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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROFESSORS: A LOOK AT LIFELONG PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### APRENDIZAGEM PROFISSIONAL DE PROFESSORES UNIVERSITÁRIOS EM EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA: UM OLHAR NO DESENVOLVIMENTO PROFISSIONAL AO LONGO DA VIDA

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze theoretically the lifelong learning of Physical Education professors at university. During the biographical processes of life, the teacher goes through episodic experiences that unfold in skills, knowledge, among other elements. This process occurs by the meaning that is attributed to such experiences, meaning this constructed by levels of critical reflection that qualify the professional performance. In this scenario, it is important to emphasize and consider that this process is social, and the university professor is an individual socially interconnected to a social culture, which in turn reveals the idiosyncratic process of learning of this subject. Thus, in his biography, the life experiences of the university professor lead his professional development.

**Keywords:** University. Lifelong learning. Professor.

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#### RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar teoricamente a aprendizagem ao longo da vida de professores universitários em Educação Física. Durante os processos biográficos da vida, o professor passa por experiências episódicas que se desdobram em habilidades, conhecimentos, entre outros elementos. Este processo ocorre pelo significado que é atribuído a tais experiências, significado este construído por níveis de reflexão crítica que qualificam a atuação profissional. Neste cenário, importa destacar e considerar que este processo é social e o professor universitário é um indivíduo socialmente interligado a uma cultura social, o que por sua vez revela o processo idiossincrático da aprendizagem deste sujeito. Assim, na sua biografia, as experiências de vida do professor universitário conduzem o seu desenvolvimento profissional.

**Palavras-chave:** Universidade. Aprendizagem ao longo da vida. Professor.

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#### Introduction

Educators have a significant influence on the teaching scenarios in which they intervene, and their importance is undeniable, considering the identity and legality status they have acquired in the social realm<sup>1</sup>. This fact makes them being recognized as individuals who have proper knowledge on classic and/or specific topics, and whose responsibility is to pass on this knowledge to others, which is the case of professors<sup>2</sup>.

Because they are in higher education and live in the so-called knowledge society, professors need constant updating and reflecting, which enable them to adequately respond to transformations in the world and, specifically, in their own profession<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, it is worth noting that the development of these individuals is a professional growth that results from experiences and a systematic analysis of their very practice, creating a relationship with identity from a perspective that never ends, and constituting something related to lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>.

In the context of an educator's professional development, learning is seen as ongoing or permanent training, in-service training, human resources development, as well as refresher and qualification courses<sup>5</sup>. Learning provides professors a comprehensive professional

learning process aligned with the challenges and needs that arise throughout their lives<sup>6</sup>, in addition to a development inherent to their workplace, where different types of learning (accredited or non-accredited) also have their place. Nevertheless, it is common to value learning on the basis of quantity, that is, the more learning experiences, the more qualified the educator will be<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, in light of the foregoing, this theoretical essay aims to analyze the lifelong learning of Physical Education professors, based on Peter Jarvis' lifelong learning theory, which considers learning as a continuum in an individual's biographical path, where episodic experiences provide a more meaningful learning. In order to contribute to this purpose, it also relies on some studies that have sought to comprehend Physical Education professors and the ways they learn.

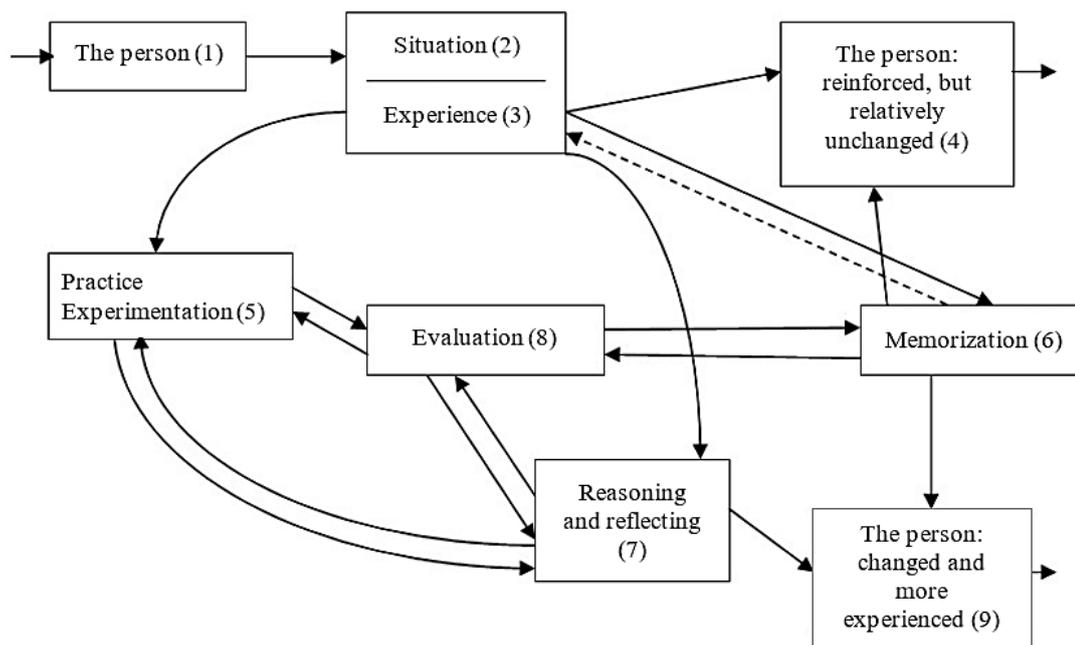
To do so, during the development of this essay, several books, theses and dissertations available in full were used as sources of consultation, along with articles published online and in print referring to the Physical Education and Education fields. In this sense, with a view to achieving the objective proposed, the text was systematized towards describing the Theory of lifelong learning<sup>8-10</sup>, the factors of said theory that are dimensioned by professors, the learning experiences of the latter and, finally, their formal, non-formal and informal learning situations.

#### *Theory of Lifelong Learning: A Contemporary Look at Learning*

Professor Peter Jarvis is deemed one of the most influential authors regarding adult learning. His trilogy published between 2006 and 2008 (Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning – volume 1; Globalization, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society – volume 2; Democracy, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society –volume 3) presents an understanding of the learning process in which experience is a fundamental element, broadening the conceptions of learning in relation to existing ones.

Learning is fundamental for humans to develop, for them to transcend a biological process of their existence by doing that which makes them become something, as human beings are always “becoming”<sup>8</sup>. Understanding this existentialism is, therefore, imperative for the learning that takes place as a whole, in a holistic, existentialist and philosophical conception, and that does not preserve the body and mind dualism<sup>8</sup>. In this context, human learning starts from the “self” that interacts with their “life-world” in search of new learning, of continuing to learn<sup>10</sup>.

Because learning is the driving force of human change, and this is a complex process, Jarvis<sup>8-10</sup> establishes that learning occurs when experience is transformed, with human learning being a combination of processes in which the whole person – body (genetic, biological and physical) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations and transforms perceived content in a reflexive, emotional or practical manner (which may be combined), integrating this into their individual biography, which results in a changed or more experienced person (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Jarvis' learning model  
Source: Jarvis<sup>8</sup>

This model evidences that it is at the intersection of the individual with their life-world that opportunities for learning present themselves, and the means for it are given by the five operational senses (hearing, seeing, speaking, feeling and tasting)<sup>8</sup>. In order to understand the changes of the person who is transformed by learning, it is necessary to first understand the concept of experience. Experience, according to Jarvis<sup>8</sup>, is the heart of learning, of conscious life, related to particular incidents, feelings, accumulated knowledge, external phenomena that affect the individual, thus reflecting a life story.

Biography, in its turn, "is the sum of the experiences we learn and the product we are from these experiences"<sup>11:61</sup>. The understanding of experience as biography is important, as it makes it clear that, in human learning, the accumulation of previous experiences affects current ones<sup>8,11</sup>, and several different meanings will be conferred on them, which will result in two different states, harmony or disjuncture<sup>12</sup>.

Disjuncture is the gap between an individual's biography and current experience, and it starts with an open-ended question or even with a sense of ignorance on the part of the individual<sup>12</sup>. Because the beginning of the learning process is a moment when sensations do not make much sense, the individual finds themselves in a state that Jarvis call "harmony", as they receive external information and do not need to change their biography to interact with the world<sup>8</sup>. "Disjuncture" occurs just when the biography needs to be changed so that the individual fills the gap created by the information received.

In this case, one can consider that disjuncture is the "[...] gap between our biography and our perception of our experience [...]"<sup>12:36</sup>. The transformation of the individual, therefore, spans the recognition that one does not know everything and that there is disharmony, with disharmony being "[...] a reason that leads me to learn so that I can restore this harmony through new learning"<sup>8:77</sup>. The individual changed by the learning experience is the key element of the learning process.

Experiences learned during life are organized into socialization processes, in which actions are influenced directly or indirectly, just as emotions and thoughts are, with these events being referred to as primary socialization and secondary socialization<sup>8,11</sup>. Primary socialization is the first type of socialization that an individual experiences, beginning in childhood, and that makes them a socially integrated individual belonging to a social space,

especially through their family<sup>8</sup>. As the individual grows up and develops, taking on new places in society and establishing new learning relations, secondary socialization emerges, subsequently (to primary socialization), and induces the socialized individual to enter/interact in new sectors of the goal-oriented world of their social spaces, namely, schools, work, clubs, universities, and others that we have learned to integrate<sup>11</sup>.

### *Professors and Lifelong Learning*

Although some efforts have already been made towards seeking an understanding of how professors perceive the learning opportunities mentioned throughout their lives – for instance, the studies by Bernardes<sup>13</sup> and Grangeat and Gray<sup>14</sup>, which evidence a tendency for informal learning opportunity at the beginning of one's teaching career, as well as the studies by Bolzan, Isaia and Maciel<sup>2</sup>, and Bolzan and Powaczuk<sup>15</sup>, which reveal, through university pedagogy, the recognition of teaching reflection as fundamental in this process –, little progress has been made towards this understanding.

Thus, learning has become a major objective addressed in some studies on teaching reality over the years<sup>16,17</sup>. However, the same emphasis and little depth in the dialogue about how these educators have been perceiving their lifelong learning opportunities<sup>18</sup> still remain, together with an incipience of studies focusing on the learning of Physical Education professors.

### *Learning Experiences of Physical Education Professors*

The concept of lifelong learning is found in Jarvis<sup>8-10</sup> as a process in which the individual, through their experiences, becomes an individual in society. Based, initially, on Kolb's learning cycle, Jarvis sought to expand the way of understanding human learning, creating a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary theory<sup>12</sup>.

In the learning process towards becoming an educator, it is important to perceive the elements that make it up along the way, and one can resort to Tardif's perspective on the types of teaching knowledge<sup>19</sup>, namely: professional knowledge, produced by scholars and passed on in the academia; disciplinary knowledge, related to a variety of fields of knowledge (biology, mathematics, history, etc.); curricular knowledge, represented by the school's curricular contents; and experiential knowledge, produced during practical teaching experiences, all of which are relevant to teaching-oriented learning. Among all of them, however, the author highlights experiential knowledge as the most important to teachers – primarily due to the external relationship that they have with the other three types of knowledge, since these professionals cannot control their production –, which differs from experiential knowledge, essentially managed by educators<sup>19</sup>. Not distinctly, experience is the great element to which learning is linked, from the moment the individual is born, throughout their development, until their last day of life<sup>10</sup>.

Experiential knowledge is that originated from a teacher's personal and professional life journeys, directly related to the teaching activity in daily practice and validated by experience through reflective processes<sup>19,20</sup>. However, Ferreira<sup>21</sup> warns that this reflective process is not usual, even though the educator has internalized, throughout their personal life (mainly professional), several types of knowledge, values or beliefs that have built their personality in practice. In the scenario of lifelong learning, these knowledge, beliefs and values present in the professional life of an educator are related to their socialization, namely, primary socialization and secondary socialization<sup>8</sup>.

In primary socialization, contact with the family, in particular, represents to these individuals the learning of values (such as respect and responsibility) and beliefs that later shapes the performance of Physical Education professors<sup>22</sup>. Secondary socialization, in its turn, puts the educator in contact with society, in environments such as school, university and work, where they broaden their learning experiences<sup>9</sup>.

The perspective of improving the understanding of learning through experience in an educator's socializations had already been highlighted by Tardif<sup>19</sup>, who considers previous experiences, such as those coming from family, friends and the school period, as pre-professional socialization. However, little has been discussed about the impact of experiences on their learning<sup>19</sup>. There is, therefore, a mistaken treatment of experience(s) throughout their lives, which is not cumulative, but episodic, reflected in their connection with the world. In this way, the life-world always changes from the moment one questions the experiences and realizes that there is a new situation to resolve – either on their own or collectively, by reflecting on previous experiences –, thus causing changes in situations of life and in biographies<sup>23</sup>.

Slicing experience and assessing it as a movement of life with no relation to other movements is a complex fact, because experience is not a product of accounting but has to do with learning about events lived and about oneself<sup>7</sup>. One opportunity for professors to learn to read their own reality is to understand their most latent learning situations, pointed out by Jarvis as formal, non-formal and informal learning situations<sup>11</sup>.

### *Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning Situations of Professors*

Formal learning situations occur institutionally from a pre-established and systematized curriculum, through which professors learn contents, basically, in educational institutions that provide certified education processes. As for non-formal learning situations, they take place in organizations meant for educational activities, though without a formalized structure, permeating more the logic of short training courses, workshops, clinics and seminars, in which teachers develop types of learning related to their interest in a specific field. Informal learning situations, on the other hand, occur from the educator's intentionality, as they build knowledge from their experiences and through exchanges with peers, or self-directed searches towards learning about something, without need for certification<sup>11,24</sup>.

Nevertheless, this reality of learning situations has already been explored in some studies, highlighting, for instance, that experienced Physical Education professors prefer formal learning situations, though also taking advantage of informal ones<sup>17</sup>, that informal learning is linked to exchange relations between professors and their peers, as well as with their students<sup>22</sup>, and that the choice for non-formal learning situations is closely related to professional practice<sup>25</sup>.

When it comes specifically to the formal learning situation, it is possible to perceive in the investigated scientific literature that initial training, though important in this type of situation, has a limited impact on the learning of professors<sup>26</sup>.

Despite being little present in the perspective of Physical Education professors, some studies already mention formal learning situations in their investigation objectives, relating them to the perception of professors about their own professional development<sup>6</sup> and to the acceptance of formal learning opportunities throughout their careers<sup>17</sup>. Regarding the non-formal learning situation, a study on the recognition and accreditation of learning arising from non-formal environments in Europe<sup>27</sup> noted that changes are needed so that non-formal learning is more valued – for instance, more adequate and flexible systems, such as cooperation between universities and other agencies, and need for properly qualified personnel. These elements are important, since the participation of Physical Education professors in non-formal learning situations depends on their fields of interest.

As for informal learning situations, at the margin of what the literature shows, that, in general, certified and formalized training is most of the times more valued than training in informal situations is<sup>6,17</sup>, it is evident that such a statement does not reflect the scenario of Physical Education professors. This importance attributed by professors is related to a growing emphasis on informal learning approaches, which, according to Watkins and Marsick<sup>28</sup>, happens through the focus placed on problem solving from strategies (individual or collective) that

consider the individual's very job as a starting point for their learning – in the case of professors, university teaching itself.

Exchange relations between educators and students, as well as between the former and their peers, in addition to the evidence of an informal learning when teaching together, are in line with studies involving Physical Education professors<sup>22</sup>, which report the use of these relations for improving teaching and learning strategies in professional intervention, also motivated by conversations, discussions and meetings between Physical Education professors. Studies related to informal learning among Physical Education teachers<sup>13,14,17</sup> have reported that this characteristic of exchange, dialogue or conversation between peers is a remarkable practice among these professionals, evidencing the self-directed nature of informal learning.

Thus, by recalling the primary theory of this study, namely, the perspective that the human being learns throughout life from birth to death<sup>8</sup>, it is possible to ponder that the educator is not an individual who teaches only, but who also learns and does so based on experiences, whether reflexively or not. In the dynamics of university teaching, understanding learning situations can help characterize how this educator learns from the sensations transformed within a social context<sup>9</sup>.

Considering the learning towards being a professor in different contexts (non-formal, informal and formal), investigations on the topic related to the Physical Education field are still sparse in the literature. Nevertheless, reflecting on what is done and on interventions is complex and challenging, thus requiring sources of consultation based on investigations that consolidate the practice and intervention of teachers in intense spheres, such as higher education.

### Further Considerations

At the end of this essay, it is possible to understand teaching in higher education as something yet to be investigated, bringing to light the constituent elements of pedagogical practice, of actions based on personal and professional experiences, on the advances of academic maturity that unveil new types of knowledge, which are reflected both inside and outside the classroom.

Given this perspective, in primary socialization educators learn through the people to whom they are the closest (family), with parents being the most important figures. In the process of secondary socialization, following primary socialization, they transform the social language (generated by contact with parents) into learning content by interacting with other environments, such as school, workplace, church, etc. All of these situations can have an impact on learning while at work, resulting in professional actions in higher education.

With regard to formal, non-formal and informal learning situations, the professors highlight the potential learned from experiences acquired in informal learning situations in relation to the other learning situations. This is because informal learning situations are directly related to the motivation and interest of educators in seeking a learning that meets the needs of their professional practice, whether from a didactic-pedagogical perspective or from a specific perspective as to their field of interest. It is worth highlighting the need for formal learning situations, such as the university, to justify a greater contribution to the learning of Physical Education professors.

At this intersection between the personal and professional life of teachers, the connotation of lifelong learning allowed revealing episodic learning experiences of Physical Education professors, providing an opportunity to understand how learning manifests in the course of life. It is also important to have the understanding that educators learn at different moments in their lives, and that this learning also characterizes their professional development for them to work in university teaching, a process that unfolds as new types of learning emerge from the teacher interacting with their social world.

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