

THE PLACE OF DIFFERENCE: CHALLENGES TO SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper proposes a reflection about the exclusion/inclusion pair in modern society and discusses its implications and consequences to the pedagogical practices concerning Physical Education. To that end, the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman is adopted as a guide for the analysis. The study is concluded with some ambiguities and challenges to the inclusive practices in contemporary society.

Keywords: Physical Education; Inclusive Practices; Exclusion/Inclusion.

Introduction

In recent years, established intellectuals such as Foucault, Adorno, Deleuze, Thompson, Certeau, Elias, Pierce, Merlau-Ponty, and Bourdieu, among others, have been frequently used to substantiate studies about various aspects which (in)directly affect us as a knowledge and intervention area. This movement shows us the plurality of theoretical perspectives and, consequently, of policies which coexist today, sometimes not very harmoniously, in the field of Physical Education. Inspired by this theoretical diversification, the article considers the sociology of one of the most prominent thinkers of contemporary society. We are referring to the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Even though he hasn't written anything about Physical Education and, specifically, about those people that we classify as having special needs, his analyses can be very useful to reflect about the place of difference or "strangeness" in the world we live in. As a guide to the analysis, we take the consequences of the search for order (understood here in the context of the exclusion/inclusion pair) as a task of modernity. In this context, we try to situate schooled education (including

Physical Education) in its diagnostic of modernity, concluding with some challenges and ambiguities to the inclusive theories and practices that occur in the sphere of this subject.

Order, school and difference: from solid modernity to liquid modernity

As some commentators have been pointing out, order as a task was the metaphor coined by the sociologist Bauman to orient him in his reflections about modern civilization (order would be, as he believes, the archetype of all other modern tasks, as it turns them all into mere metaphors of themselves). In Bauman (1998, 1999), order is the result of the naming and classifying function fulfilled by each and every language. Ordering consists of the acts of including and excluding, separating and segregating, separating “tares” from “wheat” to structure and divide the world between those who belong to the created linguistic pictures, representing its cleanliness and beauty, and those who distort that landscape, revealing its ambiguities, foulness and ambivalence. What did modernity “do”? It takes upon itself language's work of structuring and classifying, because the modern “mind” was “born” together with the idea that the world, operating as a linguistic system, can be created from a work of separation and destruction of the refuse, the abnormal, the deficient. We can say, from Bauman (1999), that existence is modern as long as it contains the alternative of order and chaos, while being guided by the urgency of classifying and rationally projecting what wouldn't otherwise be there: of projecting itself, eliminating any kind of disorder or anything unforeseen. Giving order to the world, therefore, means endowing it with a strictly rational cognitive structure, where we know for sure in which way to proceed and, along the way, who the friends, the enemies, and the strangers are.

The sociology of Bauman (1999) demonstrated that the modern dream of an ordered society ended up (re)producing its opposite, that is, more ambivalence. His thesis is that the impulse towards order endowed with a purpose got all of its energy from being horrified of ambivalence (BAUMAN, 1999). Paradoxically, more ambivalence was the final product of the modern impulses towards order, which makes the deeper meaning of ambivalence the impossibility of order. In this text, we point out one of the “ramifications” of this modern paradox: the search for order created the need to exclude the undesirables

(while at the same time these should be included in the general denomination of “ambivalence points”). Exclusion, in turn, has always been accompanied by what should be included, which helps to explain the exclusion/inclusion pair. One of the poles of this binary opposition is always the positive; in this case, what deserves to be included and serves as a reference to the negative element, which should be excluded, since it escapes the perspective of a society that operates within the paradigm of normalization.

The elaboration and implementation of this “empire of order” has been attached, on the one hand, to the constitution and emergence of a new kind of state power, with the resources and drives needed to configure and administrate the social system in accordance to a pre-established model of order, and on the other hand, to the establishment of an intellectual discourse of a legislative character, capable of sustaining that model and the practices needed for its implementation. The narrative of the sociologist thus demonstrates the strong affinity between the legislative reasoning strategy and the practice of the state power (the State reasoning) engaged in imposing the desired order upon the rebellious reality. The planning ambitions of its political rationality were well harmonized with the intellectual proselytism's desire for universalizing. The State policy and the civilizing effort of the intellectuals “[...] seemed to act in the same direction, feeding and reinforcing each other and depending upon one another for their success” (BAUMAN, 1997, p. 225).

In the work *Legisladores e intérpretes: sobre la modernidad, la posmodernidad y los intelectuais* (1997), Bauman demonstrates how school was an institution (as well as the factory, the hospital, the mental institutions, the barrack, to recall the famous analyses of Michel Foucault which influenced the sociologist so much) which was functional to the establishment of modernity as the empire of order¹. We can think of this institutions as the space-time in which the legislative ambitions of the modern intellectuals and the ordering ambitions of the gardener State materialize without disguises. Schooled education represented a project capable of putting the fashioning of individuals under exclusive responsibility of the whole of society and, especially,

1- Solidity is another metaphor employed by the sociologist to understand the construction of modern order. It is not surprising that Bauman (2001) refers to modernity, obsessed with order, as solid.

of the rulers, since it is both a right and a duty of the State to fashion its citizens and to guarantee their proper conduct, that is, their behavior towards the rational project, and, along the way, to introduce order into a reality which was previously deprived of its own organizational devices. School was the headquarters where the values used for social integration were universalized, and the intellectuals (teachers and educators), who were the incarnation of the very universality desired by the supreme gardener (the State-Nation)², were the only people capable of providing the recipe for what would be a correct and moral life to those uncultured and vulgar people. Education, in turn, was a declaration of the social incompetence of the masses and a bet on the dictatorship of the “professorate” (enlightened despots), keepers of reason, manners and good taste. It is not surprising, therefore, that Bauman (1997), in that book, conceives of schooled education as the concept and practice of a widely administrated society.

We should remember that, being a place for the fashioning of (rational, centered, uniform) individuals attuned to the project of modern order, school had a sort of disgust towards disorder, ambivalence, chaos, in short, it dreaded everything which was different from the identitary mechanisms promoted by the national State. In modernity, it aimed for order and the development of a society of producers, making it possible for those who attended to have a “solid” education that satisfied the goals previously established by the gardener State. For all of those reasons, the educational institution has never looked kindly upon the presence of those undesirable strange ones inevitably produced by every ordering project. It even sometimes tried to correct and fix them, and sometimes to make them more efficient and disciplined. In the cases where forced assimilation did not achieve the desired success, these strange ones were either silenced or banished from the school walls (let us think of the situation of blacks, homosexuals, the mentally ill, in essence, all the minorities which deviate from the tradition invented by the gardener State)³. That is why we can say that

2-Bauman (1998, 1999), in yet another metaphor, calls the modern State a gardener, since, like a gardener, it attempts to replace disorder with order, to have useful plants instead of weed.

3- In a society of producers, school's contribution to the maintenance of order included the fashioning of a conscience (and bodies) for work, around which the individuals should forge and fix their life projects in solid modernity.

the modern schooling project did not set aside any place for differences and for multiple ways of life and cultural traditions arriving at the school. School was the place for obtaining an universal culture, which coincided with the very ordering and planning desires of legislators (educators and teachers) and modern gardeners. Reading the educational institution as another garden bed (filled with plants which need cultivating and protecting) and the teachers as legislators of “correct life” leads Bauman (1997) to conclude that the goal of education (a process capable of turning foulness into beauty or ambiguity into clarity of meaning), in solid modernity,

[...] is to teach how to obey. The instinct and the will to comply, to follow orders, to do what is required by the public interest, as defined by one's superiors, were the most needed attitudes for the citizens of a planned, programmed, exhaustively and completely rationalized society. The most important condition was not the knowledge transmitted to the students, but the atmosphere of training, routine and predictability in which the transmission of knowledge was to occur. [...] The type of conduct which agreed with the public interest would be determined by society preceding every individual action, and the only ability which individuals would need to satisfy the interests of society was that to be disciplined. (BAUMAN, 1997, p. 108).

Brazilian Physical Education, as several historical studies have had the opportunity to demonstrate, has not been far from this perspective, contributing, in its way, to the construction of an orderly and productive society. The attempts to implement sanitary and eugenic proposals, for instance, illustrate how the area participated in the process of building the “national body” - the plants to be cultivated – which is intrinsically attached to the correction/elimination of those individuals considered unproductive, those considered to be outside of normality. Vago (2004), Schneider (2004) and Linhales (2006) employed the double metaphor of discipline, as orthopedics and as efficiency, to explain the normalization processes in the sphere of Physical Education in the first decades of the twentieth century. In those circumstances, school was not very conducive to difference, to strangeness, to that which was not orthopedic, disciplined and efficient, since all that deviated from the proposed order model (strongly attached to the develop-

ment of a productive society) had its alterity unsettled because of the homogenizing pressures deriving from the school form founded on order. We do not refer, in these conditions, only to those individuals with some kind of physical or mental limitation, those which today are said to have special needs, but also to any identity (of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, etc) which denoted an intruder in the garden planned collectively by intellectuals and by the State with respect to school and Physical Education⁴. To summarize, in this kind of school, identity was not affirmed in the celebration of difference, but in its suppression.

In a more recent text, Bauman (2008) recaptures his interpretation of schooled education as an order factory, destined for the production of docile, disciplined, efficient bodies, and analyzes it taking into account the “transition” from solid modernity to liquid modernity (a transition that was previously characterized by the author as the opposition between modernity and post-modernity)⁵. The presupposed, but not explicit, conclusion he arrives at in the book *Legisladores e intérpretes: sobre la modernidad, la posmodernidad y los intelectuales* (1997), is that this conception of school and education faces a great crisis in contemporary society, initiated by the “failure” of institutions and the “philosophy” inherited from solid modernity itself.

Although even today States exert some level of dominion (including its right to include/exclude), reconfiguring it according to market forces and those of other political agents involved, there are no more enthusiasts around us, impressed by the dream of total social engineering, stemming from efforts concentrated in the hands of an ordering State. On the contrary, today's overseers are reconciled to the incurable disorder of the globalized world and individuals seem to be quite busy chasing after the seductive temptations of consumerism,

4- Chicon (2008) offers an important summary of the inclusion/exclusion processes in the sphere of School Physical Education, with emphasis on the people who have special needs.

5- If the sociologist employed the metaphor of solidity as characteristic of modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century (destroying tradition and replacing it with another, potentially superior and more solid), in the transition to the twenty-first century he points out the new aspect of the modern condition, this time based on the metaphor of liquidity. If solidity was cement for the ordering project, fluidity best characterizes the life strategies in contemporary society.

without too much time or will to reflect on the dangers or impasses of this kind of society (BAUMAN, 1998, 1999)⁶. What are the consequences of this reconfiguring of the State reasoning to schools? Besides the undesirable marketization of teaching, so overpowering in recent years, it is interesting to point out that, with the end of the ordering ambitions of modern States, schools no longer figure as “temples” of conversion and ideological mobilization by the traditions invented by the State, since it has given up the civilizing mission of creating hierarchies and promoting cultural models considered superior to the others. A coordination or pre-ordered harmony between the effort to “rationalize” the world and the effort to prepare rational subjects who are adequate to inhabit it (typical function of school in solid modernity) is what we should no longer expect from school. In other worlds, since there is no chaotic reality to govern and since the variety of cultures has ceased to be a problem to be worked around in contemporaneity, the exclusive role of schools, creating and selecting values backed by the state, can no longer be sustained (or at least this is how it should be).

Under these conditions, school could constitute a space-time which is receptive to plurality and multiplicity of meanings from the many cultures and plural values within the same society. This means that the different ones, the strange ones and the minorities (whether ethnical, religious, racial, of gender, or people having special needs, etc), previously considered undesirable, have a new chance in this kind of school, no longer indifferent to difference, to ambiguities, in essence, to the ambivalence which was always used to justify the annihilation of the “weed”. School would in this way abandon old strategies in dealing with alterity. Respect for alterity, for its preferences, for its right to have preferences, is an important goal to be developed by school and by Physical Education in current society. Under these conditions, only a plural school has something of value to offer to a world of multiple meanings, filled with uncoordinated needs, self-procreating possibilities and self-multiplying elections. Maybe for this reason it makes sense to say, with Bauman (1997), that the motto of today's school is no longer the classic “battle cry” of enlightened modernity,

6- This thesis of Bauman (2001), reproduced in many of his writings, would need to be tested today because of the new demands placed on the State (or assumed by it) among the world economic crisis.

defending liberty, equality and fraternity, but, why not, the promotion of liberty, difference and solidarity (towards the strange one).

From a legal standpoint, it is possible to observe, in the past 30 years, a series of measures aiming at the concretion of school proposals more sensitive to differences. Two examples illustrate the situation well. On the one hand, since the 70's, laws have been enacted and there have been reports of initiatives in several sectors of society aiming at the preservation of identity perspectives of individuals previously called deficient or abnormal. Literature has been calling these identity policies. It is the case, for example, of policies directed towards people having special needs. We may cite, still in the 70's, the creation of the National Center for Special Education (CENESP); in the 80's, the legal opinion 215/1987 by the National Council for Education was promulgated, suggesting the inclusion of the subject Adapted Physical Education in the curricula of undergraduate courses in Physical Education as well as, in the 90's and 2000's, a series of proposals and laws towards inclusion in the school space. We can mention, in another direction, the example of the quotas (whether racial, social, ethnical, etc) which, despite the controversy they continue to stir in Brazilian society, represent the acknowledgement by the Brazilian State that minorities or the least favored ones have either been excluded from the schooling processes or had their cultures and traditions silenced by virtue of practices whose orientation reproduced values (religious or cultural) with little sensitivity to traditions deviating from the norm. Social movements, in general, express these struggles for acknowledgement in the sphere of a society where the State no longer cares about solutions aiming at the elimination of ambivalence and strangeness.

Another aspect stemming from the reconfiguration of State reasoning is the collapse of its marriage with the intellectuals conceived of as legislators. In modernity engaged in building order, the issues bestowed upon the knowledge authority (its truth, universality and certainty) were legitimized by virtue of realities previously structured by the existing power hierarchies. While these structures remained intact (that is, while the interests of the intellectuals and of the State converged) and were under no threats, there was little to distinguish between the legitimacy of established order and the legislating task. The contemporary world, however, is not well adapted to this idea (of the intellectuals as legislators). After the horrors seen in the twentieth

century, instead of willingly trusting the intellectuals and their best intentions (we may think of the teachers, even those who are progressive), we have learned to seriously doubt their wisdom in legislating what is good or bad, their ability to identify moral issues and to make judgements about them. The mark of equality that used to be placed between knowledge, civilization, the moral quality of human interaction and the social and individual well-being, for which school (and intellectuals) played a fundamental role, has been smudged with the modernizing processes that have been happening for at least two centuries. The old temptations of philosophical and scientific reasoning to provide the trustworthy criteria of certainty and the universal criteria of perfection and good life are, today, questionable efforts. This new situation of the intellectual discourse is filled with unexpected consequences to school and its formative discourse. Its new format has destabilized, in an unpredictable but definite way, the comfortable alliance between power and prescription. We end with some challenges and ambiguities raised by this new situation.

Inclusive practices in Physical Education: challenges and ambiguities

Since the plurality of ways of life (cultures, identities) has ceased to be considered a temporary annoyance, and since the possibility of different knowledges not only being simultaneously judged true, but being simultaneously actually true, the task of Physical Education (its teachers and theorists) has moved from legislating about the right way to separate what is true from what is not in cultures to the function of interpreting the right way to translate between different “grammars”, each one generating and sustaining its own truths, which may receive criticism and revisions. Such a strategy, as we can gather from the perspective of Bauman (1997), makes school abandon the search for universality of truth, moral judgement and taste. There seems to remain no other alternative to the formative discourse happening in the sphere of Physical Education than to willingly accept that all worldviews arriving at the school are based in their respective cultural traditions, because in the social organization no longer obsessed by the establishment of the true order, school needs to recognize the property rights of the diverse communities knocking at its door.

The possibility of Physical Education facing this new picture lies in

the very same plurality and multiplicity of meanings giving the chaotic and polyphonic character to today's world. In a society where we cannot predict the type of specialists that will be needed tomorrow, the debates that will need mediation and the beliefs that will need interpretation, the acknowledgment of many varied paths to knowledge and its many varied rules is the important condition of a school Physical Education that measures up to its time (BAUMAN, 2001). We should not expect this situation to be overcome, as in older days, by appealing to a massive conversion guaranteed by the incontestable march of Reason, since it is no longer a matter of arriving at the best truth or the best interpretation (the one that would be the most ethical or more just by being true), because, with the sociologist, we have learned that this can result in more lies, humiliation and suffering of others. The perspective of Bauman (1997) would not foster, among the Physical Education professionals, the expectation of reaching a supra-cultural and universal point of view, free from all contingency, according to which they could examine and depict the meaning of what is true, separating it from what is false. The proclamation of truth as a property of knowledge, unquestionable presupposition of the intellectuals in solid modernity, is indefensible in post-legislation times (liquid-modern).

The new picture will only demand from the Physical Education teachers a much more humble task: that they be specialists in the art of translating between the differences arising in their classes. The great challenge in this exercise is that, being an “outside” observer, the teacher needs to approach the stance of those “inside”, getting as close as possible to what it represents to the “natives”, without losing touch with their own universe and meaning (which is also contingent and, as such, can be modified). Under these circumstances, he will be considered a good teacher (a good interpreter), one who translates the difference he is faced with more appropriately, explaining, loud and clear, the rules that guided his interpretation and made it valid.

The acknowledgement of this new function, while bringing with it the fear of disorientation and general distress in conducting the pedagogical process⁷, makes it possible to develop a Physical Education work contemplating the multiplicity of values. The challenge posed to

7-This is very visible, as Chicon (2008) noted, in the case of teachers who need to work with people having special needs in their classes today.

the progressive perspectives of the area thus includes the acknowledgement of all differences without, in so doing, dispensing with reflection about the diverse ways of placing oneself in the world. This is a challenge which becomes even harder insofar as we cannot, in facing it, declare to possess access to Truth or suppress cognitive ambivalence based on political option in favor of a particular social class or a perspective of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, etc. If we follow Bauman (1997), communication among different traditions (among the differences) would become plurality's great bet in the educational processes of our time. Faced with the countless differences that "write" the world, the art of civilized conversation is something that the school space is in dire need of. It needs to have dialogues with the "differences" it is presented with, without fighting against them; to try to understand them, without annihilating or dismissing them as mutant; to strengthen its own perspective (that of the teacher, for instance) with freedom to appeal to the experiences of others (those of the students and their cultures, why not?). Taking this into account, from the position of Bauman (1997) we take the following imperative to Physical Education with respect to the inclusion paradigm: have dialogues or perish!

In spite of this new conscience, modernity is, for Bauman (1999), a land of ambiguities, so that the current habitat makes it harder to act according to this new wisdom. This mentality faces countless difficulties in the current school practice, which is no less defective than its predecessor. We would like to finalize by pointing out two ambiguities.

- The inclusion of different ones and minorities in educational spaces does not necessarily break with the search for more desirable standards, thus generating forms of exclusion in the name of inclusive practices, since, as we learned from Bauman (1999), every attempt at inclusion ends up also creating its opposite, that is, new excluded ones, new different ones. The consequence is that some specific educational inclusive practices may reinforce and make the exclusion/exclusive pair more lively. To illustrate, let us think about the "despotic conceptions of health" which proliferate in our area (LECOURT, 2006). These discourses speak about the correct way to lead one's life and denounce the weakness of those who do not fit such standards. The case of obesity is a good example of this situation, since the search for aesthetic order in the name of beauty turns the obese into weed for contemporary society. As pointed out by Joana Novaes

(2006), “the unbearable weight of ugliness” generates hierarchies and new social exclusion practices. Even those having special needs are not free from such a diagnostic, since there is an ever growing appeal for their differences to become normalized according to the current bioidentitary models. In this way, what would be favored for human interaction is not the formerly deficient body, in its difference, but the efficient, beautiful lean and athletic body that culminates in the image of the paralympic athlete.

- The consequence of the decline of the legislating discourse and of state gardening brings new individual responsibilities. Keeping in mind that there is no longer a collective utopia to defend, an order to establish, all energy is focused on the trenches of the corporeal fortress. A careful look at the daily school life clarifies the preoccupations about corporeal appearance, which is connected to the primacy of defending and loving one's own body, so emphasized in different currently available prescriptions present in the hallways and in the speech of individuals composing this context. This source of action for individuals in their daily life affects school directly, as Ghiraldelli Júnior (2007, p. 19) reasons:

Let us look at the changes in students. In schools, students have put away the uniforms to try to be free, different, and they soon found out (or have they?) that everyone looked the same again: tattoos and jeans dominated the classrooms. The girls started to show their bellybuttons, with low-cut pants; and, since the bellybutton was showing, they decided to put a piercing there, to be different – that became sexy. So we find ourselves in a school classroom and it is like the school has adopted that standard as the official uniform: either everyone is sexy or they are not students. [...] But it is an indication that, in the sphere of young people's lives and, therefore, in the field of education, more so than in many other fields, all information and all opinions are increasingly articulated around the body – and in a more important way than we imagine.

Under conditions such as these, where being different has become fashionable, difference becomes routine, losing its old rebellious edge insofar as it no longer presents itself as a perception of the other side of existence, a challenge to here and now, a point of view favorable to utopia (BAUMAN, 1999).

Beyond this praise to difference and the inclusive practices, we should recognize the teachers' arduous task of mediation before such ambiguities. The praise to freedom of choice in this society does not limit the normative discourses of living well. These ambiguities point in the following direction: it is not enough for school to assume the difference discourse, but it needs to put difference itself up for debate. New forms of inclusion may, according to the arguments used in this text, be accompanied by exclusive pedagogical practices.

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