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Original Article

FEMINIST RESEARCH AND COLLABORATIVE SELF-STUDY: DECOLONIAL PATHWAYS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PESQUISA FEMINISTA E AUTOESTUDO COLABORATIVO: CAMINHOS DECOLONIAIS NA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA

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RESUMO

Persiste na Educação Física (EF) brasileira um descompasso entre a produção acadêmica e os desafios cotidianos da escola, sobretudo no que se refere ao afastamento das meninas e de corpos marginalizados das aulas. Esse quadro, atravessado por relações de gênero e colonialidade, evidencia a urgência de pesquisas que não apenas descrevam a exclusão, mas que contribuam para transformá-la em colaboração com as pessoas. Neste artigo, exploramos as possibilidades de caminhos para a construção de pesquisas feministas e decoloniais a partir do autoestudo colaborativo, entendendo-o como prática metodológica que descentraliza a autoridade acadêmica, valoriza narrativas situadas e dá visibilidade a vozes historicamente silenciadas.
Palavras-chave: Pesquisa feminista. Abordagem ativista. Comunidade de prática. Autoestudo.

ABSTRACT

A persistent misalignment remains in Brazilian Physical Education (PE) between academic production and the everyday challenges of school contexts, particularly with regard to the disengagement of girls and marginalized bodies from classes. This situation, shaped by relations of gender and coloniality, underscores the urgency of research that does not merely describe exclusion, but actively contributes to transforming it in collaboration with those involved. In this article, we explore possible pathways for the development of feminist and decolonial research grounded in collaborative self-study, understanding it as a methodological practice that decenters academic authority, values situated narratives, and brings visibility to voices that have been historically silenced.
Keywords: Feminist research. Activist approach. Community of practice. Self-study.

Introduction

The participation of girls in Physical Education (PE) classes has been the subject of research since the 1990s, revealing a persistent pattern of gender inequalities and the exclusion of bodies that do not conform to cultural expectations and norms of what is considered fit and athletic.[1,2] Recent data indicate that Brazilian girls still have, on average, 15 minutes less access to practical PE classes per week compared to boys, a situation that is further exacerbated for students in public schools and for Black girls. This scenario highlights that race, gender, and social class intersect in the production of inequalities in access to bodily practices from the very beginning of schooling.[3]

This scenario, shaped by discourses of gender and coloniality that naturalize hierarchies among bodies, points to the urgency of research that not only describes and denounces this exclusion but also contributes to transforming it.[4] Gender relations are social and cultural constructions permeated by power relations.[5] Coloniality of power, in turn, organizes hierarchies of race and identity, rendering inequalities invisible.[6] This demand is further intensified because recent pedagogical changes have not yet overcome the transitional position of Physical Education: caught between the critique of an exclusionary sport-centered model and the difficulty of consolidating critical pedagogical practices committed to the social functions of the school.[7,8]

This is because, despite the fact that, throughout the 1980s, the Renewal Movement (MR) rethought PE toward more inclusive and socially just practices, issues of gender and coloniality remained largely underexplored, and the gap between pedagogical theory and practice on the gym floor has limited progress.[9,10] For this reason, we argue for the urgency of research that articulates knowledge production in a manner that is engaged with pedagogical practice and with everyday teacher authorship in schools.[11] In order for this process to be grounded in a stance committed to social and gender justice, feminist and decolonial theoretical-methodological perspectives can contribute to rethinking the relationship between theory and practice, the relationships developed in teaching and research, and the meanings of the knowledge produced.[12,13]

In this article, we explore the possibility of a methodological pathway for the development of feminist and decolonial research. We reflect on collaborative self-study as such a possibility, understanding it as an investigative practice that decentralizes academic authority, values situated and collaborative narratives, and gives visibility to voices that have been historically silenced. To this end, we present the cases of two collaborative self-studies conducted with school-based PE teachers, carried out within the context of their master's research projects. The empirical material we analyze consists of excerpts from reflective meetings on the teachers' pedagogical practice with their critical friends, understood as spaces for collective reflection, collaboration, support, and productive tension.

Our objective was to understand how collaborative self-study fostered an expanded understanding among teachers regarding listening to students, strengthened their confidence in their pedagogical practices, and prompted the rethinking of aspects of their classes, including new ways of perceiving gender relations among students. By articulating theory and practice based on a feminist and decolonial methodology, we seek to contribute to the development of a more critical, inclusive school PE, committed to social justice.

Collaborative self-study in Physical Education through a feminist and decolonial lens: engaged, embodied, and situated research in the school context

In PE, it is common to hear the statement "in practice, theory doesn't work like that," as if theories fail by not being "applicable." Caparroz and Bracht[10] contend that theories are not meant to be applied in practice; rather, they must be transformed in practice through teacher authorship. The discussion that at times devalues practice and at others devalues theory reflects a dichotomy of labor that fails to recognize practice as reflective praxis. This separation is reinforced by hegemonic modes of knowledge production in PE, in which socio-critical research aimed at denouncing inequalities predominates,[14] yet is often detached from the curricular, didactic, and assessment-related issues of the "gym floor."[10]

To address this scenario, research is needed that is oriented toward reflection and the production of knowledge with teachers, focusing on their ways of doing pedagogy/teaching and on the learning that occurs throughout these investigations. It is at this point that methods such as collaborative self-study gain prominence.[15,16] Whereas school culture tends to individualize pedagogical practice and teacher identity,[17] self-studies focus on the analysis of one's own teaching practice, carried out in dialogue with peers and within communities of reflection, as a means of provoking, challenging, and contributing to the resolution of concrete school problems and to the enactment of short- and long-term educational change.[15,16]

Feminist and decolonial perspectives enhance collaborative self-study by asserting that there is no neutrality in knowledge production and that the identities of those who conduct research (positionality) shape the process. Research is embodied insofar as corporeality and markers of gender, race, and class are taken into account, thereby legitimizing situated

narratives and decentralizing academic authority. The aim is to provoke reflection, redistribute power, and confront inequalities[13,18].

Engaged and embodied research challenges eurocentrism, values situated knowledges, and calls for practices that redistribute power. In collaborative self-study, this entails connecting theory and practice, legitimizing teachers' biographies, and imagining alternative scenarios grounded in school-based experiences.[13],[18],[19] Speaking from a feminist and decolonial perspective does not imply that there is a "feminine way of doing research," as this would essentialize and stereotype gender rather than acknowledge the complexity of cultural discourses and the coloniality of power that renders the bodies of women of color invisible.[6] It does, however, mean recognizing that knowledge is situated and that the scientific field is Westernized and androcentric.[18],[20] Conducting research from an engaged and embodied perspective entails questioning why the majority of researchers in the field of education are men, despite the predominantly female presence in schools.[13]

The process of conducting research with participants (and engaging in collaborative self-study), as well as the communication of research findings, should function as a catalyst that reflects on and from the affects of lived experience and, ultimately, encourages deep self-reflection among all those involved, informing and energizing them for transformative action.[13] It also entails attempting to move beyond the "trap of Eurocentric-colonial knowledge and (…) to question the privileged spaces, the boundaries, the flows, and the directions that structure it in this way, whose appearance is that of a natural law (p. 165)."[18] Engaged research is grounded in reciprocity, dialogue, and the negotiation of meanings, articulating theory and data in a situated manner.[13] Theory acts as a catalyst, connecting social structures to particular contexts. This process encourages self-reflection, the identification of barriers that regulate bodies, and the fostering of the imagination of alternative scenarios.

The knowledge produced, unlike that generated by traditional Eurocentric positivist research, does not aim at the generalization of laws or standardized, protocol-driven prescriptions. Rather, it seeks alternative forms of knowledge production. By validating biographies, local knowledges, and particular contexts, it speaks from the standpoint of difference, where the process of learning is more important than the product of the actions undertaken.[21] Despite these particularities, across multiple cases there may be shared lessons regarding learning, injustice, resistance, violence, and collective possibilities. Collaborative, embodied, and engaged self-study is grounded in an anti-topographical perspective, which seeks residues and common forms of resistance across different contexts, without obscuring the considerable variation among them, thereby producing a "provocative generalization" capable of inspiring other practices, imagining alternative scenarios, and engaging readers in the transformation of their own contexts.[19]

Methods

Methodological pathway

To explore the possibilities of collaborative self-study as a form of engaged and embodied knowledge production, this paper draws upon two distinct master's studies conducted by PE teachers in the public school system of Espírito Santo, Brazil. Each self-study was carried out by a teacher-researcher within her own context of practice, through reflective dialogue with the research advisor and, at times, with other colleagues from the study group. This methodological choice underscores the centrality of collaboration as a mechanism of validation and as a constitutive condition of the research process, ensuring the exercise of critique, attentive listening, and the joint construction of meaning.

Self-Study contexts

Self-Study 1 was conducted by the teacher Isabela, who was working with a fourth-grade class in a public school located in the municipality of Serra, Espírito Santo. The class consisted of 20 children, aged between 8 and 11 years, including 12 girls and 8 boys. The focus of this self-study was to understand the teacher's process of transformation into an activist educator who listened to her students and sought to develop pedagogical practices engaged with gender justice. The classes, held twice a week throughout 2023, involved games, sports, playful activities, and cooperative tasks, consistently guided by a concern for girls' participation and the valuing of children's voices. The pedagogical practice was constructed collaboratively, with the support of a collaborating teacher, a doctoral student at UFES and a member of the same study group. Isabela positions herself as a white, middle-class teacher with seven years of experience and a directive teaching style. Her self-study emerges from the need to decentralize her pedagogical practice and to learn to listen to children's voices in order to develop classes engaged with gender justice.

Self-Study 2 was conducted by the teacher Maria Eduarda at the high school level in a state school in Vila Velha, also in Espírito Santo, with a class enrolled in the curricular pathway "Digital Media and Bodily Practices." The group consisted of 30 students, aged 16 to 18, including 11 girls and 19 boys. In this context, a school marked by the absence of adequate physical spaces for bodily practices (such as courts or large open areas), the focus of the investigation was to explore the possibilities for developing an activist PE in a setting not structurally prepared for it, one that could articulate critical reflections on gender and social justice. Maria Eduarda identifies herself as a white, middle-class teacher whose practice in the public school system is shaped by the precariousness of school infrastructure. Her activist inquiry emerges from indignation with this reality, and collaborative self-study functions as a space of support to transform frustration into pedagogical action.

The self-studies were mentored by Professor Mariana, who acted as a critical friend by providing support, provoking reflection, and fostering relationships of trust. Her role was to strengthen teacher authorship and to validate situated narratives, thereby destabilizing traditional hierarchies.[22] As a critical friend, the advisor builds a relationship of trust, offers support and care, and negotiates the meanings of the knowledge produced.

Data sources

The data sources used in this study consisted of the reflective journals of the teacher-researchers, produced throughout the process, and of meetings with critical friends. In these journals, the teachers recorded memories of pedagogical encounters (classes), constituting a source of information that reflects teacher identity[16]. This instrument was read by the supervising professor prior to the critical friend meetings, enabling her to inquire into specific aspects or to encourage further reflection.

The periodic meetings with the critical friend and, at times, with other colleagues from the study group, who were also professional peers served to challenge and expand the individual analyses. These meetings were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, ensuring the preservation of the richness of interactions, questions, and suggestions brought forth by the collective. The dialogical process within these meetings functioned as a mechanism for validation and deepening of the reflections.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in a collaborative and dialogical manner, taking place within meetings with critical friends. In these spaces, interpretation was not limited to an individual reading of the records; rather, it was collectively constructed through attentive

listening and the confrontation of different perspectives. The analysis of the transcripts of these exchanges enabled the identification of turning points in the self-study[15]. Turning points refer to significant moments in the reflective process that reveal transformations in pedagogical practice and in the development of teacher identity. Identifying these moments made it possible to recognize how the experiences lived through the self-study triggered new understandings, repositionings, and learning on the part of the teacher-researchers.

The rigor of the research was ensured through a set of validation procedures that reinforced its consistency and credibility. First, the triangulation of sources (reflective journals and transcripts of critical friend meetings) ensured the depth and diversity of narratives for analysis. Second, collaboration among peers enabled the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives, strengthening the collective nature of interpretation. Third, reflexive transparency was ensured through the explicit recognition of the researchers' positions as both subjects and objects of the investigation, making visible their choices, implications, and limitations. Finally, the ongoing dialogical process, sustained through interactions among researchers, peers, and critical friends, strengthened the intersubjective validity of the analyses, ensuring that the meanings constructed emerged from a shared and critical process.

Results and Discussion

Case 1: Learning to listen to students

The first case demonstrates how collaborative self-study displaces teacher centrality and creates space for student's voices. In Self-Study 1, the turning point regarding learning to listen to students was the realization that lesson planning could no longer be understood as a fixed script controlled by the teacher, but rather as a response to an ongoing and unpredictable process of listening. This entailed embracing uncertainty and recognizing that children's collective decisions needed to be incorporated into the planning process. During the conversations in meetings with the critical friend, this shift in stance also becomes evident:

> **Prof. Mariana (amiga crítica): -** But what I understand is this: you are confronting two realities. One is Isa as a teacher at the center, concerned with following the plan that is teacher and knowledge centered teaching. But now we are going to center on the student. So we move at their pace, not at the pace of the plan, you know? (…) Sometimes there wasn't enough time because I needed to stop, to pause […] this is the goal, to move along with the students, but this will generate some anxiety, it will create tension, it will create frustration, it will create uncertainty about what to do/did I guide it properly, did I…?
>
> **Isabela: -** Putz, was the question I asked during the circle the best one, you know? That's a doubt I always have. […] It's one of my concerns when we sit down for the circle (a conversation space to listen to students). Because one thing is what she thinks and what I think. We thought about it together in theory. But she may have an idea of how this will happen, and I have an idea of how it happens. […] Was that really what we should have asked or not? That's the feeling the 'what if.' Am I doing this right?

Particular attention to power relations is essential, as they manifest not only in the classroom where Isabela conducted her self-study but also in the critical friend meetings. Recognizing the existence of power relations, rather than ignoring them, helps in navigating them, seeking to build relationships of trust that support both encouragement and critical dialogue.[23] The following dialogue captures one of these moments of reflection, which can be identified as a turning point:

> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend): -** Sometimes we read the texts here and think, wow, this is great look at this activity, it's going to be really cool, I'm going to use it, and so on. But the thing is, for us to move away from the way we usually teach, in a more directive manner, toward a more student-centered, more activist approach, we have to address a central issue, which is how we relate knowledge to the student. Yes, and it's very difficult, because sometimes I think that just by asking a question I'm already centering things on the student, you know? But it's not quite like that, right? It's an entire set of actions that will make me center the student or not. So it's kind of complicated, especially because there's so little time then we try to speed things up, and there's no time for the children to speak, and so on.
>
> **Isabela: -** In that class, I had already noticed that in the previous lesson we hadn't asked them many questions. So I stopped the class a bit earlier and held a circle (a conversation space). Then I started asking about the lesson. It was in that last class that I realized we were doing a lot and asking very little, you know? So I said, okay, I've read several texts and all, but I don't think I'm actually aligning with what I've read, you know? […] But I keep coming back to this doubt: am I mediating, or am I rushing things? In other words, how do I enact mediation? How do I decenter the class from myself in order to center it on the students? Because sometimes I may think I'm doing that, but I'm not there yet.
>
> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend): -** And think about it you, despite being young, already have considerable experience in school. Not only in years, but in the number of classes you've taught, because you teach a lot. Designing the activity to be taught is not a challenge for you; I'm sure I could give you any content and you would come up with something. That's not what challenges you. You've been doing this very intensively in your life for many years. What is challenging? How do I change the way this activity is delivered to my students? And how will the students receive and incorporate it? In other words, how will they understand this activity? Because then, I think what we need to figure out along the way is how to create a class that is indeed a class, but that also includes a moment for students to understand what is happening.
>
> **Isabela: -** Yes, and Mari, I was surprised because some of the answers they give are much more mature than I expected them to be, you know? [...]

In Self-Study 2, the turning point regarding listening occurs after one semester of implementing the intervention, when the teacher reported a new school reality: spaces that were already scarce became even more limited, as the school was undergoing renovations, with construction materials occupying all available open areas. Students had been expressing, since the previous year, their frustration with the lack of adequate spaces for bodily practices, but it was only in the face of the radical deterioration brought about by the school's renovation that this outcry could be recognized as central. The teachers' initial interpretation that the "problem" lay in students' lack of interest or in their use of cell phones was re-signified through the statements and reactions of the youth, who pointed to the classroom as an insufficient space. Listening to students, in this case, meant recognizing that the problem did not lie in individual engagement, but was embedded in the structural conditions that limited the right to PE. This becomes evident in a critical friend meeting:

> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend): -** Duda, look, when we started to think about an activist perspective with them, we said, 'there's no court, so we need to think of some kind of Physical Education approach that negotiates with the absence of that space.' Let's work with the body, with markers and so on—kind of thinking, 'I won't be able to take them down to the court because that space doesn't exist.' And then you began working on these diagnostics with them, focusing on what they perceive. We need to revisit what we did with them in the past. Looking at the notes, I'll have some clues. […] From last year to this year, you had already figured out some things with them you had noticed this difficulty of staying only in the classroom, that it generates frustration and so on. But it was only in the second year that we realized this was an issue we needed to work on with them, right? […] We changed an idea that we had

> initially taken for granted in the intervention [there's no court, so we have to stay in the classroom] based on their responses [recognizing the need to seek spaces beyond the classroom]. And then, to address this problem, we sought their input. We involved them in thinking about what could be done and how it could be done.

These two movements of listening fostered through collaborative self-study demonstrate how it constitutes a feminist and decolonial methodology. It is feminist because it is grounded in practices of listening that challenge power hierarchies and destabilize the centrality of teacher authority; it is decolonial because it questions the naturalized conditions of schooling, whether in the form of planning norms or the lack of space that silence students and produce inequalities. Listening, therefore, was an exercise in displacement: from teacher certainties to the uncertainty of dialogue; from a school routine marked by precariousness to the collective imagination of other possible scenarios.

Case 2: Learning to see gender in class

A second turning point in the first self-study was recognizing how gender relations permeate classes in very subtle ways and, precisely for that reason, become rendered invisible and naturalized in teaching practice and in the everyday interactions among students. The teacher initially expected explicit gender inequalities, but the dialogue with the critical friend revealed that they operated in subtle and normalized ways. This is evident in the excerpt below, in which the critical friend draws attention to ways of observing and perceiving how these gender relations unfold in the class:

> **Isabela: -** And I'm not even sure that the problem [of exclusion in the classes] will actually be the girls. The groups didn't end up as girls with girls, they were quite mixed. And then we told them we would organize the classes based on the drawings they had made. Again, I expected them to split into gender-segregated groups… We formed four groups, and I thought they would be unbalanced, right? But they weren't. They organized themselves quite well, and so on. There were four groups with about five students each. (…) And it was interesting, but there was one comment that caught my attention: there was one group made up only of girls five girls. After the first round of activities, I asked them, 'Do you think the teams are balanced?' They said yes. Then one girl raised her hand and said, 'No, teacher, I think our team needs one more person.' So I asked, 'Why, if you already have five?' 'No, we need one more boyAnd, like, it was only girls, and they were winning all the matches. And there was one girl on their team who is very strong. And even so, she still felt—she thought—they needed a boy on the team. But she (Bruna) said something like, 'the activities you're creating aren't that segregated, the girls like soccer and so on.' But it's not all of them, there are only about two.
>
> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend): -** We're not going to stop reflecting on gender relations. I'll keep observing, whatever it takes, I'll be in the classes. Because I think it's something sensitive, subtle. It does appear. It really does. We just need to provoke it. I think in this soccer class it will start to emerge. Because sometimes we expect to see that kind of segregation pink versus blue, you know?
>
> **Isabela: -** Yeah, but it's not like that. In this case, for example, the girls themselves didn't actually have that need. I just asked whether the teams were balanced, and the girl said she needed a boy on her team. Because sometimes we think it's the boys who will exclude the girls, you know? But this is already kind of embedded in all the children.
>
> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend): -** Oh, I didn't want to break up the clique because we like being among ourselves. That could be one reason. And that, in itself, is already a gender issue, right?

By shifting the analytical gaze to these subtleties, it became possible to understand that

gender inequalities do not need to appear in overt or spectacular forms to be consequential; they also operate through ways of being together, speaking, deciding, and occupying space in class.

Particular attention to participants' positionality is essential: issues of gender, race, class, generation, and nationality/regionality may entail different forms of mobilization and unequal access to channels of listening and recognition. Although both participants were teachers, sensitivity to gender issues was being constructed through their exchanges. Reflexivity entails making teacher-researchers visible within the research process, recognizing how their identity markers, assumptions, and experiences shape knowledge production and interlocution.[12]

The case demonstrates the potential of collaborative self-study as a feminist methodology in denaturalizing gender patterns, and as a decolonial approach in challenging school logics that render subtle inequalities invisible. Thus, collaborative self-study operated as a mechanism for making visible what is often silenced or naturalized, expanding teachers' awareness of how gender is articulated in the production of inequalities and, at the same time, pointing to pathways for pedagogical practices that not only address gender justice as a theme but also enact it through the small, everyday choices made in the classroom.

Case 3: Empathy and support in collaborative self-studies: moving beyond isolation and reconstructing the meanings of one's own practice

The third case highlights how collaborative self-study can constitute a space of empathy and support, enabling teachers in contexts of precarization and isolation to find new ways of making sense of their pedagogical practice. The experience reported in Self-Study 2 reveals the tensions experienced in the face of situations that devalue teaching work: from the lack of adequate infrastructure aggravated by school renovations that rendered spaces for bodily practice unviable to the sense of disrespect resulting from the occupation of the few spaces secured through effort and creativity.

In this context, the critical friend supported the teacher during moments of uncertainty, helping her to transform frustration into pedagogical action. By sharing episodes in which she had to abandon her initial plan in order to respond to ethical and political commitments, the teacher-researcher found, in collaborative dialogue, both support and pathways to re-signify her own intervention, connecting it to the aims of the research. This network of support did not neutralize the conflicts, but enabled them to be transformed into opportunities for reflection and for the collective construction of alternatives. The teacher writes in her field journal:

> On April 1st, I postponed our planned lesson when, on my way to school, I realized the date marked the anniversary of the coup that established the Brazilian military dictatorship. I taught a lesson on the relationship between the dictatorship in Brazil and Latin America and the sporting context, focusing on soccer through the documentary *Memórias do Chumbo* (2012). The intention was to show at least the portion of the documentary that refers to Brazil, but the television did not work. Despite this, the dialogue in that class was fruitful. Students who are interested in soccer recalled political issues that intersect with sport, such as sportswashing, the World Cups in Russia and Qatar, and the upcoming one in Saudi Arabia, a dictatorial country (Maria Eduarda's Reflective Journal, 04/01/2024).

In the critical friend meeting, Maria Eduarda apologizes for having deviated from the lesson plan established in the previous meeting, emphasizing that her ethical and political commitments did not allow her to avoid addressing the issue. The critical friend, however, offers an alternative perspective on her pedagogical action, seeking to articulate it with the aims of her intervention.

> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend):** - I think what you did bringing together dictatorship and sport was really valuable. You were right not to interrupt your practice because of the model (of sport education) and the planning. You could incorporate some kind of follow-up within it. You know that idea of the kind of knowledge I'm teaching? It is part of your civic education, but it also has consequences for your everyday life. […] One of the things the dictatorship restricted was athletes' ability to express themselves politically, because sport was expected to serve the promotion of citizenship. And even to think about drawing parallels with more recent moments—this also happened in Brazil recently, during the Bolsonaro government, for instance (…). To work with the idea that sport, as part of a democracy, involves, for example, the right of athletes and fans to express themselves politically, right? Of course, with respect without discrimination, without demeaning anyone that's democratic culture; it's democratic culture that makes this possible. And then I was thinking: if you could connect this to the culminating event, perhaps you could assign each team the task of developing a message they want to convey to the school… understanding sport as a moment of visibility, one that allows us to publicly express what we think. This very idea of sport as a stage.

Interactions with colleagues also helped to make explicit how teacher precarization can, at times, be romanticized, naturalized, or even used as a justification for neglect on the part of school management.

> **Maria Eduarda:** - The Pedagogical Coordinator (PC), who likes to come to my class and laugh, left the classroom, which is in front, and stood right next to me, while I had my back turned. Because I didn't want to look at her.
> **Daniel (study group colleague):** Is she inappropriate?
> **Maria Eduarda:** - She thinks it's cute that I teach in that kind of end-of-the-world situation.
> **Daniel (study group colleague):** - Oh, I see. Look at her there, working. She even manages to do it, right?
> **Maria Eduarda:** - Exactly, exactly. […] And I could see that she was enjoying it. Then I was like, pushing upward. And she said, 'Wow, so-and-so, you have flexibility.' She even used that term 'you have flexibility.' And I was just there, watching her laughing next to me. About five minutes later she said, 'I think tomorrow I'm going to join Duda's stretching,' she said it out loud so I would respond. I ignored it. Then she said, 'Can I, Duda, participate? It's so nice to stretch in the morning.
> **Prof. Mariana (critical friend):** - That's it it romanticizes work under precarious conditions and even blames the other teacher who…
> **Isabela (study group colleague):** - …doesn't want to work.

By narrating her indignation regarding the occupation of spaces, the teacher came to understand that her struggle was part of a collective resistance against the devaluation of PE.

> Another frustration. When I arrive (after a week away due to illness) and find that the space I had been using has been occupied something the school management knew I was using, because they observe and even praise the classes, for example and yet they still authorize placing things there, it shows that they do not care about my classes and, in my view, especially about the students' education. Management may not be able to solve the problem of the court and the construction work, but when it occupies the only space I was using, knowing that I was using it, it increases our sense of outrage and indignation about the situation. School management is aware of the space problem and of the attempts to address it, even praising them, and at the same time, its stance is to ignore what we are building (Maria Eduarda's Reflective Journal, 05/17/2024).

On this occasion, the teacher sends a message to the critical friend:

> **Maria Eduarda: -** This has been here since last week. I was informed that it will only be moved to its final destination next Wednesday. And more materials are expected to arrive today. […] In any case, our court is not able to host sports events.
> **Profa. Mariana (critical friend): -** Oh, oh. You were away from school for a week and suddenly your space is taken over. That's incredible. […] Because, like, the school thinks it's beautiful when you teach Physical Education without space, making do and creating a possible reality within precarious conditions. But then, suddenly, they go there and place materials in your space, showing zero respect for you. […] It's very significant that this happened during that period, that it happened in the week you were away, and that it happened in the space you use.

Thus, this case shows that collaborative self-study operates as a feminist and decolonial methodological practice by breaking with the isolation historically imposed on teachers, especially those working in contexts of precarity. Peer collaboration enables the identification of pedagogical situations that affect teaching practice, developing the capacity to understand one's own reality and construct new possibilities for intervention[24]. Self-studies enable teachers to investigate and reformulate specific problems in their pedagogical practices by challenging, through collaboration, implicit understandings of teaching and learning and by enriching reflection and professional development[15].

By making their pains, doubts, and forms of resistance visible, and by enabling these experiences to be legitimized in dialogue with other women, the critical friend meetings constituted a social space for learning and collective reflection, which makes it possible to move away from the isolation of the classroom and to exchange experiences and collectively imagine possibilities. It is configured as an essential form of support in this process, as teachers who set out to learn and develop their educational practice through pedagogical models identify inexperience, lack of confidence, and lack of competence as the main challenges in continuing their professional development.[25] Support and collaborative work contribute to overcoming the isolation and individualization of the profession, as participation in communities, networks, or teams enables learning through authentic conversations, in which participants mutually reinforce and challenge each other's experiences and narratives.[26]

This process strengthened the construction of an engaged teaching practice, marked by solidarity and the courage not to remain silent in the face of injustice, encouraging the personal responsibility of teacher-researchers and challenging their assumptions. Empathy and support, in this sense, do not appear as ancillary gestures but as central dimensions that enabled the teacher to persist, reinvent her practice, and affirm the political relevance of her work.

Conclusions

In this article, we sought to explore the possibilities of collaborative self-study as a methodological pathway for the development of feminist and decolonial research in school PE. Drawing on two experiences developed within the scope of PROEF, we show how this approach can decentralize academic authority, value situated narratives, and give visibility to historically silenced voices.

The three cases presented in the results highlight different dimensions of this process. They demonstrate that exchanges, collaborative reflection, empathy, and peer support—made possible through self-study are fundamental for breaking with teacher isolation, especially in contexts of precarization, and for legitimizing experiences of resistance as powerful forms of knowledge production.

The cases analyzed show that collaborative self-study, guided by feminist and

decolonial perspectives, strengthens teachers in building a critical, inclusive, and engaged Physical Education, without seeking to offer a single model, but rather to share possibilities and tensions.

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