chercher de les comprendre, de les expliquer et de les systématiser. Dans cet article, on a comme objectif analyser la systématisation du langage corporel par la compréhension de la sémiotique, à fin de présenter des subsides à son replacement dans le programme scolaire. Les raisons qui nous ont conduit à l'étude de la Sémiotique sont liées à la compréhension de que l'Éducation Physique scolaire, dans son approche culturelle, peut chercher des fondements dans les sciences du langage, en considérant que les théories critiques de l'éducation promeuvent l'école comme un lieu de rencontre de cultures et l'éducation physique comme espace pour la redécouverte, la redéfinition et l'agrandissement de la culture motrice. Le chemin méthodologique s'est basé dans une étude exploratoire et les analyses des données permettent conclure que l'archéologie philosophique de la Sémiotique proportionne l'embasement pour comprendre le langage corporel comme une des caractéristiques des manifestations de la culture corporelle. Celui dit, les contributions de la recherche impliquent une réorganisation du processus éducatif de l'Education Physique critique et fournissent des subsides pour une réorganisation de la pratique scolaire. Mots-clés: Education Physique ; langage corporel; programmes.

**EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA EN RELACIÓN AL LENGUAJE: FUNDAMENTOS PARA UN REPOSICIONAMIENTO EN EL CURRÍCULO ESCOLAR**

**Resumen:** Algunas propuestas curriculares de la Educación Física imponen a los alumnos la apropiación de un determinado lenguaje corporal ya producido y estandarizado. En esa visión, los profesores no se preocupan en hacer una lectura del repertorio lingüístico del grupo social con el cual trabajan. De ese modo, propaga una ideología performática, pues se interesa predominantemente con una incorporación gestual considerada ideal y descalifica cualquier proceso de producción cultural de otros grupos. Una vez que la cultura corporal de movimiento agregó temas generales a ser trabajados en la escuela, sus currículos podrían, inicialmente, comprometerse con el lenguaje corporal advenido de los niños en la escuela y buscar entenderlos, explicarlos y sistematizarlos. En este artículo, objetivamos analizar la sistematización del lenguaje corporal por medio de la comprensión de la Semiótica, con el fin de, presentar subsidios para su reposicionamiento en el currículo escolar. Las razones que nos condujeron al estudio de la Semiótica se juntan a la comprensión de que la Educación Física escolar, en su abordaje cultural, puede buscar fundamentos en las ciencias del lenguaje, considerando que las teorías críticas de la Educación promueven la escuela como local de encuentro de culturas y la Educación Física como espacio para el reconocimiento, resignificación y ampliación de la cultura motora. El encaminamiento metodológico se basó en un estudio exploratorio y los análisis de los datos permiten inferir que la arqueología filosófica de la Semiótica proporciona el embasamiento para comprender el lenguaje corporal como una de las características de las manifestaciones de la cultura corporal. Esto sumado a las contribuciones de la investigación implica en una reorganización del proceso educativo de la Educación Física crítica y fornecen subsidios para una reorganización de la práctica escolar.

Palabras claves: Educación Física; lenguaje corporal; curriculo.

**EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA ENQUANTO LINGUAGEM: FUNDAMENTOS PARA UM REPOSICIONAMENTO NO CURRÍCULO ESCOLAR**

**Resumo:** Algumas propostas curriculares da Educação Física impõem aos alunos a apropriação de uma determinada linguagem corporal já produzida e padronizada. Nessa visão, os professores não se preocupam em fazer uma leitura do repertório lingüístico do grupo social com o qual trabalha. Desse modo, veicula uma ideologia performática, pois interessa-se predominantemente com uma incorporação gestual considerada ideal e desqualifica qualquer processo de produção cultural de outros grupos. Uma vez que a cultura corporal de movimento agregou temas gerais a serem trabalhados na escola, seus currículos poderiam, inicialmente, comprometer-se com a linguagem corporal advinda das crianças na escola e buscar entendê-las, explicá-las e sistematizá-las. Neste artigo, objetivamos analisar a sistematização da linguagem corporal por meio da compreensão da Semiótica, a fim de, apresentarmos subsídios para seu reposicionamento no currículo escolar. As razões que nos conduziram ao estudo da Semiótica atrelam-se à compreensão de que a Educação Física escolar, na sua abordagem cultural, pode buscar fundamentos nas ciências da linguagem, considerando que as teorias críticas da Educação promovem a escola como local de encontro de culturas e a Educação Física como espaço para o reconhecimento, ressignificação e ampliação da cultura motora. O encaminhamento metodológico baseou-se em um estudo exploratório e as análises dos dados permitem inferir que a arqueologia filosófica da Semiótica proporciona o embasamento para compreender a linguagem corporal como uma das características das manifestações da cultura corporal. Isto posto, as contribuições da investigação implicam numa reorganização do processo educativo da Educação Física crítica e fornecem subsídios para uma reorganização da prática escolar.