

Artículo de investigación

Title: The normal student as a potential emancipator in the community.

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Abstract: The 2022 Curriculum for the Bachelor’s Degree in Physical Education emphasizes a learning-centered approach developed in interdependence with the community, highlighting the pillars of school–community–territory and the dialogue of knowledge as means to foster new learning opportunities. This study aimed to describe how student teachers, trained under the 2018 Curriculum, perceive their preparation as physical educators in relation to the community, with the goal of strengthening the curricular design of the 2022 Curriculum. A qualitative approach and the phenomenological method were used, involving a focus group of eight students from the sixth and eighth semesters of the

Bachelor’s Degree in Physical Education at the “General Ignacio M. Beteta” Normal School of Physical Education.

Findings showed that, although students recognize the existence of courses related to community engagement—such as Socio-educational Intervention Projects and Planning and Organization of Sports Programs—they do not perceive themselves as integral members of the community capable of fostering emancipation. While the Professional Practice training pathway brings them closer to the community, they tend to view it more as a requirement for professional assessment rather than as an opportunity to contribute to community transformation. It is recommended to strengthen the flexible curriculum courses in the 2022 Curriculum so that students perceive themselves as agents whose roles can have an impact on the community.

Keywords: Physical education, community, teacher training, emancipation, 2018 Curriculum.

Resumen: El Plan de Estudios 2022 de la Licenciatura en Educación Física enfatiza el enfoque centrado en el aprendizaje en interdependencia con la comunidad, destacando los pilares de escuela-comunidad-territorio y el diálogo de saberes para la potencialización de nuevos aprendizajes. Este estudio se propuso describir cómo los estudiantes normalistas, formados con el Plan de Estudios 2018, perciben su formación como educadores físicos en relación con la comunidad, con el objetivo de fortalecer el diseño curricular del Plan de Estudios 2022. Se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo y el método fenomenológico, entrevistando a un grupo focal de ocho estudiantes de sexto y octavo semestres de la Licenciatura en Educación Física de la Escuela Normal de Educación Física “General Ignacio M. Beteta”. Se encontró que, aunque los estudiantes reconocen la existencia de cursos relacionados con la comunidad, como Proyectos de Intervención Socioeducativa y Planificación y Organización de Programas Deportivos, no se auto perciben como elementos de la comunidad que puedan favorecer la emancipación. Aunque el Trayecto Formativo: Práctica Profesional les acerca a la comunidad, lo ven más como un requisito para su evaluación profesional que como una oportunidad para contribuir a la transformación de la comunidad. Se recomienda incidir en los cursos de flexibilidad curricular del Plan de Estudios 2022 para lograr que los estudiantes se perciban como sujetos cuya función puede tener impacto en la comunidad.

Palabras Clave: Educación física, comunidad, formación docente, emancipación, Plan de Estudios 2018.

Introduction

Teacher training in Mexico is a fundamental pillar for the country's educational, social, and cultural development. Since the creation of the first teacher training colleges in the country in the 19th century, the essential purpose has been to prepare teachers capable of responding to the needs of their time, with an ethical, humanistic, and transformative commitment to the communities they serve. Throughout history, teacher training has evolved in dialogue with social, political, and pedagogical changes, shaping a training model that seeks to balance professional practice with critical reflection on social reality (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1997).

In this context, the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education occupies a strategic place within teacher training, promoting the comprehensive development of children and adolescents in Mexico through motor activity, physical well-being, social coexistence, and the promotion of healthy living. Physical education, in addition to its physical dimension, has a profound social and cultural component that directly affects the quality of life of communities (Díaz Domínguez & Alemán, 2008). However, changes in curricular approaches—particularly between the 2018 and 2022 Teacher Training Curricula—have created a need to reflect on the relevance of current training processes and their connection to the community.

The 2018 Curriculum for the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education was designed with a competency-based approach, focusing on the technical and pedagogical development

of future teachers (Ministry of Public Education [SEP], 2018). However, its rigid structure and limited scope for linking with community contexts have been the subject of analysis in various training institutions. For its part, the 2022 Curriculum proposes a paradigm shift, orienting training toward interdependence with the community and the dialogue of knowledge, in line with the principles of the New Mexican School (SEP, 2023). This curricular shift seeks to recognize teacher training students as emancipatory subjects, capable of influencing their environment through contextualized and socially committed educational practices.

It is based on the interpretive hypothesis that training under the 2018 Plan, although valuable in technical and didactic terms, did not fully succeed in consolidating a teaching identity committed to community transformation. The results reveal a critical perception: students recognize the importance of professional practice and community projects, but do not always conceive of them as emancipatory or socially linked experiences.

Based on this framework, the research that gave rise to this document was carried out at the General Ignacio M. Beteta Physical Education Teacher Training College in Toluca, Mexico, during the 2023-2024 school year. The purpose of the study was to describe how students trained under the 2018 Curriculum perceive their teacher training and their relationship with the community, in order to provide evidence to strengthen the design and implementation of the 2022 Curriculum. To this end, a qualitative approach and the phenomenological method were used, through the focus group technique (Aigner, n.d.), applied to eight students in their sixth and eighth semesters.

The research findings reveal a critical perception among students regarding their professional training: although they recognize the existence of courses geared toward community intervention, such as Socio-Educational Intervention Projects and Planning and Organization of Sports Programs, they do not fully identify themselves as agents of social transformation. Professional practice, although valued as a learning space, is often seen more as an evaluative requirement than as an opportunity to strengthen ties with the community.

These results reinforce the need to rethink initial training from a humanistic and emancipatory perspective, in which teachers are understood not only as executors of content, but as reflective and critical subjects, capable of influencing their social context (Giroux, 1997; Freire, 2000). Consequently, this study aims to contribute to academic reflection on the evolution of teacher training in physical education, offering evidence to guide the processes of curricular flexibility and community engagement practices in the 2022 Curriculum.

Methodology

The research underpinning this paper was conducted from a qualitative perspective, because the aim was not to measure or quantify, but to understand the formative experiences of teacher training students in relation to their community. We were interested in listening to their voices, understanding their perceptions, and recovering the meanings they themselves attribute to their training as future physical educators. This perspective allowed us to delve into the meanings that emerge from their daily experiences within the teacher training college

and the way they interpret their role in the social and educational processes that surround them.

The phenomenological design was chosen because it offers the possibility of approaching experiences from the subjectivity of those who live them. Rather than seeking general explanations, the purpose was to look at reality through the eyes of the students themselves, to understand how they conceive of their training and how it connects—or does not connect—with the community. In the words of Martínez Miguélez (2004), the meaning of phenomenology lies in capturing the essence of human experience, and that was precisely the central interest of this study: to reveal how teacher training students feel about their role as educational and social agents.

Population and sample

The study was conducted at the General Ignacio M. Beteta Physical Education Teacher Training College, located in Toluca, State of Mexico. The population consisted of students enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education under the 2018 Curriculum.

Intentional sampling was used to select participants, as the aim was to include those who could contribute meaningful experiences related to teaching practice and community engagement. Thus, a group of eight students was formed, four from the sixth semester and four from the eighth semester, who agreed to participate voluntarily. The decision to include students at these levels was based on the fact that they had already completed most of their training and had field experience that allowed them to reflect more deeply on their educational process.

Among the inclusion criteria, it was considered that participants should be enrolled during the 2023–2024 school year, have participated in professional practice activities, and be willing

to share their experiences openly and reflectively. Students in their first semesters were excluded, however, as their direct contact with school communities and teaching practices was very limited, preventing them from understanding the social scope of physical education.

Data collection techniques and instruments

Focus group technique was used to collect information, creating a space for conversation in which students could freely discuss their training, expectations, and experiences in professional practice. This technique proved particularly valuable because it encouraged the exchange of ideas, the collective construction of discourse, and the identification of points of agreement and difference between their perceptions.

The dialogue was guided by a semi-structured interview, designed around three main themes: teacher training, community engagement, and the notion of educational emancipation. The questions were open-ended and aimed at promoting reflection rather than eliciting closed answers. This fostered an atmosphere of trust in which participants could freely express their thoughts and emotions about their training process.

The guide consisted of ten open-ended questions, reviewed by two teachers who are experts in educational research to validate their relevance and clarity. Some of the questions included were: How do you think your teacher training has prepared you to work with your community? and What experiences have made you feel part of social change in your professional practice?

The focus group session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was held in a classroom at the institution itself, in a quiet environment without interruptions. The conversation was audio recorded, with the informed consent of

the participants, ensuring the confidentiality of the information and respect for the ethical principles governing qualitative research.

Analysis of the information

Once the recordings had been transcribed, the process of thematic content analysis began, following the stages proposed by Bardin (2002). First, an exploratory reading of all the interventions was carried out, with the aim of familiarizing ourselves with the testimonies and detecting the first recurring ideas. Subsequently, units of meaning were identified and grouped into categories related to three broad dimensions: teacher training, professional practice, and community engagement.

This systematization allowed to observe how students construct their identity as future teachers, how they interpret their relationship with the community, and how aware they are of their transformative potential. Finally, the categories were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework, taking as references authors such as Freire (2000) and Giroux (1997), who invite to conceive of education as a practice of freedom and the teacher as a critical agent of social change.

Rather than obtaining closed answers, this process allowed to give meaning to the students' voices, recognizing their tensions, doubts, and aspirations. The analysis revealed not only how they perceive their training, but also how they imagine their role in transforming the reality of their community.

To ensure credibility and reliability, researcher triangulation, peer review, and validation of categories through feedback from the participants themselves were employed.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the information allowed to

The following table summarizes the main categories derived from this dimension:

identify various perceptions and experiences shared by teacher training students regarding their training as physical educators and their connection to the community. From reading and categorizing the testimonies obtained in the focus group, three main dimensions of meaning emerged: a) the concept of teacher training, b) professional practice and its relationship with the community, and c) the idea of educational emancipation.

More than isolated data, the findings reflect a series of tensions and aspirations that run through the students' training experience under the 2018 Curriculum. These tensions, as we shall see, are directly related to the 2022 Plan's intention to strengthen the link between school, community, and territory.

Conception of teacher training

Participants described their initial training as a solid technical and disciplinary learning process, but one that was still distant from the reality of the community. They agreed that most subjects focused on mastery of the body, technique, and planning, but left dialogue with the social contexts in which they would carry out their teaching work in the background.

One of the students expressed it as follows: "They teach us how to teach, how to plan, how to evaluate, but we rarely talk about who the people we work with are, how they live, or what they need" (Eighth-semester student, personal communication, 2024).

This perception suggests that teacher training in physical education has focused more on technical competence than on a human understanding of the educational act, a situation that Freire (2000) warned was limiting in the construction of a liberating pedagogy.

Table 1: *Categorization of perceptions about teacher training*

| <i>Main category</i> | <i>Interpretative description</i> | <i>Frequency in testimonies</i> |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Technical-disciplinary approach</i> | Emphasis is placed on teaching physical technique and mastery of movement. | High |
| <i>Weak community connection</i> | There is perceived to be little connection between the subjects and social or community reality. | Medium |
| <i>Lack of critical reflection</i> | Students express few opportunities to discuss the social significance of their work | Medium |

Source: Authors' own elaboration (2024).

Professional practice and community engagement

All participants recognized professional practice as the area most closely linked to social reality. However, it is significant that most perceive it more as an academic requirement than as an opportunity for community transformation.

A group of students pointed out that practical activities, although valuable, are carried out under a logic of compliance with reports and evidence, which ends up reducing the experience to an evaluation process.

“We do live with the community, but always from the role of practitioners, not as part of it.

Figure 1

Perception of the Community–Professional Practice Link



Source: Authors' own elaboration (2024).

These results invite reflection on the need to redefine professional practice as a space for social connection and transformation, rather than merely an assessment of skills. Returning to practice as a dialogical experience would allow students to recognize themselves as active members of the community, rather than merely external observers.

Emancipation and social awareness of physical educators

The theme of emancipation emerged in a subtle yet revealing way. Most participants did not identify with the idea of being “agents of change” or of promoting social transformations through their work. However, they did express a desire to feel that their work has a deeper human purpose.

“I don't know if I can change anything in the community, but I do believe I can help children feel better, learn to coexist, and move with joy.” (Eighth-semester student, personal communication, 2024).

This statement shows that, although students do not use the language of educational emancipation, they experience its meaning in everyday practice, through the desire to contribute to the common good. From a Freirean perspective, this is precisely the starting point for consciousness-raising: recognizing that education, even in its simplest acts, can generate processes of liberation.

The following table presents the subcategories related to this dimension:

Table 2: Perception of the social and

Subcategory

emancipatory role of teachers in training

Description

Level of presence

| <i>Subcategory</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Level of presence</i> |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Contribution to the common good</i> | Physical education is associated with coexistence, health, and shared joy. | High |
| <i>Lack of critical social awareness</i> | Difficulty recognizing oneself as an agent of change. | High |
| <i>Desire for community belonging</i> | Interest in feeling part of the school community and not just a temporary visitor. | Medium |

Source: Authors' own elaboration (2024)

Discussion

The results obtained reflect a tension between the technical approach of the 2018 Plan and the community-based and emancipatory approach proposed by the 2022 Plan. The experiences recounted by the students show that, although their training equips them with solid professional skills, they have not yet managed to establish a deep connection with the community as a space for learning and transformation.

This training gap highlights the importance of reviewing pedagogical and curricular strategies that favor a more human and critical perspective in initial training. As Freire (2000) warns, education can only be transformative if it is based on the recognition of the other and a commitment to social reality.

The challenge for teacher training, then,

is to combine technical excellence with social sensitivity, so that future physical educators not only teach movement, but also understand movement as a form of encounter, coexistence, and emancipation.

In this vein, the 2022 Curriculum presents itself as an opportunity to articulate academic learning with community knowledge, creating educational scenarios where students learn to observe their territory, engage in dialogue with their environment, and collectively construct knowledge and meaning.

In summary, the results of this study confirm the need to move toward a more humanistic, critical, and situated approach to teacher education, in which the physical education teacher is recognized not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a cultural mediator and promoter of social change.

Conclusions

Analysis of the information obtained

revealed that initial training for physical education teachers under the 2018 Curriculum has been characterized by a primarily technical orientation, focused on mastery of body movement, planning, and motor performance assessment. However, this training structure has overshadowed the relationship with the community and understanding of the environment as a shared learning space. Even though courses and professional practice experiences bring students into contact with different social contexts, this connection is seen more as an academic obligation than as an opportunity for mutual transformation between school and community. This perception reflects a gap between the educational purpose of the practices and the social commitment that the New Mexican School seeks to promote. The findings also reveal that future physical education teachers do not fully recognize themselves as agents of change, although they express a genuine interest in contributing to the common good. This contrast suggests the need to strengthen comprehensive training so that students can build a critical, reflective professional identity that is committed to their social environment.

In this context, the 2022 Curriculum represents a valuable opportunity to reconfigure teacher training from a humanistic, inclusive, and community-based approach. The dialogue of knowledge, curricular flexibility, and situated practice can become transformative axes that promote physical education that is more aware of its social and cultural impact. Finally, this study allows us to conclude

that physical education transcends the realm of movement to become a space for encounter, coexistence, and emancipation. By recognizing the community as an essential part of the educational process, we promote training that not only strengthens professional skills but also the sensitivity and ethical commitment of those who will contribute to the construction of more just, active, and supportive societies.

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CONFLICTOS DE INTERESES

Los autores no refieren conflictos de intereses

Contribución de autores

Autor 1: conceptualización, investigación, administración del proyecto, redacción.

Autor 2: administración del proyecto, revisión, validación y edición.