

Body practices in continuing teacher education: meanings of experience*

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Abstract

This article is part of a postdoctoral research done on the fine line between education, physical education and art, and addresses the relationship between continuing teacher education and the place of the body and expressiveness in education. The goal was to enable teachers in preschool and early grades of elementary school to grasp the educational and artistic possibilities of gesture through experimentation, sensitization and body self-perception. To this end we organized an extension course for preschool and early elementary school teachers in the city of Campinas, in São Paulo, where they experienced body and artistic activities. In a second stage of the investigation we formed a focus group to discuss and understand the meanings attributed to the course by the participating teachers. That allowed us to expand the fundamental discussions on the development of body practices in teacher education, understanding them from new meanings based on the humanities, which view all people, children included, as producers of culture, including body culture. Another conclusion afforded by the study was that the body activities were able to tap into other senses, becoming a significant experience in the continuing education of the participating teachers, who reported being moved and sensitized by the experiences, thus recognizing the potential of such practices to enhance their professional training and performance.

Keywords

Teacher education – Body – Gesture – Body practices.

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Opening remarks

In my experience as a higher education professor of subjects that deal with body practices in teacher training, my attention was drawn to the constant feedback of students who reported that the courses had contributed to significantly change their understanding of children and their body actions at school. A common report was that the body practices experienced during the courses had afforded them a new view of the importance and potential of such practices at school. It was based on such feedback from undergraduate students in education that I planned and carried out a postdoctoral research entitled *Education, Physical Education and Art: Dialogues in Continuing Teacher Education*.³

With the goal of understanding the place of the body and expressiveness in education, as part of the research we offered teachers⁴ in preschool and early elementary school in the city of Campinas, São Paulo, a course we called “Body, Gesture and Creation,”⁵ which aimed to provide an understanding of the body through experimentation, sensitization and the perception that bodies and gestures are constituents of the subject and of the social group to which it belongs and has access, thus deserving close attention and care.

Strazzacappa (2001), Leite and Ostetto (2004), Ayoub (2012) and Ehrenberg (2014) had already expressed concern regarding the subject of our research. The aforementioned authors also problematize issues that even today require broader discussion to address the interaction and contradictions between art, childhood and teacher education. Although some efforts have been made regarding the theme herein presented, we recognize the significant lack of research and action regarding the reality of the school environment to support new practices, whether related to the children’s experience or to the education of the teachers who will work with them.

It should be stressed that both in the experience with the team of teachers that took part in the research and in writing this article we worked with the concept of body practices materialized through body and gesture, therefore focusing on “the meaning of cultural construction and language present in different forms of body expression” (SILVA; DAMIANI, 2005, p. 24).

As explained by Le Breton (2016, p. 10), the subject inhabits its body according to imposed social and cultural conditions, rearranging them in view of its life story, and given that the human condition is corporeal, the human being “is undistinguishable from the body that gives it the denseness and sensitivity of its being in the world.”

This article features a few overall reflections on continuing education and an analysis of the results produced throughout the investigation.

3- The postdoctoral research was carried out at the Unicamp School of Education under the supervision of Professor Eliana Ayoub, who is the co-author of this article. Therefore, the article is written in both first person singular and first person plural, depending on the context to which it refers.

4- The group comprised sixteen female teachers and one male teacher, evidencing that women are the majority in the teaching profession in preschool and elementary school.

5- The course was duly approved for research and teacher training purposes by the Unicamp Research Ethics Committee, under opinion n. 2,619,981.

Continuing education: food for thought

Looking at the history of education, we find the idea of continuing education already included (implicitly and explicitly) in different educational projects. From the Greek *paideia*, the Latin *instructio*, the German *Bildung* – metaphor of travel – and the New School to the Modern School, continuing education established itself as a desideratum (CAMILO CUNHA, 2015). In Brazil in particular, since the 1990s, an attempt to overcome the serious problems of access to education and ensure the retention of students in public schools has led to changes in Brazilian education. However, efforts to re-democratize public education have caused an unbalance between the increased offer of places in schools and their capacity to provide good educational services.

Continuing teacher education is addressed in this research from the perspective of two concerns: with the quality of students' schooling and with the training and personal and professional growth of teachers, aiming to contribute to the development of critical and reflective teachers. There seems to be a consensus regarding the need for good teachers, and that a good teacher is one who combines the practical, reflective, cultural, investigative and political dimensions. However, defining what makes a good teacher is not an easy discussion. In his article entitled *Establishing the Teaching Position, Affirming the Teaching Profession*, Nóvoa (2017) offers us significant clues in this sense by proposing reflection

[...] centered on the concept of *position*, which has great potential to help understand the process of how each one becomes a professional and how the actual profession itself is organized internally and externally. I therefore avoid a reflection influenced by a set of "essential qualities," shifting the focus to a domain of positions and position taking [...]

Firstly, one must understand how to position oneself not only personally but also within a given professional setting. Next, it is crucial to realize that positions are not fixed but depend on permanent negotiation within a given professional community. In this sense, positionality is always relational. Finally, it is important to view position as position taking, that is, as the public affirmation of a profession. (NÓVOA, 2017, p. 1119, emphasis in the original).

Within this perspective, we stress the need to deepen the discussion on how and under what circumstances continuing education has contributed to the professional and personal development of teachers, in order to support the position taking referred to by Nóvoa (2017). In the case of this study, our interest concerns the relationship between education, physical education and art.

Undoubtedly, reflecting on continuing education necessarily requires reflecting on the teaching profession, on being a teacher, in order to grasp more comprehensively the setting and actors of this process. In this context, Camilo Cunha (2015) states that the construction of the profession is a continuous path that presupposes internal and external factors, manifested by ethical and deontological variables, professional identity, program design, practical and theoretical educational components, formulation at organizational, curricular and institutional levels, formative philosophies, epistemological issues, among

many other factors. Thus, it is clear that teacher education, whether initial, continuing or specialized, has complex problems behind it.

Faced with this complex context, teacher education has followed various conceptual and practical guidelines over time, according to the social, political and ideological implications of the several education systems, thus being subject to numerous interpretations.

In the last decades we have witnessed a huge amount of events, works, research, books and courses focused on professional education, in a constant quest to keep professional training up to date. According to Neira (2008), undergraduate courses usually lecture students on the need to preserve a continuous learner behavior. The author contributes to this reflection by stating that teachers, despite the efforts of initial teacher training courses, are usually unprepared to teach in the face of new social configurations, in which students with broad cultural repertoires produce a heterogeneous school environment. On the other hand, in a macro analysis we find ourselves in a new context – global, technical, complex, multicultural – from which professional (and personal) knowledge cannot escape.

According to Davis et al. (2011), there is a trend, among others, that argues that the role of continuing education is to fill the gaps produced by lack of time or even superficial initial education. Moreover, those authors warn that the actual teachers are not primarily responsible for choosing the subjects of continuing education.

In agreement with this warning, we consider both situations to be misguided: the view that continuing education should fill the gaps left behind by initial education and the fact that actual teachers, the main protagonists of teaching, are not responsible for choosing the subjects of continuing education.

The multiple tasks assigned to teachers require a high level of professionalism that is not limited to the domain of knowledge and teaching methods related to curricular components. The paradigm based on technical rationality that views teachers as mere transmitters of knowledge does not correspond to the principles we defend in education. We side with Paulo Freire in our belief that *“to teach is not to transfer knowledge, but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge”* (FREIRE, 2003, p. 47; emphasis in the original).

In addition to academic and teaching training, practical, cultural and investigative training is essential to establish effective relationships between theory and practice. Such practical, cultural and investigative training can be both imparted in the context of initial education (e.g., through internships and practical components of the curriculum) and, especially, improved during continuing education.

Camilo Cunha (2015) states that lifelong learning is essential in view of social, economic and technological change, and, consequently, of new educational conceptions.

The debate and need to appreciate continuing education stem from the awareness of social, scientific, economic and political transformations as well as the recognition that knowledge is not eternal. Recognition of the obsolescence of established knowledge and practice and the inability of educational systems to respond to society's demands have led to the emergence

of new values, the collapse of totalitarian, political, religious and pedagogical systems, among others. (CAMILO CUNHA, 2015, p. 137).

In our view, continuing education should be understood as another decisive stage in teacher education that contributes to the theory and practice of teaching, but also for teachers to collectively exercise their political and citizenship voice through critical and purposeful reflection. The act of learning and educating is continuous, taking place over a lifetime, hence our defense of the importance of meaningful continuing education that allows for the autonomy of professionals to define their own path of development.

Fusari (1998) argues that continuing education should be, as its actual name says, a continuum, in which teachers should keep up the theoretical discussion of initial education, now fed by teaching experiences. In fact, in our aforementioned “Body, Gesture and Creation” course, that was a point cited by the teachers. The sense of participation, drawing on the experience of their daily professional life, was acknowledged as significant by the group. Some teachers who had already taken similar subjects in their undergraduate studies mentioned that now, during the course, the possibility of inserting their daily experiences in the classroom discussions and activities opened up new perspectives that enriched the goals of the course.

In general, art and physical education are poorly or superficially developed with preschool children. In elementary school, the teachers of those subjects are usually specialists who often work in parallel with the institutional educational project. It is as if those components were not an integral part the curriculum, but rather followed their own paths, often outside the rest of the school project. They are usually viewed as less important and often understood as merely serving to provide relaxation, and therefore not essential to the formal educational process. Continuing education policies in these areas have followed that premise: quick, refresher courses focused on a list of so-called innovative practices for teachers to learn new activities to be used in the classroom.

In her studies on dance and body movement in school, Strazzacappa (2001, p. 70) suggests a possible reason for the detachment of those subjects from the others. The author states that “the notion of school subject has always been understood as ‘non-movement.’ Polite and well-behaved children were those who simply didn’t move.” Therefore, body expressions at schools tend to provoke the opposite of what is expected for institutions that value silence, immobility, a lot of reproduction and few possibilities for creation.

We believe that focusing teacher training merely on content can be a mistake. In their daily work with students, in problematizing social practices, teachers are required to connect knowledge from several different areas, hence the need for a broad and comprehensive education. In the current context, for example, physical education programs based merely on teaching the techniques and tactics of sports are to us the symbol of a reductionist conception, for they present sports from the single aspect of practice. From a theoretical point of view, recent trends in Brazilian physical education suggest going beyond this fragmented conception of presenting knowledge. The article by Bracht (1999) describes such trends in greater detail by analyzing the process of development of the

different pedagogical theories of Brazilian physical education in their broader relations with society, considering various current conceptions of the body and human being.

Our main purpose with the research process herein presented was precisely to provide teachers with a first-hand experience of what body practices can offer in the sense of being much more than mere recreational practices. We believed that this stimulus could later become a driver for the process of continuing education to resonate in the schools where they worked. Although our course was relatively short, we were able to verify its relevance as a significant proposal for continuing education, as will be explained below.

Body, gesture and creation: whole body teacher education

As explained above, with the aim of understanding the place of the body and expressiveness in education, preschool and early elementary school teachers in the city of Campinas, São Paulo, attended a course that provided an understanding of the body dimension through experimentation, sensitization and the perception that their bodies and gestures constitute them and establish relationships with their peers, and therefore deserve close attention and care.

For Larrosa Bondía (2016, p. 25), the subject of the experience is closely related to the subject who teaches and is open and available to the experience. In this sense, the subject of the experience “affects in some way, produces some affect, inscribes some marks, leaves some traces, some effects.” Therefore, the experience is learned in the relationship and mediation between life and knowledge. That is the point we believe to be important (if not essential) for the knowledge production process we were able to jointly achieve in the course herein presented.

The “Body, Gesture and Creation” course was offered by the Extension Program of Campinas State University and held in the facilities of the School of Education of the same university, in an appropriate space for body and artistic practices, with a total workload of thirty hours. It was divulged through our personal mailing list and contacts in teaching coordination departments and boards in Campinas. Seventeen participants signed up, fourteen teachers from the public school system and three from private schools (sixteen women and one man), and the course ran for 10 sessions between March 8 and May 15, every Thursday from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. It is important to mention that no participants dropped out of the course. Despite occasional reports of tiredness by teachers who work up to eight hours a day in their schools, they were active and participative throughout the entire course and any absences were always justified. One of the main difficulties of continuing teacher education emerges here: the excessive, stressful and particular workload involved in teaching small children often discourages teachers from attending courses and events outside their normal working hours.

In her book *How do we become teachers?*, Fontana (2005) and a group of educators she researched address the fact that teachers often need to work double shifts to be able to support their families and make ends meet:

Our reduced wages have sometimes caused us to lament the fact that many of us are forced to “double up” by teaching eight hours a day at school (as did two teachers in the group), or working another four or six hours at home, tutoring children who, for some reason, could not keep up with the activities proposed and/or imposed on them by the school (as did one teacher in the group). (FONTANA, 2005, p. 130).

Fontana (2005) also stresses that it is assumed that teachers aiming for promotion through extension and graduate courses will stop teaching to take on administrative positions as principals, coordinators, supervisors or counselors, an alternative often prompted by financial reasons. Recognizing and agreeing with the author’s considerations, we emphasize that from the very first session of our course we extolled the practical nature of our work with the teachers themselves and their sensations and perceptions. It was not a course that offered direct tools for teaching children, which we call instrumental tools, nor was it a course with an administrative focus that contributed to that kind of career advancement. Our proposal was promptly accepted by the participants.

The analyses were performed from field notes and imagery sources recorded during the sessions, as well as a focus group held one week after the end of the course..

Working with focus groups makes it possible to understand processes of reality construction by certain social groups, to understand daily practices, actions and reactions to facts and events, behaviors and attitudes, thus being an important technique to learn about representations, perceptions, beliefs, habits, values, restrictions, prejudices, languages and symbols prevailing in the approach to a given issue by people who share a few common traits, relevant to the study of the issue in question. (GATTI, 2005, p. 11).

To compose the focus group, we invited all teachers participating in the course. We explained that we needed a small group of four or five participants. According to Gatti (2005), focus groups may vary in their composition, not exceeding ten or twelve members. Our course had a total of seventeen participants, so we considered that about five members would be an adequate number to ensure good conversations and reflections, ensuring the effective participation of all, an essential aspect in focus groups.

We considered the non-instrumental nature of the course, which was aimed at the teachers themselves, to be one of the most important aspects of the whole process. We made it clear from the beginning that we had no intention of offering activities to be directly practiced by children.

As suggested by Moraes (2012), we considered it important to offer teachers in the course the possibility of undergoing experiences capable of making them feel complete, empowered, lively and immersed in a process of self-awareness and awareness of their own bodies and gestures.

The language manifested by the body is able to compose, in a dense and enriching manner, the arsenal of knowledge that educators tend to provide with their pedagogical work. Therefore, it is essential that they possess or acquire a state of self-awareness that involves body awareness,

grasping here the idea of body as a complex configuration comprising not only the physical, apparent body, but the ethical-political, socio-cultural, synesthetic, spiritual body, etc. What we allude to here is the whole body. (MORAES, 2012, p. 3).

Information about the non-instrumental nature of the course was positively received by the teachers, as exemplified by the following statement by Ms. Bem-te-vi⁶: “Importantly, it is not something we will ‘instrumentalize’ to use with the children – and anyway, what works with one class might not work with another,” stressed the teacher in our conversation circle at the end of the first day.

Mr. Ruy’s sensitivity addressed the same issue, in line with what we were proposing: “I can’t expect anything from the babies I work with if I don’t allow myself to feel.”

According to Leite and Ostetto (2004), there is growing concern at teacher education level with the need to provide teachers with a non-instrumental, teacher-centered dimension, helping them recognize themselves as subjects.

[...] an approach that aims to expand senses, listening and sensitive movements, awaken dormant languages, activate different spheres of knowledge, move body and soul, diluting false dichotomies between body and mind, science and art, affectivity and cognition, reality and fantasy. (LEITE; OSTETTO, 2004, p. 12).

Understanding this non-instrumental nature of our course, Ms. Estela feels challenged and describes the possible difficulty she will face: “I have a hard time showing myself, I don’t have much experience with it, I don’t know if I can do it,” says the participant with tears in his eyes as she recognized the challenge she was willing to take on in the very first session.

We recognized that our invitation was indeed challenging. It was a call to attempt new gazes, to recognize the act of contemplating, to experience potential feelings of chaos, error, frustration, but also success, achievement, satisfaction and, finally, wholeness. The proposal was to give in to the knowledge and enjoyment of different practices of body culture such as dance, gymnastics for all and circus (EHRENBORG, 2014; AYOUB; GRANER, 2013; LOPES; PARMA, 2016), in an expressive and creative perspective.

Ms. Estela’s tears at feeling challenged were an important driver at that moment. Perhaps we were already inadvertently sensitizing the group to what was ahead in the sessions. We realized that, from the outset, the group was receptive to the account of her difficulties and already felt that everyone there could contribute to the construction of the process.

This capacity to feel, to perceive oneself and to experience the activities paying attention to oneself and one’s potentialities and difficulties in relation to the others was the main objective for us researchers. Such actions favored putting oneself in the other’s shoes. To acknowledge ourselves as active and singular subjects was part of our purpose with the group of teachers.

6- The participating teachers are identified by codenames of their own choice decided on at the last session of the course.

Already at the end of the first session we did a body activity we call human knot: holding hands like a rope, we started intertwining, mingling, entangling ourselves until we were so tied up we could hardly move. Perceiving oneself in that situation was important for the first day of the course. We barely knew one another and were already there, barefoot, holding hands, bodies intertwined and squeezed together, each one with their own feelings. Noticing, perceiving, discerning, honing ears and senses to what was happening at that moment was important and requested so that, even in silence, each one could construct their self-perception in the relationships with others. With that beginning, we hoped to clearly illustrate to the teachers the path we would follow. It was then that Ms. Jacque exclaimed: "If I did this with my class, they would all pull and knock each other down!" And we, as researchers and group leaders, reminded her that the work we were doing was not intended to be developed directly with children. Maybe all of that could eventually reach the children in some way or another, but we had no such goal. We had to stress: "We are working here with adults and, therefore, with activities and experiences for adults."

We then realized that although the teachers had understood and agreed with the non-instrumental nature of the course, it would be a challenging task for us to make them focus on themselves without the intentionality of transposing the work to the classroom. We realized they would often be making such comparisons between what they were experiencing among them and what they might directly apply in their teaching practice.

Leite and Ostetto (2004, p. 23) also highlight such intentionality and difficulty when sharing the actions of a continuing education course they conducted in 2001. The authors stress that: "Breaking with the utilitarianism and immediacy of these practices, however, seemed to us to be the greatest among so many challenges faced in the experiences narrated here and in so many others we have had."

The course's activities included reading and discussing texts, but always making sure they were closely linked with body practices. We did not previously define an order for the theoretical discussions and reflections or classroom experiences. Sometimes we discussed before the experiences, sometimes we discussed after them, and sometimes the discussion happened during the actual practice with examples and situations from the texts. Breaking the logic of separating theory from practice or practice from theory was part of a purpose also related to a non-dichotomizing approach to gesture and thought.

The first text read by the group of teachers, according to our course syllabus, was Larrosa Bondía's "Notes on Experience and Knowledge of Experience" (2002). Our intention with this text was precisely to destabilize the group of teachers in order to pose a reflection on the need for time, observation, perception about ourselves and our actions. As the text suggests, these are times of scarce experience and experience can only happen when something moves us (LARROSA BONDÍA, 2002). This possibility of being moved is what we dared try to achieve.

Reading the text was important for the group to recognize that we live in an information society, as the author suggests. We need time to perceive ourselves as people of the world, not merely in the sense of chronological time, but of the quality we attach to it.

The speed with which we are exposed to events and the obsession with innovation, with what is new, which characterizes the modern world, prevent the meaningful connection between events. They also hinder memory, as each event is immediately replaced by another that equally thrills us momentarily but leaves no traces. (LARROSA BONDÍA, 2002, p. 23)

At the end of our second session, Ms. Flor reported that she arrived breathless, tired and worried because she had lost her way inside the building where the course was taking place, which made her arrive late that day. According to her account, she realized that she gradually calmed down during the session and allowed herself to pay attention to herself. She eventually forgot what was happening outside the room and ended the session feeling both light and focused. “When you keep quiet, you tire less and connect more,” said Ms. Luane, agreeing with the perception of Ms. Flor.

As Larrosa Bondía (2002) suggests, a lot of information had been conveyed. The teacher herself told us how many tasks she had performed that day. However, very little of it moves us, sensitizes us, makes us reconnect with ourselves. Perhaps that day Ms. Flor was able to be moved.

We can say that in the first sessions of our course such issues remained more latent, for the teachers were mostly concerned with where and how they could introduce those practices at school. Later, that need was gradually diluted in experiences and experiments in which the participating members allowed themselves to immerse. Change is not determined, but built, experienced and achieved.

It was noticeable that the teachers gradually allowed themselves, day by day, experience by experience, to perceive themselves as individuals and view themselves as an important part of the teaching and learning process, recognizing that prior to being teachers they are people, women, and that, being whole subjects, that is how they also enter the classroom. We don't leave part of us outside. We are what we the whole time.

During the focus group, Mr. Ruy made a statement that was conclusive for us and encapsulated the success of the proposal in this sense: “The course was worthwhile professionally, but it was even more so for life!”

Another important point linked to self-recognition was the constant reports about our understanding of body construction. When a teacher says she cannot dance or cannot do an exercise, it is important for her to recognize that all body practices are culturally, historically and socially constructed. Knowing or not knowing how to perform an action goes way beyond having or not the ability to do it. The human being is constituted precisely by the simultaneous competition between natural and cultural. We agree with Geertz (1989, p. 61) when the author raises the hypothesis of people with no culture: “. . . they would be uncontrollable monstrosities, with very few useful instincts, few recognizable feelings and no intellect.”

From this understanding of the construction of the subject, the fact of knowing or not knowing how to perform an activity may be directly related to the accesses and experiences we have had throughout life, as well as to what we understand as knowing or not knowing about something.

It is common for people to compare themselves to high performance stereotypes. When thinking about whether or not we know how to dance, for example, our first reference point is a professional dancer. When thinking about sports practice we commonly refer to competitive events and their high performance athletes. “Dance is considered an ephemeral and transitory art. But it also has its fixed traits and frozen genres, such as classical ballet” (VIEIRA, 2013, p. 156).

The group of teachers needed to recognize that body practices are cultural elements of humanity and that we can access them in different ways and in different contexts.

We are moving towards recognition that the elements of body culture are available to all and that we can appropriate them.

During the course we did various kinds of activities that allowed us to experience the feeling of dancing, being circus artists, doing gymnastics, in short, we were able to perceive ourselves in different body practices and realize that it was possible to do them. You didn't have to be a professional juggler to play at juggling balls. It was not necessary to have previous dance experience to realize that dance is in us. Despite never having done gymnastics we could feel ourselves doing gymnastics for all.

Reporting on her research on dance in schools, Vieira (2013) mentions the need for participants to answer questions that initially seem simple, such as: What is dance? The author acknowledges that it requires a lot of reflection and experimentation to realize and become aware of how reductionist and based on common view the answer can be. It is necessary to transcend social impositions to envision and enable body practice actions in an educational context. Only after recognizing that we can go beyond stereotypes is it possible to approach and experience this body knowledge.

It is a fact that such experimentation does not always happen so smoothly. In some cases, the teachers' bodies have been restrained, withdrawn and neglected for many years. During some practical experiences, Ms. Estela reported tearfully her difficulties and feelings of being extremely exposed. Although the activity in question was performed in pairs and there was no need to expose to the other members the experiences developed in it, the teacher felt fear and some shyness. Experiencing her body in action was a big challenge and even made her nervous.

On the other hand, considering that each story constructed by us justifies our current actions and paths, we saw Ms. Bem-te-vi enjoyed the exposure and cooperation with her colleagues: “The interaction is nice, we get to know our colleague while we are doing the activity. We came closer in the movement, I realized a unicity of movement,” said Ms. Bem-te-vi at the end of a dance experience. She continued: “We created intimacy with the person and the freedom of movement increased after that, I felt much more comfortable for us to create the dance.”

Each production of meanings from the same proposal enhances our understanding that each person is constituted historically, socially and culturally.

Regarding the environment or context, we must consider the relationships that exist between context and people from the beginning of the child development process. Supporting us in a historical and cultural perspective of human development we find

in Vigotski (2010) an important discussion on relationships between children and the environment or context.

Even when the environment remains almost unchanged, the very fact that *the child changes in the development process* leads to the realization that the role and meaning of the environmental elements, which remained practically unchanged, change because the child's relationship with that environmental element has changed. (VIGOTSKI, 2010, p. 683, emphasis in the original).

Vigotski (2010, p. 688) further stresses that “the influence of the environment on the child's development will be evaluated along with other influences, as well as with the level of understanding, of awareness, of apprehension of what happens in the environment.” In his view, human beings interact with the environment in a variable, relative and dynamic way rather than static and predetermined.

In the light of these reflections, we can see clearly how the interactions that occurred during our course progressively acquired different configurations and produced different meanings from the activities experienced. Examples are the narratives of teachers when they realized and reported, at times, their insights, their perceptions of themselves and to what extent some of the body practices enabled such perceptions to emerge: “Wow! The gaze can be more invasive than touch! I felt ashamed to gaze so intently and also to be gazed at” said Ms. Luane as we talked about the activity. It involved walking and intentionally looking at other people in order to scrutinize each classmate. The purpose was to actually notice each classmate's way of walking, looking, dressing. The gaze is part of the whole. The gaze is part of the body. Not separating them and perceiving the body as a whole was one of the goals.

On another occasion Ms. Debora realized: “The voice is not in the void; the voice is in the body.” When performing a body practice in which vocal expression was in evidence, the teachers were surprised by the expressive power we have in our voice and how it is part of the body. Realizing something so natural to teaching and at the same time so neglected was important and praised by several teachers: “We rediscover ourselves by listening and trying out our voice,” said Ms. Jacque.

The proposal to rediscover oneself, to perceive oneself, to have time to internalize oneself while performing body practices seems to have been appreciated. This was evidenced during the actual experiences, at the end of the course and in the focus group.

During the focus group, Ms. Luane, Ms. Manu and Ms. Amelie reported that sometimes they felt too tired to attend the sessions. They thought of giving up and missing due to the daily overwork at school, but once at the meetings the satisfaction was intense. Having time for oneself was perceived as something extremely positive which made them forget their tiredness in class, and even in the most intense activities, the ways the group engaged in body practices made them feel whole and committed to what was being proposed: “The group was very different and at the same time very much the same. Each one had a manner, a reaction, but at the same time everyone was very open and receptive to the proposals you brought,” said Ms. Amelie. The heterogeneity of the group was also

mentioned at some meetings and the possibility of each person perceiving themselves as unique was praised by us throughout the meetings.

When Vigotski claims that human beings are social beings and that a sum of social relationships are embodied in them (PINO, 2000), we think about the importance of cooperative practices and experiences, jointly developed in groups, with involvement, conversations and discussions based on interaction with the other. Pino (2000) stresses that, due to its vastness, the meaning of the social constitutes and includes the cultural; and given that culture is a totality of human productions – whether artistic, technical, scientific, symbolic, traditions, institutions or social practices – a double mediation operates in human activity: technique and semiotics.

Like the gaze and the word, the gesture of the other attributes meanings to the expressions of life. It is through the other, through another person, that we are subjectively constituted.

Vygotsky is stating that he views a *person* as a real and concrete social individual whose uniqueness is constituted within a specific social and cultural group. An individual, therefore, who is a *being in himself*, a biological nature, who thus has meaning for *others* and who, through them, acquires meaning for himself. (PINO, 2000, p. 74, emphasis in the original).

Such interaction, explained by the author, is processual. During our course, some of the teachers reported they felt at ease with the dynamics of the course and realized that the researchers' care and organization facilitated the collective interaction and involvement of the group. And this collectivity was widely praised by the participating teachers: "Today we are already teachers, we already view our colleagues' difficulties in a different way and are happy to help one another. Everyone was very willing to share, everyone gave their best and that was essential to make this group so cohesive, so united," said Ms. Vanessa.

We consider collective work to be essential in teaching. We have long argued that teachers, in partnership with the school staff as a whole, with students and their families, can produce work of great value if done collectively. This collective view in the performance of activities was also encouraged, appreciated and perceived throughout our meetings.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each group partner and identifying that these particular characteristics make up a whole was a prominent dimension in our goals. Body practices are social (SILVA; DAMIANI, 2005). As a premise, we wanted the teachers of the course to experience this kind of cultural constitution, to maybe later recognize the social and cultural constitution of their children at school.

All the rules, norms and values of a specific society are inscribed in the body, since it is the individual's primary means of contact with the surrounding environment. Even before they walk or talk, children already express social behaviors with their body, such as smiling at certain kinds of play, the way they sleep, the need for a certain amount of rest, their posture when being held. (DAOLIO, 1994, p. 39).

The body is cultural expression and, therefore, in the body we see, feel, perceive many stories: of incorporations, redefinitions, transmutations of time and space. Daolio (1994) argues that through their bodies, people gradually appropriate values, customs, social norms, in a process of *embodiment*. The body is hence the result of interaction between nature and culture, and such interaction is intensely experienced.

Concluding with an intensely felt experience

At the end of the course, we reviewed our initial goals: to enable preschool and early elementary teachers, by experiencing different body practices, to develop self-awareness, perceive their bodies and grasp educational and artistic possibilities of gesture. Together with the group, we sought to expand the fundamental discussions regarding the development of body practices in teacher education, giving them new meanings based on the humanities, which view all people, children included, as producers of culture, including body culture. On reviewing important statements by the teachers, we considered whether our intentions had been achieved during the investigative process.

At this moment of conclusion and review of the research findings, the statement by Ms. Amelie had a different impact on us, making us rethink the proposed goals and their scope for each of us.

At the closing meeting, Ms. Amelie told the group she was thinking about the first day of the course. She recalled the reading and discussion of Larrosa Bondía's text (2002), "Notes on Experience and Knowledge of Experience," in which the author, inspired by Walter Benjamin, discusses experience and lack of experience in contemporary society. The teacher told us that at the first session of the course she had already understood and liked the text after reading and discussing it. However, at the end of the course, she reported having experienced the text in another way. She said that by having "delved into the possibilities of committing herself wholeheartedly to the course's activities," at the end she realized that she had had an experience. The teacher said that the activities experienced and the intensity with which they were experienced (being activities that tapped into all the senses) made her understand what the author studied on the first day of the course referred to when talking about experience. She was able to directly feel what it means to have an experience.

It is amazing to note how experiencing body practices can bring people closer. It seems that the barriers and distances between people are more quickly reduced, allowing other kinds of closeness.

That was also felt by the group itself. Ms. Luane mentioned having realized that the body is not only the physique but encompasses also all senses and sensations. After an activity with eyes closed, the teacher said she realized that physical contact, without necessarily involving sight, can be as overpowering as not touching and just gazing intently at someone (as we did in another exercise).

Touch seems to us to be something really intense, which can break down barriers and create intimacy between people. Touch creates closeness. After only a few sessions, barefoot, often holding hands or embracing, supporting and helping one another, leading

one another or being led, it really seems that the group's relationships became more intense and stronger. It was as if a few years had been condensed into a few months. The feeling of intimacy with the others developed quite quickly and we believe that this was mainly due to the body practices we did together.

The explanation for this feeling is possibly based on the concept of experience.

When verbalized, experience is not revealed transparently, just as there is no objective, exact correspondence between experience and what one believes or says to have experienced. Experience thus remains submerged in the subject, glimpsed in the narrative, but steeped in corporeality, and no less important for that. (SILVA et al., 2009, p. 22).

It seemed like we had been touched, that we had had an experience. Body practices, removed from a utilitarian sense, make it possible to experience poorly explored dimensions, such as emotions, relationships with others.

The enjoyment of an experience at the level of involvement enabled by certain body practices activates the entirety of human organs and senses, retrieves forgotten sensitive possibilities, possibilities that can provide other elements from which the subject can reconstruct. (SILVA et al., 2009, p. 23).

The proposals experienced aimed to provide forgotten sensitive possibilities, in a constant movement involving distraction and dispersion, in which what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we produce are at odds with each other. We therefore sought the constitution of an experience – with its own aesthetic quality.

This possibility with intense appropriation of self and the other, remaining alert to aesthetic quality, was explored throughout our course. We started out from the premise that these elements contributed significantly to the group's rapport and, consequently, to a critical appropriation of the body practices developed.

Many reports lead us to believe that the goals were achieved and that we were able to sensitize the participants of the research. We were truly able to ascertain that the activities experienced by the teachers moved them and, therefore, in one way or another, such sensitization may resonate in schools, in their direct interaction with the children. In this sense, we clearly concluded that the body experiments were able to tap into other senses, and therefore became a significant experience in the continuing education of the participating teachers, who reported having been moved and sensitized by the experiences, thus recognizing the potential of such practices for their training and teaching.

On the other hand, we acknowledge that continuing education is part of a larger and broader process, and that our specific interest was to draw the teachers' attention to the possible lack of training related to body practices and inspire them to search for it in their schools. We had designed an investigation purposely aimed at schoolteachers, hoping that such goals might later reach the children they worked with. However, at the end of this journey we realized that we also had had an experience and how much this research process had afforded new meanings to our path as researchers.

As I reread all the field diary notes,⁷ reviewed the images of the course and reflected on them, I caught myself smiling alone, now laughing, now with watering eyes I realized that the feeling of reliving that semester in my mind was very pleasant. My body felt it. I felt that way. I felt thrilled, joyful, touched.

I felt like starting over from the beginning and reliving all those feelings. I felt an urge to experience the body practices we did with the teachers, the discoveries and discussions they contributed.

Feeling so intensely the memory of that period made me reflect that I also had an experience, exactly in the sense described above, understood as something that marks, remains, moves, to the point of urging me to continue, to the point of urging us to continue. A disquieting mark that suggests reverberations.

Had we then been subjects of this research?

Discovering the wholeness of body practices and the body's memories was one of the goals of our work with the teachers from Campinas. We aimed to raise their awareness to that potential. Throughout the course, the teachers showed they were moved and sensitized by the sessions and their actions. As researchers, we already possessed such awareness and had no doubt about the importance for people of fully experienced actions. However, only at the end of the process did we realize that we had also been moved.

Larrosa Bondía (2002, p. 20) wrote that "In the struggle between you and the world, choose the world." We now understand that, without realizing it, we had given in to the world during the study. In our urge to control the entire research process, we had surrendered to the team of teachers and been surprised by them. The reverberations of each class were also felt by us.

We acknowledged that the meanings of research go beyond those expected by academia and even ourselves. We also recognized that, as researchers, what drives us to continue researching also drives us to get to know ourselves more deeply as people, and, in our case, also as teachers thirsting for an education that makes sense to children. A whole body education, with an entirety that is as multiple as the constitution of human nature.

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7- Segment in first person singular as it relates to a personal experience of the first author of the article.

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