

Educational Reform in Tunisia: The Educational Objectives Privileged By Physical Education Teachers in the Desired Curriculum

¹Pr. Fredj BOUSLAMA, ²Dr. Anouar BETTAIEB, ³Dr. Jamel Hajji,
⁴Louay Bettaieb.

¹*High Institute of Education and of Continuing Education, University of Tunis. Tunisia.*
DiDiSt CREFI-T, University of Toulouse.

²*High Institute of Physical Education and sports of Gafsa. Tunisia.*

³*High Institute of Physical Education and sports of Gafsa. Tunisia*

⁴*Faculté de médecine Henry warmburg, Université de Lille France*

Within the framework of the reform of the Tunisian education system, this study tries to characterize the curriculum wished by physical education teachers. It also tries to scrutinize the order of priority of the educational goals proposed by the reform. Under this rubric and having the same object, 203 teachers have answered a questionnaire conceived and used by a European study. The tool has been translated and validated according to the approach suggested by Vallerand (1989). The results reveal a convergence in the teachers' answers in general and transversal objectives at the detriment of the objectives that are mainly specific to the physical and sports activities.

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I. Introduction

In 2002, the Tunisian education system underwent a comprehensive reform. A law was enacted to this effect (Education and School Education Orientation Act, 2002. No. 2002-80), instituting two major radical changes with far-reaching implications. This law ratifies the transition from a programme approach to a curricular approach to educational planning. It also heralds the adoption of the competency-based approach as a new pedagogical and didactic method of teaching instead of the goal-based approach. In all teaching subjects, subject groups have been set up to carry out the work of didactic transposition leading to the definition of knowledge and content to be taught according to the so-called competency logic. This work made it possible to produce textbooks and the necessary didactic and pedagogical tools for teachers' work. Despite the fact that article 52 of the new Orientation Act reaffirms physical education as part of the national education project, this didactic transposition process has not been carried out for this compulsory education subject. The old texts and curricula are still in force. Clearly, the work of harmonizing the teaching of physical education with the rest of the teaching subjects and with the new approach is unavoidable. Sooner or later this work must be carried out to ensure overall consistency with the new school curriculum adopted. Moreover, on the ground, the educational reform has not been well received by the pedagogical frameworks of the various teaching subjects and several unions and corporations have shown intense resistance to the new law. As this reform has not yet been introduced in the teaching of physical education, we have taken a forward-looking approach to the expectations of teachers and the educational and didactic choices they would like to see or even propose in the new texts specific to the teaching of physical education.

PROBLEMATIC AND THEORETICAL INSCRIPTION

The project to study the processes of construction, development, adaptation and implementation of curricula was originated in the second half of the twentieth century. The considerable contribution made by Anglo-Saxon sociology to the issue made it possible to apprehend the curriculum as an object of scientific investigation. However, although it remains indispensable, the sociological approach to the curriculum is proving insufficient when it comes to shedding light on curricular processes and their variations in relation to detailed learning objects and content. The contribution of a view combining a global socio-educational approach and a specific disciplinary didactic approach to educational reality is proving to be increasingly enriching. This combination makes it possible to better grasp the complexity of the teaching-learning systems that are being set up at the micro educational level and to shed light on decision-making concerning global and specific educational choices at the macro educational level.

It is therefore, a double theoretical registration that will establish our approach. It borrows from the sociological framework and curricular theories the different conceptualizations of the notion of curriculum, the analysis of the sociological mechanisms involved in its conception, structuring and functioning. It also borrows from the framework of general and disciplinary didactics, the analysis of the processes of didactic transposition and the choice of contents at different levels of curricular decision-making.

In this study, we are interested in a particular moment in the construction of curricula. It is the moment of reform. The particularity of this moment lies in the fact that educational choices are no longer made in the closed environment of the classroom or school. They are becoming a matter for the city and the object of a broad public debate. The political, ethical, economic, cultural, professional and educational stakes of curricular choices are intertwined and often find themselves in a conflictual relationship. Several studies analysing the difficulties of curriculum implementation (Bos and Amade-Escot, 2004; Klein, 1995) have highlighted the limits of top-down curriculum reforms. The difficulty of implementing a formal curriculum, designed centrally by a team of experts and then disseminated to stakeholders, is highlighted by Jewett and Bain (1985). This type of implementation approach, they state, often meets with reluctance or even rejection on the part of teachers. Top-down approaches are in fact confronted with two types of major difficulties. Either practical difficulties, when teachers adhere to these reforms but find obstacles to the application of curricular guidelines; or reception difficulties, when teachers reject, more categorically, the ideological underpinnings or the moral and professional implications of these reforms.

In fact, the multiplication of pressure groups, as well as the amplification of their influence in resisting 'bureaucratic', 'technocratic' or 'expert' policy prescriptions, has led educational decision-makers to pay greater attention to the democratic debate concerning curricular choices. Political and school leaders know, today, perhaps more than in the past that the pedagogical practices of professionals, their beliefs and representations, and their attitudes towards students and their learning are outside the realm of decree. The sphere of decision-making is thus widening to include new participants who have long remained spectators of educational reforms and renovations. The participation of actual stakeholders in curriculum reform projects is now seen as both a criterion of the quality of the reform and of the formal curriculum and a *sine qua non* for the success of the reform project.

Changes in the way in which reforms are now thought out and designed generate new theoretical, conceptual and methodological needs. On the theoretical level, at least, in the didactic and sociological field, we can deplore a lack of conceptual, univocal and stable tools to formalize this new type of approach.

It is in the field of public policy evaluation that we can find some descriptive elements of new democratic approaches to evaluation and decision-making. In this new field of research and theorization, bottom-up approaches are called participatory evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a generic term defining any evaluation that involves the various stakeholders in a project, programme or policy in its planning and implementation (King, 2005). It differs from traditional evaluations by directly and actively involving a diverse range of actors (project managers, beneficiaries, citizens, civil society, etc.) in the evaluation process, from the development of questions to the dissemination of evaluation results. Jacob, Ouvrard and Bélanger, (2010) explain that approaches favouring stakeholder participation have gradually gained momentum in the face of the approximate results of managerial evaluations in certain areas. In particular, they have developed in the social sectors, where a detailed knowledge of the population's needs is increasingly necessary in order to better take into account its specific needs and socio-cultural context.

Moreover, the adoption of approaches based on the identification of stakeholders' needs and their involvement in curriculum development is part of a forward-looking perspective aimed at anticipating difficulties in implementing reforms. The search for a consensus based on the expectations of the various protagonists in making educational choices before they are formalized and implemented has become a strategy for overcoming resistance to reforms and the obstacles to their implementation. If, in the top-down pattern of reforms, curricular choices are justified by political and scientific legitimacy, in the bottom-up pattern, democratic and practical legitimacy take on capital and decisive importance. In this sense, Rogier (Rogier, 1997, p.62) states that "a curriculum is very often the result of negotiation between the various actors and protagonists involved". To this extent, the curricula *desired* by the different actors become a kind of raw material and corpus of reference in the educational reform project.

It is therefore in this negotiated nature of curriculum design that the project to make explicit and describe the curriculum *desired* by teachers can find its place and relevance. These virtual curricula, which still exist only in the imagination of those involved, can therefore have an impact on the success of reforms. However, until now, curriculum theories have only been interested in curricular objects already in use in education. While the curriculum literature abounds in theoretical developments and empirical investigations on the notions and concepts of the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum and the real curriculum, little work has been done on other forms of curricula that are less obvious but no less influential on educational reality, its dynamics and its evolution. The failures of curriculum reform projects, despite the expression of a willingness and potential

for change among teachers, are once again living proof of this. Wanting a reform and rejecting the one proposed suggests that these actors have an image of a curriculum appropriate to their missions.

The definition of the curriculum formulated by (Roegiers, 1997, p. 89) provides us with a conceptual starting point. For this author, a curriculum is

"The complex and evolving set of rules for the pedagogical conduct of an education or training activity at the different levels of its operationalisation. This set is essentially defined by the aims, the general objectives of the action, and/or the effects expected in the field through it; the subject content, objectives, capacities and/or skills to be developed in the learners; the teaching methods; the modes of management of the process, including the mode of relationship between the actors; the articulation with the organizational or environmental context and; the modalities of evaluation of the learners' performance".

By analogy, we define the *curriculum desired* by teachers as the set of rules, norms or principles of pedagogical functioning that they wish to be able to adopt in order to carry out their teaching.

A link was established by Keddie (1971) between teachers' adherence to the idea of a hierarchy of skills and the way in which they "treat" the knowledge they teach, the way in which they characterize, organize and present it.

Expressing opinions on educational objectives and ranking them in order of importance would make it possible, in this perspective, to identify the nature of the knowledge and content valued by teachers and thus to have an idea of the curricular trend they would like to adopt. The explanation of the hierarchical order that teachers give or wish to give to educational objectives in their teaching could therefore be sufficiently indicative, if only in a summary way, of the curriculum that they wish to see proposed by an educational reform.

II. Method

In order to explore and describe the curriculum *desired* by PE teachers we used the "*Profile of a Physically Educated Young Person*" questionnaire (QPJPE, 2011) developed by Jose Diniz, Dick Fisher and Rose-Marie Repond, for the purposes of a European survey conducted by the European Physical Education Association. Conceived for exploratory purposes, the items were defined not on the basis of a theoretical construct but on the basis of a collection and representative selection of the objectives and skills targeted by physical education in European countries. The QPJPE is a forced choice questionnaire containing 57 items, 13 of which relate to educational objectives and 44 to competencies. The answers consist of ranking the order of priority/importance given to each of the proposed statements.

In order to adapt this European questionnaire to the Tunisian cultural context and to the professional, educational and didactic culture of physical education teachers in Tunisia, we have translated the tool into Arabic. In order to guarantee the validity of the translation of the questionnaire, we used the methodology of translation and transcultural validation of research tools as defined by Vallerand (1989).

The QPJPE was subjected to five of the seven steps suggested by Vallerand (1989) in the production of faithful and valid translations of research tools: 1) preparation of the preliminary version; 2) evaluation and modification of this version by a committee-type approach; 3) evaluation of the experimental version by pre-testing; 4) evaluation of concurrent and content validity; 5) evaluation of faithfulness.

In the absence of a theoretical model underpinning the construction of the questionnaire, the sixth step of the validation process of the translated version suggested by Vallerand (1989), which consists in assessing the construct validity, was abandoned. Step 7: Establishing standards. It is also not necessary since the instrument is intended for research purposes rather than clinical purposes. In addition to being impertinent, these two steps require a large sample size, unnecessarily soliciting a large number of teachers.

The successive stages and various empirical tests have made it possible to develop a validated translated version of the QPJPE (Bousslama, 2008).

203 secondary school PE teachers (159 males and 44 females) voluntarily participated in our study. These teachers are spread over the 7 Tunisian governorates: 27 in SidiBouazid, 34 in Kasserine, 32 in Sfax, 48 in Nabeul, 15 in Tunis, 14 in Sousse and 33 in Monastir. 77 teachers interviewed work in schools located in cities, 106 work in schools located in the suburbs and 20 in schools located in rural areas (villages). The majority of the participating teachers (120) have between 7 and 25 years' seniority, 33 between 25 and 35 years' experience, 34 between 4 and 6 years, 14 between 1 and 3 years, and only 2 participants have more than 35 years' experience. This distribution is reasonably representative of the profession as a whole.

The statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 13.00 for Windows. In order to establish the ranking of the objectives based on the teachers' responses, the ranks were converted to a descending score. Thus, the first place was awarded 13 points, the second place 12 points, and the third place 11 points, and so on.

Presentation of results

The objectives were thus ranked in descending order according to their total scores. The following table shows the ranking of the objectives established by the teachers.

Ranking of objectives according to the order of priority established by the participating teachers

| Rank | Objective | Score | Sum |
|------|--|-------|--------|
| 1 | Developing personal well-being | 2053 | 10,113 |
| 2 | Encouraging young people to adopt an active lifestyle | 1752 | 8,631 |
| 3 | Discerning the principles of health and fitness | 1736 | 8,552 |
| 4 | Raise awareness of the importance of the values of sport: solidarity, fair play | 1664 | 8,197 |
| 5 | Practicing (sports) activities safely | 1611 | 7,936 |
| 6 | Develop a wide repertoire of motor skills | 1470 | 7,241 |
| 7 | Promote recognition of the social and cultural value of sport and PES | 1394 | 6,867 |
| 8 | Understand the relationship of other curriculum subjects to PSE | 1270 | 6,256 |
| 9 | Develop the ability to assess one's own performance as well as that of others | 1166 | 5,744 |
| 10 | Provide learning and achievement opportunities for all young people regardless of gender, social and cultural backgrounds. | 1136 | 5,596 |
| 11 | Contributing to the development of citizenship | 1108 | 5,458 |
| 12 | Develop and apply motor skills in specific PSAs: sports, dance... | 1056 | 5,202 |
| 13 | Developing leadership and organizational skills | 1038 | 5,113 |

Since this article can only take into account most of the observations that emerge from the hierarchical classification of the objectives achieved by the participating teachers, we will limit ourselves to noting the most salient features of this classification.

First of all, an absolute and almost unanimous priority seems to be given to the objective: "Developing personal well-being". Out of a theoretical score of 2639 for first place, this objective scores 2053 points, which means that only 45 respondents out of 203 did not give it first place.

It should then be stressed that the first five priority objectives designated by teachers are general and cross-cutting objectives that are not specific to PE. They transcend the disciplinary logic by constituting educational perspectives that can be envisaged both in all the physical and sports activities (PSA) used in PE, and in the different teaching subjects of the curriculum. The general nature of these objectives seems to constitute a common point explaining and justifying their succession in the first five places on the scale. Indeed, their grouping is presented as a compact and coherent unit of meaning. The gap between the score for the fifth objective 1611 and that for the sixth objective 1394 is 141 points. It should also be pointed out that the first five objectives seem to be objectives that are difficult to measure and evaluate. Their general nature also poses a certain number of difficulties of a didactic nature in that it is difficult to determine the didactic content likely to achieve these objectives. This leads us to believe that among the teachers interviewed, the educational dimension is predominant over the instructional dimension in the teaching of physical education. The ranking of the objective emphasizing learning and achievement in tenth place seems to confirm this trend. We can therefore deduce that the desired teaching would be based on the acquisition of attitudes and habits of continuous and regular physical practice by students. Teaching that would be based on the repetition and reproduction of healthy behaviour and attitudes rather than on problem solving and the acquisition of knowledge or skills specific to sports practice.

The first appearance of the specific objectives for PE is at the level of the sixth rank. At this level of the ranking is the goal of developing a wide repertoire of motor skills. This objective is one of the three objectives in the list that relate directly to motor skills. These objectives are in a scattered configuration despite the obvious link of specificity to the physical activities that link them. It is clear that the more the objective aims to achieve

advanced acquisition and high levels of mastery of specific PE skills or abilities, the less it is appreciated and valued by teachers. The descending order of the objectives "to develop a broad repertoire of motor skills" in sixth place, "to develop the ability to assess one's own performance and that of others" in ninth place, and "to develop and apply motor skills in a variety of PSAs" in twelfth place confirms this tendency to push the more specific objectives for physical activities and sports to the bottom of the scale.

III. Discussion

It is clear that the disinterest in the disciplinary and specific objectives of the PE and PSA domain manifested in the choices of participating teachers is at odds with the sporting and performance orientations that the 1991 Official Instructions and the accompanying curricula are called upon to implement in the teaching of PE at the secondary level. The "search for ever better technical performance" - the fourth purpose attributed to PE in the 1991 text - seems to be disavowed by the participating teachers.

Finally, let us note from this ranking that the objective "to develop the sense of leadership and organizational skills", which occupies the last position on the scale, is an objective that falls within the general framework of "entrepreneurial skills" designated by Article 57 of the new law on the orientation of education and teaching of 2002 as general objectives targeted by the Tunisian education system. The same is true of the objective "to contribute to the development of citizenship", which also occupies a backward position in the order of priority for teachers and is listed in article 8 of the 2002 Orientation Act as one of the main missions assigned to Tunisian schools. The eighth place given to the objective "understanding the relationship between other subjects in the curriculum and PES" is indicative of the value that the teachers interviewed attribute to the interdisciplinary dimension in school education. It should be noted in this connection that this dimension is central to the competency-based approach adopted by the new 2002 Education and Teaching Policy Act.

Similarly, the curricular orientations that emerge from the classification of the objectives set by teachers are opposed to the suggestions made by UNESCO (2001,b) in the field of PE. According to this organization, a quality PE curriculum would meet at least seven standards. According to UNESCO,

"... the first four standards are the primary and distinct responsibility of the physical education program. There is no other subject in the school curriculum that includes knowledge, skills and behaviours related to human movement and physical fitness. »

UNESCO's recommendations draw their relevance from the presence of a teaching subject within a school curriculum which must be justified by the exclusive contribution it makes to the educational project. The teachers questioned seem to attach little importance to this factor.

The results of the European study on the same subject (REPOND, R,M, HOLZWEG, M, 2014, p. 12) revealed a relative similarity between the order of priority given to the objectives by the European and Tunisian teachers participating in our study.

« Links between physical education and health education and with personal and social development are occurring in some countries, testimony to which are EUPEA Physical Education Survey (2010-2011) findings, which indicate that exercise and health, physical activity learning and social and personal development are the most frequently cited aims of physical education programmes in the 22 countries/education autonomous regions of Europe sample »

Furthermore, the observation of a generaleducational orientation of physical education among the teachers questioned could be an element in explaining the problems of evaluation and grading of students in the national baccalaureate examination. A problem noted by the Ministry of Education as one of the reasons for the withdrawal of the sports baccalaureate exam from this examination was decided in 2010. Indeed, among the observations that motivated this decision in 2010, (BOUHOUC, H, AKROUT M, 2014) the Minister of Education at the time literally mentions:

"Experience has shown that the averages for this exam are always lower than those awarded during the year, when they should be higher, not lower. »

An assessment based on individual sports performance in gymnastics and athletics seems indeed incompatible with an educational orientation and conception of physical education. We may therefore think that when teachers are led to grade students on sports performances that are not of great importance to them, they may consciously or unconsciously bias the objectivity of the evaluation and grading.

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