Analysis of Teacher Perception’s of Students’ Participation in Physical Education Session in Sfax

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Abstract

The concept of social representations is a polymorphous concept and is not always stable due to its interdisciplinary nature. In this paper, we will try to identify, on the one hand, the semantic universe of social representations of teachers and then identify the socio-cognitive and pedagogical processes which are at their origin, and on the other hand, tackle the problematic of the effects of social representations of students’ participation in physical education sessions as seen by Tunisian teachers. Actually, this study is part of a central question: "What does talking about social representations mean?". As part of a convenience sampling, 200 novice and experienced physical education teachers voluntarily participated in this study. All the teachers work in secondary schools in the region of Sfax. The results of the study show that externals influence the relationship with the teacher, the relationship with others and pupils’ motivation plays a key role in students’ participation or non-participation during physical education.

Keywords

Conception, Student Teachers, PE Teacher, Social Representations, Participation in Physical Education Sessions

1. Introduction

In order to define the concept of social representations, it would be advisable to make conceptual clarifications aimed at identifying the similarities and differences between social representations and some related concepts namely opinions, attitudes, ideologies, contemporary myths, images, stereotypes and prejudices. Representations
are much more than mental-type images. They are linked to the social domain, to concrete reality. Starting from the perceived reality, there is a psychological phenomenon thanks to which the human mind is able to recognize the perceived objects. Social representations are not mere “opinions about a phenomenon”, “attitudes toward an individual or a group,” “images on the other” (otherness). They are rather true theories, collective knowledge aimed at interpreting and changing reality.

Representations contribute to the functioning of social thought as they are, at the same time, the products of the social environment continuously participate in the constitution of social reality. They are of major importance as they provide decoding, interpretation and explanation grids of reality. Therefore they can be considered as milestones of social life. In fact, individuals enter into the world of representations right from birth.

The theory of social representations research refers us to the research of Serge Moscovici who dedicated this phrase at the time of publication of the reference book for the specialty literature in 1961, “La psychanalyse, son image et son public” [Psychoanalysis: Its image and its audience]. Long before the concept of social representations became in the news, Durkheim (1998), in his book entitled Individual Representations and Collective Representations, talked about collective representations which, under the influence of social factors, took the form of myths, legends, theogonies, cosmological or metaphysical systems. Moscovici has revived once again concept proposed by Durkheim through adapting it to the complexity of representations which organize the symbolic relationships of modern society, deeply influenced by the development of science and by the intensification of inter-human exchanges.

Taken in their primary sense, social representations refer to “ideas, thoughts, images, knowledge that society members share; they are consensual universes, socially created and communicated that help members of society build the social reality”. Thus, these cognitive structures facilitate interaction within groups that share the same representation. Unlike collective representations, social representations are seen as dynamic and changing structures, which relate knowledge to the real life of social individuals. Social representations can be considered as social phenomena because, on the one hand, they are the common products of a group or society, and on the other hand, they are of a psychological type, because the actual perception of reality and thought mechanisms are unique to the individual.

The emergence of representations is due to the need of the individual to find imaginary compensations, which can establish the highest possible level of inner balance. This idea consists in what Moscovici called the hypothesis of imbalance.

Moscovici (1976) talks about a “system of values, concepts and practices relating to objects, aspects or dimensions of the social milieu, which enable not only to establish individuals and groups’ framework of life, but also constitute an instrument which helps the orientation of the perception of a situation and the development of responses”. Thus, representations are aimed at how social subjects achieve the understanding of everyday life events, the data of the surrounding world, the circulating information and the characters which are surround them. Usually, this type of knowledge is limited to common sense. Common knowledge is based on personal experiences, but is also influenced by the information and cognitive models inherited or transmitted through tradition and education.

Representation is an intermediate category between concept and perception: what is perceived passes through what is represented to reach the concept. Jodelet (1989) defines social representations as “a form of socially developed and shared knowledge, which has a practical purpose and resorts to the construction of a common reality for a social group. It is a form of knowledge at the level of common sense, even a naive form of knowledge, distinct from scientific knowledge”. This common knowledge is linked to the modality, the subjects of which capture the everyday reality events and objects. Representation is not only based on personal experiences, but also on information, knowledge, cognitive models that individuals receive and transmit through tradition, education and social communication. They refer to a form of social thought and even to a practical thinking oriented to communication, understanding and control of the social milieu, material milieu and ideas.

The social brand of representation content and processes relate to the conditions and contexts of representations emergence, to communication means through which they circulate, the functions they perform in social interactions. According to Jodelet, representations are reading and decoding grids of reality, and contribute to anticipating the actions and behavior (personal and others’ behavior) and interpreting new situations in terms of already lived experience, while relying on a coherent and stable system of categorization.

Representations serve to guide individuals in their naming and defining approach of the various aspects of everyday life, their way of interpreting these aspects, the type of decisions they take and their behavior towards
other individuals, groups, actions and events, through allowing their justification compared with social norms. Doise & Palmonari (1986) defines representations as “position-generating principles, related to insertion in a set of social relations, principles which organize symbolic processes intervening in those relationship”. The definition proposed by Fischer falls within the paradigm of those who consider representations as dynamic processes: “type of perceptual and mental development of reality, which transforms social objects (people, contexts, situations) into symbolic category (values, beliefs, ideologies) and which gives them a cognitive status, through making the understanding of everyday life aspects possible by linking our own behaviors within social actions”.

Social objects are thus classified into categories which allow easier handling of the first ones. Abric (1994) emphasizes the combination of objective reality and its social representation through defining it as “the product and process of a mental activity through which an individual or group reconstructs the reality they face and assigns to it a specific signification”. Representation is a functional vision of the world, which allows the individual or the group to give sense to behaviors, to understand reality through its own system of references, and therefore to adapt to it and find one’s place. Representation is not limited to merely reflecting reality, but it is rather organized according to the social context, to the specific nature of the situation and the purpose pursued by individuals.

The already mentioned definitions can provide an overall view of the extent of the notional field of social representations. First, they offer a reading grid of reality, which enables the individual to give an interpretation specific to the universe that surrounds it. Representations relate to the specificity of the individual, to his particular way of managing his communications with the external world, the way his personality is structured in relation to the social context. Social representations help the human being transform the mysterious world around him into a familiar environment that he can understand and implicitly control. As forms of social thought, representations are developed and shared by society. These cognitive structures achieve an enrichment of reality, an interpretation of the latter with respect to a context. They still constitute an object, they relate to a space, a situation, a fact, a person, an event or an idea. As forms of knowledge, representations do overlap neither on the objective thought, nor on the emotional reflection of reality. They have three dimensions (structural, attitudinal and informational), through constituting an intermediate instance between image, attitude, perception and information.

Representations are transmitted on the one hand, through traditions, education and sometimes they cannot be grasped through the open eye, as they disseminated in a subliminal manner or through obsessive repetition of messages they contain, in the form chosen by the sender to deliver it to receivers. On the other hand, social representations appear in various forms in the context of social communication (speeches, messages and media images). In other situations, representations cannot be identified. Thus, representations aim at a common repository of knowledge and social information that people share as “theories” of common sense and from which they construct social reality.

A common representation that is encountered among school officials establishes a causal link between family problems and difficulties observed in schools (Dubet, 2002: p. 145), leading in some cases to school dropout. Parents are, thus, considered as the primary educators of children, responsible for their conduct even at school, while according to the survey data and to take up their own opinion, we have to observe the limited means and problem-solving capacity of families. In the congress of teachers, the old version of “parental resignation” takes martial accents: We must fight against “resistance”, “ill will”, “profit hunger” of “indifferent”, “refractory” “weak and immoral” parents and protect children “exploited by unscrupulous ascendants” or “unworthy” parents (Vial, 1990: p. 33).

This charge against parents is not new. In fact, it has been observed from the beginning of the twentieth century. In the congress of teachers, the old version of “parental resignation” takes martial accents: We must fight against “resistance”, “ill will”, “profit hunger” of “indifferent”, “refractory” “weak and immoral” parents and protect children “exploited by unscrupulous ascendants” or “unworthy” parents (Vial, 1990: p. 33).

These representations allow school to shirk its own responsibilities (Van Zanten, 2001: pp. 172-173). According to the latest French circular regulating school attendance, if the school or the institution is the first place for prevention, identification and dealing with students’ absence, this is where the majority of cases should find a solution, the main reason for students’ absence and the heart of the solution lies within families.

This is also the philosophy of Machard’s report (2003: p. 8), which according to its author, offers a balanced overall architecture, reasoned and operational, focusing on children and their families, without neglecting, in a final stage and for a small number of “recalcitrant” parents—according to the words used by the interviewed judges—the symbolism of the existence of a sanction. In terms of research, access to the field often determines the results: some research teams, within the framework of inter-ministerial bids on school dropout in December 1999, in France, have focused on family problems of school leavers or dropouts and not on the uncertainties of
schooling itself. Several teams had indeed difficulties in getting in touch with schools. It is therefore logical that family problems appear significant in these processes.

**Exemption in physical education:**
Exemption is defined as “the given permission not to make a mandatory thing” (Le Petit Larousse Illustré, 2010). According to Raut (1990), as far as the physical education teacher is concerned, exemption would be “an exclusive thing that no other discipline obtain” (p. 5). This exemption procedure to which some students resort in a more or less abusive manner is difficult to identify due to the involvement of several different actors (medical staff, teachers, parents, school administration, psycho-medical-social center).

The PE teachers often complain about the number of exempted and/or absent students observed during their lessons and associate it with a lack of motivation. However, these complaints are often quite abstract. That is why we tried in this study to concretize the feelings of physical education teachers through interviewing them directly.

While respecting the principles of the ecological approach, this research aims to increase knowledge related to the issue of students’ non-participation in physical education classes based on the analysis of teachers’ perceptions. We used a questionnaire as part of a convenience sampling to identify the significance of non-participation in physical education lessons and the variables which might account for it.

So, what about the social representations of students’ participation in physical education classes as seen by Tunisian physical education teachers?

**Research hypothesis:**
The failure of integrating physical education could thus be explained by the contradictions between the lifestyle and the social customs of exercises practices and the absence of a sufficiently developed theory (outside the school) of sports learning.

**Purpose of the study:**
The objective of this study is to carry out a study aimed to analyze the conceptions of Tunisian teachers about the issue of exemption certificate in physical education: quantitative aspect of the problem and perceived origins.

### 2. Methodology

#### 2.1. Participants

The participants had accepted to participate in this study were 150 PE teachers (50 PE and 100 PE-STs). They were selected from total of 321 PE-STs studied in the public Higher Institute of Sport and Physical Education (ISSEP Sfax) in Tunisia. All participated in this study were voluntarily. Participants were chosen taking into account the location of the school, the teaching level and sex. They were recruited from a single Higher Institute of Sport. The sample of participants consisted of the PE-ST (third year, BAC + 3) who taught level 1 and 2 (first year of secondary education and the second year). All were aged between (21 ± 1 years old) registered in an introductory course to professional training. This activity has introduction professional life took place in schools with mixed age students (11 - 14 years old students) from a rural area in Sfax very engaged in professional training. The activity lasted two semesters, four hours per week on Tuesday or Thursday for a cumulative total time of 116 hours of teaching. Participants are not paid to participate in the research. They were not informed of the purpose and design research.

The PE Teachers recruited aged between 35 and 45 years old. Each of them has between 5 and 10 years of experience in teaching.

#### 2.2. The Interview Audio Ante-Session

After the collection of the interview data conducted among PE-STs (step 1), we have proceeded to the questionnaire and reported data in the Table 1 (step 2). This grid has allowed us to categorize the responses of PE-STs. Finally, the third step is the linking of analyzes from different investigative techniques.

#### 2.3. The Formation of the Corpus

PE-STs are questioned by allowing them the freedom to respond, they can express themselves at their ease. The interview was scheduled for 30 minutes, according to the same considerations; the duration varies slightly from one subject to another.
### Table 1. Variables of non participation of pupil in PE session.

<table>
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<th>Not concerned</th>
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<th>Peu important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
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<th>P</th>
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<td>32%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
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</table>
The interview contained open-ended questions following predetermined: 1) what are generally the reasons of exempting pupils from PE session? All survey was conducted at a convenient location for each participant.

2.4. Data Collection

Data collection was performed in two phases. The first is an interview with PE-STs in order to have data that can be useful in this study as their age and experience in teaching and we presented to them the next step of this research. The second step consists in the award of a questionnaire with PE-ST and teachers whom accepted to participated into the second step.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

1. Physical complexes

The analysis of the results of the first question confirmed that physical complexes are important (34%) and very important (18.7%). However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (7.3%) à (28%). 12% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.55, P = 9.250$.

2. Menstruation

The analysis of the results of the second question confirmed that MENSTRUATION are important (32%) and very important (29.3%). However, 27% of the PE teachers and PE-STs reveals that it is little important and 8.7% not important. Only 2.7% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.517, P = 3.250$.

3. Motivation

The analysis of the results of the third question confirmed that pupil motivation is important (31.3%) and very important (38%). However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (11.3%) à (15.3%). Only 4% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.014, P = 12.507$.

4. The age

The analysis of the results of the question n°4 shows that year old is little important (29.3%) and not important (17.3%). 29.3% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.534, P = 3.147$.

5. Schedule of session

The analysis of the results of the first question n°5 confirmed that time of day is important (22.7%) and very important (16%). However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (20%) to (32.7%). 8.7% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.857, P = 1.325$.

6. Injuries without medical certificate

The analysis of the results of the first question n°6 show that are shared between important (16.7%) and very important (26%) about Blessure without medical certificate. However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (12%) to (31.3%).14% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.011, P = 13.126$.

7. Injuries medical certificate

The analysis of the results of the question n°7 confirmed that Blessure with medical certificate is important (21.3%) and very important (36%). However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (15.3%) à (20%).Only 4% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.111, P = 13.126$.

8. Specialty of study

The analysis of the results of the first question n°8 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (25%) to (16.7%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (12%) to (36.7%). 9.3% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.276, P = 5.111$. 
9. **Season, weather**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’9 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (35.3%) to (26%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (12%) to (36.7%). 9.3% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.176$, $P = 6.330$.

10. **Teacher Characteristics**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’10 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (30.7%) to (42%). However, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (16%) to (6.7%). Only 4.7% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.008$, $P = 13.888$.

11. **External influences**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’11 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (20.7%) and (18%) about external influences on participation of pupils in PE sessions. Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (13.3%) to (36%). 12% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.022$, $P = 11.484$.

12. **Relationship with teacher**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’12 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (20.7%) and (46%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (17.3%) to (14%). Only 2% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.011$, $P = 7.549$.

13. **Relationship with other pupils**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’13 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (34%) and (35.3%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (12.7%) to (16%). Only 2% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.004$, $P = 15.202$.

14. **Forgetting clothes**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’14 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (19%) and (14%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (16%) to (39%). 12% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.000$, $P = 20.152$.

15. **Infrastructures**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’15 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (28%) to (22.7%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (14%) to (21.3%). 21% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.128$, $P = 7.150$.

16. **Influence of alcohol substance, tobacco**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’16 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (15.3%) to (24.7%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (15.3%) to (19.3%). 46% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.021$, $P = 11.573$.

17. **Content of course**

The analysis of the results of the first question n°’17 showed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (23%) and (31%) about impact of the courses on the pupil participation in PE session. Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (11%) to (23%). 12% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows a significant difference between boys and girls $X^2 = 0.008$, $P = 13.887$. 

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18. Sports proposed

The analysis of the results of the first question n°18 confirmed that the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between important and very important (24.7%) to (19.3%). Also, the PE teachers and PE-STs are respectively shared between little important and not important (20.7%) to (32%). 3.3% of them are not concerned. The analytical study of the gender variable shows no significant difference between boys and girls \( X^2 = 0.510 \) à \( P = 3.294 \).

3.2. Discussion

Perception of PE Teachers and PE-STs of Pupil Participation in PE Session

It is urgent that physical education shows its formative intentions and profound evolution in the face of traditional methods that many still believe are vigorous. Seeking to diversify practiced activities (dominant bioenergy activities, bioformational, expressive ...), and pursuing psycho-socio-emotional intentions, motor, cognitive, it cannot now blindly tolerate partial or total exemptions. The medical certificate that could prohibit any physical activity or sport, can not suffice to exclude a pupil of a training context.

Several explanatory models of motivation of individuals were then used by researchers in order to explain and predict the behavior of abandonment, particularly the motivation for competence theory (Harter, 1978) and motivation to accomplish theory (and Maehr Nicholls, 1980; Nicholls et al., 1989, 1984) feelings of incompetence (martens and Burton & Martens, 1986; Feltz & Petlichkoff 1983; Klint 1985 ...)

Social influences: the importance of significant others:

Taking into account significant others began to emerge in the studies dealing with abandonment. However, this analysis needs to be broadened and deepened. Indeed, models of Eccles et al. (1983), or those of Vallerand (1997) showed that significant others were important agents of socialization. They help to shape the beliefs and perceptions of children and indirectly affect their behavior.

Motivation is an integral part of everyday life, it is such a psychological motor which enables every individual to learn, grow, produce and therefore to flourish (Bali, 2015; Bali & Souissi, 2015). It is therefore considered a force that pushes an individual to activate certain needs and direct them to an action perceived as a goal. According to the cognitive evaluation theory (resulting from) the self-determination theories introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985), individuals have three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy and the relationship (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The conditions perceived to meet those needs facilitate the individual's personal investment (Vallerand & Losier, 1999) But the objectives of the latter and his beliefs about his chances and reaching play a role (Famose, 2001).

The study of motivational processes is therefore characterized by great complexity and involves the integration of very diverse variables.

If the students’ motivation is a key source of concern for teachers, it is certainly because it is often lacking in Classes (Bonrepaux, 2004; Bali, 2015).

Compulsory course of secondary education programs, physical education is equally concerned by this situation as evidenced by the number of texts devoted (Bertone & Méard, 1999). The inter individual variability factors which influence student motivation has clearly been demonstrated by qualitative researches (Cloes, Lédent., & Piéron, 2004). One of the main signs of student motivation lack for physical education courses is not participating in physical education activities (Cloes, Ledent, Delfosse, & Piéron, 2001; Orchard, & Gourson-Verger, 2000).

It is the only school discipline that provides opportunities for students to escape from it legitimately through the exemption (Raut, 1991).

Several authors have been concerned about the extent of the exemption (Guyard-Bouteiller, 2001; Hennebert, 1992) and have highlighted the increased number of exempted pupils. Orchard and Gourson-Verger (2000) replace the notion of incapacity to that exemption. These authors identify different types of incapacities:

- Partial or total Institutional incapacity legitimized by a medical certificate;
- Solicited by parents for a benign problem;
- Formulated orally by the students upon arrival in physical education classes.

Guyard Bouteiller (2001) examined students medically certified with a total or partial incapacity. Although, having a minimal pathology, a pupil with a total incapacity generally thinks he/she has no interest in coming over to PE courses, does not necessarily give the means to live with his/her condition and take refuge behind the
greater school context to avoid the practice. However, a pupil with partial incapacity wishes to benefit from PE courses fitted and build the limits of his/her activities in accordance with responsible practitioners.

According to Paruit (1998), the reasons for non-participation cover medical, physical, socio-cultural, religious and emotional (fear of an accident) reasons. This highlights the complexity of the problem and justifies the efforts of school authorities to curb abuses (Kohout, 2006; Bali, 2015). Furthermore, it is also essential to consider the role of the teacher who, through the creation of a positive motivational climate, can help limit the influence of these factors (Orchard, & Gourson-Verger, 2000; Viau, 2004).

Moreover, qualitative analyses have highlighted that all participants did not use the same way of practice opportunities available to them (Bali, 2013). The best are generally more active and thus experience more success than the weaker. This underlines the fact that the learner and staff commitment to the objectives pursued remain the central elements of educational success.

4. Conclusion

The concept of deficient body which was a reason for the emergence of a mandatory physical education at the beginning of the century has now become an excuse for non-sporting practice. Also, it is important that each one ensures that the special opportunity that PE represents the session to a driving load does not become too easy, a school that the student would have time at will. It is urgent that the PE shows its formative intentions and profound evolution in the face of traditional methods that many still believe are effective. Seeking to diversify practiced activities (dominant bioenergy activities, bioinformationnals, expressive ...), and pursuing psycho-socio-emotional intentions, motor, cognitive, it cannot now blindly tolerate partial or total exemptions. The medical discourse that could prohibit physical activity or sport cannot suffice to exclude a pupil of a training context. The exemption should try to be helpful. Evidence that passes from one hand by the desire not to restrict it to a single point ban but to enroll in an educational perspective to the student service, and secondly, by a rigorous effort in practitioners conveying an attractive image of the PE. If the tolerance of the exemption remains maintained, should not it be accompanied in this case, of cons-indications to physical immobility imposed, by other school subjects, even as the respect of biological rhythms been official discourse?

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