



## *Conflict Mediation in the Physical Education Class, Why and What for?*

[*Mediación de conflictos en la clase de Educación Física. Por qué y para qué*]

[*Mediação de conflitos na aula de Educação Física. Por quê e para que*]

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### **ABSTRACT**

At present, the educational models from different parts of the world are reviewed constantly with the advancement of the predominant culture. First, the external part, then the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial, and the foreseen. From another perspective, several other researchers refer to the need of continuous teacher preparedness. The main purpose is to demonstrate the importance of professional preparedness of Physical Education teachers as mediators of ongoing conflicts in the educational system, which has been solved in other specialties, including the curricula linked to learner comprehensive training. In that sense, authors stress the relevance of actions directed to the Physical Culture professionals looking to enhance the elements of pedagogy in accordance with integrated education of children, adolescents, and youngsters. Hence, professional pedagogic preparedness is essential to achieve that goal. However, daily practice demonstrates that during the training sessions, the physical aspects are emphasized. The study consisted of a bibliographic review of the state of the art in terms of the preparedness of Physical Education teachers as a conflict mediator. Consequently, a number of flaws were unveiled during teacher performance in mediating conflicts in class, caused by the dynamics of the process.

**Keywords:** Preparedness, teacher, Physical Education, conflict, mediation.



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## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) issued a report stating that Education holds a treasure. Delors (1996) mentioned several objectives in the search for accessible, quality and ever-lasting education, such as "learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together, and learn to be" (p.36), as well as others, like learn to undertake and learn to compete.

The recently approved Cuban Constitution in April 2019 by the National Assembly of the People's Power (ANPP). *The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba*, adopted everyone's right to quality education. Article 73 states that,

Education is a right of all people, and the responsibility of the state, which ensures free of charge, accessible, and quality educational services to accomplish integrated education from the early infancy to postgraduate education (p.6).

To achieve sustainable and quality education for all Cubans, the state has made it a priority to train teachers with the skills to plan and develop an internationally-acknowledged educational system.

Upon the triumph of the revolution, in January 1959, teacher training, understood as the Latin term *Profesor-oris* = a teacher or person that practices education. The etymology is *Profeitor-eri* which means profession, and can only be translated as to confess, practice, train in front of all (*pro-feitor*), or also to talk, say, etc. (Ricardo, Escobar and Balmore, 2004, p.313), a priority of the new Cuban state was the creation of new schools for pedagogues. The first action taken to assist Physical Education teachers was the foundation of the National Institute of Physical Education and Sports (INDER).

Its original goals included the creation, management, and guidance of technical schools of physical education to train teachers, coaches, and instructors, with their respective degrees, as well as active teacher, coach, and instructor upscaling (Presidency of the Republic, 1961, p. 3.)

Accordingly, the preparation of Physical Education teachers constitutes the major challenge of every educational system when the scientific and technical revolution has set unprecedented conditions. These challenges placed man at the crossroads, the need for constant improvement generating creative processes and ties between companies and research centers to raise the qualifications of physical culture professionals. In that direction, Physical Education plays a key role, according to Ruíz (1986) as:

"The set of forms of physical exercise with an educational purpose. In contemporary pedagogy, Physical Education is the process practiced in schools that looks to develop physical performance capacities of individuals, based on the morphological and functional enhancement of the body, formation, and improvements of motor skills, knowledge acquisition, and the development of their convictions, so that they are capable of fulfilling the social mission as professionals in the society." (p.23)



In short, the training of physical Education teachers as professionals in charge of providing comprehensive student education in Cuban schools is important, especially, in relation to pedagogic aspects that ensure quality teaching (Becquer *et al.*, 2009) in secondary schools. Physical Education in this educational level is understood as,

"a subject whose contents are transmitted through a compelling program according to the needs and interests of the students, and the actual possibilities of the school and the corresponding staff.

Physical Education is the learner's integrated education by means of curricular activities that help address physical and educational tasks to create the necessary culture to perform physical exercise, a healthy way of using free time and raise life quality through the lesson" (p.11-32).

### *DEVELOPMENT*

The United Nations has insisted on the training of Physical Educational professionals in schools (UNESCO, 2015).

"To strengthen teacher effectiveness, the new professionals, along with the practicing professionals must receive high quality training based on the respect for human rights and the principles of inclusive education.

The FPEFC programs must tackle the role of Physical Education in the promotion of values associated with its practice and sports practice, such as respect, fair game, and tolerance. Besides, teacher training, both general and specialists, should include proper training to deliver PE programs that support the goals of health." (p.50)

Hence, in Cuba, the preparedness of Physical Education teachers is run by INDER and the Ministry of Education (MINED), with eight hours a week in this level, an aspect that demands high synchronization.

In this respect, the term preparedness is assumed by the Advanced Terms Dictionary as a "process of organizing education for managing the working resources of the community, so they can improve the individuals professionally and personally" (Argoña *et al.*, 2010, p.56)

Other authors, like Fierro (2019), define teacher preparedness as,

"A process through which teachers acquire new knowledge, broaden the existing knowledge, or change certain opinions about the topics dealt with. It can also help develop new skills for teachers to address several problems that may arise in their profession, using the methodological tools provided to them (p.44).



Concerning this topic, the Physical Education teacher training process in the secondary level of education in Cuba, has been designed to cover eight hours a week in the two main scenarios: the methodological training in the municipality, once a month, and the actions to accomplish that purpose in schools. In every case, it must pursue:

"Higher political-ideological, pedagogic-methodological, and scientific-technical preparedness at every level, the graduate and training teachers, through the teaching-methodological and scientific-methodological departments so they are capable of running the educational process. It is characterized by their didactic, differentiated, collective, individual, and preventive nature, with a political and ideological approach, in accordance with the objectives of the Cuban educational system (MINED,2014, p.1).

Hence, the conflict, its treatment, and possible solution is a phenomenon that in recent decades has begun to be studied by the social sciences, though very little in Physical Education. Working under these conditions from early stages constitutes an important element for the adolescent and child's emotional stability, which is dealt with in goals 4 and 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in the 38<sup>th</sup> UNESCO Meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>2015, when the Action Framework was adopted. These goals seek the promotion of inclusive and quality education, and learning for life for all; the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to facilitate access to justice for all, and to create effective, reliable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, respectively. This scenario was dealt with by Gutiérrez, Orozco, and Alfonso (2016):

"In the context of ethical and political education, it entails the reduction of school conflicts, even those that turned violent, Physical Education as a pedagogic discipline can help build knowledge that develop capacities, attitudes, and values that empower individuals, and provide them with a critical and reflexive thinking of their complex reality." (p.32)

In the same order of ideas, the term conflict should be defined, as one widely treated by authors, such as Torres (2018), who defined it as,

"The circumstances that embody two or more people with opposing views or disagreements, due to interests considered or perceived by the parts as incompatible at the time they take place. In this situation, the emotions and feelings play a significant role." (p.13)

Moreover, the term school conflict has been defined by Ramón, García and Olalde (2019) as,

"The process that entails two or more people who oppose or disagree due to truly or seemingly incompatible interests, members of the educational community, such as students, teachers, and parents, conflicts that can take place in the schools or other places linked to schools, like the surrounding areas or places where extracurricular activities are performed." (p.137)



Many studies conducted in Cuba on conflict and mediation have been done by the Felix Varela Center, and The National Guild of Collective Law Firms. In pedagogy, there are a few papers, namely, Cruz, Finalé and Pañellas (2005), Chacón (2016), Camacho (2018). However, in the area of Physical Education, these studies are practically inexistent (Sánchez, 2016). Therefore, research has a major role, since it contributes to the preparedness of Physical Education teachers (Latorre, 2017).

Conflict in Physical Education is understood as work done for student growth. Conflicts (either endogenous, which relate to the activity of students and teachers, and exogenous, which keep no direct relation to the moment of the lesson (Pérez, 2019). In view of the international scenario, especially in Europe, a culture of mediation has emerged to address these conflicts.

That way, conflict in Physical Education is unfavorable to many, a loss of time and energy, from a defensive position. It causes fear when unexpected situations are created; therefore, the consequences that it generates must be further studied (Martín and Ríos, 2014). Other authors see it as an inherent element to human life and individual and society growth, provided that the proper tools are used timely (Capllonch, Figueras, and Lleixà, 2014). Then the conflict seen in Physical Education must be understood as a phenomenon that should be dealt with for student and teacher growth (Sánchez, 2016).

Within this frame, conflict in teens is a frequent phenomenon due to the process of changes observed in these ages, such as disagreements with classmates, sweethearts, etc. (Capllonch, Figueras, and Castro, 2018). Others consist of ridiculing a partner during competition, ill-hearted comments, and bullying, defined by Musalem and Castro (2015) as a "dynamic of systematic mistreatment that takes place between peers persistently" (p.1). These aspects hinder normal life in the school community, which is critical for education and satisfactory learning.

The human relations established in physical activity among students, and between students and teachers are very significant for the outcome of conflict. Particularly, physical interactions are frequent in an activity where the education of the body is a key element. Body movement as a psychomotor process shows inner and outer tension while acting, which is known as the psychology of action. The body is a combination of the physiological, the psychological, the energetic, and the social (Martín and Ríos, 2014).

In that sense, Garrido (2015) has expressed his concern over the conflictive relation set up in the Physical Education class, more striking in cases of games where everyone wants to win.

"Motor games in the physical Education class are transformed into a real laboratory of social relations, as in the society in which the key players interact, there will be setbacks that generate tension." (p.8).

These situations are associated with age, and maximize during the Physical Education class, resulting from the dynamics developed in it, as described by Capllonch, Figueras, and Castro (2018), who stated that:



"The procedural character of the Physical Education scenario makes it a space for freedom of feelings and explosion of emotions erupted from the social character. This specificity can easily cause confrontation between the students and, consequently conflict" (p.50-51).

The Physical Education teacher plays a major role in assigning activities that favor student cooperative tasks, and provide social equality among all. The purpose is getting along through physical activity, and throughout the activity as a whole, inside and outside class.

"Consequently, without being professional mediators, the physical-sports educators are engaged in this type of work. Hence, not only in their graduate degree, the skill of conflict solution should be included in the subjects, but also, it should be one of the topics dealt with in the professional upscaling, which a school organization should concern about actively" (Gambau, 2019, p.23).

Sáez, Pere, and March (2013); Garrido (2015); Acosta and León (2016), and Camacho (2018) have stressed the preparation of the Physical Education teacher as a mediator, according to the results of previous research with elementary school children. Furthermore, Silva (2015); Acevedo, S.M., Medina, L, F, and Ramírez, V.P (2019), and Chumbay and Mora (2020) emphasized conflict mediation in secondary school.

Mediation comes from Latin *medi* or *medi*, meaning the center of... Castenedo (2015) defined it as,

"The assistance given by a mediator to the parties in conflict, so they, having the least possible outer pressure, are capable of "chilling" their stances, with a different way of looking at the facts, thus reaching the reinstatement of their relation on the basis of the win-win formula" (p.10).

Torres (2011), in his Glossary of Bioethics, defined mediation as the conflict management method by means of which a third impartial party, the mediator, facilitates communication and agreements between the conflicting parties" (p.109).

Acevedo, Medina, and Ramírez (2019) defined school mediation as,

"The strategy for the solution of conflicts that enables the integration of values and procedures in the frame of education based on a peace culture speech, while permitting conflict management based on participatory criteria that lead to the consolidation of the roles of each member of the educational community to construct favorable spaces for school life." (p.25).

The mediating action of the Physical Education teacher in his class should be used in face of frequent conflicts in schools, always considering the elements of sports psychology and physical exercise.



In that sense, physical Education teachers must receive training in mediation as a relevant process to achieve the lesson objectives in primary school students. Brito (2014) stressed the role of mediation by the Physical Education teacher in the lesson, as a positive aspect to achieve the process goals and efficiency.

There is a continuous need for teacher training as conflict mediators. Cruz and Finalé (2005); Capllonch, Figueras, and Lleixà (2014); Martín and Ríos (2014); Chacón (2016); Camacho (2018); Chumbay and Mora, 2020; and Feraudy-Cardona, 2020. Meanwhile, Gutiérrez, Orozco, and Alfonso (2016); Hernández and Buscá (2016), and Flores, Prat and Soler (2019) emphasized the significance of training actions for mediation to teach satisfactorily, to accomplish comprehensive child and teen education.

An essential feature of this process is the evaluation of the staff that works with the students (including the background and references). The staff from outside the school should be properly qualified to perform work with children, and share the same pedagogic principles as the teachers. Having an informative structure with the mechanisms to address and notify the incidence of bullying and issues of race discrimination and harassment, due to gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, etc., is critical. Accordingly, the conduct codes for teachers and students are important tools to protect and promote rights (UNESCO, 2015, p. 21).

That way, mediation is a fundamental element to improve relationships in schools, particularly in the Physical Education lesson. Schools should provide an environment of peace, seeking improvements in personal relations, promoting personal development as the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century.

"The ideal education quality entails the education and development of a personality that can self-regulate, and act according to a system of values that permits life socially, with human relationships based on the respect for diversity that embraces every people or group" (Torres, 2018, p.2).

Hence, the mediating action of the Physical Education teacher in his class should be used in face of frequent conflicts in schools. In other words, the implementation of an efficient mediating process by the Physical Education teacher and their key role will rely on their preparedness, which is not permanently performed. It should provide a broad space for technical and tactical elements that students must develop during their Physical Education class.

Moreover, the Physical Education teachers should be prepared to detect possible conflicts, perform their job based on established protocols in the educational facilities or sports clubs, and even mediate with students and athletes informally, as well as with the parents (Gambau, 2019, p.4).



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## CONCLUSIONS

School life in the Physical Education lesson is frequently threatened by the appearance of conflicts among adolescents. It results from verbal disagreements, physical violence, and bullying, which hinder the fulfillment of objectives, learning, and education, and cause a negative effect on students. In these situations, teachers should mediate using their pedagogic tools. According to Hernández and Buscà (2016), "Physical Education is a favorable setting where interpersonal and motor scenarios are produced; hence, it is a unique opportunity to analyze the conflict and be able to change it through educational tools" (p.62).

Physical Education may turn into a viable specialty for conflict mediation. Cooperated actions should be encouraged through these activities, thus contributing to the education of new citizens willing to improve life in very plural societies. Accordingly, teacher preparedness is fundamental to accomplish such goals, as they are active subjects in the transformations of schools and the society.

"Physical activity and sports are important because they enable the construction and consolidation of values like cooperation and supportiveness, improving confidence and the respect for themselves and their peers. Besides, they make better social development, and prepare individuals to compete in the labor market, so they can learn cooperative work, and to live in harmony, respect, and tolerance" (Ruíz, 2016, p.4).

Therefore, the Physical Education teacher plays a major role in assigning activities that favor student cooperative tasks, and provide social equality among all to make school life better.

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