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Special issue – editorial introduction – physical education teacher education and its complexities: mapping contexts for research and sharing experiences from Brazil

Luiz Sanches Neto, Luciana Venâncio and Alan Patrick Ovens

ABSTRACT
This special edition is about the complexities of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) and focuses on the unique and often underrepresented setting of Brazil. All researchers in PETE deal with complexity; we acknowledge that is the nature of doing research. But since the 1990s there has been a growing awareness of the need to think about complexity in different ways (Ovens [2017]. Putting complexity to work to think differently about transformative pedagogies in teacher education. Issues in Teacher Education, 26(3), 38–51. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1157529.pdf; Ovens et al. [2013]. Complexity thinking in physical education: Reframing curriculum, pedagogy and research. Routledge). In particular, there has been increased resistance to overly reductionist forms of research that seek certainty and generalisability. What has emerged is the need for increased attention to the social–cultural–material environments in which teacher education takes place, particularly in the way such environments are agentic in constituting phenomena such as PETE. There has also been an appreciation that the essence of such phenomena cannot be distilled from the messiness of its context and generalised unproblematically. Such an awareness has provoked researchers to engage in more generative ways with the multidimensional, relational, dynamic and unpredictable nature of educational practice. Alongside this is the need to represent and document the diversity of PETE practices in order to understand how those practices emerge from, respond to, and consist of multiple connections, configurations, agents, interpretations and meanings.

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complexity thinking; Brazil; physical education teacher education; criticality; social justice education; collaboration

Editorial
It is this desire to document the unique and context-specific nature of PETE that led this special edition to focus on the Brazil context. The idea for this collection of articles emerged in 2018 from conversations that were initially between the guest editors, Luiz Sanches Neto, Luciana Venâncio and Alan Ovens, and then with colleagues during the planning for the 1st School Physical Education Teachers-Researchers International Congress held in the Federal University of Ceará campus at Fortaleza, Brazil during a sabbatical, Alan was an invited keynote speaker in three Brazilian states.
Introduction

Brazil is a country of continental dimensions characterised by social and economic inequalities. On the one hand, the history of Brazil is one that circumscribes enslavement, dictatorship, and exploitation of a peripheral population that is largely unassisted, or protected, by public policies. On the other hand, this context of inequalities reveals how educational structures, anchored in conservative assumptions, currently face a series of questions about their social function and inaction to address issues of social justice and all forms of oppression. Brazil has been facing a conservative wave of the extreme-right first signalled by the 2016 political coup, which led to the impeachment of the 36th democratically elected President Dilma Vana Rousseff, the first women head of state, and then by the election of a profoundly right-leaning government in late 2018. This ‘swing to the right’ threatens the advances in human rights achieved by earlier leftist governments and social movements, particularly those concerned with Black equity issues, that influenced the drafting and promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, the National Curricular Guidelines for both basic education and teacher education, and the National Education Plans. These achievements had made it possible to rethink curricula and educational practices at school and teacher education courses at Brazilian public universities. These institutions are important spaces of resistance but are increasingly under attack.

The complexity of Brazilian PETE is embedded within this socio-political environment, with many of its pedagogical intentions aimed at the transformation of educational practices and enhancement of the life chances of its citizens. Internationally, the need to readdress social justice within PETE and its complexities has taken different forms in different countries, localities and contexts with widely differing degrees of autonomy afforded by a range of privatisation processes, levels of prosperity and austerity, religious bodies, economic contingencies, national and local politics (Evans & Davies, 2015; Linnér et al., 2020). The same is true for the Brazilian context. Bracht et al. (2015) suggest Brazilian physical education is living in a liquid modernity where the certainty of traditional ideas and concepts about the subject are replaced by a fluidity of evolving and competing notions, especially in respect to the impact of living in a broadly polarised political context with contrasting aims for education and differing aspirations for physical education as a subject in schools. Despite Matta et al. (2015) suggesting that Brazilian physical education is influenced by Freirean concepts, in actuality there are many voices shaping Brazilian physical education (Sousa et al., 2019). For example, Sanches Neto and Betti (2008) and Sanches Neto et al. (2013) have mapped fifteen different school physical education approaches that connect to emergent challenges in the research field.
The nature, content and approach represented in each PETE programme are a product of the way they are deeply interconnected within their socio-political contexts. There is a parallel process happening for the students in these programmes. In their chapter in the *International Handbook of Teacher Education*, Ovens et al. (2016) advocate strongly that the trajectory of learning to teach is not a linear, progressive movement from novice to expert teacher, but ‘a journey that explores untold variations in pathways; recognises multiple starting points; and contemplates ultimately what might be possible for any person intent on learning teaching’ (p. 353). They challenge the idea that learning to teach can be reduced to the acquisition of knowledge taught in a university setting and then applied and practiced in a school setting. Rather, they suggest the process is better conceptualised as one where students navigate a flow of different educational settings, each filled with critical moments that provoke the individual to reorganise, adapt and enhance their systems of thinking and performing as teachers. In this sense, PETE programmes comprise a pedagogical pathway that shapes, but does not determine, the process of learning to teach. As Madden (2015) comments in respect to teacher education, ‘the journey is continuously contextual, distinct, relational, and unforeseeable’ (p. 2).

To help illustrate the idea that the PETE student’s journey involves negotiating and finding meaning with/in the spaces of teacher education, we are drawn to the metaphor that the journey is often like ‘taking a ride’. Many young students enter Brazilian public universities to change their lives with the prospect of personal and professional fulfilment. Upon entering, they realise that their perspectives can be enhanced through contact with teacher education curriculum subjects, projects, teachers and researchers with different views towards the world. Students often navigate this complex environment by accepting ‘rides by the side of the road’ (for instance, invitations to research groups). Students do this until they find some ‘ride’ – academic provisional explanations for teaching and ways of curriculum making – that has a coherent foundation to explain the ‘road’ destinations – professional problems of teaching and ways of curriculum control by stakeholders – to build and share knowledge. On the one hand, for young students, being in the academic and professional field is a way of effectively understanding the complexity of this field. On the other hand, the constructed knowledge is often not consistent with the conditions of origin and life histories of the students who have picked up ‘rides’ (Venâncio & Betti, 2015). In Brazil there are PETE programmes, projects and research groups that have co-opted young people who enter university and are dazzled by the promises or ‘rides’. However, we perceive a large number of discursive reproductions, which do not dynamise the ways of doing and thinking about research in light of the logic of human development, social justice and equity (Tinning, 2020). We believe that this collection of articles gives us indications that undergraduate students – and teacher educators – recognise the need and importance of making choices, perceiving gaps and advancing their academic trajectories, as well as the relevance of expansion, access and permanence within the challenges of each PETE programme.

**Overview of papers**

For this special edition, we have pursued collaborative partnerships between teacher educators and teachers-researchers who work in schools and universities as an ethical, pedagogical and political effort to represent Brazilian PETE. In some cases, such partnerships go beyond Brazilian borders to Latin America and echo elsewhere as we have tried to unveil the similarities and differences that circumscribe the complexities (Filgueiras & Maldonado, 2020). The eight articles situate various theoretical and methodological concepts that characterise school physical education and PETE. Firstly, Luiz Sanches Neto, Luciana Venâncio, Eduardo Vinicius Mota e Silva and Alan Ovens discuss *A socially-critical curriculum for PETE: Students’ perspectives on the approaches to social-justice education of one Brazilian programme*. This article argues that the many issues of (in)equity are related to a complex mix of factors, such as Brazil’s large population, ethnic and cultural diversity, class and income disparity, late slavery abolishment, unstable democracy and political governance. The
research analyses a PETE programme offered at one university in the Brazilian Northeast, drawing on the perspectives of graduates from this programme to examine how they see the complexity of social justice and equity issues from their experience in the course. Each participant expressed a strong affinity for and orientation towards social justice as an integral aspect of school physical education. The findings support the restructuring of the PETE programme to meet the regional and local needs so that future physical education teachers intervene with a more critical socio-cultural perspective in their teaching.

In the second article – also from the Northeast region – Arliene Stephanie Menezes Pereira and Luciana Venâncio analyse African and Indigenous games and activities: A pilot study on their legitimacy and complexity in Brazilian physical education teaching. Although the teaching of African-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture is mandatory in primary and secondary schools, there has been a lack of proper contextualising in PETE programmes. The article addresses how the recognition of African-Brazilian and Indigenous ethnic-racial issues in primary and secondary physical education is mandated by the law. The objective is to analyse both the teachers’ knowledge and the law application in physical education classes concerning African and Indigenous games and activities. The authors discuss the invisibility of Black and Indigenous people in Brazil, connections to the African diasporas and Indigenous cultures, ethnic-racial inequalities in physical education, and the African-Brazilian and Indigenous complexities as challenges for PETE. Transformative pedagogies prompt the construction of new paths for social justice practices and require a more culturally diverse PETE. In order to do so, it is necessary to decolonise the curriculum, emphasising the ethnic-racial complexity.

In the third article, José Angelo Gariglio contributes from Minas Gerais in the Southeast region to the understanding of Beginning physical education teachers’ induction: Discoveries and survival in the profession. The article analyses different angles of the development of professional identity from written texts of teaching cases and elaborates reflexive descriptions of their practical experience. The study has its background in teacher induction concerning university researchers, educational managers, teachers in general, politicians, different governments and multilateral organisations. José Angelo considers referential and existential aspects of the teaching profession as it needs urgently to be redefined with coherent educational policies. The first years in teaching are marked by high rates of profession abandonment. The research was conducted with 13 beginning physical education teachers and connects to recognising, valuing and supporting different forms of being and acting in teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Findings show that belonging to a certain field is an important element when analysing different teachers’ trajectories in their teaching induction period, since those trajectories define crucial ways of being a teacher, developing work and how this work is perceived by others.

The fourth article, Reflecting on initial teacher education in Brazil: Experienced teachers’ perceptions, contributes to reinterpreting the PETE curriculum. In this research, Wilson Alviano Júnior – from Minas Gerais – and Marcos Garcia Neira – from São Paulo – collaborate to examine initial teacher education through the experiences of experienced physical education teachers. The participating teachers work in primary education in the municipal public-school systems of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, and Diadema – cities located in the São Paulo metropolitan region known as the ‘Greater ABC’. There are different education networks in each city and in the state of São Paulo (Betti et al., 2015). This broad area was selected due to its diversity of institutions offering initial PETE, aiming to understand teachers’ perceptions about public school and teaching during their PETE programmes. Although PETE and teaching cover the same curriculum, Wilson and Marcos’ attention is drawn to the lack of themes relevant to working in contemporary schools and the privileged status given to knowledge the teachers understand as being secondary or even unnecessary in pedagogical practices.

The fifth article elicits the PETE challenges from the perspective of a teacher and three researchers who work in a small municipality in the State of São Paulo. Aline Rodrigues Santos, Thayse Polidoro João, Isabel Porto Filgueiras and Elisabete dos Santos Freire discuss Research on the teaching practice
itself in physical education classes: Implications and challenges perceived by a teacher-researcher. It is through the daily construction of teaching supported by research strategies that the teachers constantly learn and promote their professional development. As they teach, they learn about themselves, their students and the social context. By taking on the task of investigating their own practices, the teachers also learn the art and challenges of being researchers. Aline, Thayse, Isabel and Elissabete used Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) methodology to identify and analyse the challenges and obstacles perceived by the teacher-researcher. The perceived PETE challenges emerged in three moments: in the research planning, in the production of information and records, and in the information analysis. The study contributes to understanding that the teachers’ research on their teaching practice is a challenging process of learning, and that their improvement as researchers impacts positively on their teaching.

In the sixth article, Go Tani, a pioneer in complexity studies in the country, and his team of collaborators, Flávio Henrique Bastos, Sérgio Roberto Silveira, Luciano Basso and Umberto Cesar Corrêa explore Professional learning in physical education in Brazil: Issues and challenges of a complex system. The article addresses that PETE professional learning entangles a complex system: it involves the interaction of several components that change over time. Social needs, labour market, body of knowledge, faculty members, body of students and course curricula have been pointed out as some of these components that, when interacting, give the system a highly dynamic character. Moreover, Go, Flávio, Sérgio, Luciano and Umberto consider the hierarchical characteristic of complex systems and that professional learning develops itself in a context called university – that is immersed in an enormous identity crisis due to three major revolutions: knowledge, communication and digital. In Brazilian PETE, these constraints are complicated, varied and unstable, which results in the constant need to change their intrinsic dynamics to cope with the increasing demands of the teaching settings.

In the seventh article, Osvaldo Luiz Ferraz, Carla Vidoni and Marcos Vilas Boas share a possibility of Bridging the gap between theory and practice: The impact of school–university partnership in a PETE programme. This study examined the impact of early childhood in physical education practicum experiences on pre-service teachers’ perceptions on the development of the knowledge base. Osvaldo, Carla and Marcos used focus groups interviews and focused on how eighteen pre-service teachers bridged the gap between knowledge learned during campus classes and practicum experiences in an early childhood public school. Participants initiated their PETE practicum experiences based on academic knowledge. Nonetheless, new knowledge was generated through multiple and repeated practical lessons within their own singularities. These contextual singularities allowed the participants to re-elaborate their knowledge and produce new ways to respond to different teaching situations. The partnership between university and school was an effective way to provide identification and application of teachers’ knowledge base.

Lastly, Walter Roberto Correia discusses School physical education: Work and teaching subjectivity within one Brazilian post-graduate programme in the final article. Walter’s essay is a theoretical position offering one PETE programme’s approach to constructing the graduate curriculum. Pedagogical studies – related to teaching didactics and methodologies – are fundamental in the globalised world, especially in the complex field of comparative education. Exchanges of knowledge from applied educational practices, coupled with their underlying foundations, can produce resonances for the broad understanding and improvement of educational actions. Walter analyses the theoretical foundations that support and encourage the development of one post-graduate programme curricular subject. The paper reinforces the validity of sharing PETE experiences at different levels of analysis, in association with symbols and social values related to the nature of teaching work within deep psychological processes. The grounded Freirean perspective (Freire, 1996, 1997) contributes to understanding the subjective aspects of teaching in PETE – from the complexity thinking perspective – articulating different epistemological bases.

In closing, we reinforce that the complexity of Brazilian PETE emerges from being situated within, and interdependent with, the political–cultural–material networks that shape the Brazilian
educational context (Venâncio & Darido, 2012). This issue is an attempt at bringing together contributions to consolidate the research field and mapping future directions for collaboration. The complexity of the Brazilian PETE should not be reduced in the pursuit of any isolated approach, but embraced because of its convergences, tensions, connections and dialogues. It means that collaboration is necessary to counter narcissistic feuds and forms of conducting research on PETE and teaching. For scholars, dedication to dialogue and collaboration is not an easy accomplishment to be achieved but such a collaborative effort is necessary to advance criticality in academia (Garbett & Thomas, 2020). According to Sanches Neto et al. (2015) collaboration is a long-term process within knowledge communities. Then, we hope that these eight papers contribute to further critical steps ahead in the PETE research field.

Notes

2. As listed in the Lattes academic curriculum database, the official main source for all Brazilian research. The open call had two phases with two rounds of ad hoc peer reviews in each phase. The first phase (2018–2019) was into Portuguese and the second phase (2019–2020) was into English. It was important for us to have organised the first phase into Portuguese to value the details from the original writing process of each paper draft. Although longer, such a collaborative procedure for this special edition enabled a more diverse and contextualised range of papers.

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