

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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In the history of pedagogical ideas, we can identify, in the 1970s and the following years of the XX century, the development of analyses of the role of education in capitalist societies (central and peripheral) as well as the gradual creation of pedagogical proposals (which should guide educational practices) of “critical” character. It did not take long for these analyses and proposals to be discussed, assimilated, and incorporated into discussions on the specific field of Physical Education (SOARES *et al.*; 1992; KUNZ, 1991). This took place at distinct times and according to distinct characteristics, in addition to specific theoretical influences, in different countries. We may identify nations, such as those portrayed in this special issue, where critical pedagogy became part of the pedagogical debate on the area (TINNING, 1985; KIRK, 1986; DEVÍS-DEVÍS, 2006). In this case, we can also perceive differences, because, in some places, this thought became quite influential (both in the pedagogical debate itself and in public policies); in others, it remained more peripheral.

Despite differences, rarely small or negligible, we can identify common traits that somehow justify the (self-)adjectivizing of “critical” assumed by these analyses and proposals. Moreover, we can observe recurring influential authors (from the pedagogy field, such as Paulo Freire, from sociology, such as Pierre Bourdieu, among others), which, however, does not mean there is unity of thought. Rather, there has been a common concern with analyzing and denouncing how educational systems, unlike the pronouncements of official policy, continued to contribute to processes of social reproduction and, therefore, to inequality and injustice present in these societies. Critical pedagogies are concerned with making educational systems collaborate with processes for overcoming the inequities and injustice, which is only possible with major social transformations (KIRK, 2019).

Let us leave aside, at this moment, the discussion on the reasons why this pedagogical thought emerged and strengthened precisely in those years. For our purposes, in this special issue, what matters is to discuss its current reality and to put its future into perspective. Thus, how much of the critical pedagogical thought has been effectively implemented in educational practices in different countries? What are the difficulties in this regard? What are the accomplished reinventions? How much of critical pedagogy has been incorporated into higher education in Physical Education? How is this presence characterized? What is the degree of success of critical pedagogies in collaborating with social transformation processes? How has

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critical pedagogy been responding to “post” questions (post-modern, post-structuralist...) and to the linguistic turn (from the hermeneutic, neopragmatist, Habermasian perspective...) that had questioned epistemological principles of such tradition? Can critical pedagogy give hope for the critique and subversion of renewed neoliberal governmentality and its unregulated, precarious, and privatizing impacts within the universe of Physical Education, of body, sports, and health-related practices? Would it be able to do so?

These are tricky questions (and certainly uncomfortable), but also relevant to predicting the future of critical pedagogy in physical education. Seeking answers to these questions can prompt critical pedagogues to strive to (re)think and evaluate how to face the challenges that the social reality movement has been posing.

Our objective is to encourage a reflection on the critical pedagogy of Physical Education, considering what has been produced in literature published in English, German, and also in Brazilian Portuguese. To do so, we invited colleagues who, from different parts in the world, have been working with this tradition.

In David Kirk’s article, based on his experience in the United Kingdom and Australia, the author considers the possibility of being critical in relation to critical pedagogy itself. To this end, he mentioned five aspects required for its creation, aiming at being self-conscious and self-critical concerning its own purposes, avoiding some traps (such as indoctrination, abstraction, and arrogance) that may diminish its effectiveness as much as its reputation. Considering these circumstances, Kirk believes that the task of critical pedagogy is to provide the necessary literacy to question the contemporary precariousness, also producing pedagogical learnings that empower young people living in circumstances harmful to their well-being and quality of life.

From Australia, we have the collaboration of Chris Hickey, Amanda Mooney, and Laura Alfrey, whose article questions the impact of critical pedagogies on school curricular practices. The authors explore how the critical promises of Physical Education can play a key role in interrupting discourses and practices that convey social injustices that subjugate people. In this context, they considered that the implementation of critical pedagogy in school practices should be translated into a political agenda that encourages the critical disposition in favor of social justice within the Physical Education field.

Still from Oceania, there are two more articles, both written by colleagues at the University of Auckland, in New Zealand. In the first of them, Rod Philpot, Wayne Smith, and Alan Ovens made a literature review on the presence of critical pedagogy in the context of higher education of Physical Education teachers. In this process, they also analyzed critical pedagogy in contemporary educational practices. The authors conclude, on the one hand, that relationships between teachers and students, at the beginning of the program, should be established based on trust/care. On the other hand, bonding between higher education teachers and the broader community that teaches Physical Education is important because it provides the necessary conditions to incorporate critical pedagogies into the initial phase of training. In their turn, in the article by Katie Fitzpatrick and Darren Powell, the authors reflected on the connections between the pedagogical work and neoliberalism, defending a critical pedagogy that makes room for counter-hegemonic spaces to problematize and challenge the effects of neoliberalism on the fields of Physical Education and health.

Christian Gaum, in the light of the German debate, discussed the educational potential of sports in Physical Education, reflecting on a critical pedagogy of sport that can contribute to the development of this potential in schools and, moreover, provide the pedagogical legitimation of the discipline. The author defended the view that sports are able to empower children and young people. To do so, we must consider the current social developments and the challenges that students face in an increasingly complex, unpredictable, and contingent “world of life.”

Sara Flory, from the United States of America, made a critical literature review concerning the pedagogy of Physical Education in urban schools, from a “culturally-based pedagogy” point of view. Her results provided descriptive statistics on this critical literature. The discussion suggested “loving critiques” that may be applied within the context of urban schools, a perspective that aims at providing alternatives for such environment to be critical and dynamic in a changing society.

In the Brazilian context, Valter Bracht and Felipe Quintão de Almeida discussed three epistemological and/or political challenges of critical pedagogy in Physical Education. The first of them regards the status of criticism in contemporary society, discussing the use of the “post-critical” expression to characterize the current critical position. In the second, the authors analyzed the conditions of possibility of normative knowledge in post-metaphysical times, situating critical pedagogy within such condition. In the third, they problematized mediation processes between the “speakable” and the “unspeakable,” between reason and emotion, “thought” and “movement,” in the context of critical pedagogy.

Two other Brazilian contributions complete the special issue. In one of them, Alexandre Fernandez Vaz commented on the revolutionary movement of Physical Education, with emphasis on three concepts that are mistaken for the very idea of a critical pedagogy in the country: body culture, body culture of movement, and culture of movement. After describing body culture, some of its aspects were analyzed, an opportunity to denounce the “non-place” of the body within this version of critical pedagogy and to claim, in the light of the Marxist tradition itself, that another possible reading would reallocate its condition.

Paulo Evaldo Fensterseifer, Fernando Jaime González, and Sidinei Pithan da Silva, in the light of Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, reflected on the limits and challenges of critical educational discourses aimed at social transformation. On the one hand, they warned us about the risks of a politicization of pedagogy that muddled the boundaries between politics and education. On the other hand, they reaffirmed the place of critical knowledge in Physical Education and their role in the improvement of the Democratic-Republican spirit.

We hope, with this special issue, to stimulate the dialogue between the different realities of Physical Education and critical pedagogy worldwide, separated not only due to distance and language, but also by cultural, political, economic, and social differences. We issue an invitation, therefore, to reflect on critical pedagogy in difficult, ambiguous, and precarious times, full of implications for school education and, certainly, for Physical Education.

We thank the editors and other members of the *Movimento* journal for this opportunity, who, in the year that accounts for 25 years of a victorious life cycle, have believed in the potentialities of a section on critical pedagogy. Hence, once again this journal has been the protagonist, playing a role that characterizes its performance in the sociocultural and pedagogical field of the area, creating demands, developing themes, and promoting debate.

Long life, therefore, to the **Movimento** journal, undoubtedly a journal inserted in the “critical” field of Brazilian Physical Education. So be it for many, many years!

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