

**DOSSIER***Internationalization of educational policies within the framework of human rights***The GERM and the aestheticization of existence in school physical education*****O GERME e a estetização da existência na educação física escolar*****Renato Cavalcanti Novaes<sup>a</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

GERM is the abbreviation of Global Education Reform Movement. This movement, led by international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), aims to homogenize global education through business rationality. It manifests itself through neoliberal educational reforms, such as the implementation of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) in Brazil, in 2017. This text aims to investigate the changes in the Physical Education curriculum, marked by the production of human capital, while contrasting them with an aestheticization of existence. To this end, it first discusses the effects of neoliberal reforms on the school Physical Education curriculum by highlighting the role of private actors in public policies. Then, it points to the aesthetics of existence as an alternative for the Physical Education teacher's curricular work and highlights some points of escape from this neoliberal logic.

**Keywords:** Physical Education. Curriculum. Public Policy. Neoliberalism.

**RESUMO**

GERM é a sigla em inglês para *Global Education Reform Movement*, ou “Movimento Global pela Reforma da Educação”. Esse movimento, capitaneado por organizações internacionais como a Organização para a Cooperação e o Desenvolvimento Econômico (OCDE), visa homogeneizar a educação mundial por meio de uma racionalidade empresarial. Se manifesta por meio de reformas educacionais de cunho neoliberal, como a implementação da Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) no Brasil, em 2017. Este texto tem como objetivo investigar as mudanças no currículo da Educação Física, marcadas pela produção de capital humano, ao passo que as contrapõe com uma estetização da existência. Para tal, discute primeiramente os efeitos das reformas neoliberais no currículo da Educação Física escolar ao evidenciar a atuação de atores privados nas

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políticas públicas. Em seguida, aponta a estética da existência como alternativa para o fazer curricular do professor de Educação Física, assim como destaca alguns pontos de fuga à lógica neoliberal.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Física. Currículo. Políticas Públicas. Neoliberalismo.

## Introduction

GERM is an abbreviation for the Global Education Reform Movement, and can indeed be seen as a germ, in the sense of a virus that kills education (Sahlberg, 2011). This movement, headed by international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), seeks to homogenize global education through business rationality (Sahlberg, 2016).

The germ has been active since the 1980s in countries such as the United States of America and England, spreading throughout the globe during the last two decades through public policy reforms in a double movement for State disinvestment in public education and the expansion of private actors. According to Ball (2014), the tripod sustaining these neoliberal reforms is based on curricular centralization, large scale evaluation and professional qualification, all spanned by neoliberal ideals.

Neoliberalism is not merely an economic system, as it is characterized as a system for subjectivation, as explained by Foucault (2008) and can be explained as follows:

Neoliberalism is “in here” as well as “out there”. That is, neoliberalism is economic (a rearrangement of relations between capital and the state) and cultural (new values, sensibilities and relationships) and political (a form of governing, new subjectivities). [...] paradoxically, neoliberalism works for and against the State in mutually constitutive ways. It destroys some possibilities for older ways of governing and creates new possibilities for new ways of governing (Ball, 2014, p. 229).

The concept of “government” is related to the rationalities that congregate procedures, tactics, knowledge, techniques and instruments that are intended to guide people, known as population (Carvalho; Silva; Delboni, 2017). In the words of Foucault, neoliberal society requires the formation of:

[...] a human capital in the course of individuals’ lives, upon which neoliberals pose all problems and present new types of analysis. To form human capital, thus forming these types of abilities-machines which will produce income, or better, that will be paid for income, what does that mean? It means, of course, making what are called educational investments (Foucault, 2008, p. 315).

The formation of human capital through educational investments gained strength in Brazilian public policies through the curricular centralization imposed by the approval of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) in 2017. The BNCC is a normative document that “defines the organic and progressive set of essential content that all students must learn throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education” (Brasil, 2017, p. 7). According to Macedo (2019a), this curricular document is aligned with the OECD’s neoliberal governance, based on skills and the germ of comparability.

In this context, we researched the occurrence of recent national neoliberal reforms headed by the BNCC in School Physical Education (SPE) (Novaes; Triani; Telles, 2020; Novaes; Telles, 2023; Novaes *et al.*, 2021a; 2021b; 2023). These studies stem from a doctoral dissertation (Novaes, 2021) that sought to investigate the process of curricular modification undergone by the school subject, in which neoliberal rationality establishes the regulations for a new meaning of curriculum.

Considering the above, this paper aims to investigate the changes to the Physical Education curriculum, marked by the production of human capital, while contrasting them with an aestheticization of existence. To this end, the next section contains a discussion about the effects of neoliberal reforms on the SPE curriculum with emphasis on the acts of private agents in public policies. Afterwards, we present the aesthetics of existence as an alternative for Physical Education teachers' curricular work.

## Physical education, curriculum and neoliberalism

We understand the BNCC as a monument erected within Brazilian education by GERM. It is the main curricular reform conducted in the country during the last few decades. Various Brazilian studies in the field of education have scrutinized the subordination of the BNCC (Brasil, 2017) to the market precepts, including Lopes (2015); Macedo (2014; 2015; 2018; 2019a; 2019b); Adrião (2018); Freitas (2018); and Dourado and Siqueira (2019). Internationally, various studies follow the same critical line regarding centralizing curricula, such as Reid (2009); Ravitch (2011); Goodson (2014); Cody (2014); Sahlberg (2016); and Laval (2019). Despite the studies adopting distinct theoretical references, it is possible to state that they have in common the understanding that centralizing curricula, such as the BNCC, are at the service of human capital production.

The comparison between the criticisms conducted in national and international literature is relevant because the BNCC followed a similar pattern to curricular reforms that were conducted globally. Goodson (2014) demonstrated that these reforms are devised by private sector groups that hold interest in edu-business, the education market. That is, large corporations dedicate themselves to conducting changes in school curricula through philanthropic institutions, while they profit from the sale of so-called curricular supplies, such as textbooks, digital materials, and other such educational solutions offered to the public and private sectors (Adrião, 2018). For this reason, Ball (2014) characterizes these actors as "philanthrocapitalists" – although their strongest critics informally prefer the term "*pilantrocapitalistas*", likening them to crooks ("*pilantra*" is an informal term in Portuguese for a scoundrel or a crook).

Despite its publication in 2017, in 2013 there was already a group of civil organizations and so-called philanthropic institutions working towards the goal of proposing and implementing a national curricular base in Brazil. The point of convergence was an international conference with the theme: Leading Educational Reforms. Thus, the Movement for the National Common Curricular Base (Movimento pela Base, s.d.) was born, composed of social actors such as the Lemann Foundation, Itaú Social, Unibanco Institute, Natura Institute, the Roberto Marinho Foundation, Everyone for Education, and other such institutions (Carvalho; Silva; Delboni, 2017).

This group with a high political and economic capital, a global subproduct of the world's social inequality, participated in the BNCC's implementation by

[...] financing and coordinating meetings in which the versions of the documents were discussed and produced; qualifying researchers at international pro-curricular centralization centers such as Stanford; conducting research supporting the need for national curricula; financing seminars narrating successful international experiences; producing materials for curricular implementation; hiring international groups to evaluate the ongoing experience, and through many other actions (Macedo, 2019b, p. 1122).

As a group, these organizations established a philanthropic consensus, which is when

[...] material resources, the production of knowledge, mediatic power, and formal and informal networks are used by private foundations to obtain a consensus among multiple social and institutional actors in support of a certain public policy (Tarlau; Moeller, 2020, p. 553).

These same social actors positioned themselves so that each one would be responsible for specific and strategic functions. For instance, the Natura Institute dedicated itself to literacy, the Ayrton Senna Institute covered active teaching and learning methodologies, *Unibanco* Institute took on the high school segment, the Lemann Foundation<sup>1</sup> is involved in the management and qualification of young talents and educational innovation, Peninsula Institute covers teacher qualification, and so on. For SPE, the protagonist is Team Impulsiona (Novaes *et al.*, 2021b).

Created in 2017<sup>2</sup>, the same year in which the BNCC was enacted, *Impulsiona* is an extension of Peninsula Institute, one of these so-called philanthropic institutions that acted for the implementation of the BNCC. Both are social arms of Peninsula Participations, a corporation belonging to the family of Brazilian billionaire Abílio Diniz, a sports enthusiast<sup>3</sup>.

*Impulsiona* is an online platform (Figure 1) for the education of SPE teachers with the mission of "encouraging sports at school" (Impulsiona, 2023a). It acts alongside the Ministry of Education (MEC) to offer continued education and states that it has already qualified more than 270 thousand "*impulsionadores*", as the teachers who go through their courses are called. It is worth mentioning that *Impulsiona* is the only institution that offers courses to Basic Education Physical Education teachers alongside MEC, which demonstrates this social actor's protagonism.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lemann Foundation was decisive in the establishment of the philanthropic consensus, leading the actions of the other organizations (Tarlau; Moeller, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Impulsiona originated from Transforma, a program for "Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games Education", created in 2013. In 2017, Transforma became Impulsiona.

<sup>3</sup> Abílio Diniz, deceased on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, was a Brazilian polo and powerboating champion, having also practiced boxing, judo, tennis, capoeira and weightlifting. A lover of soccer, he created a team (Audax), that participates in official competitions (Diniz, s.d.).

**Figure 1:** Impulsiona website access page.



**Source:** Impulsiona (2023a).

As demonstrated in a study about this platform (Novaes *et al.*, 2021b), Impulsiona creates a performative narrative for SPE that does not dialogue with this curricular component's curricular traditions. It confuses Physical Education with sport and overvalues sport to the detriment of other bodily practices. It silences the critical theoretical base of different curricular traditions. Additionally, it reinforces neo-hygienic ideas, such as the fight against sedentarism. All of this serves as an extension of the BNCC. In summation, Impulsiona provides Physical Education with the means to create human capital.

Another consequence to Physical Education brought on by the BNCC was its insertion in another public policy, the National Textbook Plan (PNLD)<sup>4</sup>. Through a presidential decree, the PNLD was tasked with supporting the implementation of the BNCC. In the same year, a call was launched to publish schoolbooks and manuals for the different subjects including, for the first time, Physical Education. Finally, in 2019, the Physical Education teacher manuals were published, covering the first years of basic education (1st to 5th grades) (Figure 2), while the final years (6th to 9th grades) were left to the next year's PNLD.

<sup>4</sup> The PNLD serves basic education schools in the public network, with the goal of evaluating and providing teaching and supplemental materials, making the federal government one of the largest buyers of school textbooks in the world.



**Figure 2:** Physical Education teacher manuals in the 2019 PNLD – Initial Years

Source: Brasil (2018).

The PNLD books and manuals are, besides cultural products, coveted objects in the editorial market. In other words, this public policy is closely related to economic interests in a market that, in the years of 2019 and 2020 alone, sold approximately two billion Brazilian reais (BRL) worth of books to the federal government through the PNLD. Table 1 presents the values paid by the federal government to the publishers for the manuals contemplated in the 2019 and 2020 editions of the PNLD (FNDE, 2020).

**Table 1:** Physical Education teacher manuals acquired by the 2019/2020 PNLD

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Copies sold	Total (R\$)
Suraya Darido <i>et al.</i> (2017a, 2017b, 2018)	Práticas Corporais: Educação Física - Manual do Professor	Moderna	229,680	3,026,598.15
Roselise Stallivieri (2017, 2018) and Diego Berton (2018)	Manual do Professor para a Educação Física	Terra Sul	76,641	1,196,524.97
Luciana Leopoldino <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Encontros Educação Física	FTD	103,328	657,703.90
Ana Carolina Boog and Elisabete Urizzi (2018a, 2018b)	Práticas corporais e a Educação Física escolar	Boreal	51,177	291,588.55
TOTAL			460,826	5,172,415.57

Source: Adapted from Novaes *et al.* (2023, p. 8) and e Brasil (2022).

Table 1 shows that, in the 2019 and 2020 editions of the PNLD, over 460 thousand copies of Physical Education teaching manuals were acquired, resulting in over 5 million BRL in sales for the publishers. This amount is a mere “slice of the pie” for the publishing market, but for SPE, it represents a significant coverage: approximately half a million public school teachers. This means that these manuals, inserted in this public policy, have a relevant coverage for teaching activities and, thus, for this curricular component.

In an analysis of the most-sold Physical Education teacher’s manuals from the 2019/2020 PNLD, titled *Práticas Corporais – Educação Física* – which were written by Darido *et al.* (2017a,

2017b, 2018) and published by Editora Moderna<sup>5</sup>, Novaes *et al.* (2023) demonstrated how they embody the neoliberal curricular reforms by adopting teaching scripting strategies aligned with the BNCC. This shifts the conception of teaching from an intellectual activity to a manual one, turning teaching activities into a fast-food chain (Laval, 2019).

Besides the aforementioned works published by Editora Moderna, in the last few years we observed the publishing of new collections of teaching materials for SPE teachers. In Figure 3, we present the new collections for Physical Education from the same publisher: *Buriti Mais - Educação Física*, with a book for the 1st and 2nd grades and another for the 3rd to 5th grades; *Pitangüá Mais - Educação Física*, that has a book for the 1st and 2nd grades and another for the 3rd to 5th grades; *Presente Mais - Educação Física*, which also has a book for the 1st and 2nd grades and another for the 3rd to 5th grades; and *Se liga na Educação Física*, which has a book for each year of the second segment of basic education (6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades). This demonstrates how Physical Education made a strong entrance into the PNLD after the BNCC was published.

**Figure 3:** Other collections from Editora Moderna in the PNLD



**Source:** Editora Moderna (2023).

Still regarding the scripting of teaching post-BNCC, in 2022, Nova Escola Magazine published over 100 SPE lesson plans aligned with the BNCC (Figure 4). This magazine has been maintained by the Lemann Foundation since 2015 (Nova Escola, s.d.), and the Physical Education lesson plan initiative was supported by B3 Social<sup>6</sup>, an institution that also invested over one million BRL in Impulsiona Impulsiona (Impulsiona, 2022a). The latter announced (Impulsiona, 2022b, n. p.), that they are “112 lesson plans that consider the 540 lessons scheduled in the annual calendar and 100% of the abilities present in the BNCC. The material is part of the ‘Building a New Physical Education’ project and covers all levels between daycare and pre-school and the 9th grade of basic education”. With these plans, SPE teachers no longer need to plan lessons for students ranging from early childhood

<sup>5</sup> Editora Moderna is the publisher with the highest book sales to the federal government through the PNLD. In 2001, they were bought by the Spanish group Santillana, which is part of the largest Spanish media conglomerate, the PRISA (*Promotora de Informaciones Sociedad Anónima*), owner of, among others, the *El País* newspaper. Its social Branch, the Santillana Foundation, was one of the philanthropic organizations that supported the implementation of the BNCC.

<sup>6</sup> B3 Social, part of the Movement for a National Common Curricular Base, is the philanthropic branch of B3, a stock exchange headquartered in the city of São Paulo.

education to the second segment of basic education, which strengthens our argument regarding the transformation of teaching.

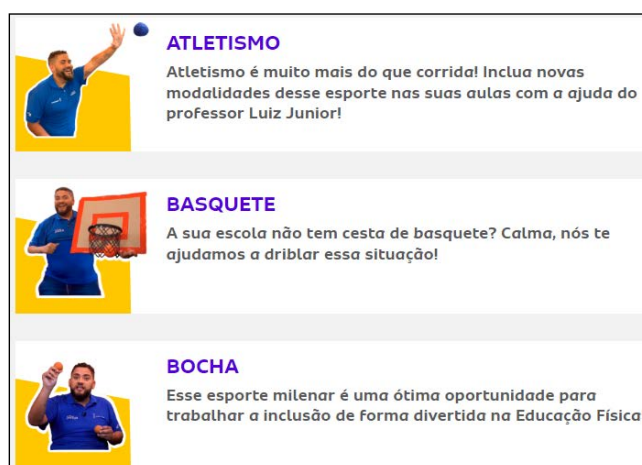
**Figure 4:** Publicity for the SPE lesson plans by Nova Escola Magazine



**Source:** Nova Escola (2023).

Another characteristic of this neoliberal conception for the Physical Education curriculum is the adoption of “scrap pedagogy”, marked by the adaptation of alternative materials to imitate bodily practices. This strategy was identified in Impulsiona, as well as in the teacher manuals, and is exemplified in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:** Example of “scrap pedagogy” in Impulsiona



**Source:** Impulsiona (2023b).

This “scrap pedagogy” consists in

[...] a solution that is typical of neoliberal rationality, with the motto of doing more with less, presented as an economical alternative for SPE teachers under the guise of sustainability, considering the lack of investment in schools (Novaes, 2021, p. 99).



This pedagogical strategy is a symptom of a much larger problem: the lack of an adequate physical structure in Brazilian schools. According to data from the 2020 Basic Education School Census, out of 135,263 Basic Education schools, 47% do not possess the facilities for sports practices, while only 40.6% possess facilities and basic materials, such as balls, ropes and cones, and 20% do not possess facilities or materials. The problem also affects the private sector, in which only 60% of the schools have sports facilities (Brasil, 2021).

This demonstrates that Physical Education needs a much more significant – and costly – educational renovation than a curricular reform. In this sense, the BNCC serves as a smoke curtain that masks a real problem faced by teachers, which is the lack of adequate teaching conditions. As estimated by Novaes, Triani and Telles (2023), an investment of approximately 4 billion BRL would be needed to acquire appropriate materials to implement the content of the BNCC in Basic Education at public schools, without considering the necessary investment for sports facilities<sup>7</sup>. As such, we position ourselves against the adoption of “scrap pedagogy” as a public policy, which does not mean that we ignore the efforts expended by teachers to offer a variety of bodily practices. We believe that using low-cost and/or recycled materials to stimulate student creativity is an acceptable action, but to encourage the systematic development of adapted artifacts means normalizing the fragility of teaching, as well as contributing to conformism regarding the difficulties imposed by the system.

Finally, we highlight that the BNCC and the teacher qualification and educational material distribution programs share the same neotechnocratic language as GERM, by emphasizing the development of “skills” and “abilities”. It is worth mentioning that the adoption of these terms constitutes a rhetoric used by different groups with international influence, such as UNESCO and OECD, as well as by national curriculum public policies since the 1990s, albeit much more discretely. In the BNCC (Brasil, 2017), Physical Education includes ten skills, which we consider high, and 69 abilities, and the number was even higher in the first version of the document: 160 abilities (Betti, 2018).

According to Laval (2019, p. 76), replacing the word “knowledge” with “skill” is not without importance: its use, both in companies and schools, “questions school’s traditional role, the transmission of knowledge and an intellectual and cultural education in the broader sense of the word”.

An analysis conducted by Neira (2018) of Physical Education in the BNCC demonstrates that this document is based on technocratic principles, to the detriment of criticality, which is defended by more recent curricular theories. In this sense, to the author, its base is related to the efficientist curricular model used in the United States during the 1950s, in which education is defined as a series of technical elements – skills, abilities, objects of knowledge, dimensions of knowledge, among others that, joined, would guarantee learning. Based on this finding, Novaes, Triani and Telles (2020) highlighted the background of a neoliberal governmentality<sup>8</sup> that is imposed on SPE through the BNCC. In other words, the base is at the service of human capital production.

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<sup>7</sup> When we use the term sports facilities, we are referring to adequate spaces for Physical Education classes.

<sup>8</sup> “Governmentality” is a term used by Foucault (2001) that refers to the manner in which we are governed, we govern ourselves and others. It is a made-up word created by merging the concept of “government” in Foucault with the term “mentality”.

For this reason, Ball (2014) indicates that centralizing curricula function as a type of “Trojan horse”, created with the goal of invading school curricula, educational materials and the field of Education as a whole with entrepreneurial language. This can be seen in SPE in the various instances we described: the Impulsiona platform, the PNLD manuals, as well as the SPE lesson plans published by Nova Escola Magazine/Lemann Foundation.

## Curriculum and the aesthetics of existence

Previously, we attempted to propose options for a Physical Education curriculum that is set apart from neoliberal policies (Novaes; Telles, 2023). Based on Foucault, especially the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, by Deleuze and Guattari (2010), titled *Anti-Oedipus: an introduction to non-fascist life*, we proposed a non-fascist concept of Physical Education.

Generally speaking, the fascism to which we refer in the SPE curriculum is based on traditions that intend to impose an absolute truth upon this curricular component. These are salvationist traditions from the field of education, of which the BNCC is merely another example, sold as solutions to educational problems. Veiga-Neto (2009) offers another example of a salvationist tradition:

[...] the effects of a certain type of interpretation and “application” of Critical Theory, associated with Liberationist Pedagogy, brought on interesting theoretical advancements in the field of the programming curriculum but provoked – and still provokes – a certain blockage in the (let’s say...) pedagogical thoughts present among us. This blockage appeared – and still appears quite broadly – as a deplorable celebration of the truths announced by the heralds that take it upon themselves to “save Education” and, with this, “save the World” ... (Veiga-Neto, 2009, p. 22).

Thus, simultaneously, we argue (Novaes; Telles, 2023) that the different curricular traditions in Physical Education were molded, despite not being conceived as such, as truths capable of saving education and the world from various evils, such as sedentarism; motor, cognitive and/or socioemotional deficits; social injustices; Eurocentric colonialism etc.

It is important to clarify that we see the curriculum not only as a normative document, but as a living organism that involves

[...] beyond the documents issued by educational planning and management agencies, school documents, projects, plans, textbooks, the media, anyway, everything that crosses the space-time of schools, as well as **everything that is lived, felt, practiced** and takes on the form of written documents, conversations, actions and feelings experienced by the daily practitioners, it is understood that the different curricular dimensions are different dimensions or aspects of the same phenomenon – the school curriculum in its relationship with the broader sociopolitical, historical, economic and cultural reality (Carvalho; Silva; Delboni, 2017, p. 489, our emphasis).

At the end of said Foucault-based text about non-fascist SPE (Novaes; Telles, 2023), we took advantage of the fact that Foucault’s philosophy “dips” into Nietzsche’s affirmation of life (Machado, 2006) to present the idea of an “affirmative curriculum”. According to Deleuze (n/d, p. 275): “to affirm is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, but creating new values that

are those of life, that make life light and active". We used this moment to take a step forward on the idea of an affirmative curriculum for SPE.

An affirmative curriculum is the opposite of the BNCC's prescriptive and exhaustive view of curriculum. Thus, it is aligned with the perspective espoused by Gallo (2002) in favor of a smaller education. To this author, "[...] both closer and farther than a larger education, that of policies, ministries, departments and offices, there is also a smaller education, of classrooms, of the daily lives of teachers and students" (Gallo, 2002, p. 169). It invests "[...] in the multiplicities, that rhizomatically connect and interconnect, generating new multiplicities" (Gallo, 2002, p. 176).

The weight of larger education – prescriptive, heavy, passive – does not dialogue with Nietzsche's affirmation of life – singular, light, active. To Araldi (2020), both Nietzsche and Foucault sought to oppose modern subjection to the norms of society and the economy with the ancient Greek manner of life, which is considered artistic. But what does it mean to see life as a work of art?

The statement "life is a work of art" is not a premise or a warning (such as "try to make your life beautiful, harmonious, sensible and full of meaning – such as painters attempt to do with their paintings, or musicians with their compositions"), but the declaration of a fact. Life cannot stop being a work of art if it is a human life – the life of a being that has desire and freedom of choice (Bauman, 2009, p. 72).

Thus, we must choose how to create our own art of living, which is not the same as literally becoming an artist. "It is a task to take up in daily life, in one's relationship with oneself, with the others, and with the world around us" (Araldi, 2020, p. 9). Thus, if we see the curriculum as an affirmation of life, that is, lived, felt and practiced in daily life, it is distant from major curricular policies such as the BNCC, conceived as machines that produce subjectivation or, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1996, p. 49), machines of faciality: "it is known as a machine of faciality because it is a social production of the face, it operates a facialization of the entire body, its surroundings and its objects, a landscaping of all the worlds and all the means".

Thus, we understand that the curriculum, similarly to life, craves a path of its own creation. To Foucault (1997), the art of living is a path

[...] that is, at the same time, a form of resistance to modern individual subjectification technologies and an art of conduct based on the coincidence between what an individual does and what he says: a search for not only what is true (metaphysically), but true being as the subject of a knowledge and a power over oneself. An author of oneself is an authentic man, that who makes of his life a work [of art] that requires permanent fulfillment (Foucault, 1997, p. 25).

This permanent fulfillment of the path of life as per Foucault sees the subject beyond the active powers in society, such as neoliberal governmentality. Thus, "Foucault considers that the subject can open spaces of freedom based on himself, establishing new relations of power in the sense of selfcare and the aestheticization of existence" (Araldi, 2020, p. 10).

This *selfcare* in Foucault is related to certain practices of freedom. This is because despite this machine of faciality that continues to produce subjects that lack a sense of self, Foucault insists that man has much more freedom than one imagines. As such, to this philosopher, selfcare is "[...] a

duty-privilege, a gift-obligation that guarantees us freedom, forcing us to see ourselves as the object of all our application” (Foucault, 2005, p. 53).

Foucault (2005) states that in Classic Antiquity, the Greeks and the Romans created an “aesthetics of existence”, an art of living, taking “care of oneself”<sup>9</sup> as an ethical exercise and a fundamental premise, and the production of life as a work of art as a purpose. According to Araldi (2020, p. 68):

We understand that the ethics of oneself and the aesthetics of existence are interchangeable and synonymous in Foucault. It is the ascetics, the set of exercises, techniques, the arduous work done by oneself for oneself that unifies a subject’s ethical conformation and the aestheticization of existence.

Ascetics are the answer to Foucault’s question about how to turn life into a work of art, since “virtue is acquired through an *áskesis*” (Foucault, 2011, p. 282). These exercises by oneself for oneself would permit the subject’s ethical formation and the aesthetics of existence:

The ascetical exercises would transform man’s manner of being, as he comes out as the subject of true discourse. It is this subjectivation of true discourses that turns ascetics into a practice of oneself. The “asceticism of listening”, in this sense, would be a privileged form of implanting virtue in one’s soul. Also, the writing by oneself to oneself, the diary of oneself, are forms of asceticism – very important in this art that is the practice of oneself (Araldi, 2020, p. 76).<sup>10</sup>

Aside from these forms of asceticism, we cannot ignore bodily practices as other important forms of selfcare. To Nietzsche (2003), for instance, bodily practices in Ancient Greece were an opportunity for transformation, contemplation and glorification, without obligations or condemnations (Mattos, 2020). Through bodily practices, we can experience and reflect about the ethics of oneself (and of others), as well as about the representations offered to us by the world<sup>11</sup>.

As such, Physical Education can be understood as an ascetic practice in the sense of self-contemplation and selfcare, presenting itself as an alternative to the curricular normativity to which it is submitted. In this perspective of the aestheticization of existence, the daily life of SPE presents an opportunity for a practice of freedom that opposes the machine of faciality operated by the BNCC.

But how to conciliate the curriculum and this ethical and aesthetic culture based on the care of oneself, especially in SPE, the object of our study? Underlying to this question, there is another

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<sup>9</sup> Selfcare must not be confused with individualism. It is important to remember that “know thyself” would be an ethical form of selfcare, notoriously known in Socratic philosophy as a relationship between the men of the *polis*, that is, the city. As stated by Araldi (2020), the care of oneself is intimately connected to a true relationship with oneself, with others and with the city.

<sup>10</sup> Truth, in this text, expresses a sense of virtue, and not a regime of truth.

<sup>11</sup> We base ourselves on the reflection of Epictetus, a Greek philosopher, cited by Foucault (2005), who recommends that [...] we go out from time to time, take a walk, watch what is happening around us (things, people, occurrences, etc.) and that we reflect about all of these different representations that the world offers us (Foucault, 2005, p. 267). These are examples of ascetic exercises that also apply to bodily practices.

one that is commonly asked: how to avoid the trap of introducing a thought that would consist of yet another theoretical essay about the Physical Education curriculum, instead of a practical action?

The trap to which we refer is the distinction between theory and practice. Many times, it is believed that SPE academic curricular traditions are more “know about” than “know how to do”, that is, they would be more theoretical than practice. However, as stated by Veiga-Neto (2015), there is no practice without theory, as they are indissociable. It is impossible to determine which came before the other, which leads to a false problem: it is not conceivable to think of “practice without a theory that encompasses it”, aside from the fact that “the theory itself is already a practice” (Veiga-Neto, 2015, p. 132). The dichotomous vision between theory and practice, in fact, corroborates a conception that is typical of neoliberal rationality, of teaching as a technical and apolitical action (Novaes *et al.*, 2021b).

This does not mean that there is no fruitful association between what we defend and a school floor pedagogical practice. Despite our awareness that the issue will not be resolved within this article, we will list a few more objective situations in which it is possible to think of the curriculum as an affirmation of the aesthetics of existence. For educational purposes, we will discuss three interconnected points that we consider more pertinent in the fight against GERM: curricular normativity; teacher qualification; and educational materials.

### **Curricular normativity**

We consider the existence of some form of curricular normativity inevitable. This is because some issues are immediate for society. An example would be, in the case of the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs) (Brasil, 1998), the seven transversal themes that traverse all curricular components (health, the environment, sexual orientation, cultural plurality, ethics, work and consumption). Another example would be the goals of the millennium, listed by the United Nations in 2000, which could be discussed transversally in schools (1- Ending hunger and misery; 2 – Offering good quality basic education for all; 3 – Promoting equality among the sexes and women’s autonomy; 4 – Reducing childhood mortality; 5 – Improving the health of pregnant women; 6 – Fighting Aids, malaria and other illnesses; 7 – Guaranteeing good quality of life and respect for the environment; 8 – Establishing partnerships for development).

Similarly, we believe that some basic principles can guide the curricula of different school subjects. In SPE, there are the examples listed by Betti and Gomes-da-Silva (2018): diversity; inclusion; suitability for students; dialogicity. Perhaps some contents or objects of knowledge, as preferred by the BNCC, can also be listed, as long as they are well established in the field. Certainly, we believe that the PCN’s proposal for offering parameters is more reasonable and potent than the BNCC’s imposition of content, which means that the latest curricular reform represents a setback for education.

A normative curriculum at the service of business rationality is incompatible with a curriculum at the service of life as a work of art. However, we cannot radicalize things and ignore the fact that the world of labor and professional qualifications are important aspects of life. We merely cannot



consent for education to remain subordinated to the dictates of the market, in lieu of a humanistic education based on ethics.

Going against curricular normativity, we agree with Lopes (2015, p. 445), who proposes a *principle-free curriculum*: “a policy with a principle-free curriculum means that there are no absolute curricular principles or rules, defined scientifically or through any other rationale, outside of the political game of education”. The author judges both curricular centralization and the attempt to attach meanings to the curriculum to ignore the fact that the texts take on different negotiations of meaning to be unproductive. Instead, she considers it more productive to

Contextually discuss what is being achieved in schools and what we are valuing can be a more productive bet for curricular policies. Disseminating different curricular proposals – disciplinary, interdisciplinary or even anti-disciplinary--, mobilizing different paths and different curricular possibilities – many of which are being applied in schools--, promoting critical discussions regarding what is achieved can be a more plural and heterogeneous approach (Lopes, 2015, p. 460).

Thus, regarding curricular normativity in Physical Education, especially for administrators and teachers who have the task of producing curricular documents aligned with the BNCC, we suggest that they value the production of curricula through local and democratic processes involving the various members of the school community, including parents, administrators, teachers, students and other local needs. We suggest that, in times of marked normativity, they use the loopholes present in the BNCC to create a sense of curriculum that is not fixed. We believe that this is a viable path while the centralizing premises of the BNCC are not revised at the government level.

### **Teacher qualification**

As mentioned by Ball (2014), teacher qualification is part of the neoliberal curricular policy tripod. Considering the previously discussed points in this text pertaining to this topic, it is necessary to adjust the trajectory from a neoliberal rationality to an aestheticization of existence. This means to value teacher actions as artisanal work, unlike the machine of faciality present in the major public policies.

We demonstrated the need to return to SPE curricular traditions in order to avoid some fads that became a true discursive avalanche in education in the name of a certain *practicalism*, as if curricular theorization had no links to the classroom. To Sahlberg (2015), a good education is much more important than mere know-how, which has been the focus of recent teacher qualification policies, as shown in the *Impulsiona* case.

### **Educational materials**

Educational materials, especially those from the major publishers, represent a tension between the market of education and books as cultural products. Considering this paradox, it is necessary to ponder the value of these educational materials Here are some possibilities for Physical

Education teaching manuals that can be applied to our purpose of reflecting about the curriculum as an affirmation of life: a) preferring non-directive teaching practices; b) valuing the investigation and production of local knowledge; c) preferring curricular theories that value knowing over doing; and d) avoiding the reproduction of the BNCC's neotechnocratic language (Novaes *et al.*, 2023).

Regarding the production of educational materials and pedagogical practices in SPE, we suggest the following: how is the proposed activity related to *selfcare*? It is worth remembering that selfcare involves ascetical exercises that transform man as he is not subjected to a regime of truth. The asceticism in question is a practice of oneself. In this sense, the educational materials, as well as the very experience of SPE can relate to the different ascetical exercises, such as: the writing of oneself; the diary of oneself; and listening (to others); vital in the practice of oneself. We consider this idea to be fruitful for future writings.

The aforementioned options for an affirmative curriculum have in common their support for daily teacher and student actions as practices of freedom, which go against the major curricular policies, seen as machines of faciality. Upon understanding the multidimensionality of the curriculum as all that is lived, felt and practiced, we defend curricular principles that value singular experiences in the classroom in favor of an aestheticization of existence; that is, a handcrafted art of living.

## Final considerations – knowledge in its positivity

The growing complexity of the current world, the almost unrestricted domain of technoscience and new information technologies, the disillusion regarding political power, the lack of perspectives for selfcare in a time of accelerated destruction of nature... These are some examples of major obstacles to the aestheticization of existence (Araldi, 2020, p. 96).

GERM is a real threat to education. It consists in a movement with ample political and economic capital in times of disbelief in *selfcare*. The biggest challenge in tackling GERM is manifested in the fluidity of its ideas, a sense of truth that conceives the subject as a neoliberal *homo economicus* in that this subject is nothing more than “a trade partner, an entrepreneur of oneself, he is his own capital, his own source of income” (Foucault, 1995, p. 311).

The power of GERM lies precisely in the crossing of subjectivities. It is a microorganism of power that contaminates on a global scale and manifests in a field of knowledge that modifies the conception of education. In this sense, to Foucault (2014, p. 30), power and knowledge are directly implicated since “there is no relationship of power without the corresponding constitution of a field of knowledge, neither knowledge that does not presume and constitute relationships of power at that same time”, producing specific forms of thinking, acting and living. This does not mean that there is nothing else to be done, since it is not only about what *power does to us* but also about what *we do with knowledge* to consider new relationships of power.

Although it is a challenging and unfinished task, we dare to contemplate the SPE curriculum from the perspective of the aestheticization of existence. Instead of heavy curricular policies, we bet on the lightness and confidence of a curriculum as an affirmation. An affirmation of life, with *selfcare* as an ethical exercise and the production of life as a singular work of art as its objective. It is based

on the challenge to build new ethical and aesthetic manners of life that we present different forms of considering SPE concerning curricular normativity, teacher qualification and the production of educational materials. Although we are aware of the obstacles to our task and its unfinished state, we trust in the positivity of knowledge.

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Author 1 – Conception and design of the research; construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data.

Author 2 – Construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data; review of the final text.

Author 3 – Conception and design of the research; construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data; review of the final text.

### SUPPORT/FINANCING

Does not apply.

### RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY

Does not apply.

### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

NOVAES, Renato Cavalcanti; TRIANI, Felipe da Silva; TELLES, Silvio de Cassio Costa. The GERM and the aestheticization of existence in school physical education. *Educar em Revista*, Curitiba, v. 40, e94741, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-0411.94741>

*This article was translated by Elizabeth Harris – E-mail: lizardy.beth@gmail.com. After being designed, it was submitted for validation by the author(s) before publication.*

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**Received:** 02/29/2024

**Approved:** 09/10/2024