

# TRUANCY AND STUDENTS' DISINTEREST IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION LESSONS

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## **Abstract**

In this study, the truancy and students' disinterest in Physical Education lessons are broached. We stress some of the proposals to fight the truancy in Brazil (e.g. the school education by cycles and Bolsa Escola [School Grant] programme) and the goals that such investments achieved. Concerning the disinterest, we can think on the problem considering the perceptions including (a) economic and social subjects affecting the school education process, e.g. the need to work for family necessities, (b) internal school matters, e.g. how to organise and structure the school, especially the correlation of the selected education contents to compose the Physical Education syllabus with the previous experiences of students.

**Keywords:** Truancy - School Disinterest - Physical Education

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## **Introduction**

As a humanisation process, the education occurs along life in different socialisation contexts, e.g. home, street, work, church, school and suchlike (D'AMBROSIO, 2004). It is a continuum process based on how to acquire and organise the scientific and popular knowledge, simultaneously (re)organising, (re)incorporating and (re)creating such knowledge. Considering the aspects included in the students' culture is essential to think on an education process arranged for school education.

The popular knowledge consists of people's necessities and experiences. It is hugely important because reveals the knowledge and cul-

ture values of some groups, i.e. a permanent creation and recreation process, and meanings and contents are exclusively from the subjects in their everyday life. The scientific knowledge consists of formal materials, articulated and acquired from institutions (universities and research centres). Schools are responsible to transmit and select it and such fact is our focus. The school we know works with the known systematic knowledge as disciplines, being responsible for the people's school education, preparing them for society and professional skills. This is just a process aspect, though; the considered subjects are from specified contexts and their empirism establishes permanent dialogs between formal contents.

This plot is a spark to make us think on how the Physical Education (PE), within the education process, became a syllabus part which absorbs new meanings for the culture of human movement. In this wise, we consider the culture aspects involving young students as parts which substantiate the relationship with the school in general, especially indicating conduct and aspiration for PE discipline. Such aspects are connected to the object of this study, i.e. the truancy and the students' disinterest in PE lessons.

Stressing the cultural influence to identify and keep students inside PE lessons, Bidutte (2001) consider that subjects' personality effects, individual experiences, and school social environment determine the motivation for the PE lessons. Assessing the PE signs and practices for school time and space, however, can contribute to learn on youths as a type of culture and history linked to society. In this sense, integrating young people into school environment is quite significant and encourages composing 'young school subjects', allowing their 'youth condition' recognition to form the PE 'disciplinary code' (DEBORTOLI, LINHARES & VAGO, 2004).

Considering such statement, in this study we aim at establishing a dialog to go deeper into subjects concerning truancy and students' disinterest during PE time and space in school; significantly regarding school education period when going from Primary School to Secondary School. To do so, we reviewed the literature with new reflections on the data presented by researches which involves this study. The intention is to contribute to a debate, thus some lack of argument can be fed.

## Truancy

The truancy historically is part of the debates and reflections for the Brazilian public education. It is hugely important for public policies, in particular for education. The central point for discussions on truancy has been the intersection between family roles and school roles concerning children's school life (QUEIROZ, 2006).

The present law, which decide on directives for education in Brazil, establishes that the family and the State are responsible for children's life guidance respecting society and education. The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education in Brazil (Law 9394/96) is quite clear in it. In its Article 2, we can verify that

The education, duty of family and State, based on freedom and ideal of human solidarity, aims at fully developing and preparing the student for society, especially with qualification for work.

Despite it, one observed that the school education in such country rose quantitatively. Such fact, however, is not already full for all citizens. Such disparity is still higher respecting concluding all education levels. It means that the truancy still restricting our youth to a full citizenship. As a consequence, it is discussed and reflected by the State and civil society, in particular by the organisations and movements concerning the education when it involves scientific research and public policies (FREITAG, 2003). Such author stresses that sundry studies showed social aspects, which are considered as deciding factors for truancy – e.g. family disintegration, government policies, unemployment, innutrition, and own school organisation. In her book, she broached how school, teachers, parents or persons in charge, and students deal with the matter.

For the school, in general, the truancy is consequence of the 'family disintegration', family problems (e.g. poverty), necessity of children having to work to aid the family, absence of parents from their children's study assistance, especially drugs and unemployment. The responsible factors by the truancy, concisely, would be found out of the school. There is, however, a lack of responsibility, laying all responsibility regarding the students' truancy on the school external aspects. For teachers, the reasons for the students' truancy can be found

into family, students and school. Families are a focal point when does not took part in students' school life. For teachers, families are an institution full of feeling and financial problems, and if it were more active and interested in learning on student, we could lessen the truancy. For parents or persons in charge, the cause of truancy for children is the 'bad companion' and violence within school. When parents or persons in charge refer to 'bad companion', in general they state that this is due to the fact they are absent to work all day long. Hence, they state no time to assist their children, especially for their school activities and friendship. The conversation shows the problem is in the other children. For students, the truancy is not split from social life. Situations inside family can affect directly (or indirectly) their attitudes and decisions concerning (or not) the study community. In such situations, the students indicate: parents' unemployment and the resulting necessity to work for family; family problems discouraging the students to continue attend lessons; and real disinterest in study. Internal school factors are also stressed, e.g. fights, mess and disrespect (FREITAG, 2003).

Thus, considering the different agents, the data collected by Freitag (2003), reveals a fact quite worrying, affecting school and its relation with the society. Sundry government measures were taken for such fact at different stages to try to destroy the truancy. We can mention, for example, the proposals to organise the school in cycles and the creation of Bolsa Família [Family Grant] programme.

Organising the school in cycles is a syllabus policy proposal quite spread across Brazil<sup>1</sup>, significantly from the late 1880s.

It means a split with the traditional model of yearly school education which keeps in its standard stages, i.e. for each year one stage, its main characteristic. The cycle proposal presumes extending the running time and changing easily to suit for education levels. Shortly, the change would allow a reduction in disapprovals and, hence, in truancy.

Besides (and because) it is interesting while option for public policies, such proposals also start do appear within academic environment. There is a weighty and growing production on how to arrange the school in cycles for researches in education institutions in Brazil.

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1-According to Miranda (2009), other countries used the school organisation in cycles – e.g. Spain, France, Belgium, Canada and Switzerland.

From 2000 to 2006, 123 doctoral and Master's theses on school education in cycle were completed and distributed by means of 45 post-graduate course programmes including different fields – e.g. Education, Business Administration, Human Movement Science, Language and Literature, Psychology, Semiotics and Applied Linguistics. This amount of studies broached the topics considering different trends. Such topics are (a) implementing cycle policies, (b) assessing students' learning, (c) teaching–learning process in school in cycles (classroom), (d) opinion of teachers, parents, and students, (e) cycles, organisation for educational work and syllabus matters, (f) conception and creation on cycle policies, (g) cycle policy and its principles (psychological, philosophic, historic and sociological), (h) cycles and composition of teachers, (i) assessing students' performance and (j) cycles, i.e. impact on academic work (MAINARDES, 2009).

Alavarse (2009) bring some interesting notes when broaching the sub-topics, i.e. cycles and stage overload, which we are interested in to think on truancy. For such author, cycle idea tears the conditioning typical of stage education, from a school education passage full of disapproval threats. The utilitarian knowledge involving analysis processes, for which the approval would be a prize full of social rise promises, would be replaced by a fluid and continuous process. 'Hence, one can transform the school into a centre, developing learning without professional 'aim', neither social future already planned (p. 38). In this wise, understanding cycle school education as a period extension would be a mistake, especially when at the end of it would have a pass or fail. Associating the (controversial) automatic pass idea with the cycle proposal is obvious.

The wide Family Grant programme is other example of public policies questioned here to wrestle with the truancy in Brazil. Such programme also drew into centre the national public policies for income distribution. It was performed to ensure school education for children and young people by distributing grants, presuming that such grants would stunt the work necessity. A strategy politically questionable on income redistribution was hastily verified, and it aroused suspicion as to potential use of FSM election sweeteners (SCHWARTZMAN, 2006). The author do not question the necessity of income redistribution in Brazil, but he questions improper behaviour on blending such two policies, i.e. truancy control and income distribution. The criticism points to an investment for education without a positive feedback

and a way to become headteachers and teachers co-responsible for professional policies, supposedly considering they are not able to manage social programmes for income distribution. Based on the available data-analysis for education in Brazil and Family Grant programme, Schwartzman (2006) considers that such programme did not achieve its aim due to a focus problem. In such wise, the author take into account what the Family Grant programme invested wrong when establishing students in Primary School, since the Brazilian truancy problem is the passage from Primary School to Secondary School.

From some time ago, Rodrigues (1984) has shouldered the preoccupation and truancy problem. The author also considers that it is not a problem limited to some schools, but a national problem highly relevant to educational discussions and researches in Brazil. The Brazilian education academicians have been preoccupied with school-coming children who suddenly stop attending it.

In general, the studies show the school failure in two viewpoints, i.e. searching for explanation based on school (1) external and (2) internal factors. The external factors — particularly work, social inequality, child and family — are linked to the school failure. By contrast, for intra-school factors, the most remarkable are school, language and teacher.

### **Students' disinterest in physical education**

The Brazilian state schools have school external and internal factors which fall upon truancy. The disinterest analysis in syllabus disciplines, one of the school internal problems, can aid to build traces on truancy. The clarification on reasons students have not concern for some disciplines can help to understand part of the problems which trigger off truancy. Despite the differences, however, we start from the premise that the truancy factors (in and out of school) are related. The social and cultural aspects occur a lot in the manners to establish the truancy and school disinterest.

Concerning the students' disinterest in PE lessons, there is a characteristic making it clearer and more manageable. It means that the PE lessons in general are pedagogically treated by using body enjoyment activities. For other disciplines, however, students without interest can go unnoticed. For PE, conversely, it is easily found. Consider

a mathematics lesson in which teacher proposes doing 20 exercises. If a student, for any reason, is not interested in solving it, nothing stops the student from quickly mark any operation and doing (or not) any other thing not involving going out of the desk. In the case of PE lessons, if teachers propose any activity without interest from students and students choose not to do it, such refusal will be easily detected. Studying the students' disinterest in PE lessons, thus, consists in a clearer understanding to learn on school internal reasons, which result in its failure and giving up. We present now part of it, respecting the fact of not fleeing from this study focus and without the intention to show the more relevant or manageable research.

Darido (2004) published a research report on PE lesson non-participant students stressing (a) doing an interesting literature review concerning regular practice and school PE and (b) showing new data on the sources and reasons for PE non-practice. The author concluded a gradual separation of students from PE in and out of school, particularly in Secondary School. One of the factors which triggered off such separation would be the PE programme repletion. For the factors developed in Primary School, they are also developed in Secondary School. Such programmes, hastily, would be inhibited from performing the sport technical gestures.

Barbara (2007) confirms the interpretations of Darido (2007) and considers that the students' disinterest in PE lessons occurs due to an inappropriate way such syllabus part is interpreted. The PE lessons should not be sublime as the out-of-context practice or only the known theorisation. The PE would be a field of knowledge with a particularity, i.e. a conscious human movement. On this wise, it wisely intervening is necessary, but without losing the procedural characteristics.

We consider pertinent the reflections of Darido (2004) and Barbosa (2007). We stress, however, that due to the tradition taught students, school community and at times teachers usually see PE as a subject solely practical. It is often for students' immediate interests, e.g. play football. Considering such fact, despite a social construction for Goodson (2008) to the PE becomes fixed while part of the school syllabus, it still being seen by many people as an additional activity for school. Showing energy or educating students by using utilitarian focus, Rodrigues and Galvão (2005) reveal a remarkable assumption within PE academic field in the later decade. Such assumption means

that to perform broader aims and harmonise physical skill learning with intellectual learning, the school PE should worry on all content aspects proposed by Zabala (1998). Such contents are (a) conceptual contents, what students must do; (b) procedural contents, what students must learn; and (c) attitudinal contents, how students must be. For Darido (2005), the three content aspects are interconnected for good and are not subject to be dissociated. What can vary, however, is the stress applied to each aspect by the learning. Throughout history, the PE prioritises teaching its contents, emphasising almost exclusively the procedural content. We academically consider such matters nearly conceptual; nevertheless, in daily life it still has difficulties to select and implement the conceptual and procedural contents

Kolyniak (2006) also strengthen the argument that the factors involving school PE non-practice are linked to specific problems of such discipline. An example of this is the absence of an own theory, being it reference for all professional category. There are some publications preoccupied with what the PE needs and how to deal with the pedagogical knowledge known as body culture. Despite it is well accepted within PE academic field, there was not a great impact on school daily life. Some studies showed that such theories slightly affected the leading PE teachers' perspectives, revealing even less influence over how they teach (MUNIZ, 1996; MILLEN NETO, 2003).

According to Betti and Zuliani (2002), such situation results in doubts on the present school PE pedagogy practice from the own students. Such students, however, seeing a meaningless discipline, give it up and force to be sent back home. In spite of this fact, they carefully consider the body practices performed out of the school. This is sharper in the Secondary School, and if you consider the psychosocial changes experienced by students, the PE preserves the pedagogical model for Primary School (similar to the Darido's position, 2004). The PE lessons, thus, become meaningless for Secondary School, since it is not perceived by students as recreational and leisure activities, it is considered as a specific practice for sports activity.

From another perspective based on Aquino (2005), we could consider that the adolescent students have an opinion formed on PE, based on their previous personal experiences. Since it had success and pleasure, students will have a favourable opinion for lesson attendance. Conversely, when students record several failure situations (and somehow abstained from it or were abstained) their option would be



for exemption from lessons, stating they do not like the activity. Considering this, Aquino (2005) assessed the difficulties which teachers assert facing in their daily life concerning the students' disinterest. The lack of interest was related to skill level. Such skills, however, are obviously related to previous experiences. Similarly, negative experiences including fear of making a mistake were deciding factors. Observe that such line of argument consider school external factors. We consider such factors join and do not exclude those considering the school PE intrinsic dynamic as an obstacle to the students' full participation.

### **Final considerations**

The truancy and students' disinterest in PE lessons are not an exclusive characteristic in school. Clearly, external factors affect options to both keep and achieve success concerning school. Family low-income students have a greater tendency towards giving studies up earlier due to economic and social necessities. Likewise, as showed by Bourdieu & Passeron (1982), one can realise a culture shock when low-income students discovered the knowledge relevant to school, i.e. the school culture. Such univocal sense, still, perhaps show us some route diversions.

The Family Grant programme and its strategy to wrestle with the truancy are an example for us. Existing social matters which can keep children and young people within school composes the argument basis, justifying such attempt. The sense of it is basic; the government provides some income to avoid the early entry into the labour market and thus hindering the study progress. Nevertheless, as thought by Schwartzman (2006), the programme was not able to ensure children and young people attending school and their school development. Somehow, there was an opposite effect since the children who receive the grant (those from poorer families) still entering into labour market than those who do not receive the grant. Despite what media transmit nowadays (see the advert for Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – IDEB [Basic Education Development Index]), one cannot precisely state that after implementing the Family Grant the education in Brazil improved markedly.

If we want to tackle the truancy and disinterest rates, multiple strategies should be considered. Social aspects should be also considered since it is hugely important. The matters found within school, howe-

ver, cannot be forgotten. As Freitag (2003) show us, we should strongly consider the role and power of daily life for the school education process. Without policy subsidy for education considerable social and economic factors, we will have to deal with obstacles. An out-of-context policy, however, for sure will miss the target. As an example, we can mention again the Family Grant programme, which invested in the Primary School students, inasmuch as the main problem is in the passage from Primary School to Secondary School. The strategy focus must be broaden and consider all school dynamics. Both truancy and disinterest in PE lessons usually occur in the passage from Primary School to Secondary School. Considering this, we should observe that such fact happens due to previous experiences in students' life.

These are instances of internal school matters which should be relevant for programmes aiming at lessening the truancy and students' disinterest. The culture shock that low-income students suffer when they discover the knowledge valued by school; and, more specifically, the disinterest in PE during the Secondary School liked to prep courses. In such wise, we understand that the scientific production from pedagogy field of study concerning PE need to be rethought. If we keep only imagining a PE with a social and political relevance without comprehending our students' culture and what occur within schools, we will be only taking shots in the dark.

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Recebido em: 24/09/2009

Revisado em: 17/02/2010

Aprovado em: 01/07/2010

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