

## BODY PRACTICES IN NATURE: FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

### PRÁTICAS CORPORAIS NA NATUREZA: POR UMA EDUCAÇÃO AMBIENTAL

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#### ABSTRACT

Body practices in nature in leisure perspective show relations with environmental education and contribute to the moral, physical, social and personal value aspects. This study's objective was to promote environmental awareness through an educational strategy based on body practices in nature. The action research involved 12 subjects from the physical education course from UEPB. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used as instruments. The results were obtained from analysis of the data collected and compared with the theoretical support. One observed that there was a reconstruction concerning the values and concepts about environmental situation, allowing a critical view of the problems that nature is facing, and also an increase in the feelings of solidarity, friendship and respect among the participants towards nature and society.

**Keywords:** Environmental Education. Nature. Leisure Activities.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The present study is part of the final term paper titled Environmental Education in Outdoor Activities, which seeks to develop environmental awareness through body practices in nature.

Body practices in nature, from the leisure perspective, have grown every year since the 1970s (BRUNHS, 2009). That growth is related to several factors, such as, for instance: the improvement in the materials and equipment used in these practices - shown by Marinho (2009); the escape from urban chaos - indicated by Tahara and Schwartz (2003, and Tahara, Dias and Schwartz )2006); and the industrialization process, which triggered the displacement of the rural population to large industrialized cities, although it is known that that population has an instinctive need to return to nature (CHAO; SILVA, 2007). It is worth pointing out that nature, in this study, is understood as an element that had been little modified by man (FUNOLLET, 1989).

According to the studies of Marcellino (2003), leisure is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, and, as such, it is not isolated, but connected to other aspects of education, such as moral and physical development and formation of personal and social values. Thus, the leisure embraces the recognition of social responsibility through personal sensibility and the increase in solidarity and of primary opportunities for contact, as the author declares.

In this sense, body practices in nature are also inserted in the educational realm; however, according to Silva and Freitas (2010), intervention strategies are necessary for these practices, given that with the growing interest and search by city dwellers for adventure in uncertain environments, it also increases environmental degradation, caused by the lack of guidance and proper educational interventions for conservation and environmental ethics (BARROS; DINES, 2000).

Environmental education promoted by physical practice in nature has been the object of study by several authors, such as Monteiro (2003), for instance, who worked on that subject with tour groups; Betrán and Betrán (2006), Inácio et al. (2005a; 2005b), who bet on these practices in physical education in schools as an option environmental education aimed

at students. The studies of Ruiz and Schwartz (2002) also present proposals to work on environmental education through games during physical education at school; however, there are still few works in schools beyond research on the subject. One of the causes of that reality can be the lack of disciplines regarding body practices in nature in several universities in Brazil, resulting in a shortage of these practices in the school environment, as well as of the ones that promote leisure.

According to the studies of Bruhns (2000; 2006; 2009), the nature scenery sensitizes individuals; however, several experiences are necessary to develop this sensible aspect; also because body practices in nature are developed in groups, favor preservation, friendship, collaboration of the "me, the other and the planet", indicated by Pimentel (2006, p.70). Thus, body practices in nature, from an educational sense, favor the reflexive construction on the meaning of the man-nature relationship, as introduced by Suassuna et al. (2005). On the other hand, Morin's studies (2003; 2005) highlight the dissociation of the individual/society/species triad, which was fragmented over time, and one cannot reduce one term to another.

Given this scenario, the need to working on the environment theme is observed starting from body practices in nature through leisure, to raise the practitioners' awareness and to provoke in them a critical reflection on environmental ethics. In this perspective, the study has the objective of promoting environmental awareness through an educational strategy starting from body practices in nature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The guidelines established by Resolution No. 196/96 of the National Council of Health/MS and complementary norms, seeking to assure the rights and duties of the scientific community, the individuals in the research and the State, as well as resolution /UEPB/10/2001 of 10/10/2001 were followed. The project was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research with Human Beings of the State University of Paraíba, with number CAAE 0360.0133.000-07.

The study, of a qualitative approach, is characterized as an action research, given its intentional purpose of altering a researched situation and proposing to the group of individuals a few changes that, according to Severino (2007), seek to improve the investigated practices. In the understanding of Thiollent (1997), action research comprises four phases: exploratory, main (planning), action and evaluation.

To accomplish this study, the participants signed an informed consent form.

The research population consisted of 400 students of the undergraduate course in Physical Education at the State University of Paraíba. The investigated sample was selected in an intentional way, opting for first year students (morning and evening), totaling 80 subjects. This is justified by the fact that those students do not take the Leisure discipline, which could interfere in the study. All were invited in class to participate in the research. A total of 28 students joined the study, taking into consideration the following criterion: any subject who missed one of the initial meetings (first or second) would be automatically excluded from the research, because according to the suggestions of Bruhns (2000; 2006) and Barro and Dinez (2000), body practices in nature should be accomplished with a reduced numbers of participants, for better performance in the understanding dialogues as well as to minimize the environmental impact. The first meeting was attended by 21 students; in the second, the presence of 18 students was verified, and in all other meetings of the research there were 12 subjects, whose ages varied between 19 and 24 years. The other students who could not participate in all phases were invited to *rappel* another time, with specialized professionals.

As instruments for the collection of data, a questionnaire for characterization of the subjects and a semi-structured interview were used. In the interview "the interviewer is freed from preset formulations, to introduce questions or to make interventions that seek to open the field of the interviewer's explanation or to deepen the level of information or opinions" (MINAYO, 1996, p. 122). A field diary, tape recorder for oral recordings and a digital camera for photographic records were used as resources to record the activities/information. Those instruments aided the collection of data.

The field study was developed over five meetings, at the Physical Education Department (three times), at Poeta Rock (one time) and in the Marinho Rock (one time). Theoretical and practical activities were developed for environmental awareness on these occasions, as well as basic rappel techniques (one of the practices selected for the interventions), which counted on the support of the Campina Rappel Team.

The theory aimed to present leisure in nature that contemplated environmental ethics, basic and behavioral foundations of leisure activities in nature, aspects referring to ecological and social impacts, respect and conservation, safety, history of rappel, presentation of the equipment and styles of the technique. The practical classes included the activities, trail and rappelling.

To develop these activities, the research was based on the studies of Cornell (1996; 1997), which present 'sequential learning' as a pedagogic strategy for environmental awareness, divided in four apprenticeships: 'develop the enthusiasm, focus the attention, direct the experience, and share the inspiration'.

The first phase refers to the enthusiasm, euphoria or discouragement of the participants, to the outstanding characteristics of the landscapes, to climate and other factors. The success of the experience depends on this phase. It is important that all participants stay in harmony with each other and with the environment to be explored. The second phase aims to focus the attention' to calm the mind and the participant to ponder about the environment that surrounds him. In this phase, activities should be developed that focus on the senses (touch, vision, hearing, smell) to let the participants concentrate. The third phase seeks to energize the previous phase, involving the participants in experiments of greater contact. Activities with blindfolded eyes are suggested, aiming to increase perception through the other senses, in order to understand the explored space in another way and stimulate participants to consider themselves part of nature. The fourth phase consists of 'sharing the inspiration' among the participants, with reflections about the lived experiences, and to share the situations practiced during the experience, which will serve as base for the acquisition of new knowledge and values.

Sequential learning is necessary to sensitize participants to environmental issues and make them aware that human beings are part of nature, thus strengthening the bond between human beings and nature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, so they could best be understood they were classified in five categories, which are shown and described next. Sections of the discourse of participating subjects obtained during the meetings are highlighted with simple quotation marks, to differentiate them from citations by the researched authors' reproduced in this study.

### ***First category: 'the interfaces of environmental issues: the meetings'***

In the first meeting, carried out at the Department of Physical Education, the subjects arrived a bit shy, but some activities were later conducted to loosen them up, which improved

camaraderie among the group. Everyone paid careful attention to the proposal of the project and heard the subjects on basic rappel procedures involving the history, equipment, notions of knots, because none of them had yet experienced that technique. The educational activities on the rappel technique provoked a lot of relaxation and interest in the participants, such as when a mistake was discovered with a member that was equipped inadequately and the tug of war to show the level of resistance and safety provided by the appropriate material for practicing rappel.

The second meeting, also at the DPE, caused an important dialogue regarding the social and ecological impacts on preservation and urban areas, as guided by Barros and Dines (2000). The developed activities were 'prey and hunter', to develop a sustainable conscience, and 'the fool', to develop group trust.

Comments that value the importance of preserving nature appeared from the play activities. The participants' explanations revealed that 'it is very difficult to get the necessary food', and they noticed the 'need to save food so there is enough for everyone'. In the activity 'the fool', the statements were interesting because many highlighted that 'in the beginning it is difficult to trust the other holding the rope, but later' [...] This activity favored the practice of rappel and the first jump - of approximately three meters.

In the third meeting, held at Parque do Poeta in Campina Grande/PB, a trail of five kilometers was traveled, with the development of the following activities: "forest", aiming at the group cohesion and relaxation; "blind guide", to promote trust among the participants and improve their perception with regard to the environment and rappel; and "share the learning", to absorb this new knowledge. The activities followed the suggestions of the Cornell Sequential Learning of 1996 and 1997.

The "forest" activity revealed the perception of the participants on the importance of flora diversification and environmental aspects. Walking on the trail was fun, which contributed to camaraderie among the participants and for the union of the group. On the "blind guide" activity, several interesting statements were obtained, and the comments of those who were blindfolded were of insecurity: 'It is difficult for a person suddenly not to see and have to trust somebody else'. There were also comments referring to awareness, such as: 'You feel nature without seeing, you listen better, with a different quality, and you feel the plant, only later to try and discover what it is. That impressed me a lot.' A statement that was worth highlighting is expressed as such:

*'I didn't care a lot for it [...] but from now on, with all the knowledge I acquired, it is very cool to learn these things'.*

In the fourth meeting, held at Pedra do Marinho in the city of Massaranduba - PB, the following activities were carried out: 'Stop the Reflex', to ponder and stimulate auditory perception; 'Local Map', to observe the environment and stimulate auditory perception; rappel; and later the semi-structured interview.

The activity 'Stop the Reflex' offered individual moments of integration between the human being and nature and propitiated sensations of peacefulness and peace of mind. The activity 'Local Map' provided a lot of amusement: the groups drew different angles of vision of the landscape, and a team imagined having already rappelled. The discussion of the sounds was productive, as they tried to identify which animal the sound belonged to.

On the fifth meeting, held at DPE, the study participants analyzed the four previous meetings, discussing the positive and negative points, and making suggestions.

### **Second category: 'senses and emotions'**

Question 1 investigated the changes in the senses (self-confidence, self-knowledge, self-accomplishment, self-control, self-esteem etc.) from an emotional point of view. The

interviewees recognized they had positive changes in their senses, regarding the importance of their development and the recognition that is possible to accomplish activities and overcome fear: *I was more confident (E6)*. Another one stated regarding the practice of rappel:

*You have more courage to do things, you lose the fear you have, the person gets more confidence in the things she is about to do (E7).*

Interviewee 11 emphasized the subject of overcoming fear:

*I was always afraid of heights, but today I overcame it, even with all that fear, I made it (E11).*

In this sense, according to Le Breton (2009), these practices can promote changes in the individuals. Another important analysis is centered on self-knowledge, approaching the breadth of the conscience of one's own body:

*I thought I would not be so afraid. I wanted it, but I thought I could not make it, but in the end everything went well (E12).*

The preparatory period for the practice of rappel, in a certain way, represented a pre-requirement for participation in the descent through the rocks. One of the focused issues was the subject of safety. For better understanding, it is necessary to mention Nazari (2007), when he mentions that accidents occurred in rappel are caused by the trainee's negligence, excess confidence or lack of maintenance of the material used. In this sense, interviewee 9 mentioned something important:

*You cannot be too confident; you have to put safety first (E9).*

In this sense, we turned to the studies of Bentley (2006; 2007; 2008), which reveal that most diseases and accidents that happen in body practices in nature come from a lack of interventions and educational action by tourism companies that offer those practices, in order to reduce the rate of accidents through the basic care necessary for each type of activity.

### **Third category: 'Outstanding and significant moments'**

In the moments that preceded the meetings, there was diversity in participants' opinions. Each interviewee gave their opinion according to their own experience, and the most mentioned were: *the part of walking the trail was touching, the contact with the nature, the contact with the people, people helping each other* was great (E1). This comment is in agreement with studies by Monteiro (2006) and Pimentel (2006), who revealed that the body practices in nature sensitize the individual, bringing friendship and respect for nature.

Interviewee 4 was flattered with all the meetings in the natural areas:

*Everything was very impressive, everything, everything. It was a new experience, I had never done that. I had already been in touch with nature, like this, trails, but never so thoroughly like this (E4).*

The activities, an important part of this study, made it possible to expand the perception of the participants. In this sense, Rita Mendonça (2000, p. 139) contributes to this work when pointing out:

*[...] if we change the way we think, we can change the way we connect with it, we can change ourselves, we can change the whole system of which we are a part.*

It is believed then that the knowledge acquired through the perception of the unperceived brings a new way of seeing environmental issues.

For others, the most outstanding moments were reflexive:

*To feel that relaxation, feel good about being here, feel good about breathing this air, and I think it stays with me (E9).*

That statement indicates that the participant incorporated the sensitive experience with nature.

The diversity of outstanding moments in the meetings, mainly in the natural environment, constitutes a significant reference for the people who take part in the proposed activities, making it possible to improve the quality of the experiences lived close to nature.

#### **Fourth category: 'Affective-social changes'**

All interviewees revealed positive aspects in the relationship with the group. Several statements showed issues regarding the contact during the meetings: *I felt closer to the group (E2)*. The contact with the group during the meetings led to better interaction among participants, as in the words of interviewee 3:

*We already knew a few people [...] but not as many as I do now (E3).*

Others, who declared themselves to be shy, showed that with these activities it was possible to improve socialization within the group, as affirms interviewee 11,

*[...] I am not used to talking to anybody, but from the moment we join a group, with an objective... Then everybody shares his best, everybody shares experiences, and that help us to socialize with everybody, talking, with the teacher, as well as with the students, effectively socializing.*

Seeing the others through physical practice can unleash a perception of collective action expressed in the environment. The capacity of participants to experience play activities allows them to associate the acquired knowledge and reflect on it. In this perspective, Monteiro (2006, p. 142) emphasizes that it is "possible to understand leisure as a field of privileged human experiences together with renewed processes of constitution of subjectivities and a form of sociability".

In this sense, we observe the statement by interviewee 4 who points out, with regard to learning and the conviviality among the group, that for a better understanding with others it is necessary *to respect the differences [...] to respect everything from each person (E4)*. The social relationships and body practices in nature can be fruitful, because the environment is favorable to affinities, contributing to closeness among individuals. The fact that the activities are usually practiced in groups makes it possible to notice the valorization and efforts of the collective action (INÁCIO, et al., 2005). Thus, body practices in nature favor a feeling of

affection and caring for the neighbor, with the possibility of generating a circle of friendship in which companionship, solidarity and respect are interlinked among participants.

#### **Fifth category: "Maturing regarding to environmental issues"**

The learning acquired in the activities referring to the respect for nature was pointed out by interviewee 1:

*The part of respecting nature, not throwing garbage, not pulling out plants, not cutting, respecting the trail because you are invading the territory of other creatures, it is not a city where you can go to every corner. There is that specific trail, you cannot step on an ant's nest, an ant's hole that took months to build, and you go and destroy it with a step. I think that the importance of valuing and respecting the other creatures of the forest and the city as well, you bring to your own city, to urbanization (E1).*

The learning process in preserving nature was also mentioned by interviewee 4:

*I learned plenty of things, the importance of preserving nature, the issue of noise, dirt, those things, that for me, I didn't care about them, to tell you the truth. But from now on, with all that information that I have now, it was very cool to learn those things (E4).*

The vulgarization of the conservation process and the incorporation of noise and dirt into daily life can be changed through perceptions on something that can be planned and systematized as a pedagogic action.

Thus, the body practices in nature promote awareness in those who exercise them, who become reflexive individuals and notice the intrinsic relationship that exists between man and nature (GOMES, 2010). The information acquired during the meetings was fundamental for the individuals' awareness. When man starts to value the natural environment through learning and experiences with body practices in nature, he submerges in emotions and feelings of respect for the environment that surrounds him.

The natural scenario and awareness activities contributed to those positive perceptions, in the individual as well as interpersonal and/or social level, which, in some way, brought changes, knowledge and new concepts, in addition to sensations and emotions, as stated by this participant: *when we rappel down we have a sensation of freedom, we forget all our problems for a few minutes*. In this perspective, it is believed that these aspects allow individual transformations that value human expression. The practices directed at leisure have these characteristics pointed out by the participant and are also mentioned in the studies by Elias and Dunning (1992), according to whom leisure brings excitement and emotion to individuals and leads them to find in leisure a world less regulated, which contributes to social formation.

From the students' statements, a sense of respect for nature was observed, as well as respect for themselves and the other participants. Thus, it is intended that these new attitudes spread through actions in the city environment and become characteristic of new behaviors in relation to the environment. For that, it is necessary to continue body practices in nature on an educational realm, to consolidate the developed learning, because this commitment needs to be under constant evaluation.

Through the discussed data, the commitment with nature made it possible to assure the play experiences under the perspective of expanding the knowledge in relation to body practices. Perhaps these results could have been better if all interested participants had initially participated in the experience. With regard to this limitation, it is worth pointing out

the importance of the preparation and previous work concerning the body practices accomplished in nature, in order to minimize social and ecological impacts. The discussed analyses pointed to a more extensive and sensitive rationality and made it possible to know ideas that were unknown until then, and to transform preconceived notions.

In this sense, the expanded knowledge from this interdisciplinary study also contributes to the construction and formation of an environmental ethics, forming individuals who are critical and capable of understanding the environmental problem and of understanding each other as parts of nature.

## CONCLUSION

The pedagogic strategy proposed by Cornell, used in this study, offers possibilities of educational changes to participating individuals. This pedagogic sequence promotes environmental awareness and encourages new forms of offering the individual opportunities of observing the environmental problems from playful and conscious behavior. The interventions by the participants regarding sequential learning allowed them to notice that their senses were stimulated and that they got to develop new perceptions on nature through their discoveries and movements in the body practices in nature.

The main innovation from this study is the integration of dynamics of environmental awareness and the rappel experience. The feeling of conquest when overcoming the fear of heights was shown in several reports, which, according to Le Breton (2009), contributes to revelations about the personality. Thus, the orientations towards awareness, self-esteem, trust and solidarity are inserted in these practices starting from the teacher's relationship with the students.

Given these perspectives, Physical Education should include new pedagogical proposals, inserting body practices in nature as educational strategies for environmental education, because those practices allow a formation that qualifies the individual to understand himself as an element of nature. Pedagogical experiences in nature, from a dialogic perspective, make it possible to expand and modify concepts in light of environmental education and man's relationship with himself, others and the planet.

A sensitizing education strengthens the relationship between man and nature with regard to environmental responsibility and brings new civic experiences and a critical potential capable of make man assume an ethical commitment with society and nature. It is pointed out that, in a first moment, obviously, it is not possible to globalize those attitudes, as they are part of an enormous environmental problem; but small actions can make a difference, bringing knowledge and understanding of the importance of preserving nature, in benefit of the improvement of the planet.

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