

## ENSAIO

TEMOS DE ENSINAR EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA COMO SE O FUTURO DEPENDESSE  
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**Resumo:** Este artigo é uma tentativa de expor algumas ideias que não são apresentadas como passos a seguir, mas como uma provocação para pensarmos de forma diferente sobre a nossa área temática. As ideias servem como um meio de orientação para nos ajudar a encontrar um caminho além dos limites atuais de “como as coisas são” e buscar novas maneiras de mover o assunto em direções que não são apenas para frente e para trás, mas para fora, para dentro e direções atualmente não imaginadas. O artigo está relacionado a um dos objetivos deste congresso, pois visa explorar como os(as) professores(as) podem utilizar a pesquisa para que a sua prática continue a ter sentido profissional, relevante e eficaz para os(as) alunos(as) que lecionam. As questões levantadas ao longo do artigo são: Qual a finalidade da educação física? Qual é a nossa responsabilidade, como professors(as) de educação física, em um mundo de guerra, pobreza, preconceito e poluição? O que esses problemas têm a ver com o ensino de educação física? É importante refletir sobre o propósito da educação e desafiar a noção de que nós apenas educamos os(as) jovens para se encaixarem na sociedade contemporânea e para prepará-los(as) para o futuro emprego. Temos que ensinar educação física como se o futuro dependesse disso. Nosso poder vem de nossos corpos, mentes e nossos corações.

**Palavras-chave:** Complexidade. Pedagogia Crítica. Ensino Democrático. Justiça Social.

## TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS THOUGH THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON IT

**Abstract:** This article is an attempt to state some ideas which are not offered as steps to follow, but as a provocation to think differently about our subject area. They serve as a means of orientation to help us find a way beyond current confines of “how it is” and seek out new ways of moving the subject in directions that are not only forwards and backwards, but outwards, inwards and directions currently not imagined. The article is connected to one of the goals of this congress as it aims to explore how teachers can utilise research to help their practice continue to be professional, relevant and effective for the students they teach. The questions raised throughout the article are: What is the purpose of physical education? What is our responsibility, as physical educators, in a world of war, poverty, prejudice, and pollution? What do these problems have to do with teaching physical education? It is important to reflect on the purpose of education and challenge the notion that we just educate young people to fit into contemporary society and prepare them for future employment. We have to teach physical education as though the future depends on it. Our power comes from our bodies, minds and our hearts.

**Keywords:** Complexity. Critical Pedagogy. Democratic Teaching. Social Justice.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Maori proverb:

*Ka tangi te Titi*

*Ka tangi te Kaka*

*Ka tangi hoki ahau*

*Tihei Mauri Ora*

Provérbio maori:

O Titi está chamando

O papagaio está chamando

E eu gostaria de ligar

Eis que há vida!

I would like to begin by respectfully acknowledging that we are located on traditional territories of the Anace, Tapaba and Paraguari tribes. I also acknowledge those who trace their heritage back to those who were forcefully and criminally brought here against their will. We must never forget the rights, culture, and sacrifices of those who have forged the place on which we stand today. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the organisers of the congress for their vision, time and commitment to make such an event possible. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge and thank you, the delegates to the congress, for your commitment and willingness to become involved and ensure the event is a success. *Na reira* (therefore), *tena koutou*, boa noite and obrigado.

It is a great pleasure to be with you tonight. I am particularly pleased that one of the goals of this congress is to explore how teachers can utilise research to help their practice continue to be professional, relevant and effective for the students they teach.

I do not come to this conversation as a member of your professional community. I am not Brazilian. Nor do I have any lived or practical experience of the issues that you face each day in your schools. I am an activist and an academic by both calling and profession. For the last five years, I have directed a research centre in Critical Research Studies in Sport, Health and Physical Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. For the past twenty years, I have worked in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) with a particular emphasis on social justice, democratic teaching and critical pedagogy (See OVENS, 2016a). While I am an outsider to your context, I long ago learned how important research tools and insights could be in helping to move more people to become good teachers and helping more teachers to become active builders of successful professional communities. I am very honoured to be invited to be a part of your congress here in Fortaleza.

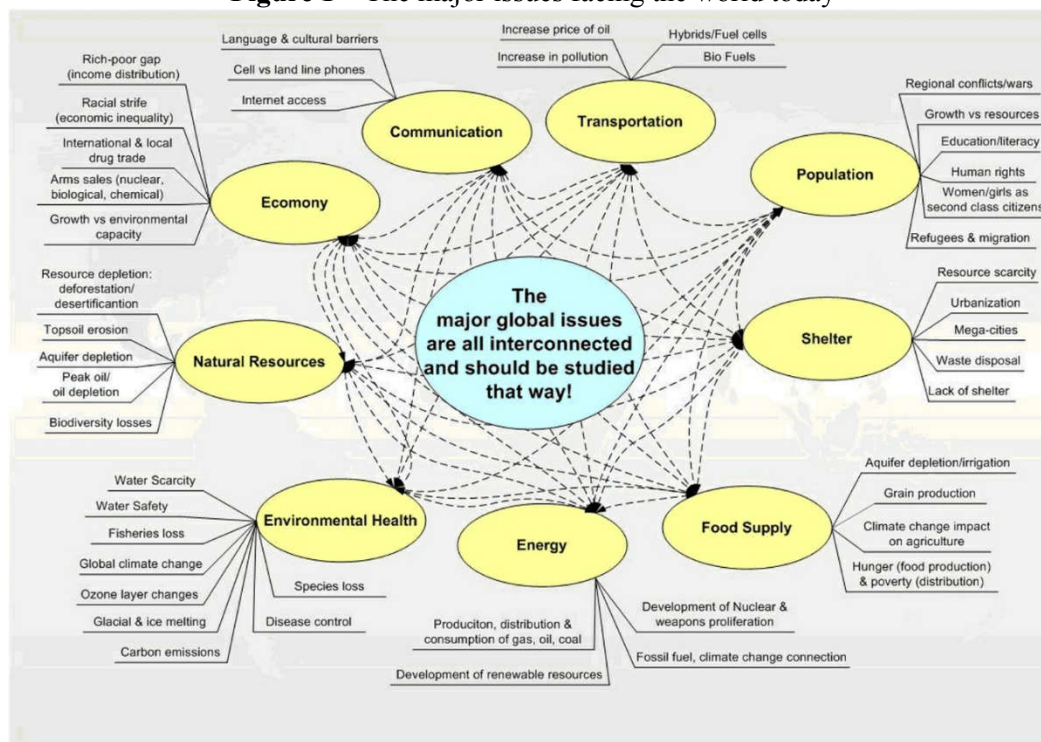
To start off today, I want to state that my ideas are not offered as steps to follow, but as a provocation to think differently about our subject area. They serve as a means of orientation to help us find a way beyond current confines of “how it is” and seek out new ways of moving the subject in directions that are not only forwards and backwards, but outwards, inwards and directions currently not imagined.

## 2 PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR WHAT?

What is the purpose of physical education? And is this still relevant as we move into a new century where our world faces serious global issues of environmental health, ethnic conflict, social inequality, and over-exploitation of natural resources (see **Figure 1**)? Kirk (1997) suggests that school physical education has been somehow the result of the modernist thinking of the 20th century. Within modernity, the body is reduced to a compliant, malleable, productive, anatomical object. As an object of educational practices, the body is an unfinished project that needs to be molded, improved, altered and ultimately, changed (OVENS; POWELL, 2011). This preoccupation with the body as an object may be evidenced in physical education practices that regulate, discipline, survey, and normalise young people’s bodies, particularly when the focus is the development of sports skills, fitness or physical activity (KIRK, 2004; WRENCH; GARRETT, 2008).

Tinning (2000) has observed that we are living in ‘new times’ where there has been an increasing awareness of how physical education is socially constructed in specific cultural, historical and political contexts and discourses. This opens the possibility to ask, ‘what is our responsibility, as physical educators, in a world of war, poverty, prejudice, and pollution?’ Of course, we might ask: ‘What do these problems have to do with teaching Physical Education? Isn’t it our job about creating well-adjusted young people capable of taking responsibility for their health and physical activity needs?’

Figure 1 – The major issues facing the world today



Source: downloaded from <http://www.geni.org/globalenergy/issues/global/index.shtml>. Accessed: 27 August 2020.

I think it is important to reflect on the purpose of education and challenge the notion that we just educate young people to fit into contemporary society and prepare them for future employment. In this respect, I would like to travel back sixty years to a speech Martin Luther King, Jr. gave in 1957 titled, “The South Thinking Ahead” since I believe it is still relevant today. In his speech, King, Jr. specifically challenged the notion that the goal of education is to help individuals become “well-adjusted” to the social world in which they live. As King, Jr. (1957) put it in his speech:

Now in a sense, all of us must live the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I suggest that you too ought to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence. I call upon you to be maladjusted. Well you see, it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.

King, Jr. argued in this speech that it is actually pathological for a person to become well-adjusted to a world of injustice, violence, and exploitation. He argued that if teachers were going to make a more meaningful contribution to education, they would have to find ways to help ordinary citizens deepen their capacity for what King, Jr. called “creative maladjustment.”

I have taken inspiration from King, Jr.’s speech to reflect on what types of people are needed to address the global issues outlined above and plot a challenge for physical education. I start with King, Jr.’s assumption that being educated requires us to be maladjusted to the great social and ecological sins of our day. My more fundamental argument, however, is that for us to be creatively maladjusted, we need to become authentic and active citizens working to heal our local communities and this beautiful blue-green planet that we call home. Authentic people are honest, trustworthy and kind, cultivate a life of integrity, and generate power from within, and transpose it outward to add value to the lives of others (CONNORS, 2017). At the same time, we need people who can recognise and work with interdependence. Our contemporary social systems are highly interconnected and integrated. They rely on a complex division of labour and exchange of goods and services to accomplish feats that no group of people could achieve working independently. Working with interdependence involves being able to acknowledge that in our hyper-connected world, connections matter and that caring for others is an essential human trait. I believe it is a focus on becoming activist citizens who are community network builders that put the “creative” into what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “creative maladjustment”.

The future needs people with self-awareness and compassion to reduce their impact on the world and protect the health of their communities and environments. So how can PE contribute to this and create a better world? In my opinion,

1. **We need an ethic of care for our communities** that involves a primary orientation to maintain, contain, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. Tronto (1994, pp. 126-136) identifies four sub-elements or dispositions that are involved in an ethic of care. These are: (1) attentiveness, a proclivity to become aware of need; (2) responsibility, a willingness to respond and take care of need; (3) competence,

the skill of providing good and successful care; and (4) responsiveness, consideration of the position of others as they see it and recognition of the potential for abuse in care.

2. **Embrace physical activity as a core part of living.** A healthy, active community is one that is continually creating and improving opportunities in the built and social environments and expanding community resources to enable all its citizens to be physically active in day-to-day life (EDWARDS; TSOROUS, 2008). Active living is a way of life that integrates physical activity, such as walking and cycling, as a regular part of everyday daily routines and getting around the community (GERRARD, 2009)

3. **Enable a love of play.** Research shows that play contributes to our overall wellbeing. Play is not just about adding fun to our lives. Play offers a sense of engagement and pleasure, takes the player out of a sense of time and place, reduces stress, enhance problem-solving and can even facilitate deep connections between strangers. Play has been shown to speed up learning, enhance productivity and increase socialisation and communication, and cultivate healing (BROWN; VAUGHAN, 2009; KRETCHMAR, 2018).

4. **Redefine what “being successful” means.** Too often in modern societies we are made to believe that success is based on external factors such as how prestigious of a career we have, how wealthy or famous we are, how many things we own and whether these are the latest and best, and what labels and fashions we wear. Thinking like this dangles the things we think will make us happy (status and stuff) when in reality what we want is the way we think the stuff and status are going to make us feel. Redefining success involves striving for internal factors such as happiness, personal fulfilment, integrity, and peace.

5. **Model what a functional democracy looks like.** Developing an engaged citizen, like any complex skill, takes time and practice in varied contexts to achieve mastery. Skills developed from democracy in the school or community can transfer to improved citizenship and result in a better functioning democracy. Participants in a democratic environment may also develop a greater concern from the common good, which also transfers to active and critical citizenship. If we want our young people to participate and collaborate with others productively, to be critical thinkers, and to have

ownership and agency in their learning, then we need to model what a functional democracy looks like in our learning environments.

### **3 WHEN YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE PROFESSION, CONSIDER THIS...**

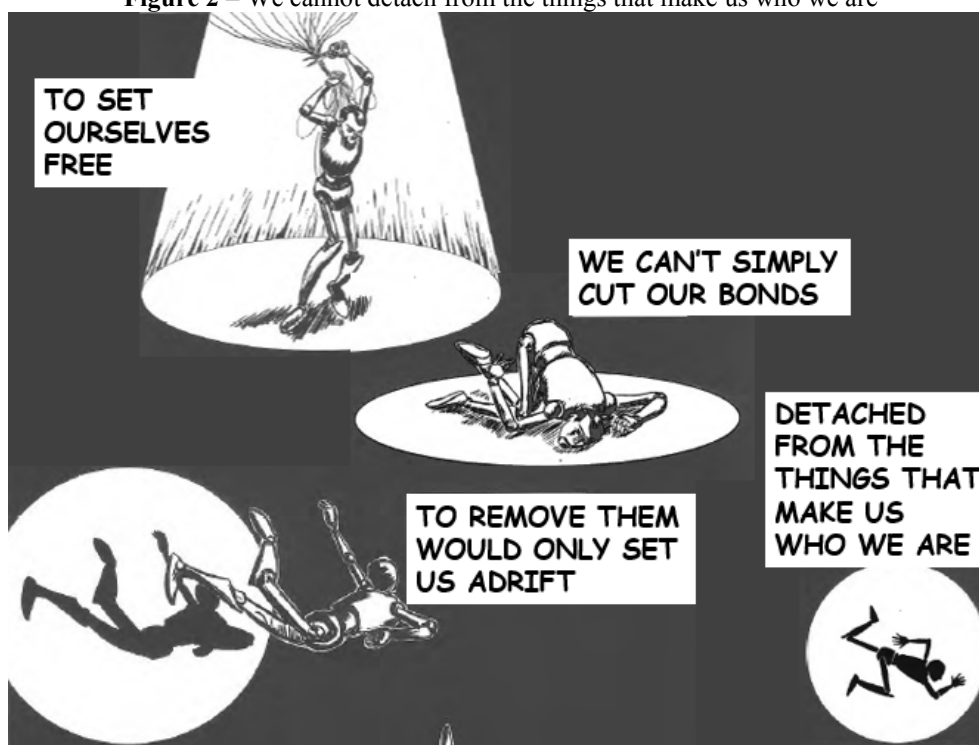
In this next section I want to draw on the ideas of Nick Sousanis (2015). In his brilliant book “Unflattening”, he uses graphic art to weave together diverse ways of seeing to show that perception and human knowledge is always an active process of incorporating and evaluating different vantage points. It is a book that I highly recommend, being complex in its ideas while simultaneously being accessible through its use of pictures.

As teachers, we always walk in the paths worn down by those who came before us. We are always in the midstream, always influenced by history and the contingencies it has created (OVENS et al., 2018). We are always constrained by what others have created and what has become the ‘norm’. These pathways and ways of being have become grooved into our professional landscape, and we are swept along by its current. This river is our history, our professional identity, our way of being teachers, our way of understanding and creating a base of certainty on which we engage in the practice of education. However, as John Dewey (1933) identified some 90 years ago, when something becomes routine and engrained with the certainty that we got it right, we risk following without questioning, and become trapped within convention. In a real sense, when everyone thinks the same way, thinking tends to stop!

Initiating and sustaining change is never an easy process. We are deeply entangled in the connections we make in our lives. Our practices are interwoven with the conventions and normalising logics of the particular contexts in which we work. How we teach is a product of how we organise ourselves within the constraints we encounter in our particular workspaces. Change is not merely a matter of deciding on something different. We are too embedded and interdependent with the elements that constitute our professional and personal lives.



Figure 2 – We cannot detach from the things that make us who we are



Source: modified from SOUSANIS, 2016, p. 115

This means that we cannot set ourselves free by simply cutting our bonds. To remove them would only set ourselves adrift and detached from the things that make us who we are (see **Figure 2**). We do not become emancipated by being free from our bonds, but by being well connected. Connections matter. Social networks matter. Professional communities matter and are essential to creating the collective agency needed to support change and innovation. The key point here is the need to see connections as forces to harness and not bonds that limit.

#### 4 HOW DO WE AUTHOR OUR OWN PATHWAYS?

New dispositions for approaching teaching as a professional activity are necessary in order to reframe physical education as a meaningful and relevant subject for all young people. I propose that it is through a disciplined approach to collaborative inquiry, resulting in strong professional learning communities and new teaching cultures, that educators, students, their families, and involved community members will normalise the mindsets and strategies required to design new and powerful learning systems in physical education. As Clarke and



Erickson argue, “Inquiry is a defining feature of professional practice. If you cease to be inquisitive about your practice, your practice ceases to be professional” (CLARKE; ERICKSON, 2007, p. 58).

My central argument here is that teaching floats on a sea of collaborative inquiry and that the desire to continually adapt, experiment and improve is a crucial driver for change. However, I acknowledge that inquiry is difficult for individual teachers to do in isolation from their colleagues or their school leaders. This is why I have been explicit in stating that engaging in inquiry is a process of developing a collective professional agency either within a school or across a professional network or community. Creating the conditions in schools where curiosity is encouraged, developed and sustained as a normal and expected part of being a teacher is essential to opening up thinking, changing practice and creating more innovative approaches to learning and teaching dramatically.

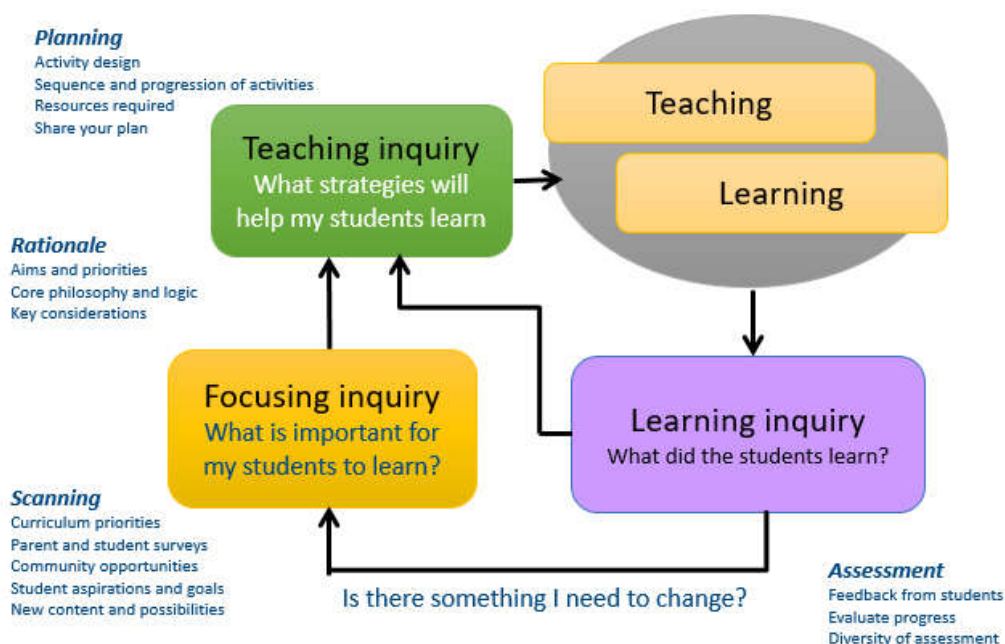
Expecting teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry involves all educational practitioners (administrators, teachers and teacher educators) to focus their efforts on developing contextualised understandings of teaching and learning, particularly in ways that provoke them to think deeply about their practice (BROWN, 2011). My colleague, Tim Fletcher from Brock University, and I have advocated for the use of a methodology known as the Self-study of Practice as a way of expanding conversations, knowledge, and understandings of teaching and teacher education practices (OVENS; FLETCHER, 2015). In particular, we believe self-studies provide the means for enacting a politics of action in ways that are transformative for both knowing in action and for pedagogical practice. Some of the core features of the self-study methodology are:

- It is driven by a desire to improve and enhance the quality of teaching and learning for all those involved.
- It is initiated by, and focused on, understanding the self-as-teacher. That is, it is the teachers who decide what the focus of their inquiry should be. It is the collaborative inquiry process that matters, focused on better understanding how the teacher-researcher enacts their practice.
- It is interactive at one or more stages of the process as evidence generated and collected from the context is put into dialogue with colleagues, literature, and critical friends.

- It lets the evidence tell the story.
- It provokes you to reframe your beliefs about good teaching.

A similar approach that has been promoted in the New Zealand curriculum is the notion of teaching-as-inquiry (see **Figure 3**). Such an approach can provide a useful framework for a department or school to shift their practices to being led by inquiry and questioning. One important aspect of this approach is the notion that inquiry should focus on three different areas, namely questioning what is important for students to know (focusing inquiry), what strategies will help students learn (teaching inquiry) and what learning is taking place (learning inquiry). Another aspect of this framework is the notion that inquiry is an ongoing and iterative process. That is, there is an ongoing process of gathering information to help evaluation and planning. Thirdly, in this framework, there is an opportunity to emphasise the involvement of learners, their families, and communities in each of the phase of the process. To do this effectively requires a shift from student voice to developing learner agency, as the students help to identify and address issues in their learning environments (for more information, see TIMPERLEY, 2011; TIMPERLEY; KASER; HALBERT, 2014).

Figure 3 – An inquiry approach to teaching



Source: from [tech.ed.gov/netp/learning-engage-and-empower](http://tech.ed.gov/netp/learning-engage-and-empower)). Accessed: 27 August 2020.

## 5 PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING

It is important here to stress that merely engaging in reflection and inquiry is not enough to enact the forms of transformative teaching that I am advocating. Transformative teaching as an educational disposition that concerns itself with questions of justice, democracy, and ethics (Tinning, 2017); the critical point here is the notion of 'disposition.' As Bourdieu (1993) outlines, dispositions are the natural tendencies or inclination of each individual to take on a specific position in any field. Rather than a teaching strategy, a disposition is a particular attitude that guides professional decision making and actions (OVENS, 2017a). In other words, the practice of transformative pedagogy embodies and is guided by principles designed to promote equity and social justice rather than enact some teaching strategies that have proven successful in some educational context. No single transformative pedagogy or model is waiting to be discovered (WALTON-FISETTE et al., 2018).

Recently, my colleague Dr. Rod Philpot and I were invited to consider what the principles underpinning transformative teaching may be. I outline the five that we thought were most important in Table 1. It is important to stress that transformative practices will

always be woven around the constraints of individual settings, the needs of learners and the aspirations of the professionals involved (OVENS, 2017b; PHILPOT, 2016). While implementing these principles requires a commitment in time and effort, they also cannot be reduced to a teaching method that is learned through transmission and then enacted with no consideration of the teacher, learner, and context (OVENS, 2016b). Rather, the principles help teacher educators to be adaptive and willing to challenge the status quo in the quest to find those novel and innovative solutions that are effective in their settings.

**Table 1 – The five principles of Transformative Teaching**

Principle	Explanation
1. Provoke understanding through an embodied awareness	It is how the learner <i>feels</i> the experience that is crucial. Transformative teaching should enable each student to feel empowered, feel emancipated, feel heard, feel respected, feel expressive, and feel creative
2. Recognise and work with diversity	A lack of understanding of diversity is a barrier to teaching for social justice, and PETE students need to understand diversity before they embark on developing the agency to address injustice
3. Involve students as co-contributors to course design	Reposition the student as a subject of pedagogy so that students are involved in the educational process of producing a course that is meaningful, inclusive, and relevant to their lives
4. Question your own practice	The focus in teaching should be on how the core ideas and concepts central to social justice become enacted within and lived through the instructional practices and structures of the course
5. Address the mechanisms and consequences of oppression	A transformative pedagogy should be about consciousness raising <i>and</i> taking action

Source: from PHILPOT; OVENS, in press.

## 6 IN CLOSING

I began my presentation with some words from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1957 speech that challenges the logic that education should be focussed on producing well-adjusted young people. Let me conclude with some words from his dramatic 1967 speech opposing the war in Vietnam. Once again, his words are highly relevant to us today.

We must find new ways to speak for peace... If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time

reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight. Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world... Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell [ourselves] the struggle is too hard?... Or will there be another message- of longing, of hope, of solidarity with [our own] yearnings, of commitment to the cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history (KING, Jr., 1967).

In my view, we have to teach Physical Education as though the future depends on it. Our power comes from our bodies, minds and our hearts. *Ake ake kia kaha* (Sempre seja forte),

Obrigado, and thank you all very much!

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