
CAPOEIRA AND THE PHYSICAL CULTURE CIRCLE: DECOLONIAL GINGAS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

CAPOEIRA E CÍRCULO DE CULTURA FÍSICA: GINGAS DECOLONIAIS NA EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA

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RESUMO

O presente estudo buscou investigar como a capoeira pode ser tematizada na Educação Física escolar a partir do círculo de cultura física, contribuindo para uma educação crítica comprometida com a decolonialidade e com a valorização de saberes afro-diaspóricos. Trata-se de uma pesquisa exploratória, qualitativa, do tipo relato de experiência, construída a partir das reflexões e práticas desenvolvidas nos Grupos de Pesquisa Corpo, Cultura e Ludicidade (GPCCL/UEM/CNPq) e Corpo, Diferença e Educação Física (CODEF/UFG/CNPq). O texto organiza-se em dois momentos: inicialmente, discutimos a capoeira como prática cultural afro-brasileira que articula jogo, luta e dança, forjada na resistência negra e historicamente marginalizada nos currículos escolares. Em seguida, apresentamos a proposta do círculo de cultura física, estruturado em quatro etapas interdependentes: leitura empírica e contextual, tematização e sensibilização, experimentação e problematização e ação dialógica criadora. A análise evidenciou que a capoeira, ao ser articulada a essa metodologia, ultrapassa abordagens técnicas, permitindo sua compreensão em meio às relações de poder social. Conclui-se que a proposta potencializa o reconhecimento da capoeira como pedagogia decolonial na Educação Física, abrindo caminhos para um ensino comprometido com a crítica à modernidade e à colonialidade de saberes.

Palavras-chave: Decolonialidade. Estudos Culturais Físicos. Círculo de Cultura.

ABSTRACT

The present study sought to investigate how capoeira can be thematized in school Physical Education through the methodology of the physical culture circle, contributing to a critical education committed to decoloniality and the valorization of Afro-diasporic knowledge. This is an exploratory, qualitative study, in the form of an experience report, built upon the reflections and practices developed within the Research Groups Corpo, Cultura e Ludicidade (GPCCL/UEM/CNPq) and Corpo, Diferença e Educação Física (CODEF/UFG/CNPq). The text is organized into two parts: first, we discuss capoeira as an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice that intertwines game, fight, and dance, forged in Black resistance and historically marginalized within school curricula. Next, we present the proposal of the physical culture circle, structured in four interdependent stages: empirical and contextual reading, thematization and sensitization, experimentation and problematization, and creative dialogical action. The analysis showed that capoeira, when articulated with this methodology, goes beyond technical approaches, allowing its comprehension within broader relations of social power. We conclude that this proposal strengthens the recognition of capoeira as a decolonial pedagogy in Physical Education, opening pathways for teaching committed to the critique of modernity and the coloniality of knowledge.

Keywords: Decoloniality. Physical Cultural Studies. Cultural Circle.

Introduction

This study takes capoeira as its reference, an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice recognized in its ambivalent condition as game, fight, and dance, forged in Black resistance. From this perspective, we understand the capoeira roda as a space where subjects access decolonial knowledge and challenge the epistemic hierarchies of modernity/coloniality. It is in this interplay of forces that ginga reveals itself as a gesture of resistance, moving the body in dialogue with the other and straining the boundaries between oppression and freedom, attack and defense. In this movement, ginga produces cracks for other ways of existing in Brazilian physical education.

The choice to thematize such categories results from provocations that emerged from our participation in the research project *Decolonial Challenges in Physical Culture: Ethnic-*

racial, Gender, and Social Class Crossings, coordinated by Professor Larissa Michelle Lara. From the sharing of knowledge in that space, we began to interrogate pedagogical processes of/in Physical Education, identifying how discourses in the field still reproduce colonial logics in different teaching themes. This movement led us to seek strategies capable of challenging such structures, valuing other knowledge, and constructing paths toward a pedagogy committed to recognizing power asymmetries and the possibilities of subverting them. Hence our engagement in investigating capoeira as a pedagogical experience capable of establishing other narratives about body and difference, breaking with the logic of the single story¹.

It is at this point that we situate our contribution: by proposing the circle of physical culture as methodology, we seek to strengthen a dialogical, participatory, and critical space in which capoeira becomes an experience of reading and transforming the world, and not merely of reproducing gestures. The circle of physical culture is translated as a theoretical-methodological approach inspired by Freire's culture circle. Although it maintains a foundational dialogue with Paulo Freire's proposal, conceived in the 1960s in a context marked by labor exploitation and the need for political literacy, the circle of physical culture assumes its own perspectives, adequate to the urgencies of contemporary society, enhanced by the contributions of decolonial studies²⁻⁵ and Physical Cultural Studies⁶ (PCS), which broaden the critical scope and update the language, overcoming the limitations of Freirean terminology. Thus, by articulating capoeira and the circle of physical culture, we propose that Brazilian Physical Education recognize the decolonial potential of this practice, challenging the curriculum and instituting pedagogies that affirm dignity, plurality, and social justice.

For this reflective exercise, we constructed our writing inspired by PCS, especially in productions that emphasize, through feminist lenses and self-reflexive approaches, the incorporation of authorial identities in the text as a political strategy that acknowledges the positions that we – authors – occupy in the power networks of research. We situate our identities from our lived experiences in Physical Education: a gay man, interested in the dancing dimensions, born in the early 1990s in southern Brazil; and a heterosexual woman, mother, capoeirista since 2006, born in the late 1980s in northeastern Brazil. Both white, cisgender, non-disabled, middle class, working as teachers and researchers in distinct regional contexts, we are driven by sociocultural studies of the body and physical culture.

From this situated perspective, we struggle and aspire to a liberating and conscientizing education, inspired by Paulo Freire's writings, committed to social justice, the questioning of epistemic frontiers, and the valorization of decolonial knowledge within Brazilian Physical Education. As a result of this commitment, we have sought to produce, within the educational processes in which we engage – both in basic education and in higher education with future Physical Education teachers – spaces of identification, analysis, and intervention of power relations that emerge from hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, disability, and other social markers, as PCS emphasizes in its scholarly production.

In the Brazilian educational context, this commitment is reinforced by public policies aimed at confronting historical inequalities. Capoeira is addressed as one of the cross-cutting themes in the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) and is included in the thematic unit of combat practices in the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), recognizing its cultural, pedagogical, and historical value⁷. In addition, Laws No. 10,639/2003 and No. 11,645/2008 represent important milestones by making the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture mandatory at all levels of basic education. These laws expanded the possibility of addressing racial and ethnic issues within the curriculum, including in Physical Education, and challenged the role of the school as a space for valuing cultures that have been historically marginalized. As teachers, we work with these frameworks, while also seeking to articulate them with other social markers of difference - gender, sexuality, disability, and social class - from an intersectional and decolonial perspective.

Within this universe, capoeira occupies a privileged place: an Afro-Brazilian expression forged in the diaspora, which synthesizes game, fight, and dance, but also resistance, memory, and collective creation⁸. However, academic scholarship in Physical Education has frequently emphasized that, in the school context, capoeira is often associated with technical or folkloric aspects⁹, relegating its decolonial and political dimensions to a secondary position¹⁰. Thus emerges the proposition of a way to thematize capoeira in the curriculum not merely as content, but as a critical experience, traversed by knowledges that mark this cultural manifestation as a form of combat against the European expansionist project, turning the body into a weapon of liberation against the slave system and its colonial devices¹¹.

Coloniality, unlike colonization, surpasses the colonial period and continues to operate even after political independences and formal abolitions. Even when a country becomes independent, aesthetic, ethical, and political values remain anchored in colonial foundations, naturalized and incorporated into social structures, manifesting in internal hierarchies. In contrast, Latin American authors such as Aníbal Quijano², Walter D Mignolo⁴, Nelson Maldonado-Torres³, and Catherine Walsh⁵ have developed the perspective of decoloniality, which seeks to understand and transform the social reality of peripheral countries by overcoming the colonial matrix of power, present both in the modes of knowledge production and in political and economic spheres. To think outside this matrix, it is essential to recognize “the points of view produced from lived experiences that contribute to the proposition of more just and humane worlds”^{12; 140}.

In this context, capoeira is grounded in African knowledge systems and is articulated with ritualistic elements and aspects of African cosmology, such as ancestry, orality, rituality, collective memory, and communal presence. These elements constitute educational practices that, when lived, promote resistance to coloniality/modernity. It is a fight/dance that materializes in symbolic, existential, and organizational fields, affirming the existence and re-existence of subjects belonging to Black and peripheral communities who face daily the neglect of the State, racism, sexism, homophobia, and epistemicide¹³.

Based on this framework, our study sought to investigate how capoeira can be thematized in school Physical Education through the circle of physical culture, contributing to a critical education committed to decoloniality and to the valorization of Afro-diasporic knowledge. To this end, we structured an exploratory, qualitative study¹⁴, of the experience-report type. Our investigation is organized into two sections: (1) Capoeira in education: between game, dance, and fight; and (2) Circle of physical culture: a proposal for decolonial gingas of resistance in Physical Education. With this, we aim to foster discussions and decolonial practices within the field of physical culture – and beyond.

Capoeira in Physical Education: between game, dance and fight

The history of Physical Education in Brazil is marked by strong medical and military influences, originating from the biological and health sciences. These influences supported a Cartesian view, based on the separation between subject and object¹⁵. In this context, popular expressions such as capoeira were marginalized, criminalized, and excluded from the school space, precisely because they challenged the disciplinary and rationalist order that was being established. This scenario began to change in the 1970s and 1980s, when renewal movements emerged in the field of Physical Education, aligned with the ‘humanist’ movement in pedagogy. This renewal was characterized by the valorization of philosophical principles centered on the individual, their identity, and their value, grounded in the limits and interests of the human being¹⁶.

The pedagogical proposals developed during this period – such as the developmentalist, health education, psychomotor, critical-overcoming, and critical - emancipatory approaches – began

to understand Physical Education as a possibility for social transformation. With this, the object of the field was redefined and directed toward the study of body culture¹⁵. This shift paved the way for the thematization of historically silenced practices, albeit in unequal ways.

In this horizon, the perspective of the cultural curriculum of Physical Education gains strength, configured as an arena for the dissemination of meanings and the production of identities, oriented toward the analysis and interpretation among and from cultures. It is a conception that seeks to identify and question the power relations that have historically prevented the recognition of differences. Cultural studies, in this sense, not only recognize diversity but also problematize the apparatuses and social mechanisms that have produced and sustained it¹⁷. By assuming such a conception, Physical Education becomes a space of resistance, where practices such as capoeira can be recognized in their political, aesthetic, and cultural density.

In this key, capoeira affirms itself as an expression that goes beyond its ambivalent condition of game, fight, and dance, revealing itself as a rite of rebellion and disobedience. It manifests the contradictions arising from coloniality while proposing a political-aesthetic engagement that updates ancestral and collective memories¹⁸. It is also a formative practice that contributes to the preservation and valorization of cultural heritage, and therefore, an important educational instrument in the critical and resistant sense.

When examining academic production on pedagogical practices in capoeira, we highlight a state of the art that identified 5,192 articles published in seven national journals between 2013 and 2017¹⁰. In the field of Physical Education, notable contributions discuss the inclusion and relevance of capoeira in schools and in the context of the discipline^{19, 20, 21}. Certain studies^{22, 23} problematize the structuring of capoeira as content in school Physical Education and propose intervention strategies. Other investigations focus on the process of pedagogization of capoeira, with emphasis on the training of Physical Education teachers to work with this cultural manifestation in the school environment^{24, 25}. Although these studies point to advances, the authors themselves conclude that, even with capoeira occupying a prominent place among combat practices, its pedagogical dimension has not yet been consolidated as a privileged axis of research²⁶.

Despite these relevant contributions, we observe few studies that thematize capoeira from a decolonial perspective^{27, 28}, notably from a didactic-pedagogical structure within Physical Education. Some research acknowledges the African legacy in its origin, but this reference does not unfold into an analysis of power relations, the coloniality of knowledge, or the possibilities of a pedagogy of resistance anchored in Afro-diasporic epistemologies. This absence is not trivial, as it reveals how Physical Education, even in critical approaches, still hesitates to assume capoeira as a practice that directly challenges racialization processes and colonial hierarchies.

Capoeira, however, has historically constituted itself as an instrument of struggle and a resource for the emancipation of social minorities²⁸. Through the body in motion – in the *ginga*, in attack and defense moves, in *floreios*, in chants, in the sound of instruments, in games and in *rodas* – emerge knowledge that integrate teaching and learning processes linked to the Afro-diasporic ancestral tradition. From an educational perspective, capoeira can act as an instrument of conscientization²⁹, contributing to the formation of emancipated subjects. As a cultural manifestation, it enables the learning of social values and encourages the construction of critical solutions to everyday conflicts³⁰.

Given this panorama, we reaffirm that capoeira, although already thematized from different perspectives in Physical Education, still lacks approaches that recognize it as a decolonial and pedagogical practice of resistance. This gap points to the need for methodologies capable of challenging the colonial hierarchies that traverse both academic production and school daily life. It is within this horizon that we situate the proposal of the circle of physical culture: an approach that, inspired by Paulo Freire and updated by Decolonial Studies and PCS,

creates space for dialogical, participatory, and critical practices. Through it, capoeira can be treated not only as curricular content but as a formative experience that preserves and updates collective memory, values subaltern knowledges, and creates possibilities for social transformation.

Circle of Physical Culture: a proposal for decolonial gingas in Physical Education

The circle of physical culture aimed at the critical teaching of capoeira in the school context, as we propose here, is inspired by the culture circle present in Freirean pedagogy³¹. We start from the conception of the circle, created by Paulo Freire in the 1960s, as an alternative to banking education, through meetings aimed at the critical reading of reality, collective problematization, and transformative praxis toward a political education³¹. Although structured for a specific historical context, namely to provide literacy for workers in a Brazil marked by inequalities and class oppression, we understand that such a structure contributes, as stated in the introduction of this text, to the development of critical pedagogical actions in Physical Education.

In this dynamic, we seek to update the circle in the face of the complexity of contemporary oppressions, which have already been denounced in the historical-cultural dimensions of capoeira^{30, 32-35}, notably from two perspectives: a) the expansion of the circle to the corporeal dimension, hence the addition of the term 'physical', to centralize the body as an ontological and epistemological key and as a locus of politics, practice, and production of meanings, traversed by power relations, discourses, and contexts, always dialectical and culturally articulated, and not a neutral or merely biological instance³⁶; b) the expansion of the circle also implies moving from a centrality of class consciousness to recognizing other social markers of difference, such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability, territoriality, among others, in order to challenge hegemonic narratives and denounce practices that have invisibilized colonial bodies and knowledges³⁷.

Thus, to think of the circle of physical culture in a decolonial perspective means articulating pedagogical practice with the radical listening of these subjects, understanding that gender, race/ethnicity, and other markers constitutively traverse bodily experience and the production of meanings. As a result of these assumptions, the circle aims to produce interpretations and experiences that challenge patriarchy, structural racism, heteronormativity, and other forms of oppression that operate intersectionally³⁸ and from colonial models, as previously denounced²⁻⁵. Our effort, therefore, is to articulate Freirean pedagogy with these contributions, repositioning the circle of physical culture as a pedagogical practice capable of interrogating the hierarchies that traverse capoeira in Physical Education.

The structuring of this circle was also developed in *roda*, through members of the Research Group Body, Culture and Playfulness (GPCCL/UEM/CNPq) and the Research Group Body, Difference and Physical Education (CODEF/UFG/CNPq), based on four stages: (1) empirical and contextual reading, (2) thematization/sensitization, (3) experimentation/problematization, and (4) creative dialogical action. These stages are understood as pedagogical moments that intertwine and can assume different configurations according to the context. Throughout the text, each of them will be presented in its theoretical foundation and pedagogical implications, in order to make explicit its links with capoeira and with the decolonial perspective assumed here. At the end, we present a synthesis that can assist in the overall visualization of the proposal, without reducing it to a mere prescription.

The first stage, called empirical and contextual reading, takes as its starting point Freire's critique of banking education, which conceived subjects as empty receptacles to be filled by the teacher. In opposition to this logic, Paulo Freire³¹ argued that any critical educational process must emerge from the vocabulary universe of the participants: from what

they already know and live in their concrete realities. Inspired by this perspective, but updating it in a decolonial key, we understand that mapping the knowledge of the subjects is not only an act of recognition, but a political act of legitimizing historically silenced narratives and experiences. The circle of physical culture, therefore, begins with the recognition that the community gathered already possesses repertoires, memories, and practices that constitute an epistemological heritage.

In this sense, empirical reading is not limited to collecting information about capoeira, but seeks to question which stories are narrated and which remain invisibilized. The reflection on the ‘danger of a single story’¹ is powerful insofar as we consider that when only one version of capoeira’s history circulates, whether the narrative of criminalization in Republican Brazil or the folklorized version as a national dance, there is a risk of reducing the complexity of the practice and denying the multiple meanings it assumes in different contexts. Thus, the initial stage of the circle is positioned as a space for the confrontation of narratives: which capoeira do we know? Which family memories are present? And, above all, which voices have been silenced in the transmission of this history?

At the same time, empirical and contextual reading needs to be situated in a decolonial horizon. This means understanding that knowledge about capoeira is traversed by power relations forged in modernity/coloniality, which historically classified knowledge as legitimate or illegitimate². When mapping perceptions, it is essential to question how social markers of difference – race/ethnicity, gender, class, generation, sexuality – influence the way subjects access and signify capoeira. Reading, therefore, is configured as an exercise in displacement: instead of projecting external categories, the circle learns from the subjects and their narratives, building the bases for the subsequent stages to be carried out in dialogue with reality.

In the second stage, the circle opens to thematization/sensitization. This second moment seeks to provoke critical shifts, transforming what is already known into generative themes³¹. As a resource for this, it is possible to use, from capoeira, *ladainhas* that narrate histories of enslavement and freedom; historical elements that celebrate the importance of masters and their ancestors; the toques of the *berimbau* evoking struggle, *ginga*, and resistance. Thematization, in this sense, is not merely the selection of contents, but an aesthetic-political exercise, as a manifestation that emerged as resistance to the colonial structure, given movements as “potentials for (re)existences, capable of contributing to human and academic formation, conceived in a decolonial and inclusive perspective”^{27; 1}.

It is in the aesthetics of the *roda* that historicity and ancestry take shape through movements³⁹. A song, when collectively chanted, can become a generative question: ‘what does this music tell us about inequality and freedom today?’ Nineteenth-century engravings contrasted with current images can elicit debates on the criminalization and re-signification of capoeira throughout history. Access to and analysis of the mapping of female capoeira masters, carried out by França⁴⁰, may contribute to the visualization of memories and female presences in capoeira, recognizing the importance of women masters for the preservation of capoeira.

In experimentation/problematization, the body moves to the center of the scene. It is no longer just a matter of reflecting on capoeira, but of experiencing it as a practice that mobilizes memories, identities, and resistances. Each element – the *ginga*, the attack and defense move, the *floreio*, the sound of the *berimbau* and other instruments – ceases to be a technical gesture and becomes a political act³⁰. At this point, the practice of capoeira assumes the status of a pedagogical language: it translates oppressions but also announces resistances. In practice, one learns the *malícia*, the *mandinga*, the *malandragem*, and other elements that compose a pedagogy rooted in experience⁴¹. In the universe of capoeira, practitioners are encouraged to value elders, respect the environment, broaden their perspectives, and engage in self-assessment, both in the small and the large *roda*, that is, both in capoeira and in society, without losing sight of possible oppressions that operate therein.

At this moment, Afro-Brazilian civilizational values emerge as a pedagogical key for debate⁴². Ancestrality helps perceive capoeira as a continuity of the African diaspora; corporeality reaffirms the body as a territory of knowledge; cooperativity is expressed in the collective game and choral singing; orality sustains the transmission of ladainhas and the memories of masters; and circularity finds immediate resonance in the roda, which is, par excellence, a space of equality and sharing. In addition, activities such as role reversal – allowing women, children, or beginners to play the berimbau gunga or lead the singing – destabilize hierarchies and provoke critical reflections. Sequences of gingas and esquivas accompanied by social metaphors bring body and daily life closer, while body diaries record sensations and thoughts after the experience. Thus, experimentation turns into problematization: one learns not only capoeira, but with capoeira, recognizing it as a possibility for teaching to transgress, following the reflections of bell hooks⁴³.

Creative dialogical action, finally, is the moment when learning is translated into transformative practices. Here, the roda projects itself beyond itself through knowledge that returns to the community in the form of new experiences: manifesto rodas that invert traditional roles; original songs that denounce racism and sexism; extension projects that bring capoeira to schools and neighborhood associations; or collective records (zines, murals, videos) that document and share lived experiences. It is important to emphasize that this stage is not an endpoint, but a relaunch, as it feeds new processes of reading, thematization, and experimentation, establishing a spiral logic of continuous recommencement through a pedagogy of re-existence, which at the same time confronts coloniality and announces other ways of living⁵.

In this horizon, capoeira affirms itself as a political-aesthetic gesture of resistance and, in the educational context, contributes to a decolonial pedagogy that encompasses modes of education historically practiced by colonized peoples of the Americas, constituting resistance both to colonialism and coloniality²⁸. It is a proposal that breaks fissures in the modern/colonial logic by constructing other ways of being and existing, recognizing and valuing knowledges, codes, and languages of historically excluded populations.

Next, we seek to highlight how each stage of the circle of physical culture is structured in dialogue with capoeira, articulating critical theory and pedagogical practices based on a liberating pedagogy. For the purposes of synthesis and far from a rigid prescription, this figure organizes the four stages with their respective objectives, possible procedures, and indicators of analysis.

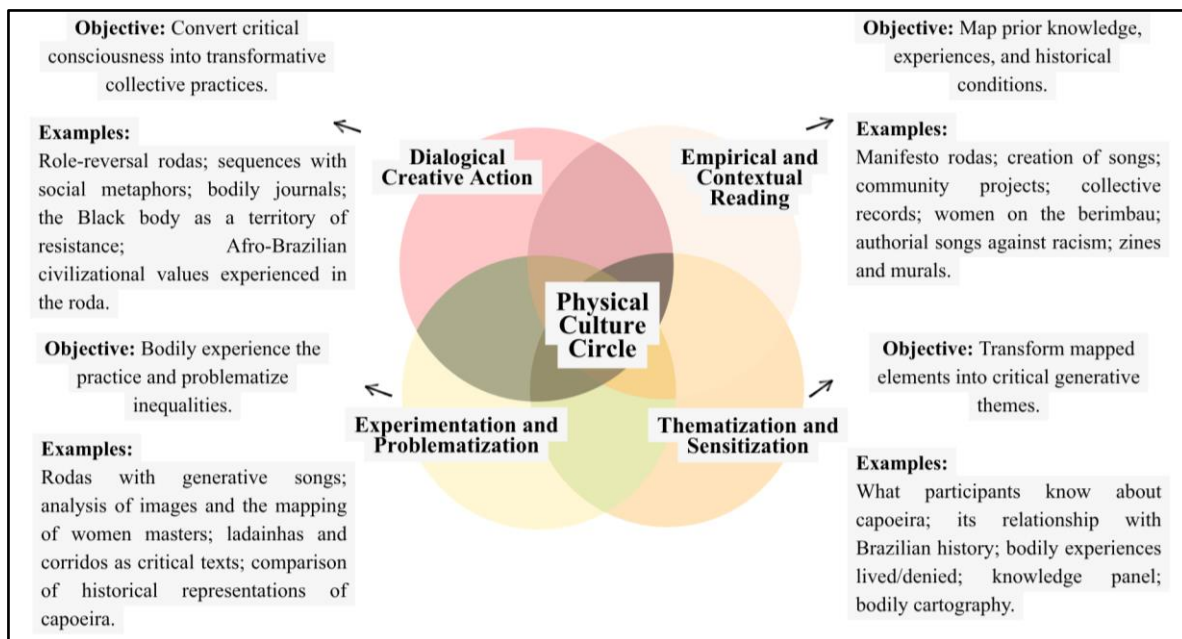


Figure 1. Stages of the physical culture circle articulated with capoeira.

Source: The authors.

Finally, the physical culture circle proposes a reading of capoeira that goes beyond merely technical perspectives, repositioning it as a political, decolonial, and pedagogical practice. By updating the Freirean circle in dialogue with intersectionality, decoloniality, and PCS, the proposal acknowledges the limits of the Freirean approach and advances its re-signification for contemporary debates. Ultimately, the study critically situates itself within the existing literature, taking a strong stance in claiming capoeira as a decolonial practice, beyond the restricted reading of ‘fight content’ in the curriculum. Thus, we call attention to sensibilities that we consider essential: situated and radical listening, valuing the body and ancestry as territories of knowledge, an intersectional reading of oppressions, the articulation between reflection and action, and community co-responsibility. This is not a rigid set of principles, but rather pillars that permeate each stage of the circle and ensure its ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical coherence. When articulated with capoeira, we recognize this practice in its historical, political, and aesthetic density, as a pedagogy of resistance and re-existence in the field of Physical Education.

Final Considerations

This study sought to investigate how capoeira can be addressed in school Physical Education through the Physical Culture Circle, contributing to a critical education committed to decoloniality and the valorization of Afro-diasporic knowledge. To this end, an exploratory, qualitative, experience-report type research was conducted, anchored in references from Freirean pedagogy, PCS, and Latin American decolonial studies. Structuring the analysis around the four stages of the physical culture circle made it possible to explain how capoeira can be thematized critically in the Physical Education curriculum, overcoming reductionist views that restrict it to technical or folkloric content and affirming it as a living pedagogy of resistance and re-existence.

Among the potential contributions of this work, we highlight the proposal of the Physical Culture Circle as a methodological alternative that integrates social critique, ancestry, and corporeality, strengthening the dialogue between education and Afro-Brazilian practices. We argue that this proposal expands the possibilities for teacher and student education by

challenging epistemic boundaries and promoting educational experiences engaged with social justice. However, we also recognize its limitations: the study was developed as an exploratory investigation and requires further empirical depth. For this reason, Physical Culture Circles are currently being implemented in schools and communities, and more detailed empirical analyses will be presented in future studies. We believe that these developments will contribute to consolidating capoeira as a critical and decolonial pedagogical experience, reaffirming Physical Education as a field of analysis and intervention in social power relations, while strengthening the dialogue between education and Afro-Brazilian practices within national curricular guidelines⁴⁴.

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