

**Epistemology, School, and Pedagogical Practice: Festschrift for
Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer**

***Epistemologia, escola e prática pedagógica: Festschrift a Paulo
Evaldo Fensterseifer***

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Abstract

This study addresses the contributions of Professor Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer to the field of Latin American Physical Education. The text is structured around three main axes: epistemological activity, pedagogical practice, and Physical Education in the republican and democratic school. Although presented separately, these dimensions are interconnected, since the “thinking without a roof” advocated by Paulo underpins his analyses of the role of schools in a republican democracy, while also serving as a guiding thread for his reflection on powerful knowledge that can orient pedagogical practices in Physical Education classes.

Keywords: Physical Education, school, epistemology.

Resumo

Este estudo trata das contribuições do Professor Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer para o campo da Educação Física latino-americana. O texto estrutura-se em três principais eixos: atividade epistemológica, prática pedagógica e Educação Física na escola republicana e democrática. Ainda que separados, esses momentos são conectados, já que o “pensar sem teto”, defendido por Paulo, fundamenta suas análises sobre a tarefa das escolas na democracia republicana, além de servir como fio condutor para sua reflexão sobre um conhecimento poderoso que oriente as práticas pedagógicas nas aulas de Educação Física escolar.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física, escola, epistemologia.

Introduction

The critical upheaval of Brazilian Physical Education, which took shape in the 1980s with its well-known renewal movement, brought forth a denunciation of the field’s historical framework. This framework had been grounded in traditional forms of thought and in a pedagogical practice predominantly guided by the parameters of the natural sciences, with a focus on developing individuals’ physical fitness and motor skills. Within this context, we witnessed a denunciation of the epistemological, pedagogical, and political foundations that had until then sustained Physical Education in Brazilian society.

In this light, it becomes evident that the early works of the renewal movement in Physical Education (Bracht, 1986; Castellani Filho, 1988; Cavalcanti, 1984; Ghiraldelli Júnior, 1988; Kunz, 1989; Medina, 1983; Oliveira, 1983; Santin, 1987)¹ centered their critiques on issues such as the predominance of the physical fitness paradigm in school Physical Education and in professional training; the role of high-performance sports as the core producer and driver of meaning in Physical Education; and the biologicism underlying conceptions of body and movement. In the spirit of that moment, a tradition was denounced, and reinvention became necessary.

¹ Certainly, there are other relevant works that convey the meaning of this initial movement. However, we chose to list only a few of them, given the impact they had on Brazilian Physical Education.

A second movement, unfolding from the initial critiques and the surge of political debate within Brazilian Physical Education, began to outline possible paths to transform the landscape of pedagogical activity in schools and in professional training programs in the field. In this way, some of the figures who had engaged in the first critical movement continued their efforts to develop didactic and methodological proposals for the discipline. Representative of this second movement are the studies of Hildebrandt and Laging (1986), Betti (1991), Kunz (1991, 1994), Soares et al. (1992), Moreira (1992), and Daolio (1994).

A defining feature of this second movement was the dissemination of the idea that, starting in undergraduate programs, we should defend an approach and a political stance capable of addressing all the challenges of pedagogical practice and of connecting Physical Education with a transformative and emancipatory social project. Thus, in place of the physical fitness paradigm, it was necessary to seek a new legitimizing argument for Brazilian Physical Education: “the new official Physical Education”, but grounded in culture — that is, in body culture, movement culture, or body movement culture. Even so, despite the proliferation of new theories in Physical Education, by the 1990s they had achieved little penetration into the realm of pedagogical practice in schools (Bracht, 1999).

Ultimately, the field faced the emblematic situation in which, between the proliferation of theoretical narratives in academia and the transformation of pedagogical practices in professional training and in schools, Physical Education resisted change. It is precisely within this new context — namely, the challenge of translating the discourses of critique and the pedagogical propositions of the renewal movement — that we locate, particularly from the 2000s onward, the emergence of Professor Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer’s contributions.

Although he had experienced, as an undergraduate and graduate student, the moment of critical upheaval and the construction of approaches/theories in Physical Education — and although he had already produced important reflections in the 1990s, as we will highlight later in this study — the most vigorous contribution of Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer can be identified from the historical moment when Physical Education began to witness the consolidation of some of the advances it had long sought, such as attaining the status of a mandatory curricular component recognized by national law and the development of its academic field from a critical perspective on knowledge.

In this regard, our aim in this paper is to elucidate the theoretical depth and main thematic fields of Professor Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer's contributions. As a central element characterizing his work, we highlight his perspicacity in producing syntheses and in proposing epistemological and didactic pathways for the critical understanding and transformation of the Physical Education landscape in Latin America, recognizing the impossibility of any single discourse being taken as the truth in order to achieve the changes we so strongly aspire to. It is at this point that an important contribution of this study emerges — namely, the possibility of discussing the intellectual work Paulo developed around the affirmation of a critical pedagogy of Physical Education. Furthermore, we have not found in databases or other sources any study that sought to elucidate and discuss in detail Paulo's contributions to Latin American Physical Education.

Thus, our reflective itinerary seeks to reconcile both a chronological and an epistemological logic in addressing Professor Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer's contribution to Latin American Physical Education. Accordingly, we have divided the article into three thematic axes aimed at presenting both the specificities and the interconnections of Fensterseifer's² intellectual pursuits, namely: (1) epistemological activity in Physical Education; (2) teaching practice in school Physical Education; and (3) Physical Education in the republican and democratic school. The article is organized around these three sections, followed by the final considerations.

Epistemological Activity in Physical Education: The Contribution of Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer

It is virtually impossible to mention the name Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer without associating it with epistemological reflections on Latin American Physical Education. This trajectory began in the 1980s, when, after completing his undergraduate degree in Physical Education at the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM), he began, in 1985, his studies in Philosophy at the Regional University of the Northwest of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (Unijuí), the “home” he chose until his retirement in 2024. In the final year of the program, in 1989, he enrolled in a *lato sensu* specialization in Political Philosophy at Unijuí itself — a fact

² Throughout the text, we refer to him respectfully as Paulo.

that undoubtedly contributed to his appointment, in 1990, as a tenured professor at that institution. Since then, he has systematically engaged in the task of examining Physical Education from a philosophical standpoint.

Another important institution in Paulo's trajectory was the Brazilian College of Sport Sciences, where he regularly participated in the Thematic Working Group (GTT) on Epistemology, serving as its coordinator between 1997 and 2001. His political-epistemological engagement was decisive in shaping the direction of the GTT on Epistemology, an influence that extended into the broader Latin American context of Physical Education.

Although he was already publishing and attending events in the field during the 1990s, such as the Brazilian Congress of Sport Sciences³, it was particularly from the 2000s onward that his "mark" was strongly felt in the epistemological reflection of the discipline. In part, the publication of his doctoral dissertation as the book *Physical Education in the Crisis of Modernity* (Fensterseifer, 2001)⁴ helps explain the impact his ideas achieved in the years that followed.

In this work, Paulo reflects on the crisis of modernity and its impacts on Education and Physical Education. After presenting the main characteristics of "modern thought", he describes the critiques directed at it and then asks: "what prospects does the Enlightenment have at the end of this millennium?" (Fensterseifer, 2001, p. 126). Chapters IV and V of the book introduce the reader to two ways of responding to this question. On one side stands the "conservative critique", represented by authors aligned with postmodern thought. On the other side stands the "progressive critique", which acknowledges the ambiguities of the modern experience and proposes its rewriting. Paulo situates himself within this second perspective, adopting from the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas the thesis that modernity is an unfinished project that requires continuity. In light of Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, Paulo proposes for Physical Education a neomodern paradigm and communicative rationality as possibilities for establishing new foundations for the field's

³ As a good storyteller of *causos*, Paulo likes to recall that he was called a "lackey of capital" by a "Marxist-Leninist" professor at the Brazilian Congress of Sport Sciences (Conbrace) in 1995, in Vitória. At the event, Paulo presented the paper *The Contribution of Philosophy to the Field of Physical Education and/or Sport Sciences*, published in the *Brazilian Journal of Sport Sciences* (RBCE) the following year (Fensterseifer, 1996).

⁴ The dissertation, supervised by Pedro Laudinor Goergen, was defended in 1999 (Fensterseifer, 1999).

critical theories⁵. In his own words, this perspective represents a way of “overcoming the propositions of ‘traditional’ Physical Education (blind practice) and the alternatives presented: rationalist (discourse about movement) or irrationalist (spontaneism/mysticism that takes movement as a raw given)” (Fensterseifer, 2001, p. 240).

The book *Physical Education in the Crisis of Modernity*, the first of many to follow, contains a mode of thinking that accompanied Paulo throughout his subsequent trajectory. The work consolidated his defense of overcoming the Subject–Object paradigm, grounded in the philosophy of the subject (consciousness), in favor of the Subject–Subject paradigm, mediated by the universal medium of language and disputability (Fensterseifer, 1996, 2000, 2001). Rather than dispensing with the possibility of truth, this thesis represents a different understanding of how to establish it: truth becomes the outcome of the capacity to present and put forth reasons that hold only through the force of sound arguments articulated within a given communicative audience.

Truth, like objectivity, is not attained through an alleged correspondence between mind and object (representationalism), but rather as intersubjectivity grounded in the mutual understanding that human beings reach concerning the objective world (science), the social world of norms (morality), and the subjective world of experiences and emotions (art). Truth as intersubjectivity, therefore, is always a provisional process, founded solely on unending dialogue and on the principle of non-coerced agreement (Fensterseifer, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2009).

The neomodern paradigm adopted by Paulo is thus a step toward the linguistic turn in epistemological reflections on Physical Education, in a time he characterizes as post-metaphysical. From this perspective, an inquiry into the nature of knowledge — a traditional task of Epistemology — becomes a historical-social evaluation of how people attempt to reach agreement about what they believe.

It is inspired by this understanding that Paulo would later propose (Fensterseifer, 2006) the introduction of the term “activity” before the word “Epistemology”, since that term “ensures the notion of a process that accompanies something living, something renewed

⁵ This position had already been announced in his presentation at the Conbrace in Vitória in 1995 (Fensterseifer, 1996). The debate on critical pedagogy has accompanied Paulo ever since. See, among others, Fensterseifer et al. (2019).

whenever new discursivities arise within our field”⁶ (p. 31). In sum, within the epistemological activity of Physical Education, there is no room for any (metaphysical) substantiality that would stand apart from the very exercise of thought in the realm of language, its dwelling place.⁷

This centrality of language also led Paulo to “encounter”, in various texts (Almeida & Fensterseifer, 2011, 2019; Fensterseifer, 2006, 2009, 2010; Johann & Fensterseifer, 2021; Rezer et al., 2011), the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, understood as a perspective that, in presupposing historicity and finitude, inquires into the conditions of possibility of understanding. From this engagement with hermeneutics onward, epistemological activity (the pursuit of truth, objectivity, universality, normativity, etc.) does not proceed through access to the being of things, but is instead oriented by discourses about being — which, in turn, can only be understood through language as the distinguishing mark of the human condition, according to a Gadamerian maxim so often repeated by Paulo.

The dialogue with yet another German philosopher reaffirms, through a new vocabulary, arguments already put forward in earlier writings. It is, so to speak, the same intellectual exercise of reconstructing — now from the standpoint of philosophical hermeneutics — the unfinished project of modernity, even though, in this encounter with hermeneutics, the *Theory of Communicative Action* was placed in the “background”. In this process, Paulo never succumbed to the intellectual and political blackmail of being either for or against modernity; rather, he carried forward his critical reflections from within the boundaries of that tradition, with the aim of understanding “what is not, or is no longer, indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects” (Foucault, 2008, p. 345).

⁶ This suggestion was incorporated into the syllabus of the Thematic Working Group on Epistemology, a way of noting the impact of Paulo’s proposal.

⁷ According to Fensterseifer (2020b), this historicist and propositional dimension of epistemological activity finds a parallel in the democratic and republican experiences of the political sphere, since this too should not be guided by a substantivized Epistemology. As they have no a priori guarantees, their preservation depends on their reproduction — a task carried out by schooling, one of Paulo’s favorite themes, to be addressed next.

Paulo — whether on his own, with colleagues, or alongside his advisees — was a pioneer in appropriating hermeneutical theses to discuss the epistemological activity of Physical Education. In doing so, he inaugurated a dialogue with Gadamer that had previously been absent from the epistemological activity of the field in Brazil⁸.

The centrality of language in the way Paulo conceives epistemological activity did not, however, dispense with an analysis of its limits in understanding themes central to Physical Education, such as the body and movement. This is a reflection addressed by Paulo in a 2012 text whose title is quite suggestive: *“What Does It Mean to Learn in the Context of the Body Movement Culture”* (*“O que significa aprender no âmbito da cultura corporal de movimento”*) (Fensterseifer & Pich, 2012). In this article, the authors argue that there is no language without “remainders”, for there is always something unnamable that either remains as such, never gaining access to human language, or that, in order to be communicated, “pays a toll”. And this, Fensterseifer and Pich (2012) conclude, is not a defect of language, but its very condition — its “constitutive imperfection”.

In the case of Physical Education, it is a discipline that deals with forms of social codification and signification that have already “paid a price” in saying something about the universe of bodily movement practices, which are always learned only partially. After all, how can one comprehend that which presents itself in the form of gesture, of movement? (Johann & Fensterseifer, 2021). Bodily experiences, therefore, never fully settle into a given concept, for there is always an unspoken remainder whenever something is said. In Paulo’s words:

This unnamable, unknowable element is not manipulable like content that is fully given to us in a pedagogical practice, yet it remains present in such practices by virtue of their very characteristics. Its presence, however, occurs as a “negative” (without any pejorative sense), non-objectifiable, and by these very characteristics it does not allow for the suppression of difference in the name of an identity between word and thing, signifier and signified. (Fensterseifer, 2012, p. 235)⁹

⁸ This fact runs counter to the idea, assumed in a well-known epistemological classification that circulated in Physical Education, according to which research produced in the field, as early as the 1980s, drew on a phenomenological–hermeneutic framework (Souza e Silva, 1990, 1997).

⁹ This argument is taken up again years later: “In languages, aspects of being that are ‘forgotten’ or not ‘revealed’ seem to survive, and may surface/emerge with each new encounter with the works or with each new experience. In other words, something may happen that representational thought did not anticipate or does not grasp (or did not anticipate because it does not grasp)” (Fensterseifer & Johann, 2021, p. 10).

In the circumstances of the “always insufficiently said” (Fensterseifer & Johann, 2021), Paulo’s suggestion is to broaden the notion of experience and to foster the development of aesthetic-expressive sensitivity as a condition for affirming personal identities within the realm of bodily movement practices. After all, the experience of movement is always an existential event — something that touches, transforms, and cannot ever be fully translated into words.

In this defense, however, Paulo did not intend to take a step back from the linguistic and hermeneutic turn in order to affirm the primacy of the senses without the mediation of language, nor to propose a pedagogical project built upon an “originary” experience of movement (Fensterseifer, 2012). Rather, he sought to recognize the dignity of the aesthetic domain¹⁰ as a way of knowing through sensitivity. To this end, Paulo proposed broadening the concept of rationality so as to encompass, in addition to its instrumental dimension, its practical-moral and aesthetic-expressive facets. For him, the “ground” on which to achieve balance among these dimensions is the lifeworld, “where the human being exists as a whole — will and desire, *faber* and *ludens*, rational and mystical” (Fensterseifer, 2001, p. 246).

However, beyond considering such balance, Paulo also advanced the task of conceiving human movement as a form of non-nominal language, one embedded in the materiality of bodily processes. Following the line of Walter Benjamin, Fensterseifer and Pich (2012) argue that it is possible to conceive of the concept as not restricted to orality, but rather expressed in other forms of language — such as movement — which, for the authors, is closely akin to aesthetic/artistic experience. Within this framework, they posit the possibility of translatability between them. Yet could there be translatability without loss? (Fensterseifer, 2020a). In addressing this question:

¹⁰ In his dissertation book, Paulo speaks of a “poetry of movement”, which he sees as a residue of childhood, an antithesis to a mechanical world (Fensterseifer, 2001).

The translatability among the languages of which human beings are capable can be conceived not on the basis of a hierarchy that places the word, discursivity, at its summit (as might perhaps be the Benjaminian option), but rather by understanding different languages as legitimate spaces of truth production, which relate to one another through the attempt to contemplate and present an idea. In this way, the subsumption of every form of language to discursivity would not be justified; instead, the specificity and legitimacy of different languages to express being would be acknowledged. Insofar as we do not establish hierarchies but propose the translatability of languages among themselves, we recognize, in the Benjaminian vein, that there will never be coincidence in translation. There will always be a (re)creative relation to the original. That is, the claim of non-coincidence among languages — far from being a defect in their relation — should be seen as a constitutive mark of the power of language (Fensterseifer & Pich, 2012, p. 33).

This understanding, in granting the body (in movement) the capacity to “speak the world”, results, on the one hand, in the possibility of reconciliation with bodily nature and, on the other, in the establishment of dignity and truth value for bodily/artistic expressions¹¹ — a development with far-reaching consequences for disciplines such as Physical Education or the Arts, as it calls into question the (disembodied) conception of knowledge that has historically predominated in schools.

In these works, which address the specificities of the body, movement, and language in learning situations, there is a profound connection between the themes of epistemology and pedagogical practice in school Physical Education. This demonstrates that Paulo’s epistemological reflection was always attentive to the condition of Physical Education as a pedagogical practice — even when he recognized the singularities and didactic consequences arising from knowledge expressed through the body and movement. At this point, Paulo contributes to the remarkable theoretical constructions initiated in the 1990s by professors Valter Bracht and Mauro Betti regarding the possibility of a non-discursive knowledge manifested bodily. His main addition lies above all in exploring the relations among body, aesthetics, and criticality.

¹¹ This new status of the body and of sensibility is yet another blow to the equation Truth = Reason = Science, so often questioned by Paulo.

On Teaching Practice in School Physical Education: Between Disinvestment and Pedagogical Innovation

The theme of teaching practice in school Physical Education can be understood as a collective concern — one that, at a certain point, Paulo came to share with a group of researchers interested in understanding the directions of pedagogical practice in Physical Education after the renewal movement. This dimension of Paulo's intellectual activity, like several other aspects of his work, should be regarded as a collaborative and dialogical effort carried out with his peers.

The embryo of this field of study can be traced back to hallway conversations between Paulo and professors Valter Bracht and Fernando Jaime González during an academic event held in 2005 in the city of Chapecó, Santa Catarina (SC). On that occasion, accompanied by a certain sense of frustration, the professors asked themselves why it was so difficult to identify significant changes in the pedagogical practice of Physical Education in Brazilian schools. That is, even though the 1980s and 1990s had brought forward a set of critical proposals envisioning the teaching of Physical Education content, the initial diagnosis of the period still indicated that many elements of the tradition, which were expected to be overcome, continued to persist in everyday school life. Beyond the so-called traditional Physical Education, another phenomenon was becoming increasingly present in schools, namely: the abandonment of teaching work/pedagogical disinvestment (Bracht et al., 2018).

This initial inquiry later evolved into a research project proposed by Paulo and Fernando González, which sought to bring together researchers from diverse institutional and cultural backgrounds to investigate the state of teaching practice in school Physical Education. Between 2006 and 2008, several studies were carried out with the aim of understanding the nuances of pedagogical practices developed in public schools in Brazil and Argentina. As a result, in 2008, the collective of researchers gathered at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) to discuss the findings of their investigations, as well as the theoretical foundations and methodological procedures adopted. In short, this marked the creation of the International Research Network on Pedagogical Practice in School Physical Education

(REIPEFE), which was “formalized” in 2010 at a seminar held in Córdoba, Argentina (Bracht et al., 2018)¹².

With this contextualization of how the intellectual concern with teaching practice in school Physical Education in Latin America materialized through the establishment of REIPEFE, we can now highlight some key particularities of Paulo’s contribution to the development of this field of study. A first important point to be mentioned is that the discussion on the quality of pedagogical intervention and the types of teaching practices present in the daily life of school Physical Education, in Paulo’s view, are closely related to his perspective of the republican and democratic school. Thus, as an educational discipline within the school, it is essential that the pedagogical practice developed by Physical Education teachers point toward its recognition as a curricular component, overcoming its tradition as an activity (Bagnara & Fensterseifer, 2020a). That is to say, beyond the essential legality guaranteed by the law, other factors are necessary for Physical Education to stand as a curricular component — one of them being the very meaning of the pedagogical practice carried out by teachers.

In light of this, during the investigative process carried out in public schools, Paulo contributed to the theoretical typification of three forms of teaching practice present in the daily life of school Physical Education, namely: traditional, abandonment of teaching work/pedagogical disinvestment, and pedagogical innovation. Although REIPEFE studies focused more on the phenomena of pedagogical disinvestment and innovation, in the work of González et al. (2013) — of which Paulo was one of the authors — traditional Physical Education is associated with the hegemony of teaching team sports, oriented toward the refinement of technical gestures and the development of students’ physical fitness.

Thus, it is certainly the concepts of abandonment of teaching work/pedagogical disinvestment and pedagogical innovation that represent the most significant theoretical contributions to the discussion on teaching practice in school Physical Education. In the pioneering study by González and Fensterseifer (2006), the authors associate the abandonment of teaching work with the phenomenon of the “non-class”. In such cases, no

¹² The network, initially composed of Brazilian and Argentine professors, expanded with the inclusion of new members and universities from Brazil, Argentina, and other countries such as Uruguay, Chile, and Colombia. Its most recent meeting, the eleventh, took place in 2023 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This year, a new edition will be held in Brazil.

process takes place with an educational intentionality mediated by the thematization of specific content articulated with a medium- or long-term formative project. Accordingly, the abandonment of teaching work occurs when “the teacher gives up on teaching — that is, when the teacher does not teach a class” (p. 4).

In the aforementioned study, which has an exploratory character and a conceptual-reflective orientation, the notion of abandonment of teaching work is used to describe those actions that, in essence, cannot be regarded as a Physical Education class, since they lack the minimal identifying elements of what can be understood as a class. This means: pedagogical intentionality on the part of the teacher; the learning of content or the development of some skill; the involvement of all students in the teaching and learning process; and the articulation of a sequence of lessons within an educational project planned to unfold over a given period of time through specific didactic-pedagogical procedures (González & Fensterseifer, 2006).

As investigations into everyday school life advanced, the notion of abandonment of teaching work in Physical Education was further refined. For example, in the work of Mai and Fensterseifer (2010), the term “pedagogical disinvestment” is used to refer to practices of abandoning teaching work. In this sense, “pedagogical disinvestment will be addressed in this investigation as the stance adopted by those teachers who continue working in schools, yet do not invest in quality pedagogical practices” (p. 2).

With regard to the opposite pole — namely, pedagogical innovation — Paulo’s contributions highlight that, in such cases, pedagogical practice moves toward affirming Physical Education as a curricular component, with the character of an educational discipline within the school. Thus, even when running counter to what school culture may desire or expect, these interventions are guided by a reflective relationship between theory and practice, in which teachers seek to thematize the different contents of the body movement culture, addressing the technical, historical, sociocultural, and political aspects that constitute the universe of bodily practices. In such practices, a Physical Education class takes place with pedagogical intentionality, systematically organized content established in advance, active student participation, planning, and an assessment process articulated with the objectives of the curricular component (Fensterseifer & Silva, 2011; González & Fensterseifer, 2006).

Fensterseifer and Silva (2011) point out that the use of the term *pedagogical innovation* refers to the opposition these practices display in relation to the tradition of Physical

Education as mere activity. Ultimately, it involves an innovation or renewal in the way of conceiving the pedagogical responsibility of school Physical Education, which, in such cases, aligns with the meaning of the school as an institution that seeks to guarantee access to the knowledge of the cultural tradition that must be shared with new generations. According to Souza et al. (2018), the phenomenon of pedagogical innovation can be “characterized by the constant exercise of teaching functions specific to the subject taught, and its articulation with the school curriculum” (p. 145).

The concepts addressed above, in themselves, already constitute fertile contributions to the field of school Physical Education. However, in analytical terms, some of the studies in which Paulo collaborated present a set of explanations aimed at understanding the causes of pedagogical innovation or disinvestment. A point of consensus across all REIPEFE studies, reaffirmed in Fensterseifer (2018), is that these are multifactorial phenomena. Accordingly, Paulo and his collaborators emphasize that, in order to understand teaching practice in school Physical Education, one must adopt a critical, creative, and reflective spirit, conducting research capable of articulating the macro and micro contexts that influence the pedagogical practices of Physical Education teachers.

Thus, through the theoretical-methodological legacy of approaches such as the case study, multiple case studies, and action research, along with data production tools such as observation, interviews, narratives, and document analysis, it became possible to construct a categorical framework that enabled a more sophisticated understanding of cases of abandonment of teaching work and pedagogical innovation. On this matter, Souza et al. (2018) point out that several aspects influence teaching practice in Physical Education and that, for both pedagogical innovation and pedagogical disinvestment, it is necessary to take into account personal factors, the types of teacher training, processes of continuing education, the theoretical underpinnings of such training, school culture, attitudinal factors, and professional factors.

Thus, drawing on the theoretical-methodological legacy of approaches such as case studies, multiple case studies, and action research, together with data collection tools such as observation, interviews, narratives, and document analysis, researchers were able to construct a categorical framework that allowed for a more nuanced understanding of cases of teaching abandonment and pedagogical innovation. In this regard, Souza et al. (2018) emphasize that

several aspects influence teaching practice in Physical Education and that, for both pedagogical innovation and pedagogical disinvestment, it is essential to consider personal factors, types of teacher education, processes of continuing professional development, the theoretical foundations of such training, school culture, attitudinal factors, and professional factors.

For this reason, those seeking to understand teachers' professional practice, Paulo and his collaborators would argue, must take into account, as an interpretive possibility (Fensterseifer, 2018), an understanding of how all the political and epistemological changes (especially in their training processes) that have taken place in Physical Education since the renewal movement affect these teachers; what their objective working conditions are (career, salary, workload, job stability, continuing education, etc.); how school culture — through its actors, practices, and traditions — relates to the discipline of Physical Education; and, finally, what kind of social project the teacher believes in and how this connects with his or her personal motivations in the profession.

With this exposition, our aim has been to highlight that the legacy of the REIPEFE investigations, in which Paulo has taken part, must be recognized within the field of Physical Education — especially by those dedicated to its trajectory as a school subject. In summary, the discussion on teaching practice in school Physical Education not only carries theoretical and analytical elements capable of contributing to research on pedagogical practice, but also points to a set of elements that may be envisioned as a path toward legitimizing Physical Education in the republican and democratic school, through the thematization of the contents of the body movement culture grounded in the principles of innovative practices.

More recently, we find works in which Paulo, together with Ivan Bagnara, articulates the debate on pedagogical innovation and disinvestment in dialogue with those involved in teacher education in Physical Education, highlighting the responsibility of initial training for the direction of school Physical Education (Bagnara & Fensterseifer, 2020a, 2020b). From the standpoint of reflective critique, we point out that studies on teaching practice still lack sufficient data production, particularly in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil.

Beyond this aspect, caution is needed so as not to establish pedagogical innovation — based on the idea of fulfilling the basic elements of teaching — as the ultimate ideal for defining good pedagogical practice in school Physical Education. We would argue, then, drawing on Paulo's own intellectual legacy, that it is desirable to pursue innovation guided by the radicality of critical and emancipatory interest in knowledge within the realm of body movement culture. This certainly requires that we be able to recognize the non-transferable functions and the political limits of the republican and democratic school.

Paulo Fensterseifer and the Republican and Democratic Perspective on Physical Education

Paulo made significant contributions to the renewal of critical pedagogies in Physical Education. In Bagnara and Fensterseifer (2019), the authors emphasize the particular importance of producing knowledge from a critical perspective. For them, to a great extent, this dimension of knowledge is fundamental for school Physical Education conceived through the lens of the republican and democratic school.

From the standpoint of the archaeological and comprehensive exercise concerning the meaning of the republican and democratic school, carried out by Paulo and his collaborators, it is worth noting that, at first, this reflection was constructed to support the idea that Physical Education — seeking to establish itself as a curricular component — needed to learn how to connect with the objectives of the school conceived as a republican institution. Thus, the works of Fensterseifer and González (2007) and González and Fensterseifer (2010) can be considered a reflective inflection in the critical pedagogical discourse of Brazilian Physical Education, insofar as they posed the question of the function of school Physical Education as intrinsically related to the purposes of the school in the Republic.

From the perspective of González and Fensterseifer (2010), the tradition of Physical Education as an activity guided by the idea of “exercising for”¹³ prevented the discipline from connecting organically with the republican aims of schooling. After all, if the school is

¹³ Exercising for better health, exercising for the development of the whole person, exercising for character formation (González & Fensterseifer, 2010).

concerned with the knowledge arising from the cultural tradition of a given society — so as to establish connections between past, present, and future — what, then, would be the rationale for a curricular component detached from the public, integrative, and identity-forming democratic spirit of the school institution? (Johann & Fensterseifer, 2020).

In the case of Physical Education, González and Fensterseifer (2010) reiterate that it was with the renewal movement that concrete possibilities were established for developing a disciplinary project attuned to the meaning of schooling in democratic societies. Accordingly, González and Fensterseifer (2010) present the idea that the body movement culture must be treated as a part of humanity's cultural tradition that needs to be thematized in the school. This, then, would be the specific contribution of Physical Education as a curricular component — justifying its presence in educational institutions — namely, to socialize new generations into the shared world of the body movement culture through the teaching of knowledge about bodily practices.

From this perspective, since we would be dealing with a type of knowledge different from that of the tradition of “exercising for”, we should be concerned with a series of responsibilities proper to a school subject that is part of a republican educational project, such as: planning the teaching of bodily practices across different stages and levels of schooling; establishing teaching and learning methods and processes consistent with the specificity of this field of knowledge; and implementing assessment practices to verify students' learning development. Even so, Paulo questioned knowledge as something finished and given, instrumentalist understandings of rationality, traditional science, Truth (with a capital “T”), as well as the Enlightenment and its possible effects. This self-critique of critique led Fensterseifer and his collaborators to envision a project for Physical Education grounded in a republican and democratic perspective of education¹⁴.

An interesting aspect to highlight is that the earlier debate on the implementation of innovative pedagogical practices is fully consistent with the spirit of Physical Education as a curricular component that thematizes the body movement culture in the republican and

¹⁴ It is from this understanding that Paulo recognized the importance of the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC, National Common Curricular Base). Without overlooking the limits of this curricular text (Franck et al., 2023), Paulo values the republican dimension of the document and its significance for a discipline that, for many years, was characterized by “internal disorder” (Kunz, 1994). He thus identifies a democratic rationality in the BNCC, insofar as it is a tool that helps ensure that rights and duties are observed by the republican state — represented, in this case, by the school and its teachers.

democratic school. Indeed, Paulo was so insistent in discussing the need to understand the role of the school and of the knowledge derived from cultural tradition that, later on, a considerable number of works emerged guided by the argument in favor of the republican function of public education. Along these lines, Fensterseifer et al. (2019) emphasize that the decision to educate everyone is a political one, which arose with modern societies that broke away from the aristocratic traditions of the *Ancien Régime*. This decision is tied to the political regimes that were established — namely, democratic republics. In modernity, these republics placed their bet on the legacy of the Enlightenment, on the liberating power of knowledge, and on the institutions responsible for conveying such knowledge, such as the school.

Drawing on Todorov (2008), Fensterseifer et al. (2019) argue that we cannot, today, embrace all the proposals formulated within Enlightenment thought; rather, we must refound the Enlightenment — preserving the legacy of the past while subjecting it to critical examination. They take this vision as a horizon, from which they derive the criteria for judging/criticizing its empirical manifestations across time and space. Among these configurations that assume an institutional character is the school.

Thus, the position Paulo and his collaborators take regarding the “birth” of schooling in modern societies is that it serves as a benchmark for subsequent critical stances. Critique must be directed at everything that prevents the school from fulfilling its role: teaching “powerful knowledge” to all, introducing the world to children and young people. Therefore, the school is like a “window”: an opening to the world, a means of accessing and appropriating it (Johann & Fensterseifer, 2021, p. 89).

This “powerful knowledge”, according to Michael Young, cited by Bagnara and Fensterseifer (2019), refers to special, formal knowledge, independent of context, so described because of its capacity to explain the world reliably and provide tools for informed decision-making. In the case of Physical Education, when teachers become aware of and engage with the complexity of knowledge linked to bodily practices and bring this into their classes, they enhance the production of such “powerful knowledge”, disauthorizing the discipline’s “tradition” and moving toward a new practice oriented around both conceptual knowledge (technical and critical) and bodily knowledge (activities that foster experiences of movement) — a practice Bagnara and Fensterseifer (2019) also describe as innovative.

The school provides important elements for critique, for ethical reflection, and for the demands of citizenship, even if without any guarantee of their effective use. Paulo develops this interpretation drawing on an author who inspired much of his academic trajectory: Hannah Arendt. In line with the author's classic essay *The Crisis in Education* (Arendt, 2002), González and Fensterseifer (2010) argue that the school — an institution to which Physical Education is linked — legitimizes itself before society by inserting the new generation into the cultural context, at times assuming a somewhat conservative function in maintaining and continuing tradition. Culture, in turn, must be understood as a web of meanings into which one enters by weaving it, democratically and republicanly, from all to all.

Given this position of Fensterseifer et al. (2019) regarding the contribution of education to critical thought, it falls to each discipline — including Physical Education — to identify the knowledge that can empower new generations to establish a reflective immersion in the world they inhabit. It is not the task of critical theory to transform society, but rather to engage with knowledge about the world. The transformation of the world belongs to the political sphere.

It has not been an easy task to recognize the link between politics and education without erasing the distinction between them. Such a lack of differentiation reduces education to a mere epiphenomenon of class struggle. While it is an achievement to acknowledge that education is related to the political sphere, the relationship between them is not linear. Thus, if one wishes to avoid falling into “politicism”, it is necessary to recognize the specificity of the distinct spheres involved (Fensterseifer et al., 2019).

This inflection regarding republican thought challenges us to seek a counterpoint within social-critical discourse. It stands between the perspective that highlights the value of school and education as a means of conserving traditions — and thus of socializing a common good and building a civilization — and the perspective that underscores the unfinished and contradictory character of social life and, consequently, of democracy throughout the course of Western history. This makes the place of critique inextricably linked to the idea of education and, indeed, of politics. Ultimately, from this perspective, the school is by nature a political institution, since it is part of the republic — even though, in its mode of

action, it must be concerned with educating new generations in certain republican competencies¹⁵ for the future exercise of politics in adult life.

The relations between education and society demonstrate, on the one hand, a certain belief that education has significance in the constitution of the world; on the other, that it is constituted through its relations with the social and historical world. For Fensterseifer et al. (2019), perhaps here lies a strong sense of the meaning of critical theory in general — or even of critical thought: to participate in the constitution of the world, rather than merely be carried along by it. A society, in order to be autonomous or democratic, must be grounded in the idea of critique — an idea that can also be fostered through education.

This condition prompts Paulo and his collaborators to envision a critical project of Physical Education from a republican and democratic perspective — a project that seems to require a permanent instituting capacity of subjects in relation to what has already been instituted. This means recognizing the merits of representative democracies while moving toward the construction of participatory democracies, aimed at building autonomous societies.

Final Considerations

This article is a well-deserved tribute to someone who has done so much for the academic and professional development of Physical Education. Its initial motivation came from the news, received with mixed feelings, that Paulo would, for the second time in his life, “hang up his boots”¹⁶, at least officially, from teaching at Unijuí. This does not mean, of course, that he has stopped thinking, advising, writing, singing, and playing¹⁷ — in short,

¹⁵ Drawing on contributions from Flávio Brayner, Johann and Fensterseifer (2020) list the following republican competencies: argumentative, propositional, decision-making, and self-questioning.

¹⁶ As a teenager and young man, Paulo ventured onto the football pitches with the goal of becoming a professional player. As he likes to say, he once had the opportunity to be a starter on a team where Dunga — who would go on to become a World Cup champion with Brazil in 1994 — was his substitute. “Fate”, however, reserved for him a career in teaching Physical Education.

¹⁷ Paulo also devotes himself to playing and singing as a member of the group *Peabiru*, dedicated to *missioneira* music.

teaching us about Physical Education in democratic and republican societies.¹⁸

We have organized this tribute into three parts. In the first, we offer a commentary on the way Paulo conceived epistemological activity in Physical Education, providing an opportunity to examine his interpretations of key issues in this debate, such as truth, objectivity, scientificity, universality, language, corporeality, and so forth. It is particularly interesting to observe the “movement of thought” Paulo developed, as he incorporated into his interpretations different traditions, such as the philosophies of Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer, without, however, dispensing with dialogue with other authors, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Cornelius Castoriadis. Thus, it can be said that German philosophy predominates in his work — a fact explained not by his family ties to that country, but by the academic networks of sociability Paulo wove throughout his career.

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In the second part of the article, the reflection focuses on pedagogical practice, another of Paulo’s favored themes. Here we find an important contribution in the sense of, on the one hand, understanding “pedagogical disinvestment”, one of the multiple factors that hindered the overcoming of the gap between the “no longer and the not yet” (Fensterseifer & González, 2007), and, on the other hand, outlining the contours of a desired “other” Physical

¹⁸ Another facet of Paulo, well known to his friends, is his sense of humor: he is an outstanding storyteller of *causas*, anecdotes, and tales. One example in this regard is his “*Dicionário Babelico*” (“*Babel Dictionary*”) (Fensterseifer, 2004).

Education, described as “innovative”. In the effort to study these two multifactorial phenomena, Paulo’s ideas came to be more widely recognized in the debates on school Physical Education in neighboring countries, particularly among those gathered around the group he founded with his colleagues: REIPEFE.

Paulo and his research partners were responsible for establishing a more complex and less prejudiced understanding of what gives rise to the “ball-rolling” phenomenon in Physical Education, while at the same time enabling a comprehension of pedagogical innovation within the framework of the discipline’s critical pedagogies. In doing so, they helped ensure that this multifaceted concept served the emancipatory practices of the field — a condition not always associated with this terminology in other domains of knowledge.

In the third and final section, our attention turns to Paulo’s reflections on the meaning of education in democratic and republican societies. This is particularly noteworthy, as Paulo, “inaugurating”, so to speak, a way of thinking about the role of the school institution, introduced an approach that was not very common within the critical traditions of the discipline, which, in politicizing education, had assigned to the school the role of transforming society. Paulo’s republican educational perspective, in contrast, emphasizes the “conservative” dimension of the school — not in the sense of reproducing the status quo or enforcing an authoritarian learning process, but rather inspired by the teachings of political theorist Hannah Arendt, for whom the school is committed to the tradition that ensures the preservation of the world as it is — that is, to education as the socialization of a common good (in the case of Physical Education, the body movement culture), which will be continually renewed by the arrival of new generations. This does not, of course, imply giving up criticality, but rather placing it at the service of the republican (and democratic) character of the school institution.

The decision to organize the writing around these three dimensions does not exhaust all that could be said about each of the themes addressed, nor does it imply that Paulo did not engage with other issues — such as those of aesthetics, the arts, education, and philosophy itself — as a glance at his *Curriculum Lattes* readily reveals. We assess that the greatest breadth and depth of his reflections are found in the fields of epistemology and pedagogical practice in school Physical Education. Moreover, although presented separately, these dimensions are

intrinsically connected, since the “thinking without a roof”¹⁹ advocated by Paulo underpins his analyses of the role of schools in republican democracy and serves as a guiding thread for his reflection on powerful knowledge to orient pedagogical practices in Physical Education classes.

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¹⁹ The metaphor of “thinking without a roof” refers to the provisional nature of the processes of knowing — that is, to the absence of an “ultimate” foundation that determines what is taken to be true or “objective” within a given community of dialogue.

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