
RITUAL OF VIOLENCE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

A VIOLÊNCIA RITUAL NAS AULAS DE EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA

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RESUMO

A partir da narrativa da interação violenta entre um professor de educação física e seus alunos, os autores analisam seus significados simbólicos e seu poder organizativo. A interação violenta é vista como ritual e como teatro que reintroduz a violência que o clima cultural, as formulações pedagógicas e os dispositivos legais tentam excluir do universo da escola e, de forma mais ampla, da educação de crianças e adolescentes.

Palavras-chave: Educação física escolar. Violência ritual. Escola.

ABSTRACT

From the narrative of the violent interaction between a physical education teacher and his students, the authors analyze its symbolic meaning and organizing power. This violent interaction is seen as ritual and as a theater which reintroduces the violence that the cultural climate, teaching formulations and legal attempt try to exclude from the universe of school and, more broadly, from the education of children and adolescents.

Keywords: School physical education. Ritual of Violence. School.

Introduction

This article derives from an episode observed at a school during our field research in the second semester of 2007. Participant observation was the privileged research technique, although, as usual, other related techniques were also employed: interviews with teachers, students and employees; field diary; photography; consultation to the pedagogical material of the institutions etc.

Throughout the observations, a certain kind of interaction between teacher and student at one of the schools caught our attention. In this way, this article seeks to address and analyze behaviors of ritual violence observed at Senador Sobrinho School [*Escola Senador Sobrinho*] (ESS). The studied case of ritual violence could be included within the broader category of violent interaction in school life; however, we will focus on its peculiarities to discuss three issues specifically: a) production of knowledge from a break with familiarity (which is almost inevitable when studying society itself and, more specifically, the school that we also attended and where, in various senses, we were formed); b) the meaning of ritual violence in the educational and social process in its relations with constitutive spheres such as religion and sports; and c) the relations of ritual violence and violent interaction with pedagogical or school theories that emphasize the control of violence, even of the ritual one, in the educational process.

Methods

We use the ethnographic method, which, according to Geertz², is the intellectual effort to perform an interpretation that comes closer to an understanding of the reality studied.

However, it is not the obsession with describing details that characterizes ethnography, but the attention to them, which can, at some point, be arranged in a whole and provide a new understanding³.

The effort of ethnography is to carry out a translation of the researched group's culture. Nevertheless, we cannot understand the culture of a group only as an accumulated historical patrimony. Culture is dynamic and constantly rebuilds itself from the interactions of social actors in a process of fights and contestations. Our effort is to present it, as well as a field of fights and affirmation of new meanings.

Geertz^{2:7} points out that doing ethnography "is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript-foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior." Therefore, we realize that the analysis of a group's behavior is the main form of culture analysis. However, we could resort to the student's' discourses through interviews, but the latter were not necessary because the analysis of the group's behavior provided enough empirical material for our investigation.

According to Fonseca⁴, the ethnographic method can be an important instrument for the intellectual comprehension of our world, but it can also have a practical utility. According to the author, the ethnographic method can and should be used in the education field in order to enrich educational practices. The utilization of this method helps us understand and denaturalize the practices and routines of everyday school life, allowing us to shed new light on the school.

Fonseca⁴ warns that the ethnographic method does not have a standardized and absolute model for analysis, as it acts with groups and situations that cannot be predicted. Thus, the ethnographer's effort is to construct a model of interpretation. However, Fonseca^{4:76} points out that:

"We can never predict that the model we build is 'the key to understanding' or even relevant when dealing with specific cases. It should be handled as a hypothesis to be tested with other hypotheses. It offers an alternative to open the range of possible interpretations, not to close the subject or to create new dogmatic formulas."

However, if, on one hand, the search for a standardized model seems to meet the proposal of the ethnographic method, on the other hand, we cannot endorse the misunderstanding that ethnography should be an open method without any references or principles. It is in this sense that there is a vast literature that points out elements that are indispensable to the ethnographic method. About that, Fonseca⁴ highlights: estrangement, schematization (of empirical data); deconstruction (of preconceived stereotypes); comparison (with analogous examples taken from the anthropological literature) and systematization of the material in alternative models as some of the principles for thinking the ethnographic method.

Observation was chosen for being an advantage compared to other methods. According to Becker⁵, the ethnographer has more conditions to test his or her hypotheses for being continuously present, different from in other methods. In observation, there is commitment and prolonged contact between the parties, reducing the possibility of the informant omitting or lying about any situation. Together with the observations we used a field diary to record actions, routines and some speeches that occurred during the observation.

We observed the classes the whole second semester of 2007 and, early in the observation, we identified the episode of violent interaction in question that took place

throughout the time we were at the school. As we mentioned before, we chose ESS because it met the criteria of our dissertation; we did not know that there were episodes of ritual violence happening there. However, once we identified it, it became one of the focuses of our observation.

The research in question is registered in the National Council of Research Ethics (CAAE - 0043.0.312.000-07) and was submitted to the Ethics Council on Research Involving Humans of Gama Filho University [*Universidade Gama Filho*], obtaining approval through legal opinion No 045.2007. Therefore, the research poses no harm to the physical and moral integrity of the participants.

The beginning of the research

One of the reasons for the rejection of researchers by schools is the recurrence of researches that only denounces teachers as “causers” of the difficulties of the school system. It is common for teachers from investigated schools to say that researchers go there only to criticize.

Investigated groups that accept a researcher may suspect of the content and visibility of the study. According to Becker⁶, the final report of a research may reveal that things are not as they should be and that nothing is being done about it. By disclosing the report, the researcher makes the deviation public and can therefore displease his or her own informants.

Although we were not conducting the research in places considered to be high crime, before arriving at the schools there was concern that the informants would not see us as researchers driven by the objective of inspecting, evaluating and criticizing the institution's proposal. Such a view could cause the social actors to fabricate behaviors and omit information. Becker⁵ states that actors may attempt to fabricate behaviors when they identify in the researcher the power to influence, directly or indirectly, the context where actions take place. According to the author, “One cure for the ill consists of convincing people that you are not important, that those who control their fate don't know you or, if they do, don't care much what you say.”^{5:77}. When we arrived at the schools, we had no trouble making teachers, students and employees realize that we had no association or power with institutional decisions. The fact that we were recommended opened the doors of the scenarios to be observed and weakened eventual suspicions.

In this sense, we had two options for negotiating our access into the field: a) entering the school with the documents and hope that those responsible received our request well or b) having a contact that would help us enter the school. We went for the second option.

First, we searched within our network of contacts and other physical education professionals someone who knew the institution or some teacher that worked at ESS. A colleague soon told us that he knew teacher Fernando, who taught there. Then, we contacted teacher Fernando and he facilitated our access into the institution.

We observed teacher Fernando's classes; he made himself available and was the mediator and main collaborator during the period in which we were at the school. Teacher Fernando has been teaching physical education classes at ESS since 1999. The observation started at the beginning of the afternoon shift, when the students arrived. It continued with class 701 (focus observation group), whose physical education class began at 2:40 p.m., and went on until the end of the shift. We stayed at the school after observing the classes to talk to students, teachers and other employees at the end. In addition to facilitating our acceptance, this strategy allowed us to observe more broadly the interaction between students and teachers.

Ritual violence

In the second week of observation, we somehow tried to put into practice what anthropology teaches about detaching ourselves from what is familiar. This was not a bit easy; after all, we were physical education teachers doing a participant observation research in a school. For us, the school environment was a familiar place. Familiarity can be seen as an advantage in the research process, but it seems to be contrary to the production of estrangement, because familiarity makes the everyday life “natural.”

A remarkable fact triggered an effect of “defamiliarization”, of detachment and estrangement. It was another afternoon of physical education class at ESS. As we walked toward the school’s court, we observed, from afar at first, a scene that was surprising; more than that, that astonished us: a student on the floor being kicked by an adult. By the speed of the kicks and the way the student writhed to protect himself, we realized that it was not just a joke. We saw that the student was being assaulted by an adult. Face the aggression, we tried to imagine reasons for that scene. As we approached the court, we confirmed that the adult in question was teacher Fernando. A teacher kicking a student is not a familiar scene, neither statistically normal, nor natural in any sense.

Although violence belongs, in a recurrent way, to social relations, the scene before us is not recurrent and, moreover, it is difficult to observe. It is easier to observe the dramatization of violence between children and even between parents and children. The famous “fighting game” seems to have several “functions”: body development and relationship, learning fighting arts, strength self-control in the fight and others. It appears as a fun and entertaining activity between peers and friends, but also between different people, such as parents and children and older and younger siblings, among others. It is a type of game that predominates among children and youths and, not infrequently, among male adults, sometimes in the form of dramatization of physical aggression. Its practice by females is more difficult to see or occurs more rarely. Its extension in space and its permanence in time may indicate a deep or functionally oriented need.

The question that arose from the observation was: why would a ritual of physical aggression be carried out in the context of school physical education between a teacher and a student, and how is it understood, represented, by the participating actors and especially by the students? We used the word aggression because there was one-sidedness, from the teacher toward the student, without any reaction from the latter. Violent acts without a normative possibility of response are frequent in rituals and constitute trials or processes for the learning of specific values (before becoming king, the predestined one must be beaten and spat on, must be disrespected and depreciated, so that he learns the suffering of others face these acts). The ethnographic literature profusely reports rituals that hurt, wound, cause pain and a desire to resist the suffering. The line of analysis of classical initiation rites in the work by Van Gennep⁷ was abundantly fruitful in this sense.

The definition of bullying cannot be centered on the desire that comes after the aggressor’s act, nor the aggression to which there is a response could be put in the category of bullying. Unresponded aggression, physical or symbolic, is common and has been growing in descriptions grouped under the name of bullying. In this case, would the teacher be bullying the student? Should the assaulted one manifest himself as injured, demeaned, humiliated or attacked so an act of bullying takes place? Bullying can be defined only by the subjective feelings of the one who suffers with the aggressive acts. It can exist only in the damage, physical or moral, to the recipient of the acts and should have a repetitive character, that is, an isolated or unrepeatable act cannot be characterized as bullying. A fight by mutual consent,

egalitarian, is not bullying, however much it repeats in time. The damages that each fighter causes in the other do not fit the definition of bullying.

We perceive a considerable difficulty in defining violence at school and that a necessary agreement has not yet been reached to construct shared research indicators⁸. Debarbieux⁹ states that a single definition of school violence would be a mistake in the scientific field, so complex this theme is. Abramovay¹⁰ points out that the difficulty lies in the fact that violence is expressed in multiple forms and understood in different ways. However, even if the construction of a concept of violence at school is complicated, Stelko-Pereira and Williams¹¹ stress that violence is something that must be explicit and perceived by the victim. We can see that ritual violence does not seem to fit formulations about the ideas of violence and mainly of violence at school. Before interpreting the functions and meanings of violent interaction between teachers and students, we will describe what we observed.

While the student was being kicked, the rest of the class was laughing out loud. Some students would point at their classmate on the floor and laugh; others would take advantage of his temporary impossibility of reaction to tease him with derogatory nicknames. Teacher Fernando and the targeted student seemed to be having fun too, because between one kick and another we perceived their laughs. If, on one hand, we did not know the reasons for that scene, on the other, we were sure that anger did not motivate the kicking. Certainly, the kicks were not for real, as it was clear that the teacher did not use force that could break some bone or cause an injury that needed urgent medical help. It seemed that we were watching a play, before rehearsed scenes. However, it should be noted that it was not just a joke, like the slapping of a clown, or mere pantomime. The student writhed trying to protect himself from the blows and even had his skin a little red when the teacher stopped. There was a calculated amount of strength, capable of causing pain without injury. The act resembled the physical punishment, supposedly measured, from parents on children. Punishment that usually causes anger, pain, crying and even humiliation. In the observed act, there was an important difference: the students continued to laugh until the teacher stopped and the student stood up, also laughing, and along with the other students left the court for break. We had the sensation that we had just witnessed a “realistic” theatrical performance, in the sense that the blows, though strong, were intended to create a ritual play to amuse the main actors and the observing participants.

Still baffled by the scene witnessed, we sat on the court. The teacher came to us, greeted us and we began to talk normally. Nothing extraordinary or abnormal seemed to have happened. The teacher’s reaction appeared to indicate that that ritual was normal, familiar and known to all. The fact seemed even stranger to us because we assumed that, for his law degree, he mastered the legislation in force that condemns and punishes violence against children and youths.

As the days passed at ESS, we began to realize that that scene was not an isolated fact. There was a recurrence of “violent gestures” or violent interaction between teacher Fernando and his students in virtually every class. The main gestures were slaps on the throat, bites on the scalp and nipple pinching, with the latter exclusively being done in male students.

We know that physical and symbolic punishment used to be part of disciplinary practices in the traditional school. It is not always easy to distinguish between physical and symbolic punishment. Is having to look at the wall for a certain time physical or symbolic? Is writing 100 times about respect to a norm physical or symbolic? The definition depends on the subjective interpretation of the punished one. However, in the last decades, the most clearly physical punishments have been pedagogically fought and banned by the legislation that protects children and adolescents. Many teachers do not dare to punish, such as leaving students without break, and others think that this would be a violent, unfair or illegal action.

When it occurs in families, physical punishment is increasingly hidden or concealed, and the news disclose cases of relatives arrested and sentenced for punishing children and, especially, when they cause physical injury.

The traditional possibility of using punishment to reestablish the balance lost through violation of a norm has rapidly declined in the case of children and adolescents. At daycare, for instance, a child bites another; the teacher promotes conversation, trying to show what is wrong, and seeks to lead him or her toward peace and forgiveness. The aggressor is forgiven, sometimes promising not to repeat the act. The assaulted one, however, seems to have only the benefit of having forgiven. There is an evident imbalance in the way of dealing with the act, because the attacked individual may feel he or she is not compensated. He or she would only feel compensated if he or she felt to be morally superior. Let us recognize that this feeling is difficult to emerge even among adults and even more among children. Punishment, nevertheless, was a serious thing that was clearly aimed at restoring the balance broken by a punishable act, changing certain behaviors and generating accepted habits. The famous biblical law of talion is the best known way to reinstall or restore the balance broken by the aggressive act.

If the context indicates a decline in punishments, especially the use of physical force, the observation at the school showed its repetition. It also evidenced that violent acts of interaction did not occur with all students, but only with those who were closer to the teacher and committed more disciplinary infractions. The violent interaction could happen at any moment: before school begins, during, after school, or even during the break at the school's halls. We did not know of or perceive any other physical education teachers, nor teachers of other disciplines, interacting with the students in that way. That is, although physical activity could favor the occurrence of physical violence, we saw that only one teacher of the area used it and that it was accepted by the students, who laughed instead of crying and who seemed to be privileged rather than punished and depreciated. The other teachers of the school knew and witnessed the violent interaction between teacher Fernando and the students. We must emphasize that they did not criticize his behavior, which shows that this way of acting was accepted not only by the students but also by the teachers, even though they did not use the "resource". Colombier¹⁵, when defining violence at school, points out that violence is, above all, born from a logic of exclusion. However, the ritual violence in question acts exactly in the opposite sense of a logic of exclusion. The ritual violence includes and aggregates those who are different, by means of ritual. Therefore, it is not possible to treat ritual violence as a form of violence. The atmosphere of acceptance and even of rejoicing made both the interpretation of violence and bullying difficult from the point of view of representations or subjectivities.

The violent interaction seemed to have two faces. On one hand, it appeared to bring students and teacher emotionally closer. On the other hand, it operated as an act of retaliation, punishment or correction on the part of the teacher for some disciplinary infraction. Generally, when it was the case of indiscipline, the teacher warned. The main warning phrase was, "Look! You really want to be beaten. I really want to beat you. It's a match!" At this warning, the students apologized to the teacher and the case could end there. The message that seemed to hover in the air was: I punish you because I love you. The violent act took the form of a corrective message of love.

The ritual of violent interaction usually began in the same way: the teacher would call a student with a sarcastic tone of voice, a slight smile and a slow movement of his hand. After that, the sentence was decreed, and the student just had to come to him. When the latter was reluctant to go spontaneously to the teacher, the other students would quickly organize themselves and take the offender to the teacher. While the student received the punishment, he was the focus of attraction and mockery of the other students. This type of interaction,

therefore, was consolidated in the teacher-student relationship and was recognized as something both funny and punitive: we were before a punishment that amuses or an amusement that punishes.

Only on one occasion a student refused to participate and did not allow to be led by the others to the teacher. On that day, teacher Fernando said out loud for the students to “forget that” but warned the offending student that he would not forget the refusal. He was saying that he only postponed the punishment, but would not leave the act unpunished. At the end of the class, after a long time had passed, the teacher slowly approached the student without he noticing and held him. Then, he performed all the typical gestures for a longer time than normal. Even though he was caught by surprise after the initial refusal, the student reacted naturally, laughing and joking, while the other ones would not stop laughing at the scene. It seemed that the teacher had a perfect notion of the moment and how punishment should be provided: he awaited an opportunity that did not cause anger or negative feelings in the student. We were faced with the art of punishing physically without causing physical damage or negative feelings, such as those reported in cases of bullying or non-consensual violence. The teacher seemed to know how and when the violence would be consented and cause laughs and jokes.

On another day, two students arrived at the court for another physical education class. They were part of the group of students who were closer to the teacher. We had already observed several times both being slapped and bitten on the scalp. However, on that day, there was something curious about their behavior: they entered the court looking at the teacher and pretending they were fighting. While faking slaps, they would look at the teacher, waiting for some reaction. Both were visibly waiting for the teacher’s reaction, because they fought lightly and only when he was looking. Teacher Fernando noticed and then reached out his arm and called them with a gentle movement of his fingers. With that gesture he decreed his punishment for the disciplinary infraction of the two students, who reacted with satisfaction, as they wanted that attitude from the teacher. The other students waited attentively for the moment of the bites. Teacher Fernando performed the whole ritual, with slaps, bites and curses. While he was interacting with the actors of the fight, the other students were watching and laughing as usual.

Violent interaction seems to acquire a character of affection, of recognition, of intimacy, and even of love. With their simulated fight, the students wanted to be the closest to the teacher. The analogy with violent interaction in erotic and sexual relations seems to impose itself, although, in the case of school, sexuality is left out. However, physical contact is very present and without it the ritual would not occur. There seems to be the rule that causing a certain degree of pain, that can be suffered, is part of the violent interaction. Murakami¹⁶ describes how exertion in running causes pain and establishes suffering as the will to bear the pain. Suffering is the possible pain to be resisted without leaving the race. It’s a consented pain.

Moura et al¹⁷, analyzing 52 high performance athletes in collective sports, pointed out that pain and pleasure are always associated in situations in which pain can be overcome. In addition, they stressed that pain is considered an indispensable element in the pursuit of goals. Gonçalves, Turelli and Vaz¹⁸, analyzing athletes of different sports modalities, showed that physical training values the pains and sufferings that end up justifying violence against one’s own body. The authors also highlight that there is in physical practices “a pedagogy of pain and suffering, to the extent that they are represented as normal, ordinary, necessary, uplifting and pleasurable”^{18:154}. In other words, punishment and pain appear, perhaps, as a possibility of a relationship with oneself, in the case of the race, and with others, in the ritual of school violence.

The present observations seem to meet the pedagogical chains that intend to ban pain and suffering, both in the teaching and learning process (to learn with pleasure) and in school interaction, and one of its most mentioned manifestations: the so-called bullying (which today has legal sentences that penalize it or, to put it better, penalize the school where it was committed, as in a recent sentence of public domain). Pedagogy would be situated in the civilizing process, as seen by Elias¹⁹, that reduces more and more the acceptance of violence in any of its forms.

Actors and participations

In the violent interaction we reported, the teacher takes on the role of the officiant, as he defines the moment and type of violence he practices. He also seems to be guided by the student's ability to bear the pain, that is, somehow he knows what the bearable limit of the suffering is. If the pain became unbearable, it could produce a reaction in the punished ones and a break with the violent interaction.

In the case of the students, we classify their participation in four levels: the targets, the leaders, the followers and the spectators. These roles were played by students with different characteristics. The targets were those that suffered the aggression or could be considered beginners in the ritual process. The target's role was played by a smaller percentage of the students. The targets were closer to the teacher, engaging more and participating intensely in the activities proposed by the teacher during the class. They seemed to have the right profile to become warriors. The leader were potential targets or candidates, as they had all the characteristics the targets had and were responsible for taking the targets who refused to go to the teacher on their own. The followers were the students who did not have physical strength to take the target to the teacher, but who accompanied the leaders. They were, so to speak, part of the choir. The few girls, who were also sometimes targets, played the role of followers with significant frequency. Participating in the violent interaction as a follower is a way to belong actively, as an actor, to the ritual of the interaction. And, finally, the spectators were the students who watched, who laughed loudly, with some of them even teasing the targets. The group of spectators comprehended those apparently weak physically, the shyest and the less skillful ones in sports. Violent interaction is a type of participation that engages the whole class, while maintaining the old distinction between those who act and those who watch, between the main actors and the supporting actors. Above all of them the figure of the director-officiant stands out, who occupies the position of teacher.

Participation as a target seems to grant a special and superior status before the class. Being kicked or bitten by the teacher within the ritual of the interaction is a symbolic strategy that would indicate greater affinity and reciprocity of affection or a more intense relationship with the teacher. Moreover, those who resist violence without crying, without complaining, and laughing are brave, know how to suffer and overcome, in the final integration with the officiant of the punishment, the obstacles of a hero's journey. Therefore, more than a simple fighting game, the violent interaction reveals a complex and organized form of hierarchized sociability between the teacher and his students, with the targets occupying the highest place of the pyramid, and the spectators the lowest. The director of the ritual seems to float over the pyramid and, perhaps, occupies another space.

Imprisonment in the solitary confinement can grant a special status of respect to the inmates that stay in it longer. After all, they show a high capacity to withstand the pain of their condition; in other words, they bear the suffering, they endure the sacrifice. Those who sacrifice themselves by faith, for the cause, for others are respected and not infrequently loved. Although in the studied ritual the targets are laughed at and teased, do they earn

admiration and respect, that is, a superior status? Even if we lack evidence, we work with the affirmative hypothesis as the one with greater probabilities.

Oliveira²⁰, analyzing the education of the body in Brazilian schools, points out that violence has always been an element present in this environment. From physical punishments, through some kind of moral violence in which a mechanism of public embarrassment was used, to the present day with a form of symbolic violence that acts in a more subtle and silent way. We have the image that in traditional education there is a “center”, regulated by more or less codified and more or less explicit norms, that can apply violence. Principals, teachers and monitors, if any, belong to the center. The violence perpetrated by the center can be reinforced by family violence. However, in recent decades we have seen a legal and cultural reaction to the use of violence in the school context as punishment or correction. What we hear is that teachers do not dare to use physical punishment, and even in the households physical violence has been either banished or become silent, invisible, shameful. We experience a cultural and legal climate that forces us to control the will to punish children and adolescents, although there are reactions to this dominant trend. As the prohibition of punishment dominates the schools, the “center”, which could carry out violent but legitimate punishment, disappears. Let us say that violence ends up without rules, without regulation and without a center.

At the same time, there is an increasing dissemination of the idea that children have never been as violent as they are today. Without regulation and application of violence by a center, does it explode at the least expected places and times? Would the attacks on peers and teachers, the establishment of scapegoats (bullying) have as a component the disappearance of the center in charge of regulated violence? Would children and youths have taken on the application of violence that was once owned by the center?

In the narrative we carried out of the violent interaction, the latter seems to come back in the form of ritual, dramatization, punishment that amuses or amusement that punishes and reclaims the “center”, in this case, a very special teacher. Let us emphasize that the targets of violence are the favorite, the best, the closest, in short, the most loved ones. One punishes those he or she acknowledges and appreciates. The others can only be mere spectators and part of the choir that laughs and mocks the favorites. Would punishment be a measure of love? Could punishing the favorites be also understood as a form of revenge or compensation for those who are not the “elect”? Or would it make the others jealous, since the punished ones receive more attention from the teacher?

Far from us the objective of denouncing or defining the answers to the questions asked. The violent interaction narrated reveals a complex process of social interaction and sociability between a group of students and a teacher that is highly appreciated by them and his peers. Perceiving the complexity in the interactions is a fundamental methodological effort for ethnographic research. The familiarity of the actors with their events can dim the meanings at stake. However, dimness may be an important condition for the effectiveness of the interaction. Is it effective because its mechanisms are unknown?

If we could simplify violent interaction, we would say that it operates as a form of sociability and organization of group dynamics, both between teacher and students and between the latter. In terms of organization, it distinguishes those who are closer to and farther from the central figure, the teacher. It creates a will to mobilize to be part of the select group of targets. Violent interaction pleases, generates a pleasure that is based on both suffering and mockery. It recalls Simmel’s concept of sociation²¹, in which individuals interact by their interest in socializing, by the emotions that the event generates. For Simmel, in sociation, goals are left in the background and the individuals’ only reason is to enjoy their own encounter. Some social phenomena facilitate this type of interaction and conversation

between people who apparently do not have affinities, as in the field of the arts, gastronomy and, in the case of Brazil, football.

The violent interaction we observed seems, on one hand, to have similar characteristics to Simmel's sociation, though less civilized than his examples. Interaction would be the sole purpose of an individual's motivation, but it also seems to fulfill some explicit functions such as repressing, punishing or warning students as to some disciplinary infractions during the class, in addition to acknowledging, valuing and giving affection.

In everyday school life, it is common for physical education classes to fulfill other functions besides the pedagogical one, such as creating a more relaxed atmosphere among students. The alternative space of the classes and the possibility of doing the same activities that are oftentimes practiced in moments of leisure, in the street or in the club, reinforce this fact. Another common point is the teachers' complaint that students from Brazilian public schools are increasingly aggressive and violent. In general, the theme of violence at school has been demanded and disseminated in the news, magazines, TV shows and specialized journals. What draws attention in this study is the use of violence as a tool of sociability and organization, thus calling into question school violence indicators elaborated little densely, that is, without descriptions that insert the alleged act of violence in the symbolic network of everyday school life.

Velho²² warns about the need to understand violence not only as something derivative, consequence and product of other social forces, but as a phenomenon with its own density and logic. The violent interaction between the students and the teacher is a sort of consensual game that reveals affection and respect between them. The pranks observed were played on both girls and boys, though in different ways and intensity. Respect was present, for at no time the students cogitate or claimed the possibility of performing the gestures against the teacher. In that scenario, the hierarchy was clear and the ritual violence flowed from the center to the periphery.

Violent interaction would not be a reflection of a form of sociability and playfulness; it seems to be a fundamental agent in creating this same sociability and playfulness for the group. To the students, the kicks, the bites, and slaps are not a form of violence, authoritarianism, or any other manifestation aimed at harming one's physical and moral integrity. Above all, the gestures operate as a kind of ritual that congregates a form of playful sociability through violence, which corrects, acknowledges and manifests appreciation.

Conclusions

The case of violent interaction described in this article could be interpreted by the education field as a practice linked to traditional pedagogy. Educators affirm that in this pedagogy the teacher acts as a centralizer of the teaching process and establishes directive relations. He or she is the center. The progressive education field has always deemed the traditional education as a ghost to be fought. To say that a teacher is traditional is an insult. The good teacher seems to be the one who speaks against tradition.

In physical education, the traditional pedagogy has gained nomenclatures such as sports-oriented, mechanistic and technicist. These accusatory names were given by proponents of an alternative intervention in which there was no authoritarianism at all and the classes focused not only on sports technique, motor learning, or motor development. Classes without violence, without performance hierarchies, without competition, without discipline, without suffering and with pleasure.

The narrative of violent interaction seems to meet criticisms of traditional pedagogy and to question alternative, non-traditional or progressive proposals. Violence returns in

interaction disguised as ritual, dramatization, where sacrifice is consented, suffering, accepted. Against innocent postulations about pleasure, it replaces pleasure with possible suffering. In the case analyzed, students and teachers engage in a process of consensual violence, in which it gains contours and meanings of organization and recognition. Teachers and the school community witness the aggressions and do not stand against it. Do they accept the return of what is being excluded? Could violent interaction help us rethink the paradox in force between the repression of school violence and the repeated assertion that the school is increasingly violent?

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