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Educación Física y Comunidades Virtuales

Physical Education and Virtual Communities

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Resumen: Las comunidades virtuales de internet son un fenómeno de la actualidad, constituyéndose en fuente de investigación y medio de acceso a los discursos sociales. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar los discursos de dos comunidades virtuales «Yo amo Educación Física» y «Yo odio Educación Física», del website Orkut. El surgimiento de tales comunidades se constituye como elemento para reflexión acerca de los significados atribuidos a las clases de Educación Física escolar y a la tradición de esas clases en Brasil. Como procedimiento metodológico es realizada investigación bibliográfica e investigación de campo, con base en principios de la etnografía, caracterizando una discusión eminentemente cualitativa. En las entrevistas con los participantes de ambas comunidades fue posible observar que hay varios relatos de malas experiencias en las clases, tanto por parte de los que dicen «amar» Educación Física como de los que dicen «odiar» esa disciplina escolar. La justificativa para eso es la tradición de esas clases en Brasil, siendo predominante una visión de cuerpo y de las prácticas corporales exclusivamente biológica. Esa tradición implica un accionar pedagógico por parte de los profesores direccionado para la universalización de las expresiones de los alumnos, desconsiderando sus diferencias.

Palabra clave: Cultura; Prácticas Corporales; Clases de Educación Física; Internet; Escuela; Comunidades virtuales.

Abstract: Virtual communities on internet are a current phenomenon. They are sources of research and access to social discourses. The present paper has the objective to analyze discourses in two virtual communities: «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education» on Orkut website. The emergence of these communities constitutes an element for reflection about the signifiers assigned to Physical Education classes at school and the tradition of these classes in Brazil. Bibliography and field research were the methodological procedures based on ethnography principles characterizing a mainly qualitative discussion. During the interviews with participants from both communities, it was able to realized that there are many complaints of badly succeeded classes by people who say «to love» Physical Education as by the ones who say «to hate» this subject at school. The reason for that is the tradition of these classes in Brazil, which are mainly an exclusively biological view of the body and body practices. This tradition implies a pedagogical action by the teachers focused on standardizing the students and not considering their differences.

Key words: Culture; Body Practices; Physical Education classes; Internet; School; Virtual communities.

1. Introduction

The reflections developed on this paper are related to two virtual communities on Orkut called «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education». The investigation on these virtual communities is a possibility to access social discourses and signifiers attributed to Physical Education classes at school.

Created by Google, Orkut is a social network website with the goal of maintaining and making new friendships which are shared in the profiles (personal pages which contain a description of the user like physical characteristics and favorite games, food, music, movies, sports, TV programs, etc.) or in the virtual communities. It is a recent phenomenon that joins young people from all over the world. It is one of the biggest networks available.

According to Pereira (2007, p.362), virtual communities are social bonds that are created from «practical histories, life styles, beliefs and common values». One of the characteristics of virtual communities is that many of them are created from a view of the real world – and transported to virtual world, in which their participants have social histories in common. The communities «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education» are reinforced as places to express a social-cultural reality and could be attributed to the success or lack of it in Physical Education classes at school.

Lévy (1996, p.15) analyzing the characteristics of virtual reality states «(...) the virtual does not oppose to real, but to actual: virtual reality and actuality are merely two different ways of being». The author explains that the virtual, frequently, is something that is not present and it implies to consider its aspect of deterritorialization. It is the existence (of a person, collectivity, an act, a piece of information) in non-presence, separated from the ordinary and geographic physical space, the clock temporality and the calendar. It is not a separation totally independent from the time-space of reference, as they are inserted

in physical supports and are updated in a certain moment. However, it is about another time-space reference. The unit of time is separated from the unit of place, as it is noticed in interaction in electronic networks, live transmissions, telepresence systems. There is action continuity, although there is a discontinuous prolongation (like in the answering machine or email). A third differential factor is the substitution of the unit of place by synchronization and interconnection, the unit of time.

The exit of the «presence», main characteristic to understand virtualization, brings implication to the collective life. Lévy (1996) exemplifies stating that each new communication and transport system modifies the pertinent space to human communities. When a railway is built, the cities or nearby regions become closer because of the railway and when they are seen from other perspective, by the cities that are not connected, it could mean they are further when compared to the connected regions. However, to those who do not use train, the old distance keeps the same. The author presents this example to show that the same occurs with other communication and transport systems like cars, airplanes, telephone, etc. and the result is the coexistence of many closeness systems and many practical spaces.

According to Lévy (1996, p.22), in the same way, many registration and cultural transmission systems (oral, written, audiovisual record, digital networks) «(...) build rhythms, speed, or different history qualities». Communication mediated by computer, specially virtual communities on Internet, express a type of interaction characterized for the exchange signifiers about a certain subject, they are in a closeness system, not being in presence.

This type of communication is part of an emerging interactive communication system that, according to Castells (2002), was started in two large scale experiences: the French Minitel – a device to lead France to the Information Society and to the North American ARPANET, Internet precursor, a system to keep the communication networks in case of nuclear attack.

Castells' descriptions (2002) show that Internet came up from an audacious system. The intention was to avoid the North American system from being attacked, or taken by the Soviets, in case of nuclear war. This was the main tactic used, a network architecture that were

able to control all territory using communication networks through Internet.

In 1990, Internet is not only for militaries anymore and it became popular. From now on, we face the growing of the communication through Internet, meeting new changes for communication.

It was understood that Internet was used as a communication tool for general security, so everybody's security, having information exchange in a safe way among people involved in the military group and this information were important because of how quickly the information exchanged happened in real time. When it was available to the society, it is not only a security tool but it is used for different things, according to different interests, becoming a way of interaction among people in virtual world.

According to Castells (2002, p.455), «Internet is the spine of global communication mediated by computer: it is the network which connects most computers». The emergence of Internet begins to connect people in real time; even without the physical presence, as it was described by Lévy (1996) and with the comfort of multiplied information through websites and communities that interact with information needed.

Castells (2002) highlights in his descriptions the importance that should be given to the statistics that show how intense is the growing in computer connections. It is estimated that by 2010, one billion computers will be connected and have more than two billion Internet users. These figures show the implicit differences on the Internet access – social, racial, sexual, age and place.

The possibility of inclusion and also the significant raise of cultural expressions that make possible for people to communicate is the main characteristic of this new system.

In Brazil, there are studies made about Orkut that deal with the matters related to school environment. Zuin (2009) explains that in the history of education there are moments of intense restriction to the students' manifestations in classroom, as, for example, the lack of opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. Due to education style, the student starts having a feeling of dissatisfaction towards to the teacher and the subject and find difficulties in expressing them because of the fear of the teachers and because they consider the possibility of retaliation. Communities on Orkut represent to these students an alternative to expose their opinions and feelings.

The existence of virtual communities like «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education» on Orkut lead us to suppose that members of these communities use Internet to debate and exchange experiences about their Physical Education classes at school.

Physical Education area originated from the naturalistic conceptions about the men and body, and, in Brazil was greatly affected by hygienist medicine in 19th century. Most of Physical Education courses in Brazil are basically focused on biological area. This is the type of argument Daolio (2001) presents to analyze the problem related to dealing with differences between students in Physical Education classes at school. The premise is that teachers in these classes see their students as being biologically the same. Based on this view, they do not recognize other factors that are determinant on the construction of body expressions as cultural, social and psychological factors.

The tradition and history of Physical Education classes in Brazil follow a biological view of the body and the students that do not meet the teachers' expectations in motor terms end up being left out in classes. This could be one of the reasons some people say «to love» Physical Education and others «to hate» the school subject and also body practices.

Geertz (1989) states that there is no human existence without culture. Drawing a limit between what is biological and what is cultural is very difficult, almost impossible. For this reason, for Daolio (2004), it is not polemic to state that Physical Education is studying concepts from other areas, specially human sciences (sociology, anthropology, history and others) and, because of this, bases on different sciences to justify its specific themes, not limiting itself to Physical Education in which:

[...] the body was only seen as a group of bones and muscles and not as an expression of culture; sport was only a hobby or an activity for athletes and not as a political phenomenon; physical education was seen as an exclusively biological area and not as an area in which can be explained by human sciences (DAOLIO, 2004, p. 02, our translation).

Discussing Physical Education under the perspective of social anthropology and taking in consideration cultural aspects of human being, Dalio (1996, p.40) believes that Physical Education is «an area of the knowledge that studies and acts on a group of practices connected to the body and movement created by men during his history». This fact justifies the position of a group of Brazilian researchers who work on corporal culture field. In this field, if Physical Education is an area which is related to corporal culture, so, the base for Physical Education at school should emphasize the practice of the cultural content, giving the possibility of a new living and not only practices that emphasize students who detach in classes by the physical ability criteria.

2. Material and methodology

2.1. Sample

Participants of Orkut communities: «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education». The participants who say «to hate» Physical Education were more easily found in Orkut communities, some answered the invitation and would take part in the research. 126 people who were contacted, 42 showed interest in giving interview but only 16 did it in fact. Among the 16, 5 people met the criteria to be selected for the group to be researched.

The ones who say «to love» Physical Education classes, 8 people agreed to take part in the interview but only 5 really did and met the pre-established criteria for the research among 73 people that were contacted.

To refer to the statements of the interviewees, it is going to be used the initials of their names, to keep their identification confidential. From the communities that say «to hate» Physical Education: G, 19 years old, student; P., 19 years old, student; L., 19 years old, student; Ar., 20 years old, student; A., 20 years old, student. From the communities that say «to love» Physical Education: JM., 21 years old, student; MM., 22 years old, student; D.B., 28 years old, Physical Education teacher; A.A., 31 years old, DJ; E., 40 years old, Physical Education teacher.

2.2. Instrument

Orkut has its own search system where it is possible to research by typing keywords or selecting big themes (as sports, TV, cartoons, etc.) or communities or groups that cover specific matters. The first time when the website was visited, when the chunk «I love Physical Education» was typed, the results were 108 communities created with the same name and when typing «I hate Physical Education», the results were 39 communities.

Firstly, a profile of the researcher was created on Orkut so messages could be exchanged. Then the first messages to members of the community «I love Physical Education» to take part in the research were sent. In «I hate Physical Education» community a total of 126 people were contacted and in «I love Physical Education» community 73 people were contacted.

The interviews were arranged to happen in person and also virtually. The biggest part of the interviews were made virtually through programs that make online communication (in real time) as Msn® (Microsoft Service Network is a portal and service network offered by Microsoft where it is possible to talk online, in real time with people through computers or cellphones) and Skype® (software or communication program on Internet in which it is possible to telephone through computers, for free, or between a computer and a telephone or cellphone).

2.3. Method

Methodological procedures as bibliographic and field research were made in the virtual communities «I love Physical Education» and «I

hate Physical Education», on Orkut (www.orkut.com.br). Bibliographic research, based on Severino's ideas (2007) were made through a bibliographic research in the library system at UNIMEP (Methodist University of Piracicaba) and at UNICAMP (Estate University of Campinas), corresponding to the authors' work in the field of anthropology, sociology and Physical Education that focus on social cultural aspects. For this research books, theses, essays and articles were consulted.

The field research consisted in accessing and doing interviews with the participants in the virtual communities «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education». It was considered the participants in both communities who use this internet resource for virtual interaction and who answer messages very often. Besides, it was considered another two criteria – people who had finished basic education and they had to be more than 18 years old. So they could evaluate Physical Education classes better and they would be in accordance with the Brazilian ethical criteria for scientific investigations involving human beings.

2.4. Procedure

The contact with the interviewees was made by semi-structured interviews, procedure considered by Triviños (1987) as one of the main ways for qualitative research in Human Sciences. The interviews were based on a guide allowing the interviewee to spontaneously continue with their thoughts and experiences.

The guide for the interview was the following:

- 1 – History about Physical Education classes at school;
- 2 – History about corporal practices made at leisure moments;
- 3 – Health concept;
- 4 – Beauty concept;
- 5 – Corporal practices concept;
- 6 – Daily life implications.

After the interviews, the third and the last part of the research were made about the analyses of the data collected in the field research. For this, ethnography was the base, what Geertz (1989) understands as «dense description». To the author, there are four characteristics for this type of description:

It is interpretative; what it interprets is the social discourse flow and the interpretation involved consists in trying to save the «saying» in a specific discourse of its possibility of vanish and fix it in researchable forms (...). There is, in advance, a fourth characteristic in that description, at least the way I practice it: it is microscopic (GEERTZ, 1989, p.31, our translation).

The objective of the third part of the research was to interpret the discourses that surrounded the two virtual communities, so to understand the reasons why some people «hate» Physical Education and others «love» the subject at school. Therefore, it was made in the level of social behavior investigation in relation to the signifiers attributed to Physical Education classes at school for the two groups that were investigated: people that take part in the virtual communities «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education».

3. Results

In communities «I hate Physical Education», there is a certain frequency of complaints about badly succeeded Physical Education classes at school. On the other hand, in communities as «I love Physical Education», in general, the virtual space is used for advertisements and sports articles sales and courses in Physical Education area. There are no topics or debates about why some people «love» the classes. To cite just some examples of the debate themes and forums in this community: «Bodybuilding teacher needed», «Specialization course in Exercise Physiology», «Looking for Physical Education Books? – get in here», «Personal Trainers», etc.

During the interviews, «I hate Physical Education» community members comment how their classes were at school:

«... I've never had a theoretical class, as far as I remember, all classes were «stretching-sport» or just sport and it was usually football, volleyball or handball...» (Interviewee G)

«... in the 5th and 6th grade, boys played football and girls played dodgeball. In the 7th and 8th grades, again football for boys and handball for girls...» (Interviewee P).

«... we had volleyball, handball and basketball classes for girls and soccer for boys... in the kindergarten I remember games and rhythm gymnastics classes...» (Interviewee A).

«...until the 7th grade there was a bit of everything, sports, stretching and gymnastics..., later it was more volleyball and football...the most we had was one or two classes teaching how to hold the ball, kick or serve. Most of the times the teacher just asked the class to divide into teams, gave us the ball and he was the referee. I just started hating the whole things when it was only about the match, there was the pressure for you to play well, when we didn't even know how to play, what to do in the match because the teacher had never taught and seemed not to care, and there was this thing with funny nicknames and people complained because you made a mistake here or there...it was complicated because there was a type of bullying and the teacher didn't realize or pretended he wasn't seeing anything.» (Interviewee Ar)

«...basically football, the teacher threw a ball into the court and said 'play'...I don't like the classes because there was the obligation of doing something that even my teachers seemed to hate, many seemed not wanting to teach...and I started hating it because I've never been good at football and I was always mocked because of the ridiculous sexism that thinks that the man has the obligation of knowing and enjoying football...later, in high school, it was worse because the teacher didn't care, seemed not to care about anything related to Physical Education...» (Interviewee L.)

The comments made by members of «I love Physical Education» communities are similar to those who say «to hate» the classes:

«...classes were terrible, it was volleyball for girls and football for boys...the teacher sat down and didn't care about the students...» (Interviewee JM.)

«...it was more football, volleyball...the teacher gave the students the ball to play, few times the teacher taught with physical activities for example...when there was a nice activity I did it but when it was football I didn't because I hate soccer, I don't know how to play...» (Interviewee A.A.)

«...now I'm a Physical Education teacher, but at school I didn't love the classes...most of the time the teacher gave the students the ball to play football, dodgeball...I didn't play anything...I just enjoyed the gymnastics, stretching classes because I don't like soccer and boys always played football...» (Interviewee D.B.)

According to the descriptions of «I hate Physical Education» community members, physical performance was the main objective. Students who stood out and played well were praised and were the example to be followed. Students who did not play well or were not fit, were left out, on the margin of the class, and were mocked by classmates and even by teachers.

«...I was always the last to be picked by the team because I played badly, I was too tall, too thin and clumsy...even when I got something write, the teacher didn't praise me, only criticized me, I even cried not to go to Physical Education classes...» (Interviewee A.)

«...I've never liked football...but I had to do something to be graded, so I played dodgeball with the girls, what made me to be called «fag», «queer» by my classmates...» (Interviewee P.)

«...the problem is that the ones who didn't play well (like me) were despised and teachers didn't help much...some teachers showed favoritism (even if they didn't recognize it at all)...» (Interviewee G)

People who say not to like Physical Education classes not necessarily hate corporal practices, most practice some physical activity in their leisure moments. The interviewees talk about their concern in being fat or slim and connect corporal beauty and health as being something fundamental to their lives and define beauty having as reference people that are in the media.

«...being health is to take care of yourself, not only physically but also mentally...corporal beauty is to have a health body, it doesn't need to be toned, but it can't be fat, intermediate is fine...» (Interviewee A.A.)

«...health is related to constant physical and sport practice, leisure and well-being activities, balanced diet, reduce emotional stress, a job you enjoy, have an active and relaxed life...my concept of corporal beauty, no hypocrisy...I consider a beautiful body the one that is well-toned, with low fat percentage, nice and proportional curves, without exaggerating, natural and well cared...and my reference is athlete bodies, martial arts athletes and people who work out, actors and actresses' bodies that play superheroes in the movies, figure, body muscle, fitness athletes, nothing very exaggerated as bodybuilding or catwalk models...» (Interviewee D.B.)

When being asked about the interest in taking part in virtual communities on Orkut, «I hate Physical Education» members said:

«...because I've suffered bullying and I am on medication because of it, I have the goal to help and comfort other student that go through this in Physical Education classes...» (Interviewee A.)

«...because Orkut offers you things, like communities, in which you can show what you feel...» (Interviewee D.)

«...I was always left out in Physical Education classes, I was out of the teams or I was the last one to be picked because I played badly, but I got in the community on Orkut to share with others the terrible experience I had...» (Interviewee P.)

«...I have a community on Orkut against Physical Education and what I notice is that the biggest reason to everybody not to like it is the bullying the classes bring, you know. There's one or other that complains because really doesn't like the activity itself, but most of people have problem with the way other students treat the ones who don't know how to play. My case is exactly the latter. Because the tendency is that they get competitive, then you enter a team because you have to or your teacher tells you that you will fail, then you try to play or do something, but every time you lose or make a mistake everybody complains...it's complicated». (Interviewee Ar.)

People who take part in the communities who say «to love» Physical Education said why they have joined the communities:

«...because I love rhythmic gymnastics and I joined the community in my first year at Physical Education University, I get super excited and there I see advertisements and news...» (Interviewee JM.)

«...I always liked Physical Education classes and I also chose this course at university because I think it's important to join the communities: you can get to know people, their preferences, styles...» (Interviewee E.)

«...because I chose Physical Education as a profession because I love it and I like to be in touch with people who have the same goals that I do...I always advertised on Orkut and it always worked...» (Entrevistado D.B.)

4. Discussion

In «I hate Physical Education» communities, their members use that space as a form of denouncing Physical Education classes they had at school. This datum is similar to Zuin's studies (2009).

In «I love Physical Education» is noticeable the use of that space to advertise about jobs, sport materials sale and courses advertises for post-graduation and specialization.

We can note by the answers of «I love Physical Education» and «I hate Physical Education» virtual communities' members the predominance of sport content in Physical Education classes at school. In Brazilian reality is very common the emphasis in teaching collective sports as volleyball, handball, basketball and specially football. The members' stories, based on certain discourses attributed to the body, to sport, to teachers' pedagogical acts, configure a traditional social practice in Brazilian Physical Education.

The interviewees relate that physical performance in the performance of the movements was the main goal in Physical Education

at school. This datum corresponds to Daolio's studies (2001) and confirms the presupposition that in these classes the biological vision of the body is predominance, focused on physical performance and this can justify the teachers' difficulty in dealing with the differences among students in the classes.

It is realized that the interviewees understand the question of health and corporal beauty having as reference the body shape and images from athletes and famous people in media. Besides, they present a view of health associated with physical activity. This type of relation is widely spread in our society these days. Physical activities are considered to be the main way to obtain a beautiful and health body, not considering if the person is really healthy.

5. Conclusion

The data show the necessity of a pedagogical intervention by Physical Education professionals, an action that considers the social representation attributed to the body and corporal practices. It is fundamental the development of other studies in the area, that have the focus on the analyses of signifiers attributed to the body and corporal practices by the media, generating theoretical basis for the work of Physical Education teacher at school.

The study made a contribution for the production of knowledge about formal education at school in realities and specific contexts, instigating the development of studies in the area and in other social realities and also it is an innovation in the way of using the communication mediated by computer as a source for research.

It is hoped that the data and reflections presented here can mobilize the debate among professionals and researchers in Education, Physical Education and Communication areas and also contribute for the revision of the values and concepts by professionals who work in Physical Education area.

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