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## RUGBY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: FROM TEACHER TRAINING TO INTERSCHOOL FESTIVALS

### O RUGBY NA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA: DA FORMAÇÃO DE PROFESSORES AOS FESTIVAIS INTERESCOLARES

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#### ABSTRACT

The school is an important environment for the development of physical and sports activities. Thus, to deconstruct the polarization of school sport, rugby emerges as an alternative to Physical Education (PE) classes. This article aimed to describe the process of introducing rugby in the school environment in the city of Pelotas/RS. This case study originates from an extension project developed to introduce rugby in the Pelotas-RS schools. Between 2015 and 2017, 102 teachers participated in the project, reaching around 9,600 students in PE classes and 995 students in the festivals. In addition, most teachers showed an interest in the modality as an alternative of content and wanted to learn and reproduce it. Finally, rugby was introduced into the teaching plans and viewed positively as an alternative to PE classes.

**Keywords:** Sport; Adolescents; School.

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#### RESUMO

A escola é um importante ambiente para o desenvolvimento da prática de atividade física e esportiva. Assim, com o intuito de desconstruir a polarização do esporte escolar, o rugby emerge como alternativa para aulas de Educação Física (EF). Diante do exposto, o objetivo do presente artigo foi descrever o processo de inserção do rugby no âmbito escolar na cidade de Pelotas/RS. Este estudo de caso tem origem em um projeto de extensão desenvolvido para difundir o rugby nas escolas de Pelotas-RS. Entre os anos de 2015 e 2017, com a participação de 102 professores no projeto, aproximadamente 9.600 alunos tiveram contato com o rugby durante as aulas de EF e 995 alunos, em festivais. Ademais, a maioria dos professores buscou a modalidade como uma nova alternativa de conteúdo e esperava conseguir aprendê-lo e inseri-lo nas aulas. Por fim, o rugby, além de ser inserido nos planos de ensino dos professores, passou a ser considerado como uma alternativa viável e positiva às aulas de EF.

**Palavras-chave:** Esporte. Adolescentes. Escola.

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#### Introduction

The school is an essential environment for the development of physical and sports activities. Therefore, Physical Education (PE) plays a crucial role in addressing the elements of the body culture of human movements using games, dances, fights, gymnastics, and sports, providing students with such experiences throughout their school life<sup>1,2</sup>.

In turn, sports in the school context is one of the most frequent contents in PE classes, emphasizing hegemonic modalities such as futsal, basketball, volleyball, and handball<sup>3</sup>. This priority limits learning opportunities and becomes repetitive and unattractive, often making students lose interest in sports over time<sup>4</sup>.

Assis de Oliveira<sup>5</sup> discusses the importance of proposing a “reinvention” of sport in school PE, seeking to deconstruct the promotion and hegemony of some modalities, enabling the production of specific culture for the school environment using diverse and contextualized practices. Thus, it seems crucial to break through the determinism imposed by the hegemonic modalities and provide opportunities for new practices.

Teaching and learning rugby emerge for PE as a possibility to aggregate and stimulate new concepts. Due to specific rules, rugby is a sport that stimulates motor and cognitive learning of new skills, in addition to those stimulated by hegemonic modalities<sup>6,7</sup>. For example, the rule that requires passes to the side or back demands a driving perception that differs from

the other modalities previously experienced by students, mobilizing a new motor and tactical repertoire<sup>7</sup>. Also, rugby presents some particularities regarding players' position in the field, which require different and complex characteristics. This need can be a teaching strategy, becoming a topic to discuss with schoolchildren and show them that everyone plays essential roles in this modality<sup>6-9</sup>, regardless of their biotypes.

Another essential aspect to highlight is that rugby indicates five basic principles, which are registered in the book of laws of the Game. These principles must be considered at the time of its teaching, as the principles of discipline, solidarity, integrity, passion, and respect contribute to citizens' formation<sup>6,7</sup>. Such principles can and should be discussed in class, encouraging students to understand why and how they are applied to the modality and how they are undoubtedly present in other contexts of their lives. In addition, rugby is considered one of the most practiced collective modalities globally, and with the commitment of the Brazilian Rugby Confederation, it has been in exponential growth in Brazil<sup>8,9</sup>.

However, despite the educational characteristics of rugby, some factors may hinder the introduction of the modality in the school environment. Considering possible barriers, we highlight, among others, the fact of having the image of a violent game, the lack of knowledge of the modality by teachers, lack of adequate space for practice, in addition to the rejection of the school community as it is a game which demands physical contact and falls<sup>6,7</sup>. Thus, to minimize these negative points, World Rugby, together with national confederations, implemented the rugby tag, an initiation modality to regular rugby. This is a version of the game without physical contact, in which a belt with two ribbons is attached to the waist of each player. The defense players must remove one of these ribbons to prevent the opponent's advance in substitution for the contact action (tackle)<sup>7</sup>,

Given how broad the content of PE is, the continuing education of teachers in this curricular component seems to be an alternative to propose innovative, attractive content with teaching methods that stimulate attention, perception, and student decision-making. Also, it is possible to address content that can be incorporated into the planning of educational managers and the promotion of new continuous training. In this sense, ongoing training courses provide direct benefits to students, affording new experiences and new reflections from PE teachers<sup>10,11</sup>.

Therefore, this article aimed to describe the process of introducing rugby in the school environment in Pelotas/RS.

## Methods

The present investigation is characterized as a case study. It aims to understand in depth a fact or reality, regardless of whether it is composed of one subject or more, a social organization or community<sup>12</sup>. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Superior School of Physical Education at the Federal University of Pelotas (ESEF / UFPel) approved this study under the number 3,325,785.

The introduction process of rugby in the school environment in Pelotas took place based on developing an ongoing extension project entitled Project Rugby Tag in Schools. This project aimed: a) to present rugby as alternative content for school PE; b) provide students with the opportunity to practice a different sport; c) contribute to the continuous training of PE teachers in public schools.

The project started in 2015 and takes place every year. It became feasible due to a partnership between ESEF/UFPel and the Municipality of Pelotas through an agreement with the Municipal Sports Incentive Law program, which finances the materials delivered to teachers during continuous training courses.

To carry out the actions, ESEF / UFPel was led by a responsible teacher and a group of academics from the PE course. Forty free places were offered for continuing education each

year, 30 for teachers from municipal public schools, and 10 for state and private schools. Chart 1 presents the stages of the project's development.

Stage	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
Description	Raising teachers' awareness of rugby teaching and practice.	Application of content in schools and organization of an internal tournament.	Interschool interaction.
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact with the Municipal Department of Education and Sport (SMED).</li> <li>• 8-hour continuous training.</li> <li>• Participating teachers receive a kit containing rugby balls, rugby tag belts, and cones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of content in schools and school tournaments.</li> <li>• Engagement of ESEF/UFPEL students in supporting and assisting teachers in their schools.</li> </ul>	<p>A tournament in the form of a festival among the schools participating in the Rugby Tag Project in schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four teams per school</li> <li>• Under 9 years old, mixed (M9).</li> <li>• Under 11, male and female (M11).</li> <li>• Under 13, male and female (M13).</li> <li>• Under 15, male and female (M15).</li> </ul>
Evaluation	Instrument: self-administered questionnaire	Instrument: self-administered questionnaire	Instrument: semi-structured interviews

**Chart 1.** Stages of development of the Rugby Tag Project in schools

**Source:** The authors

### *Stage I - Raising teachers' awareness of rugby teaching and practice*

The first stage took place in 2015, 2016, and 2017 at the ESEF/UFPEL facilities through face-to-face meetings conducted by a Coach Educator from the Brazilian Rugby Confederation and the International Rugby Confederation (CBRu / World Rugby) and by members of the Team-Sport Studies Laboratory (LEECol). The four-hour class was divided into practice and theory. At the ongoing training meetings, proposals to promote the practice of the sport in their teaching environments were presented, according to the technical support from PE students and LEECol members, to afford more profound knowledge and instructions on how to conduct a rugby school competition.

In the first stage in 2017, an online tool, developed by World Rugby (International Rugby Confederation), called *Get Into Rugby*<sup>13</sup>, was implemented. This application for smartphones presents several lesson plans and strategies to better develop the modality in the school environment.

The tool is divided into three dimensions: TRY, PLAY, and STAY. The present study was dedicated to implementing the TRY dimension. This dimension best fits the school reality, presenting rugby without contact or with modified contact. Practitioners overcome prejudices and gradually understand the rules of the game and the functional role of the modality (pass only backward, tackle, scrum, among others).

Regarding evaluating the first stage in the different years, questionnaires were applied to participants as investigation instruments. However, in the study, only a few of the questions were presented. From 2016, they investigated the following questions: *Why did the participants seek training? The expectation from training?* While in 2017, the first stage was evaluated by only one question: *Did you start using the online application?* This question evaluated the number of uses.

### *Stage II - Application of content in schools and organization of an inter-tournament in each school*

The second stage initially aimed to encourage and guide the rugby tag modality in PE classes. To this end, the LEECol team of trainers, following the requested demands, was present in schools that showed interest in improving knowledge about the game. At this stage, we attempted to guide students and teachers on the actions of the game and competition, aiming to prepare them for carrying out an inter-tournament in the school. The second stage ended with a two-hour meeting at the ESEF/UFPeL facilities to report on the process and apply the questionnaire with the following questions: *How many teachers applied the modality in their classes, and how many held the school tournament?* What were the reasons for not applying the modality? In the same meeting, the third stage of the Rugby Tag Project in schools was presented.

### *Stage III - Interschool interaction*

The third stage, called the interschool festival, aimed to offer a space for teachers participating in the stages of continuous training to compete with each other and promote more experiences with applying the sporting principles of rugby. The first festival, in 2015, took place at a federal partner school, while the 2016 and 2017 editions took place on the premises of ESEF/UFPeL.

The research instruments of this stage from 2015 to 2017 were quantitative and qualitative. In 2016 and 2017, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the teachers who agreed to participate. Using a script, teachers answered questions about their perceptions on continuous training and easy and challenging aspects of the process.

Regarding the analysis of the quantitative findings, calculations were carried out, considering the period from 2015 to 2017. Regarding qualitative findings, the content analysis technique was applied to explore, identify, approximate the meanings of the evidence found, and discuss the literature<sup>14</sup>.

It should be noted that the analysis of the qualitative information generated a substantial body of evidence, which was challenging to be shown in full. Therefore, the general results and those that indicate paths and offer instruments for applying the project in other locations are presented.

## **Results**

The Rugby Tag in Schools extension project was offered to 102 teachers from municipal and state schools in the city of Pelotas, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, from 2015 to 2017, reaching approximately 9,600 schoolchildren. Additional quantitative information is described in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Activities of the Rugby Tag Project in schools

	Stage I			Stage II			Stage III		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Schools	20	32	30	20	32	30	18	20	23
Teachers	31	36	35	16	34	33	12	16	20
Scholars	-	-	-	2.000*	3.600*	4.000*	252	323	420

**Note:** \* Approximate number of students who had contact with rugby during PE classes

**Source:** The authors

The following can be highlighted in chronological order about the main findings of the Rugby Tag in Schools Project over the three years concerning the application of the modality in PE classes and the implementation of internal tournaments.

In 2015, 16 teachers applied the rugby tag modality in PE classes, and two promoted an internal tournament. The main reason for not having an internal tournament was that the PE annual plan had already been organized. Also, we found out that 149 boys and 103 girls participated in the interschool tournament.

In 2016, 36 teachers reported having applied the rugby tag modality in PE classes, but without conducting an internal tournament, justifying that the period between participating in the ongoing training course and the third stage was too short, leaving little time for step II. In addition, 272 boys and 51 girls competed in the interschool tournament. Regarding specific issues in 2016, 92% of the teachers listed the interest in offering new content to students as a reason for seeking training, and 97% of the teachers indicated that they expected to assimilate the entire content of the meeting before using it with their students as the expectation for training.

In 2017, 35 teachers reported having introduced the modality in their PE classes. They pointed out that the main reason for not carrying out the internal tournament was the unavailability of further adjustments to the school calendar, which was already hampered with various reasons. Finally, 305 boys and 115 girls participated in the third stage.

## Discussion

This study aimed to describe the introduction process of rugby in the school environment in the city of Pelotas/RS based on the analysis of information from an ongoing training course for PE teachers. The main finding of this analysis was identifying more than 100 PE teachers from the municipal and state network of the city participating in the project. From the topics presented and discussed during the training course, almost 10,000 students had access to rugby during PE classes. Thus, the Rugby Tag in Schools Project seems to have fulfilled its purpose. Using ongoing training courses, the participating teachers reported having applied the content in their PE classes and were successful in assimilating concepts, and promoting them at school. As a result, the proposed training course contributed to the disruption of repeated classes, which starts at elementary schools and is often perpetuated at high schools, where sports practice focuses on the modalities of volleyball, basketball, handball, and football<sup>15</sup>.

We understand that cultural expansion in sports education is an emerging demand as well as diversifying and overcoming traditional teaching methods<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, the proposals for continuing education, such as the one proposed in this study, are essential to update these professionals, as recurring challenges in the routine of PE teachers are well known. These difficulties are often due to the 'lack of time,' making constant self-improvement difficult, and 'teacher isolation' minimizing the chances of exchanging knowledge among peers. Due to this reality, ongoing training is an essential condition for teachers' improvement<sup>17</sup>.

Our results show that carrying out internal tournaments was not a possible practice for the investigated teachers, even though they are proposed in the second stage, with the assistance of students from the PE course. However, considering schools and different contexts and the "[...] supposed inferiority condition of PE, as it is placed on a level where it is questioned or not valued as to its contribution to school education"<sup>18:153</sup>, our results suggest that even seemingly simple activities can demand confrontations and, amid existing difficulties, the teacher may give up making new commitments to avoid work overload. Furthermore, one cannot underestimate the reasons previously mentioned, such as the school calendar or the previous establishment of an annual education plan.

Regarding the number of participants in the third stage, there was an increase in teachers and students. This result is attributed to better publicity made by SMED and better knowledge of the modality and the basic principles of its practice from teachers and students in Pelotas. It

is also essential to add the demystification of the violent image of the modality. This fact comes to collaborate with the teachers' predisposition to apply it as content in PE<sup>19</sup> classes.

Finally, the number of girls involved in the third stage decreased from 2015 to 2016, indicating a greater need for attention on this fact. Our findings also point to the need to adapt tournaments to school demands, always promoting everyone's participation.

## Conclusions

The evidence from this study reinforces the importance of ongoing training courses as an opportunity for professional updating, redefining the teaching of sports in the school environment. We can infer from this context that the most significant contribution of the present study was disseminating the rugby tag implementation process in schools in the city of Pelotas. Our findings also highlight the significant relevance of the project to spread the sport and serve as a framework for future training actions with the expansion of teacher training courses in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The most important limitation of our study lies in the internal school tournaments - stage II. We believe that this stage needs to be either reviewed or removed from the process. Finally, another limitation was the difficulty in designing a long-term investigation generating a considerable body of information and requiring the authors to present the most representative correlations.

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Received on Mar, 24, 2020.

Reviewed on May, 21, 2020.

Accepted on May, 23, 2020.

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