

ARTICLES

**From Critique to Ascesis: Articulations in the Cultural
Curriculum of Physical Education**

***Da crítica à ascese: articulações no Currículo Cultural da
Educação Física***

***De la crítica a la ascesis: articulaciones en el Currículo Cultural
de la Educación Física***

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Abstract

This article proposes an articulation between the notions of critique and ascesis in Michel Foucault as a framework for a possible reading of the Currículo Cultural (Cultural Curriculum) in Physical Education. Accounts of pedagogical experiences constitute the empirical material of this investigation. A careful and sensitive analysis of these accounts revealed how the study of bodily practices can operate both in the invention of the self and in the problematization of norms. Critique is proposed here not as denunciation, but as an ethical attitude toward the transformation of subjects. In this sense, the Cultural Curriculum seeks to shift school practice from reproduction to creation, and from technique to lived experience, activating alternative modes of existence. Ascetic critique thus emerges as a pedagogical gesture that implicates the subject in the reinvention of both self and world.

Keywords: Physical Education, Curriculum, Pedagogical Practice, Critique.

Resumo

O texto propõe a articulação entre as noções de crítica e ascese em Michel Foucault para elaborar uma possível leitura do Currículo Cultural da Educação Física. Relatos de experiências pedagógicas constituem o material empírico desta investigação. Uma análise atenta e sensível deles mostrou como o estudo de práticas corporais pode operar tanto na invenção de si quanto na problematização das normas. Propõe-se aqui a crítica não como denúncia, mas como atitude ética de transformação dos sujeitos. O Currículo Cultural, nesse sentido, busca deslocar a prática escolar da reprodução para a criação e da técnica para a vivência, ativando modos outros de existir. A crítica ascética emerge, assim, como gesto pedagógico que implica o sujeito na reinvenção de si e do mundo.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física, Currículo, Prática Pedagógica, Crítica.

Resumen

El texto propone una articulación entre las nociones de crítica y askesis en Michel Foucault para la elaboración de una posible lectura del Currículo Cultural de la Educación Física. Relatos de experiencias pedagógicas sirvieron como material empírico para esta tarea. Una investigación atenta y sensible de los mismos mostró cómo el estudio de las prácticas corporales puede operar en la invención de sí y en la problematización de las normas. Se propone la crítica no como denuncia, sino como una actitud ética de transformación de los sujetos. En este sentido, el Currículo Cultural tiene la intención de mover la práctica escolar del ámbito de la reproducción hacia la creación, y de la técnica hacia la vivencia, activando otros modos de existir. La crítica ascética emerge como un gesto pedagógico que implica al sujeto en la reinvencción de sí mismo y del mundo.

Palabras clave: Educación Física, Currículo, Práctica Pedagógica, Crítica.

Introduction

In times marked by the growing influence of social media, the fragmented circulation of discourses, and the continuous questioning of universal truths, Education is challenged to rethink its foundations, practices, and curricula. The bases that once sustained the certainties of modern reason now share their space with other readings of the world, which undo such certainties amid multiplicities, instabilities, and crossings that strain the modes of being, teaching, and learning. In this scenario, the need gains strength for constructing pedagogical experiences that not only transmit knowledge or enlighten subjects, but that activate processes of listening, creation, and transformation.

The Cultural Curriculum of Physical Education (CC) has established itself as a proposal-bet (Silva & Nunes, 2023) in the face of these challenges. By shifting the centrality from content to lived experience, from repressive control to an open listening to meanings and affects, and from reproduction to re-signification, this proposal seeks to break with the traditional logic of the school as a space of normalization, understanding it instead as an ethical-aesthetic-political field for the production of the subject. From this perspective, the encounter with bodily practices ceases to be a pathway of training, performance, health promotion, social class overcoming, or emancipation from dominant forms of movement — as proposed by the gymnastic, sportivist, holistic, and critical perspectives of Physical Education (PE), respectively — and becomes instead an opportunity for problematization and reinvention of modes of existence.

It is within this horizon that this text proposes a reflection on critique as ascesis, grounded in the writings of Michel Foucault (2010, 2013, 2014a) and in its articulation with the Cultural Curriculum of Physical Education (Neira & Nunes, 2006, 2009, 2022). Our concern is to think of critique not merely as denunciation or judgment — marks of an enlightened rationality — but as a practice of freedom and of self-creation in the face of the modes of subjectivation that traverse us.

The analysis begins with a cartographic research based on experience accounts produced by public-school teachers. By following different pedagogical lived experiences, we seek to

understand how critique as ascesis is expressed in the folds¹ of practice, in curricular choices, in bodily gestures, in silences, and in words that challenge the instituted.

The text is organized in two movements. First, we address the Foucauldian notions of critique and ascesis, highlighting their ethical and pedagogical unfoldings. Next, we analyze practice accounts through this conceptual lens, showing how the curriculum can operate as a practice of the self rather than as a script — as a gesture that takes shape in the encounter with difference.

Methodological Pathways and the Effects of Giving an Account

This study is part of a broader research project whose object was a significant set of experience accounts on the CC, published in the open repository of the School Physical Education Research Group of the School of Education at USP (www.gpef.fe.usp.br/relatos). In total, 220 accounts were analyzed, produced by teachers of Physical Education and Pedagogy in different school contexts over two decades of pedagogical systematization.

For the initial empirical treatment, we carried out a full reading of the available accounts in order to identify and organize elements related to teaching practice within the framework of the CC. From this exploratory reading, provisional categories were formulated that addressed aspects such as the chosen study themes, the contents thematized, the modes of didactic-methodological organization, the relations between bodily practices and social markers, as well as the forms of documentation and evaluation mobilized by the teachers, among other aspects. In the end, a chart was composed with 38 categories subject to analysis.

At this stage, our concern was above all to problematize the effects of truth produced in the very act of giving an account — that is, what is asserted as legitimate, desirable, or successful in a pedagogical practice. Drawing on Foucault (2014b), we understand the account not as a mirror of an objective reality, but as a discursive production that takes part in the constitution of subjects, practices, and school knowledge. In other words, we take the account

¹ Deleuze (2019) starts from the idea that Foucault's thought does not proceed from the subject but from the outside — the field of impersonal, historical, discursive, and non-discursive forces that traverse the world, folding into an inside: the subject. The fold is the mechanism through which the individual becomes a subject. It is a process in which forces are interiorized in a relation of the self to itself. This interiorization is not a retreat or a closure but a reconfiguration of the outside, like a curvature or an inflection.

as Borges (2019) proposes: an alethurgy practice, a way of telling the truth about oneself, about the other, and about what is lived and done at school, according to the truth regimes of the CC.

The procedure adopted was not aimed at statistical codification or data generalization, but at constructing cartographic traces that would help us follow the ways of doing and saying the narrated curriculum. Aligned with the methodological perspective of cartography — though without restricting ourselves exclusively to it — we did not establish beforehand fixed hypotheses or variables, but allowed the written accounts themselves to affect us, guiding the choice of the paths to be taken.

For this article, we take cartography as an attitude, a mode of conduct of the researcher. Following Escóssia and Tedesco (2015), we understand the cartographic method as a practice of intervention, insofar as, in selecting the accounts, composing and recomposing their reading based on the articulations sustained by the theoretical framework, we intervene in the territory where the statements that constitute knowledge about the CC are arranged. Thus, we can also identify cartography as a practice of invention. By choosing the path that animates us to research, guided by our traces, we assume the exercise of producing a discourse of truth about the CC and set into circulation statements that constitute the discursive order of such a curriculum.

Among the traces formulated for the broader research, two proved to be especially relevant for the perspective adopted in this text: attention to the habit of valuation and attention to what seems to displace the meanings attributed to the modern school.

Regarding the first, the exercise consisted above all in not hierarchizing the production of the accounts, avoiding classifying them as better or worse among the published texts. We started from the premise that all were written from the author's translation of the CC and that all produce statements that compose the veridiction regime of this curriculum. This holds both for its non-negotiable terms — or rather, for the exercises of fixity that constitute and differentiate the CC from other curricula — as well as for unprecedented events, which do not repeat, which generate doubts, and which also destabilize the meanings attributed to it.

The second trace aimed to investigate whether, in engaging with the CC, the teacher would indeed be enabling the conception of the school as a space that circulates not only discourses servile to modern reason, but also other ways of thinking about the body, the subjects, and the practices of bodily culture. This trace led us to inquire, from the exercise of

problematization carried out by the teacher and from something recurrent in the accounts — the transformation of students' perception of their own body at the moment of lived experience — about the possibility of a temporary treaty between the notions of critique and ascesis in Foucault. So far, this seems to substantiate an important debate for the CC: that of the possibility of, through bodily practices, making viable other experiences of being a subject in the world.

It was from this — together with the limits imposed by the form of an article — that we chose to select five experience accounts for presentation in this text, through a more in-depth analysis of the theme in question. The selection criteria were: thematizations of diverse bodily practices; their occurrence in different grade levels; productions carried out in the post-pandemic period, from 2022 onward; and, in the case of the latter, that they were produced by different teachers, who were also authors of other accounts. We understand that this last criterion may provide greater comprehension on the part of the writers of these accounts with respect to the didactic and epistemological fields that compose the CC, which, in our view, would favor greater possibilities of diversified pedagogical experiences for the composition of our analyses.

It is important to note, however, that these criteria were not restricted to formal aspects of diversity. The selection of accounts was guided above all by conceptual affinity with the central problematization of this article, which became more evident in certain pedagogical experiences than in others. Although other accounts analyzed in the broader research also presented strong indications of this problematization, we prioritized those in which subjective changes, tensions with norms, and gestures of reinvention — both by teachers and students — were more densely narrated, thus favoring a reading more closely aligned with the objectives of the study.

It is also important to emphasize that the selection of accounts was not intended to configure representativeness in numerical terms. We selected those that enabled us to produce an in-depth reading of singular events. This choice allowed not only for a more detailed analysis of the discursive and pedagogical effects enunciated in the accounts, but also for the preservation of the heterogeneity of meanings present in the experiences.

In this way, our work also sought to follow the effects enunciated in the accounts, above all with regard to relations of power, forms of subjectivation, and the process that we here name critique as an ascetic practice that becomes possible in everyday school life. This perspective

allowed us to shift the focus from fidelity to the model of the CC to an attentive reading of the movements of escape, invention, tension, and contradiction that traverse pedagogical practices and their modes of narration.

On Critique as Ascesis

Before advancing to critique as ascesis, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of Immanuel Kant in formulating the notion of critique that acquired decisive centrality in modern thought. In his celebrated text “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”, Kant (1784/1985) defines enlightenment as man’s exit from his minority—that is, from the incapacity to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Critique, in this context, becomes the exercise of reason judging itself, establishing the limits and legitimate uses of knowledge. It is, therefore, a project of enlightened autonomy, in which reason must be capable of governing itself according to universal laws that it itself establishes.

Foucault (2013), in revisiting Kant’s text and discussing the notion of critique, proposes to understand it not as simple refusal or negative judgment, but as an attitude of problematization of the historically constituted modes of subjection. Anchored in the Kantian Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), yet displacing its focus, Foucault rejects the idea that reason can provide a universal model of autonomy. Instead, he affirms critique as a historical, ethical, and political gesture that interrogates the regimes of truth that traverse us and the ways by which we are governed and govern ourselves. It is an art of disobedience that is not limited to the epistemic field but is enacted in the everyday practice of questioning the present, its knowledges, its powers, and its effects of subjectivation. This occurs, for example, when a teacher refuses the uncritical standardization of external assessments and begins to construct, together with students, evaluation criteria that value processes, expressivities, and situated knowledges. In the field of Physical Education, this critical attitude becomes evident, for instance, when a teacher decides to thematize funk in class, not as a strategy of attraction or as a resource for students’ interests, but as a way of challenging the discourses that marginalize these knowledges and bodies, opening space for other experiences of the self in the school context.

From this perspective, critique takes the form of a philosophical ethos: an attitude, a disposition to relate to the present as something that is neither given nor necessary, but

contingent and open to transformation. Instead of seeking ultimate foundations or universal principles, this critical attitude operates at the limits of what we are, opening possibilities for becoming otherwise. It is inseparable from the practices of freedom, for it strains the naturalized forms of authority and truth, creating space for alternative modes of existence. Critique, for Foucault, is therefore a permanent practice of the deconstruction of the self, an exercise upon oneself that resists imposed conduct and invents new ways of living (Foucault, 2013).

In the last years of his life, especially in courses such as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault, 2010) and *On the Government of the Living* (Foucault, 2014a), Foucault devoted himself to the study of the ascetic practices of Greco-Roman antiquity, seeking to identify forms of subjectivation distinct from the modern ones. These practices aimed at forming a full relation of the individual with himself, grounded in self-mastery and personal transformation. They did not amount to sacrifice, but to the elaboration of the self through exercises of freedom, a continuous work upon oneself oriented toward the constitution of ethical modes of life. By cultivating such ethical exercises that produce modes of existence, subjects are transformed not by adherence to external norms but by the creation of their own forms of life. Asceticism thus becomes a pathway of constituting the subject as an ethical, aesthetic, and political work, as a singular response to the conditions that traverse it. In contrasting this asceticism with the Christian tradition — centered on renunciation and submission to a revealed truth — Foucault (2010) assigns a general sense to ascetic practice, defining it as the mobilization of a set of techniques that allow the subject to elaborate himself.

Christian and modern asceticism does indeed seek to enable the subject to access his own truth; this takes place through practices such as confession and moral interiorization, centered on renunciation in the name of the salvation of oneself and/or of society. The asceticism here understood, however, implies the production of the self — that is, the transition to other forms of existence. In this movement, Foucault (2010, 2013, 2014a) provokes us to ask how it might be possible today to activate ascetic practices that are neither disciplinary nor moralizing, nor subordinated to the capitalist logic, but that instead make possible ethical experiences of existence.

The key here is to understand that asceticism, as a work of self-transformation through exercises formulated in light of ethical presuppositions, can operate as a practice of freedom. But this must not be understood in the liberal or emancipatory sense of the term; rather, in the

Foucauldian sense, as an ethical acting upon oneself in dealing with power and in its exercise. It is not a matter of placing oneself outside the uses of power, but of always calling it into question (Foucault, 2014a). Here, constituting oneself as a subject must not be understood as an act of self-affirmation, but as a critical and experimental experience of the self.

In this way, an important approximation is established between critique and ascesis. Both configure practices that refuse subjection to norms and summon the subject to engage in the creation of the self. Critique does not aim at correction or denunciation, but at detaching from instituted modes of subjectivation; ascesis, in turn, can operate as a destabilizing exercise of identities, opening space for the new. It is about cultivating movements that involve choosing, experimenting, and creating ways of living; of making oneself a terrain of problematization, of aesthetic and political creation. It is therefore neither withdrawal nor purification, but an active practice that challenges modes of subjection while at the same time inventing fields for the production of subjectivity — or rather, of other forms through which subjects see themselves, position themselves, and speak about themselves.

From this perspective, the school can become a space of problematization and self-creation, where knowledge, the body, and language are traversed by experiences that challenge and displace the subject. Ascetic critique, thought from Foucault, gains strength as a pedagogical practice that displaces the curriculum, fixed identities, and instituted truths. By mobilizing both operators — critique and ascesis — to think this path, there is an investment in changing teaching conduct. Rather than keeping students in a passive position before ready-made knowledge or demanding from them conformity to pre-established standards, nor is it about leading them, as subjects, to class emancipation; rather, it is about confronting them with the limits that constitute them, provoking displacements that detach them from given identities, destabilize their certainties, and implicate them in an ethical process of self-production.

In this sense, ascetic critique becomes a pedagogical attitude oriented toward the invention of new possibilities of being a subject through the practices of bodily culture. It is a pedagogical attitude that challenges, provokes, and opens space for each one to become other, in relation to oneself and to the world.

In this scenario, the school must deal with meanings that fray depending on the context and the subjects involved. A meme, an emoji, a performance, a hashtag, or a misplaced utterance can be more revealing than lengthy dissertations. The ethical and pedagogical challenge lies not

merely in teaching how to identify the “right” and the “wrong,” the false ideology and the true one, or the so-called “media education,” but in sustaining the discomfort of the *in-between*, the void of that which does not yet have a name and which, precisely for this reason, carries the potential of the new. It is in this space that critique as ascesis becomes possible: not as the search for guaranteed knowledge or as a return to the lost ideal of the pseudo-good old days, but as an experimentation of the self in the face of difference and the event.

Ascetic critique, therefore, proposes an ethical movement of implication in the face of difference — not as opposition to the identical, but as a force of deconstruction and reinvention. Instead of judging the other or reflecting upon their practice, the subject turns to the self: Why do I subscribe to certain practices and reject others? What forms of life do I repeat? How can I create other forms of relation? In Education, this translates into proposals that expose the student not only to diverse knowledges but also to experiences of the self.

The Cultural Curriculum in Physical Education and Pedagogical Practices in Movement

Within this horizon, the CC presents itself as an ethical-aesthetic-political field of experimentation that displaces the very meaning of teaching and learning (Neira & Nunes, 2009). Instead of starting from ready-made knowledges or from predefined objectives, the authors propose that the curriculum be constructed in the encounter with students, through the sensitive listening to experiences, affects, and tensions that emerge in everyday school life. The CC, as their writings point out, seeks to shift the axis of the curriculum from content to lived experience, from control to listening, from repetition to creation (Nunes, Silva, Boscariol & Neira, 2021). It is a pedagogy that takes place in the *in-between*: between the instituted and what is yet to come, between what is expected and what erupts. It is also important to stress that this curriculum is not oriented by a logic of emancipation in the mold of Kantian or Marxist critique, which have so strongly influenced Education — whether in its traditional version or in the critical one². That is, the aim is not to liberate the subject from a supposed tutelage or alienation in order to lead them to an autonomous and/or enlightened consciousness. On the contrary,

² We use these terms in accordance with Silva’s (2017) proposition regarding curriculum theories, in order to facilitate the identification of theories that guide Education toward autonomy or toward the enlightenment of the use of reason.

what is sought in the classes of this component, from this perspective, is to activate displacements that destabilize the subject and expose them to the ethical work of self-invention, amid the relations of knowledge and power that traverse them, so as to activate processes of differentiation and problematization (Nunes, 2018).

Unlike the linear organization of content or the application of pre-fixed objectives, planning in this curricular perspective emerges from the immanence of the events of each class. It is about conceiving the curriculum as a field of forces, in which the teacher observes how students relate to bodily practices, to knowledge, and to each other and, from there, formulates questions that strain naturalized meanings. Problematization in the CC does not seek to resolve a closed problem, but to open breaches: to provoke displacements, to activate contradictions, and to listen to what does not yet have a name (Santos, 2016).

By problematizing what is considered valid as knowledge about bodily culture and by also embracing traditionally marginalized practices — placing both under suspicion in order to strain their modes of regulation — the CC, as a proposal-bet, operates as a form of ascetic critique. It is not a matter of denying or reactively inverting norms, nor of rejecting hegemonic practices or simply affirming subordinate culture or that of innovation. Rather, it is about provoking fissures in the instituted modes of teaching, learning, and being at school. Here, ascetic critique takes shape as a pedagogical possibility because it is not limited to the external contestation of the norm: it operates internally to the subject and to teaching practice, opening space for the emergence of new meanings, other questions, and ways of being with the body, with knowledge, with bodily practices, with collectivity, and with the world.

Thus, a practice grounded in the CC may invite students to research and experience bodily practices from different social groups, such as peripheral dances, Indigenous games, or games of African origin. In engaging these practices, students not only learn new gestures and knowledges, but are also led to reflect on the values, prejudices, and hierarchies that traverse the body in school and in society. More than simply knowing cultural difference or the conditions that have placed it in a subordinate position or one of exotic admiration (Santomé, 1998), it is a matter of confronting the strangeness within oneself, that which detaches from the habitual and opens space for other forms of existence. This, however, is not restricted to practices considered marginal or subalternized: hegemonic practices themselves — such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, or track and field — are also problematized in their historicity, in the

forms of exclusion they operate, in the body patterns they reinforce, in the values they silence, and in the modes of regulation through which they produce identities. The CC, in this case, does not abandon these practices, but regards them with creative suspicion, investigating how they were produced, whom they serve, whom they may include or exclude, and how they might be reinvented; how we have learned to speak about them, about their practitioners, and in what other ways we might think, speak about them, and, of course, enact them (Neira & Nunes, 2006, 2009, 2022). The proposal thus ceases to be merely technical or performative and becomes an opportunity to experience other possibilities — both in less visible cultural practices and in the most instituted ones — to question oneself and to reconstruct meanings about oneself and the world, thereby activating critique as ascesis.

Cultural Curriculum...

A caveat: what follows does not claim to be an empirical demonstration. In order to present a wide range of situations in which ascetic critique could be observed in the accounts, we have chosen to highlight excerpts drawn from them. We suggest that readers, for a fuller understanding of what we allude to here, access the repository <http://www.gpef.fe.usp/relato> for a complete appreciation of the texts discussed. Consistent with what we propose and with the Foucauldian framework adopted, we understand that such reading will allow for glimpsing other traces and possibilities of analysis beyond our own.

... Indications of Ascetic Critique as Pedagogical Practices in Movement

The analysis of the account “Playing Barefoot in Brazilian Indigenous Territories” (“*Brincando descalças em territórios indígenas brasileiros*”), which took place in a municipal preschool and was written by a pedagogue, highlights a pedagogical practice traversed by critique as ascesis in the Foucauldian sense. The choice of the thematization “the games of Indigenous peoples” is not configured as the application of predetermined content but emerges from a collective

³ Masella, M. B. (2022). *Brincando descalças em territórios indígenas brasileiros*. EMEI Nelson Mandela. GPEF. <https://www.gpef.fe.usp.br/2023/02/13/masella-m-b-brincando-descalcas-em-territorios-indigenas-brasileiros-emei-nelson-mandela-sao-paulo-sp-2022/>

school project that, articulated through the Political-Pedagogical Project, Law No. 11.645/08, and the urgencies of the present, urges teachers and children into an ethical, aesthetic, and political immersion in other knowledges. The inaugural gesture of “taking off one’s shoes” functions both as metaphor and as a practice of deterritorialization: an invitation to unlearn hegemonic school codes and to open oneself to the wisdom of the body, the earth, and difference.

The account highlights the centrality of lived experiences as formative experience. Rather than transmitting “knowledge about Indigenous peoples,” the pedagogical practice is woven between listening, imagination, investigation, body, and affect. The relation with Indigenous knowledges does not occur as appropriation but as encounter. The children are placed in contact with elements of *Guató* culture through objects, videos, research with families, and lived experiences. The questions that arise — “do they use boats to swim?”; “do they play naked?” — are not corrected with closed answers but welcomed as starting points for new inquiries.

Throughout the year, Indigenous games — such as the log race, the building of small houses with branches, the *emuẓi*, the *otó*, and the *kopu* — are not merely replicated but re-signified in the school space. The lived experience of the *peteca*, for example, paves the way for questioning the notion of “normal,” provoking displacements in how children understand objects, bodies, and ways of playing. In this process, critique as ascesis emerges: by comparing materials, ways of making, and ways of discarding toys, children elaborate new meanings about consumption, nature, and culture.

The account also highlights the role of the teacher as the one who sustains the space of doubt, displacement, and invention. Instead of organizing an instructional sequence of activities selected *a priori*, the teacher follows the movements of the group, creates passages between knowledges, provokes resonances, and welcomes deviations. The building of small houses that do not stand on the tables or the strangeness before the discarding of the *kopu* are examples of how failure and incomprehension can be activated as pedagogical forces. The school thus becomes a space of experimentation of the self and of the common.

Finally, the encounter with another school and the exchange of letters and games between the groups expand the territory of the class, dissolving the school walls into a network of affects, knowledges, and shared experiences. Critique, in this context, is not external or

transcendent, but immanent to everyday life, to play, to corporeality. In this account, it becomes evident that the CC is realized as a practice that affirms difference — and not as a fixed identity, but as openness to the other and reinvention of the self. It is, therefore, a pedagogy that does not seek adequacy but rather the expansion of the sensible and the creation of new ways of existing together.

Carried out with first-grade elementary school groups, the account “Mobilizing Insurgent Knowledges through the Waving of Our Banners” (*Mobilizando sabres insurgentes pelo balançar dos nossos pavilhões*⁴) presents a pedagogical practice in which samba is thematized as a way of knowing, feeling, and reinventing the world with children. Instead of restricting itself to teaching steps or rhythms, the project is built from listening to the children’s cultural repertoires, their relations with the territory, and the activation of memories and affects. In this process, samba is treated as a living practice, one that traverses gestures, histories, memory, bodies, and collectivities.

The reading of the book *É Pretinha*, written by Black women samba artists, inaugurates a sequence of encounters in which music, dance, and orality activate family memories, religious perceptions, neighborhood festivities, and media references. The children recognize sambas in current songs, comment on clothing, talk about relatives who parade, and about samba circles they have already witnessed. Samba is not presented as content external to experience, but as something that already inhabits childhoods — it only requires listening, welcoming, and returning in the form of inquiry.

The interviews conducted with school staff function as a first cartography: by asking adults what they know about samba, the children perform a gesture of research and circulation of knowledge, displacing the center of the class into everyday school life. The records return to the classroom in the form of slides, re-signified by the narratives and the dances shared in circle. Each new activity — videos, dances, songs brought from home — expands the group’s field of sensible experimentation.

The making of the banners marks a symbolic turning point in the project. Each class chooses colors, elects a design, and follows the assembly of the flags, which then take a central

⁴ Irias, E. A. (2024). Mobilizando saberes insurgentes pelo balançar dos nossos pavilhões. EMEF Romão Gomes. GPEF. <https://www.gpef.fe.usp.br/2025/01/22/irias-e-a-mobilizando-saberes-insurgentes-pelo-balançar-dos-nossos-pavilhões-emef-romão-gomes-sao-paulo-sp-2024/>

place in the lessons. The act of spinning the banner, saluting it, kissing it with respect — as seen in the samba schools — is reenacted by the children with rigor and affection. One student, spontaneously, teaches classmates how to spin with the flag, guiding gestures and directions. At this moment, the pedagogical practice is no longer organized by teaching but by contagion, by sharing, and by experimentations that redefine what is meant by learning.

The introduction of the *samba de roda* skirts further expands this field of creation. Initially worn only by girls, they soon came to be worn by boys as well, drawn by the visual and kinetic effect of the spins. Samba ceases to be practiced individually and begins to be danced in pairs, trios, and parallel circles. The collective use of the skirts, the spontaneous turn-taking, and the freedom in the ways of dancing produce a subtle destabilization of gender norms, opening space for the ethical exercise of self-invention.

The presence of the *mestre-sala* and *porta-bandeira* couple, as well as the encounters with samba artists from the community, brings children into direct contact with embodied knowledges, life trajectories, and histories of popular culture. The live dance, the adornments, the explanations about the banner, and the questions asked and attentively answered compose a moment in which knowledge is embodied in gesture, and the child sees and governs herself as part of a collectivity that produces culture. The dance with the student — now *porta-bandeira* — synthesizes this encounter between play, affect, and recognition.

The project culminates with the Samba Festival, which invites groups from the neighboring EMEI to share dances, banners, and reunions. There one sees the possibility of ascetic critique: it is not a matter of theoretical refusal but of a constant exercise of displacement, care, and self-transformation. In this trajectory, samba ceases to be mere content: it becomes a means of listening, of producing difference, and of inventing the world. The school, when traversed by rhythm, by spinning, by the circle, and by the children's knowledges, becomes a space in which its subjects can experience, even if only for moments, other ways of being in class and in school, free from the bonds common to disciplinary aspects of schooling.

The account “Barroom Games and Their Disputes” (*“Jogos de boteco e suas disputas”*), carried out with sixth-grade elementary school groups, presents a pedagogical practice that

⁵ Neves, M. R. (2023). *Jogos de boteco e suas disputas*. EMEF Anna Silveira Pedreira. GPEF. <https://www.gpef.fe.usp.br/2023/10/15/neves-m-r-jogos-de-boteco-e-suas-disputas-emef-anna-silveira-pedreira-sao-paulo-sp-2023/>

strains the normative limits of the school by incorporating, as an object of study and experience, bodily practices traditionally marginalized by the official curriculum. By thematizing games such as pool, card games, dominoes, bingo, foosball, *palitinho*, and even the *jogo do bicho*, the teacher constructs a proposal that challenges both the canons of school Physical Education and the control devices that regulate what can and cannot be taught. What is at stake is not merely the teaching of new practices but the production of displacements in the ways of perceiving the body, the school space, and legitimized knowledges.

The choice of “barroom games” is neither random nor a hostile provocation: it emerges from attentive listening to the territories, to the students’ everyday habits, and to the crossings that compose their existences. It is a pedagogy rooted in the ground of the community, capable of recognizing that leisure, sociability, and bodily culture are also actualized in bars, at corner tables, in the gestures of players, and in popular narratives. The initial mapping, carried out through the cartography of nearby bars, not only situated the students within the territory but also highlighted the pedagogical potential of shifting the gaze. That which was once considered banal or deviant thus comes to be taken as knowledge.

The work developed highlights a mode of teaching that refuses homogenization. Instead of applying predefined content, the teacher establishes a field of collective research and curricular invention. The presence of a particular student in the class, who masters pool and challenges peers with the rules of the *lambreta* (a penalty imposed on those who lose without pocketing a ball), is an eloquent example of how bodily practices can operate as spaces of subjectivation, recognition, and the displacement of gender norms. The body marginalized in everyday school life for not conforming to binary expectations gains centrality in the game: it teaches, wins, inverts positions. The class thus becomes a space for the affirmation of other bodies — those that inhabit the territories of infinite bodily practices.

The account also makes explicit the institutional clashes provoked by this proposal: the administration’s refusal to authorize the entry of the *jogo do bicho* machine into the school reveals how the limits of the curriculum are also limits of power. Even so, the teacher chooses to sustain his practice as a political gesture of resistance, incorporating disobedience as method. It is not a matter of breaking with authority on principle, but of affirming that a school committed to difference and curricular justice must be able to embrace knowledges produced outside

normative parameters. With Foucault (2013), we see here the materiality of what he formulates as not letting oneself be governed in such-and-such a way.

The purchase of the pool table as pedagogical material for Physical Education, the pedagogical outings to bars, the encounters with residents and frequenters of these spaces, and the students' accounts of the games and their meanings — all of this composes a fabric in which knowledge is not given but produced in the fold between lived experience and reflection. Learning is not restricted to the mastery of rules; rather, it involves knowing the subjects of the practice and being traversed by histories, affects, and ways of living. The pedagogy proposed does not seek the rehabilitation of the game as a moralizable object, nor reduce it to a resource for the learning of mathematical content — as is customary in schools — but to reinvent it as an educational event.

In the end, the creation of a new version of bingo with prizes brought by the students consolidates the inventive and collective character of the process. The activity does not end in the mere reproduction of what already exists but projects itself as reinvention. This is a Physical Education that detaches itself from the obsession with technique and the measurement of performance, opening itself to play as a space of encounter, sharing, and experimentation of worlds.

The account “Gesturalities, Bodies, and Spaces of Calisthenics: Weaving Translations in the New Secondary Education” (“*Gestualidades, corpos e espaços da calistenia: Tecendo traduções no Novo Ensino Médio*”⁶) presents a pedagogical practice that strains the boundaries between prescribed curriculum and lived curriculum, unfolding as an inventive translation between the bureaucratic requirements of the State Department of Education, the guidelines of the New Secondary Education, and the principles of the CC. The thematization of calisthenics, far from operating as mere technical content, is activated as a trigger for experiences, conflicts, affects, and meanings — a pathway of collective inquiry into the ways of being in the world through the body.

The choice of calisthenics was not the result of a unilateral decision by the teacher, nor merely the application of the learning expectations imposed by the official curriculum. It

⁶ Santos Júnior, F. N. (2023). *Gestualidades, corpos e espaços da calistenia: Tecendo traduções no Novo Ensino Médio*. EE Professor Tenente Ariston de Oliveira. GPEF. <https://www.gpef.fe.usp.br/2024/04/14/santos-junior-f-n-gestualidades-corpos-e-espacos-da-calistenia-tecendo-traducoes-no-novo-ensino-medio-ee-professor-tenente-ariston-de-oliveira-sao-paulo-sp-2023/>

emerged from the students themselves, especially the boys who were already practicing the modality spontaneously in school spaces such as the hallways and classroom desks. This fact is relevant because it inscribes the body as both the starting point and the language of the thematization. The school, in this context, assumes a place of listening and resonance with youth ways of life, without thereby losing its function in presenting the world — of making knowledge common, of problematizing, and of denaturalizing meanings (Masschelein & Simons, 2018).

From the outset, the work relies on the creation of questions rather than the delivery of answers. The extensive list of questions developed by the students themselves functions as the articulating axis of the proposal, opening the field of collective inquiry and displacing the teacher's role from that of explainer to that of provocateur of other experiences of the self. Knowledge about calisthenics is produced in the crossing between videos, lived experiences, encounters with practitioners of the modality, personal accounts, bodily experimentations, and debates on gender, aesthetics, body, media, and territory. It is a pedagogy of contagion, in which knowledges circulate, rub against one another, and displace themselves in network.

The political dimension of the practice manifests itself forcefully, especially in the discussions about women's participation, the normativity of muscular bodies, the codes of the "fitness body," and the unequal distribution of public spaces. The students' reactions to videos of women practicing calisthenics, the disauthorizing remarks, and the tense silences are thematized in class not through moral lessons but by means of an ethical work of listening and repositioning. The gesture of one female student, executing an exercise on the bar with a smile while her peers struggle to keep their grip on the apparatus, operates as a fissure in the discourses of male physical superiority. The female body is not only a theme: it is practice, presence, and potency.

The school experiences are expanded through pedagogical outings to Parque Santo Dias, near the school in the periphery, and to Parque Ibirapuera, in the central region of São Paulo — spaces where students encounter calisthenics practitioners of various ages and styles. The presence of elderly people, with bodies distant from hegemonic youth yet full of vigor and knowledge, deconstructs dominant imaginaries and inscribes other forms of subjectivity. The account of these encounters conveys a pedagogy of affect and listening, in which knowledge is constructed "eye to eye," in shared sweat, and in the collective vibration before each achievement.

Finally, the proposal inscribes itself as a powerful exercise of critique, not in the sense of denunciation but as an ascetic practice of the invention of the self and of the common. By thematizing calisthenics, the project questions what a body can do, who can practice, what is learned in movement, where gestures come from, and what meanings traverse them. The account offers an example of how the school can reinvent itself as a space of world-creation when it allows itself to be traversed by the forces of difference and of life.

To conclude our analyses, we present the account “Sport as a Right of Diverse Bodies” (*“O esporte enquanto direito dos corpos diversos”*), developed with a Youth and Adult Education (EJA) class. The pedagogical proposal described therein reveals a profound commitment to the deconstruction of norms and the affirmation of bodies historically subalternized. More than a study of sport, it is a practice that interrogates the ways in which certain bodies are enabled or disauthorized to participate in bodily practices on the basis of aesthetic, age, disability, or gender and sexuality criteria. The Physical Education class is thus transformed into a field of symbolic, sensible, and political dispute.

The thematization begins with a simple question: *“Are you satisfied with your body?”* — a question that quickly mobilizes dissatisfactions, internalized standards, and desires for aesthetic modification. From there, the work unfolds into multiple tensions. Google image searches lay bare the fatphobic, racist, and cisnormative standards that still structure the representations of “beautiful bodies”. The discussions then come to be traversed by news reports, videos, spontaneous remarks, and the students’ own analyses, establishing a collective process of critique, displacement, and elaboration.

Next, bodily practices are taken as a field for the affirmation of other bodies. Analyses of Olympic athletes highlight the morphological diversity across modalities; videos on elderly people and adapted volleyball reveal the potency of aging bodies; games against the senior team from SESC confront, in practice, the idea that youth is equivalent to physical superiority. The students’ astonishment at the performance of the elderly not only breaks stereotypes but also reconfigures the perception of what it means to play, learn, and compete. It is a process of

⁷ Martins, J. C. J. (2022). *O esporte enquanto direito dos corpos diversos*. CIEJA Aluna Jéssica Nunes Herculano. GPEF. <https://www.gpef.fe.usp.br/2024/01/06/martins-j-c-j-o-esporte-enquanto-direito-dos-corpos-diversos-cieja-aluna-jessica-nunes-herculano-sao-paulo-sp-2022/>

critique that is carried out through the body and that, in the moment of the class, redefines affects, gestures, and modes of being together.

The proposal also thematizes disability in a careful way, provoking displacements in the students' perception. Paralympic boccia and goalball are experienced with creative adaptations, from balls made with balloons and sand to helmets with spoons, simulating support devices. These adaptations, however, are not treated as exceptions or concessions but as constitutive possibilities of participation. The presence of students with disabilities and their specific ways of playing is embraced as a legitimate variation of the sporting body, sustaining an implicit critique of the normalization that has traditionally marked the field of Physical Education.

The collective dimension of learning manifests itself forcefully in the strategies of inclusion. The more experienced students in volleyball themselves take on the role of facilitators, adjusting plays and rhythms to allow everyone's participation. Sport, in this context, is not measured by performance but by the capacity to sustain bonds and to create an environment in which different bodies can appear and act without censorship. The lived experiences on the official court, the visit to the Brazilian Paralympic Center, and the exchanges with athletes and coaches reinforce this process of world-expansion and the recognition of difference as value.

The debate on LGBTQIA+ bodies marks another point of the proposal. Drawing on videos and accounts, the students reflect on the mechanisms of exclusion that affect these subjects in the field of sport, not because of their motor skills but due to the crossings of gender, sexuality, and prejudice. The choice to preserve the silence of a trans student in the class, respecting her privacy, does not empty the debate; on the contrary, it inscribes it within an ethics of care and listening, showing that inclusion is achieved not only through discourse but also through attentiveness to contexts and affects.

Here, critique is realized in an ascetic manner, in the Foucauldian sense — not as abstract negation but as a patient and situated work of transforming the ways of seeing, speaking, playing, and including. Each proposed lived experience — from the street to the court, from improvisation to institutional visit — articulates knowledge and experience, gesture and reflection. The body ceases to be merely an object of technique to become a surface of inscription of rights, histories, and struggles. At the end of the thematization, what is affirmed is not only the right to sport but the right to exist fully in the games of life.

Conclusion

The analysis of the accounts of pedagogical practices gathered in this work reveals a powerful and diverse fabric of experiences which, although singular in their contexts and strategies, share a common axis: the wager on a Physical Education curriculum constructed in encounter with subjects, at the edges of the instituted, and in openness to becoming. These accounts are not organized around a model to be replicated but as experiences that activate ascetic critique — not as a gesture of judgment but as the creation of other possibilities of existence in school. It is in this territory that it becomes possible to recognize the emergence of an ascetic critique, formulated in the articulation between the notions of critique and ascesis presented by the philosopher Michel Foucault and their relation to the CC, especially in the way it inscribes itself in the body, in language, and in pedagogical relations.

In all the accounts, it is clear that critique is not an objective to be achieved but a mode of operating pedagogy. It is provoked by the problematizations posed by teachers and students and manifests itself in lived experiences: in bodies that put themselves at risk, in words that interrupt what is foreseen, in gestures that reconfigure the organization of space. It is precisely there that critique as ascesis becomes possible, contributing to moments such as these allowing the school to cease being a place of certainties and to become a field of experiences, of exposure, and of reinvention of the subject.

To traverse everyday school life with a sensitive listening, to problematize what emerges from relations and from bodies in class, to value lived experiences as a form of thought, and to produce displacements that touch the subject: this is the wager of the CC as a field of exercising critique as ascesis. Instead of normalizing knowledge or regulating behavior, it is a matter of cultivating a creative attitude toward life, difference, and education. By articulating philosophies of difference with situated pedagogical practices, the text sought to show that planning is not a script to be fulfilled but an ethical, aesthetic, and political gesture that reinvents itself in the immanence of the encounter with students, with bodily practices, their practitioners and modes of life, and with the world. Critique as ascesis, in this context, is neither judgment nor isolation but implication — a way of living and teaching that makes of practice in Education an act of freedom in the face of instituted limits and of invention of the self, of the other, and of bodily practices.

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