



Social Representations of the Curriculum in Physical Education Teachers: A Multi-Method Analysis regarding Teachers from Copacabana, Colombia

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Abstract

Objectives. This study aimed to provide a specific analysis of social representations on the curriculum in physical education teachers.

Materials and methods. The study focuses on a sample of 25 physical education teachers from Copacabana, Antioquia, using a multi-method approach with a predominance of grounded theory. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, sociodemographic surveys, and natural semantic networks.

Results. Qualitative analysis using ATLAS.ti revealed four emerging categories in this group: dynamic and situated curriculum, curriculum for comprehensive training, flexible and contextualized curriculum, and prescriptive curriculum. Quantitative analysis identified a central core of representation composed of concepts such as planning, instructions, and education. The results indicate that physical education teachers conceive the curriculum in a multidimensional way, reflecting the particularities of their discipline. A tension is observed between adherence to prescriptive curricular structures and the need for flexibility to address the specific demands of physical education.

Conclusions. The study concludes that these representations are strongly influenced by the practical context of teaching physical education, suggesting the need for curricular approaches adapted to this area.

Keywords: social representations, curriculum, physical education, planning, comprehensive training.

Introduction

The epistemological and cultural elements that determine the purposes associated with training are embedded in the school curriculum; its analysis favors an approach to school culture and the actors that give life to the school, hence problematizing the curriculum constitutes a current task for the institutionality.

To do so, this exercise takes as its axis the concept of social representations by Serge Moscovici (1979), representations contribute to the understanding of complex and situated phenomena such as the curriculum. Additionally, they constitute an expeditious path to return to people and their daily practices as a source of conceptual elaboration. Social representations allow us to understand the knowledge of communities from what they do in an unprepared way; their

voices and actions are the reference for the concretion of metacognitive processes.

This characteristic of social representations brings it closer to the curriculum, facilitating the reconstruction of the concept and its relations with more complex elaborations such as didactics or pedagogy. Bourdieu (1997) points out that the conceptual elements that add up to the capitals of a people are built in social interaction, which underlines the importance of their study in the spaces and routines of the school, a natural space for the construction of the curriculum.

The research takes as a reference the approaches of Jean-Claude Abric (2001) on the structure of social representations, postulating that all representation is organized around a central core and a peripheral system. According to Abric (2001) “the central core is the fundamental element of the representation since it determines both the meaning and the organization of the representation” (p. 20).

On the other hand, the peripheral system, which surrounds the central core, is made up of more flexible and dy-

namic elements. These peripheral elements “allow individual adaptations of the representation” (Abric, 2001, p. 23) and act as a frame of reference that contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon, its structure, connections, and meanings; as Lo Monaco et al. (2013) point out, “peripheral elements are much more sensitive to the immediate context” (p. 5), which allows the social representation to adapt to specific situations and to account for the trends and perspectives that make up the representation as a whole.

This reflection on the contexts is shared with the curriculum, since from critical theories it is assumed as a cultural and emancipatory construction (Grundy, 1987). Fernández (2016) points out that what happens with the curriculum, its movements and transformations go through the practices associated with everyday school life and the social representations developed there for the purpose of teaching.

The review of the background reveals a growing interest in understanding how teachers construct the curriculum in their daily practice. For Gómez and Velasco (2017), teachers’ curricular practices depend on multiple factors, including institutional learning expectations and community aspects; along the same lines, Fernández (2016) underlines the importance of understanding the curriculum as a historical and social construction. This is complemented by what Giraldo et al. (2019) propose, who point out the diversity of approaches and the lack of conceptual clarity in curricular reflection in the West. It highlights that for some authors such as Labrador (2020), teachers incorporated devices and strategies into pedagogical practice, which can contribute to the understanding of what happens in the classroom and the associated knowledge. Finally, for other researchers such as Aguirre (2017), it is essential that reflection on the curriculum goes beyond traditional disciplines and focuses on fields that have an impact on other aspects of schooling such as corporality.

Regarding the link between social representations and curriculum, for authors such as Jesús Pérez (2016), the curriculum reflects the knowledge and experiences of the people, hence its study should focus on the people who create it; for Fernández Menor (2020), given the historical nature of the curriculum, it is essential to direct the instruments beyond the conceptual aspects and cross-reference them with elements such as experience. Cadavid (2019) proposes a curricular construction that goes beyond the nomination of content and integrates school subjects in its elaboration, an aspect endorsed by Ortega Rodríguez (2020), who points out that given the dialogical nature of the curriculum and the way it influences the development of the training project, it is necessary to return to those who problematize it in the classroom to favor its analysis and understanding.

This research sought to expand knowledge about how educators name and make the curriculum possible. To do so, the following question was raised: What are the social representations that teachers in the municipality of Copacabana have constructed in relation to the curriculum and the relationships they establish from them with their classroom practice?

Materials and Methods

Sample Selection

The study sample consisted of 25 physical education teachers intentionally selected from seven educational

institutions in the municipality of Copacabana. The majority of the teachers surveyed were men (60%), the average age was 36.4 years (SD = 11.3). The age distribution shows a wide range, from 25 to 59 years. As regards the level of education, a trend towards advanced professional qualifications was observed. 40% of the participants had postgraduate studies (28% with a specialization and 12% with a master’s degree), while the remaining 60% had undergraduate education. 70% of the teachers worked in urban areas, and the vast majority worked at the basic secondary level.

Information Gathering Techniques

Three data collection techniques were used: in-depth interviews, sociodemographic surveys, and natural semantic networks. The in-depth interview, following Galeano (2007), allowed the teachers’ narratives and experiences about the curriculum to be captured. The sociodemographic survey provided contextual information about the participants, while natural semantic networks, as proposed by Velásquez and Córdoba (2018), facilitated the identification of the conceptual associations and relationships that teachers establish around the curriculum.

Design and Procedures

A multi-method approach with a predominance of grounded theory, as proposed by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), was adopted to capture the complexity of social representations about the curriculum. In complementary terms, a descriptive non-experimental quantitative study was used. The data collection process was carried out between June 2022 and June 2023, allowing to capture the current dynamics in the educational field. Individual interviews were conducted, surveys were applied, and the natural semantic network technique was implemented in group sessions.

The qualitative analysis was carried out using Atlas Ti v24 software, following the open, axial and selective coding procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2002). This process allowed us to identify emerging categories, establish relationships between them and build a substantive theory on the social representations of the curriculum. A constant iterative and comparative analysis was carried out until theoretical saturation was reached.

Statistical Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, Statistical Analysis in Microsoft Excel and SPSS 29 was used, carrying out a descriptive and semantic network analysis (González, 2019, p. 48). The statistical profile of the defining words expressed by teachers in relation to the curriculum was established, and the representational structure was determined. The method proposed by González (2019) was applied to identify the central core of the social representation, establishing a cutoff when a word presented a semantic distance of 5% or more from the main defining word.

Results

The results are grouped into two sections. The first refers to the elements associated with qualitative instruments (in-depth interviews), and the second section presents

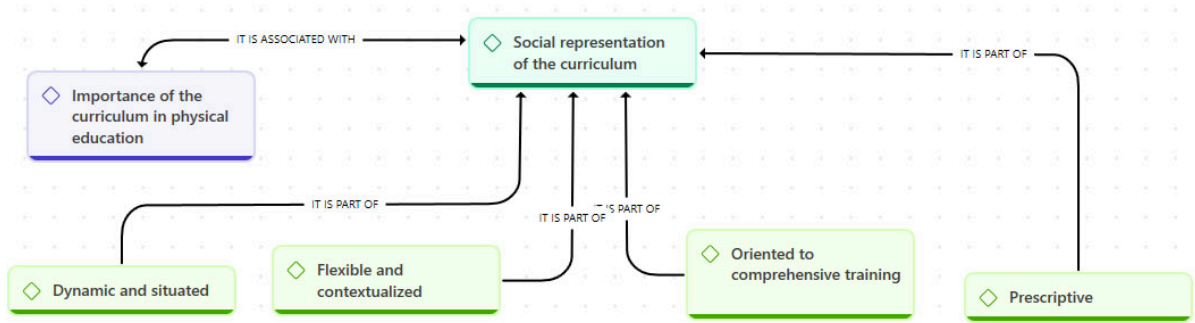


Fig. 1. Categorical network associated with the curriculum

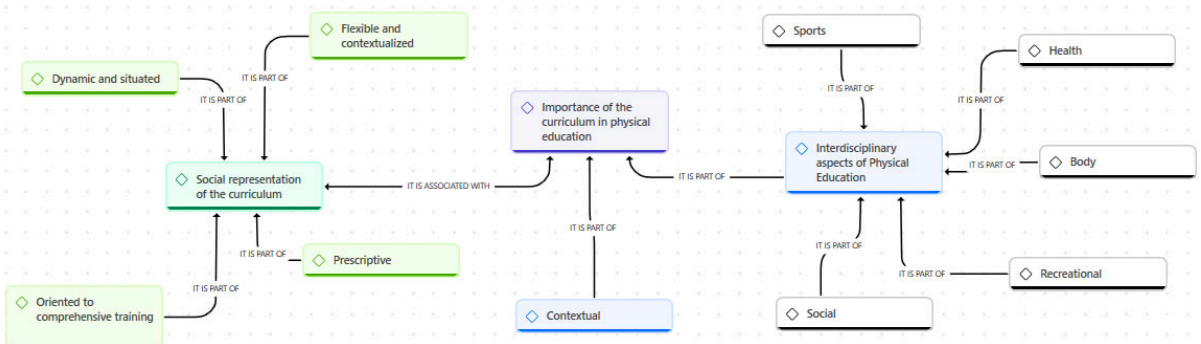


Fig. 2. Axial categories that refer to the curriculum

the findings in relation to natural semantic networks and representational structure.

Figure 1 presents the categorical structure emerging from the qualitative analysis of social representations. This analysis reveals four axial categories: flexible and contextualized curriculum, dynamic and situated, oriented to comprehensive training, and prescriptive. Additionally, aspects related to the importance of the curriculum in physical education and its disciplinary dimension are identified.

It is notable how, for the participants, elements such as context, health, sport, body, social and recreation shape their conceptions of the discipline and the associated curriculum. This finding agrees with that indicated by Baena et al. (2023), who identify these elements as key factors in the construction of the competencies of the area, those that teachers incorporate into their pedagogical practice and in the curricular design. This interrelation between teaching experiences and the specific disciplinary components of physical education underlines the complexity of social representations in this field.

The social representations of the curriculum were analyzed through the defining words and their metrics: frequency, order, semantic weight (M), semantic distance (FMG) and semantic percentage. These elements reveal the structure of the representation.

Figure 2 presents a structure that reflects the semantic distances between the defining words that make up the central core of the social representation of the curriculum in physical education teachers. This core is composed of 22 lexical units, which are positioned at the center of the hegemonic representation. The prominence of terms such as “Planning”, “Instructions” and “Education” suggests a vision of the curriculum strongly linked to organizational and

pedagogical aspects. This is in line with what González-Hernández et al. (2022) point out, who highlight that “training in physical education must integrate pedagogical and organizational aspects that respond to the current demands of the educational and sports field” (p. 5).

The hegemonic structure is complemented by peripheral elements that, although they have less semantic weight, are crucial to understanding the complexity and dynamism that the analysis has revealed as underlying the curricular study.

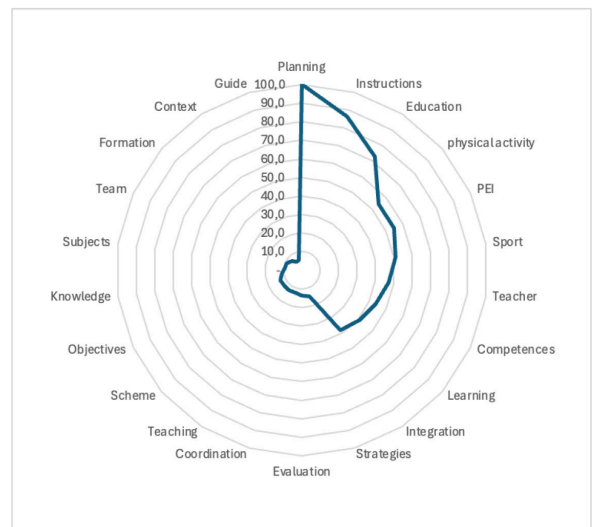


Fig. 3. Semantic distance from the hegemonic social representation of the curriculum

Table 1. Defining words associated with the social representation of the curriculum

Words	Frequency	Order	M value	FMG	%M	%RS	RS
Planning	5	22	110	100.0	12.7		
Instructions	5	19	95	86.4	10.9		
Education	5	16	80	72.7	9.2		
Physical activity	4	15	60	54.5	6.9		
Pei	5	12	60	54.5	6.9		
Sport	4	14	56	50.9	6.5		
Teaching	4	13	52	47.3	6.0		
Competencies	4	12	48	43.6	5.5		
Learning	3	15	45	40.9	5.2		
Integration	3	14	42	38.2	4.8		
Strategies	2	8	16	14.5	1.8		
Assessment	3	5	15	13.6	1.7	90.7	RSH
Coordination	2	7	14	12.7	1.6		
Teaching	2	7	14	12.7	1.6		
Scheme	2	7	14	12.7	1.6		
Goals	2	7	14	12.7	1.6		
Knowledge	2	6	12	10.9	1.4		
Subjects	2	5	10	9.1	1.2		
Equipment	2	5	10	9.1	1.2		
Training	2	4	8	7.3	0.9		
Context	2	3	6	5.5	0.7		
Guide	2	3	6	5.5	0.7		

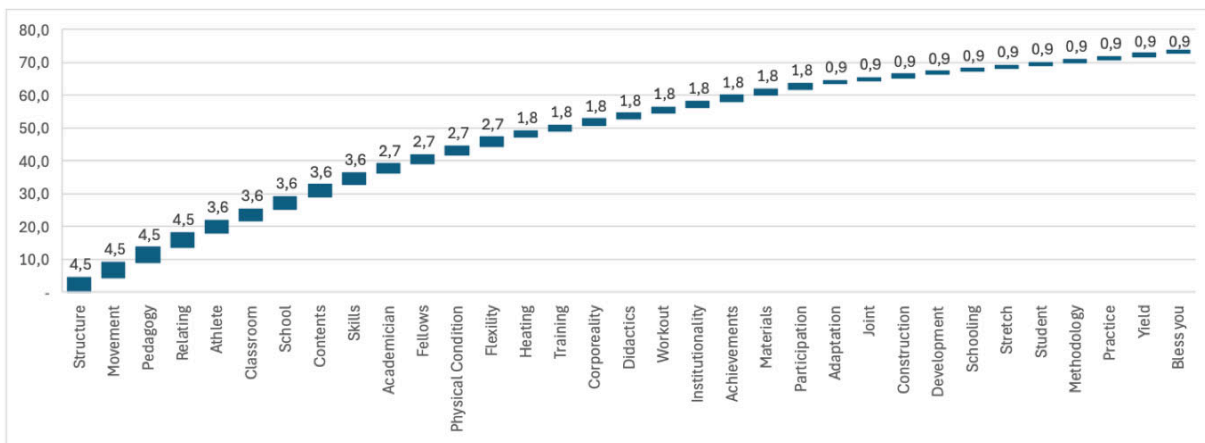


Fig. 4. Semantic distance of the peripheral social representation of the curriculum

The graph reveals a series of concepts that broaden the understanding of the curriculum in the field of physical education. It highlights the presence of terms such as “structure”, “movement”, “pedagogy” and “referents,” which suggest a vision of the curriculum that goes beyond the merely instrumental. As Molina Neto (2023) points out, “physical education is not limited to physical activity, but encompasses comprehensive human development,

including pedagogical, social and cultural aspects” (p. 3). This perspective is reflected in the inclusion of concepts such as “skills”, “flexibility” and “warm-up”.

Discussion

The qualitative results showed four emerging categories. Below are some considerations linked to the testimonies of

the participants and the considerations that the study raises as a result of the analysis.

Dynamic and Situated Curriculum in Physical Education

The curriculum in the field of physical education is revealed as a multidimensional construction, this is made evident when the participants point out: “The curriculum allows the complexity of the field of performance of the physical educator to be made visible, allowing issues such as locomotion, nutrition, calisthenics, and sports to be put on the classroom stage” (Ent-6). This statement underlines the capacity of the curriculum to develop formative practices that accommodate the complexity of the area and the different elements that make up the corporal development in schoolchildren. In addition, another participant emphasizes the collaborative nature of the curricular construction by stating that “The curriculum is an agreement around which to learn, its elaboration is based on the knowledge of the teacher and the school formative project” (Ent-8). This conception highlights the importance of a pertinent and significant curriculum that starts from the knowledge of teachers and the recognition of the context.

This understanding of the curriculum places the teacher as a key actor in the construction of pedagogical knowledge and its development in the classroom. Cardona Marín et al. (2024) postulate that the curricular structure in physical education should be a reflection of the specific competencies that learners are expected to use to insert themselves into cultural dynamics.

Flexible and Contextualized Curriculum

Participants associate the curriculum with a construction capable of adapting to the contemporary demands of the discipline and the interests of students. This is evidenced in a testimony that states: “The curriculum is the bridge between theory and practice, in the case of physical education it allows us to understand biologically how the body works, its possibilities and limitations” (Int-5). This curricular allusion underlines the integrative function of the curriculum, which articulates theoretical knowledge with practical experience, facilitating a deep understanding of corporality.

Regarding this relationship, Rojo-Ramos et al. (2024) point out that the Physical Education curriculum needs to adapt to technological and social changes in order to effectively meet the needs of students. This statement underlines the importance of a dynamic curricular design, capable of incorporating pedagogical innovations that enrich the learning experience.

Curriculum for comprehensive training

The curriculum in the testimonies is presented as a construction capable of adapting to the changing needs of the educational environment and of the students. One of the participants states: “The curriculum allows the educator to put their knowledge around how the body works, based on what students and people do on a daily basis to get from one place to another, play, breathe” (Int-7).

In this sense, Balcázar et al. (2024) point out that physical education must go beyond the physical and

promote a development that involves the daily life of subjects and what they do in their lives. That is, a curriculum that encourages training that addresses elements such as identity, citizenship, and culture. Such a curriculum becomes a means for the training of individuals capable of understanding and using their corporeality in relation to the sociocultural spaces and practices in which they live.

Prescriptive Curriculum

This conception of the curriculum is based on the recognition of the regulatory and institutional documents that are intended for teaching. One of the participants points out that “The school curriculum is based on legal references and allows the teacher to lead his students in the construction of the expected competencies for the level of training” (Ent-13). This vision highlights the normative nature of the curriculum as a vehicle for transmitting social references, while recognizing its role in the integral formation of the individual.

The notion of prescriptive curriculum is based on the need to provide a coherent and well-founded structure for educational practice. In this regard, Stahringer and Carbajal (2024) point out that the curriculum calls for a solid disciplinary foundation and a reflection on what happens in the classroom; prescription is the starting point. However, its development is conditioned by the knowledge, experiences, and questions inherent to pedagogical practice.

Structure of the representation

The proximity of “Physical Activity” and “Sport” to the reference values of the representational core highlights disciplinary specificity, while the presence of “PEI” indicates the importance of the institutional framework. Concepts such as “Competencies”, “Learning” and “Integration” reflect a contemporary educational approach. This configuration suggests a representation that balances technical aspects of the discipline with broader educational considerations; for Pérez-Pueyo et al. (2022) “the new Physical Education curriculum must promote comprehensive training, which not only develops motor skills, but also socio-emotional and cognitive skills” (p. 78).

The peripheral elements of social representation are organized around the central core. These elements can be categorized mainly into three aspects: the structure and form of the class, the curricular components related to the formative and pedagogical aspects, and the disciplinary issues specific to the area of physical education, such as movement and basic motor skills. This configuration suggests that, although the structure of social representation tends to maintain a certain stability, it is susceptible to variations due to the inherent dynamism of the context and the flexible nature of the curriculum. These variations can manifest themselves in relation to teaching practice, teacher training and the educational environment.

Conclusions

The trend toward standardization, reflected in concepts such as “planning” and “instructions,” may conflict with the dynamic nature of the field of physical education. This raises the need for more flexible curricular approaches that

balance the requirements of the area with the particularities of the context, school actors, and discipline.

The identified representations reflect a tension between tradition and innovation. Terms such as “sport” and “physical activity” coexist with emerging elements such as “integration” and “skills”, indicating an evolution towards more holistic approaches. This duality underlines the need for a continuous dialogue between established practices and new pedagogical trends.

The presence of elements such as “adaptation” and “flexibility” indicates an awareness of the need for ongoing training. It is important to implement professional development programs that promote ongoing training in technical knowledge, pedagogical aspects and recognition of the context.

Another important issue is the urgent need for curricular models that favor recognition of the contextual elements of the territories, their inhabitants and social dynamics. The curriculum must allow for the conjuring up in a single practice disciplinary, cultural and historical issues; it is about consolidating a proposal that starts from the disciplines, while recognizing the value of culture, the knowledge of people and the principle of formability that underlies any school process.

Conflict of Interest

The researchers claim no conflicts of interest.

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Соціальні репрезентації викладачів фізичного виховання щодо навчальної програми: Мультиметодичний аналіз стосовно викладачів з Копакабани, Колумбія

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Авторський вклад: А – дизайн дослідження; В – збір даних; С – статаналіз; D – підготовка рукопису; Е – збір коштів

Реферат. Стаття: 7 с., 1 табл., 4 рис., 27 джерел.

Мета дослідження. Мета цього дослідження полягала в здійсненні специфічного аналізу соціальних репрезентацій викладачів фізичного виховання щодо навчальної програми.

Матеріали та методи. Дослідження фокусується на вивченні вибірки із 25 викладачів фізичного виховання з Копакабани, Антиокія, із застосуванням мультиметодичного підходу, в якому перевага надається обґрунтованій теорії. Збір даних здійснювався за допомогою проведення глибинних інтерв'ю, соціодемографічних опитувань та природних семантичних мереж.

Результати. За результатами якісного аналізу із використанням програмного забезпечення ATLAS.ti виявлено чотири нові категорії в цій групі: динамічна та ситуативна навчальна програма, навчальна програма для комплексної підготовки, гнучка та контекстуалізована навчальна програма, а також прескриптивна навчальна програма. Кількісний аналіз визначив центральне ядро репрезентації, що складається з таких концептів, як-от планування, інструкції та освіта. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що викладачі фізичного виховання розуміють навчальну програму у багатовимірний спосіб, що відображає специфіку їхньої дисципліни. Спостерігається протиріччя між дотриманням прескриптивних навчальних структур і необхідністю гнучкості задля задоволення специфічних вимог фізичного виховання.

Висновки. Згідно з результатами дослідження встановлено, що зазначені репрезентації значною мірою залежать від практичного контексту викладання фізичного виховання, що вказує на необхідність адаптації навчальних підходів до цієї галузі.

Ключові слова: соціальні репрезентації, навчальна програма, фізичне виховання, планування, комплексна підготовка.

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