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Critical pedagogy and power relations in sport for development and peace: lessons from Colombia

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Abstract

Recent research highlights promise and limits of critical pedagogy within Sport for Development and Peace (SDP). Drawing on ethnographic research with an SDP organisation in Colombia, this paper analyses how critical pedagogy implicitly transpires in daily practice and how SDP employees and participants understand and respond to these practices. We specifically examine how donor-NGO relations affect the experience of SDP practitioners and participants in ways that do not support the successes of critical pedagogy and may potentially undermine it. The findings raise critical questions such as what SDP organisations can accomplish within these 'normative' power relations and potential reconfigurations.

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organisations have used sport as a method to recruit youth who are labelled as vulnerable or disadvantaged. In addition to and sometimes in conjunction with sport, these programs provide educational curricula catered to the various issues faced by participants such as HIV/AIDS awareness, conflict resolution, or income generation. SDP organisations' community focus and accessible programming (i.e. low operating expenses, adaptability to location) has garnered support from the United Nations (UN) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), leading to Global North bodies funding and thus altering the course of the SDP movement.[1] In the process, goals became donor-driven, funding became project specific, and project evaluations became streamlined 'check boxes'.[2]

Scholars have grappled with how to define, classify, and make sense of this new development industry that operates under an umbrella term that includes an array of sport-focused government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The newly applied neoliberal markers to (characteristically) grassroots initiatives have prompted concern about the power dynamics between the donor and community-focused organisations.[3] This paper critically examines how power relations between the receiving SDP organisation (most commonly located in the Global South) and the donor affect the application of critical pedagogy in the SDP context. The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to examine critical pedagogy as it is currently occurring within the SDP context; and second, to build on critical work that examines SDP power relations to explore how these relations impact critical pedagogy in SDP.[4] In doing so, the paper aims to inform contemporary debates around critical pedagogy in international development practice through a focus on SDP. To do this, we will explore critical

pedagogy, explain the primary research upon which our analysis draws, and then examine critical pedagogy in an SDP organisation operating in Colombia. In the discussion, the challenge of continuing or strengthening critical pedagogy under donor pressures will be clarified.

SDP and critical pedagogy

Research has begun to explore the promise and application of critical pedagogy to SDP, with a focus on how critical pedagogy, as a language of critique and possibility, can be used to underpin SDP pedagogies.[5] Building on the work of Paulo Freire and his contemporaries, this emerging research area examines the way education fosters or impedes transformative action that underpins the social development outcomes to which the SDP sector aspires. Proponents of critical pedagogy share a recognition that the value of education resides in how it prepares learners to 'engage in a common struggle for deepening the possibilities of autonomy, critical thought, and a substantive democracy'.[6]

Critical pedagogy suggests that SDP programs should move beyond the goal of merely engaging participants in activities that prepare them for the labour market and produce lifelong consumers, and instead strive to create social change by developing critical and reflective capacities and action repertoires in participants. Core aspects of critical pedagogy include questioning taken-for-granted knowledge and identifying structural inequalities by interrogating power relations. Yet, critical pedagogy is ultimately concerned with collective action toward changing oppressive conditions. Freire refers to 'praxis' as the transition from critique to transformative action in which learners are able to both understand the world and take action to change that world.

Freire recognised that in the process of praxis the two central elements, reflection and action, are inextricably intertwined.[7]

For this paper, a key aspect of critical pedagogy is participation: the active engagement of people who are intended to benefit from SDP programs in the making of relevant decisions. Participation does not serve simply to improve the operation of projects; rather, it can empower people and act as a catalyst for democratic decision-making and governance. This approach to community development involves the transfer of power from power holders to project recipients, a loss of central control and proliferation of local diversity.[8] SDP practice thus needs to explore ways in which such dialogue with participants can be established. Critical SDP education can play an important role in this process by enabling participants to develop their critical awareness of the structural forces that shape their lives. Instead of reinforcing 'the official state definitions of social problems which focused on individual, family, or community pathology', they 'would resist them and help others to do the same, individually and collectively'.[9] In doing so, argues Giroux, critical pedagogy 'offers the best, perhaps the only, chance for young people to develop and assert a sense of their rights and responsibilities to participate in governing, and not simply to be governed'.[10]

The ability of critical pedagogy to deliver on this promise is contested. Critics question the authenticity of the open-ended process of dialogue and to what extent it steers learners toward certain foregone conclusions. Furthermore, they question its alleged utopian approach to empower and demarginalise people who traditionally have been marginalised; and, the idealistic belief that people excluded (relatively inadvertently) from positions of power in society can transform the world.[11] For the purpose of this paper, the latter critique is especially pertinent as it draws attention to the constraints under which critical pedagogy operates in SDP and, in particular, the

tensions and incongruences between critical pedagogy and the aims of the institutional settings in which it takes form. We will return to this critical issue in our analysis.

Whilst advancing a critical understanding of pedagogical theory and practice in SDP, this field of research is still in its infancy, and has yet to fully come to terms with the complexities and contradictions of critical pedagogy 'on the ground' in SDP settings. More specifically, very little is known about how critical pedagogy implicitly transpires in everyday practice and how SDP educators and participants experience and respond to these practices. SDP organisations are well suited for teasing out 'documentary practices' that are 'embedded in external social relations and deeply implicated in mechanisms of ruling', as it is the 'internal processes of organisations', Escobar argues, that connect the individual and community to 'external social relations involving governments, international organisations, [and] corporations…'.[12]

This paper aims to advance this knowledge by reporting on ethnographic research conducted in Colombia, with the purpose of reinvigorating broader debates around the uses and limits of critical pedagogy in development practice, at a time when the expectation of critical pedagogy to assist in challenging the inequities and power relations at work today has arguably 'fallen flat'.[13] Considering the normative nature of neoliberalism within the United States and Colombia's economies (where the majority of donors discussed in this paper are located), and its centrality in international development, we recognise that critical pedagogy whether explicitly or implicitly engaged – is, as Escobar and others suggest, arguably more relevant than ever before in the history of international development.[14]

Methods

This paper draws on ethnographic research undertaken in 2015 within specific zones in two marginalised neighbourhoods located on the outskirts of two major cities in Colombia, which will be called Chévere and Bacano. To protect the identity of the organisation and interlocutors, pseudonyms will be used and identifying information withheld. Referenced documents that provide critical details on the communities have also been de-identified.

This paper draws from a larger study that aimed to understand the extent the SDP organisation has influenced the community. In this instance, community – as understood by our respondents – refers to residents who regularly have contact (direct or indirect) with the organisation and its participants. Fieldwork included the first author spending six months (three months per location) at the two field offices coaching, playing sports, and assisting in daily programming. Research methods included 60 semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

The majority of interview participants lived within a 15-minute walking distance from one of the organisation's field offices. The researchers employed a purposive sampling strategy, interviewing participants comprised of a range of community members (aged 18-81), such as coaches, social workers, youth leaders, parents, and residents not associated with the program. By interviewing younger and older adults, we were offered insight into the local social context: how the community has changed over time and what critical challenges community members regularly encounter. The diversity of interview participants offered a rich picture of what the organisation means to the local community and its significance in the participant's life.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Drawing from the life-history method, interview participants were asked to answer questions and share stories about their upbringing, family relations, gender roles and expectations, association with sport, and opinion on young women's participation in sport. The discussion concerning donor relations and program implementation naturally became a common theme in interviews, especially for employees and leaders, but also for parents. We note that the staff of Chévere made more references in interviews to the tension between the donor and their office than Bacano; however, both case locations equally displayed implicit elements of critical pedagogy and a focus on quantitative measures.

Participant observation took place in Chévere and Bacano (e.g. field, office, streets), and included many informal conversations and observances of power imbalances between the donor and organisation. Document analysis included analysing the organisation's internal and external reports, marketing documents, as well as the organisation's website and social media accounts. Initially, all data was systematically analysed and compared based on (theoretically informed) themes identified prior to collecting fieldwork. In addition, themes were identified inductively, such as critical pedagogy, through a second analysis using NVivo 11 software. Full human ethics approval was obtained from the authors' University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Colombia and VIDA

Lasting nearly 60 years, Colombia's internal conflict, which included government forces, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups, was the longest running armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. Since 1985, more than 5.5 million Colombians have registered

with the national government as victims of conflict.[15] The World Bank reports 27.8% of Colombia's population lives below national poverty lines.[16] The two case study locations are home to some of Colombia's most vulnerable citizens. In the specific neighbourhoods where this research was conducted, sexual and domestic violence and teen pregnancy are critical issues that assist in reproducing the poverty cycle.[17] Moreover, residents live in insecure overcrowded houses and regularly experience chronic stress, which leads to high levels of depression.

The first location is one of the poorest zones within a neighbourhood in the city of Chévere. Chévere houses 46% of the city's Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) population.[18] Many residents are demobilised members of illegal armed groups. The neighbourhood's unplanned establishment has resulted in little infrastructure: more than 58% of the population lives in insecure housing, and schools are economically disadvantaged and overcrowded. Furthermore, violence is normalised as paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and gangs organise the neighbourhood into contested territories, aggressively recruit young men into their circles, and demand citizens to follow their commands. A VIDA employee in Chévere addressed local challenges:

Boys join together to steal. They are immersed in drugs, but the biggest problem is the gang mentality. Obviously, there are drugs, weapons, but crime in that area is more marked gangsterism...There are girls who are sexually exploited. There are gangs, men that get together to do evil...We want to work more on prevention because our kids live here and they see the drug abuse so we go and see that nothing is going on and then at night the neighbourhood becomes another world (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena).

The second location has important similarities, such as rampant violence and endemic poverty; more than 53% of its residents subsist on less than two dollars a day and 51.9% report feeling insecure.[19] A major difference is Bacano's proximity to beaches, sweltering heat, and colonial history: qualities that make the surrounding areas a major tourist attraction. Tourist demands coupled with extreme poverty has led to underage prostitution becoming a lucrative business.

The NGO that participated in this research, which we will call VIDA, manages sport-based community programs in these (and other) locations. VIDA draws on multiple methodologies to create their own pedagogical approach. In this paper, we will foreground aspects of critical pedagogy as evident in VIDA's programming. These elements, such as the establishment of an inclusive environment and the implementation of a horizontal power structure align with critical pedagogical theory. The staff demonstrated caring and empathetic attitudes that were displayed through their actions, but their behaviour was not explicitly connected to critical pedagogy.

In VIDA children play together on a regular basis (two days a week) and are taught values such as tolerance and respect. Coaches, social workers, and psychologists support participants on and off the field. Parents are required to register their children, but VIDA does not regulate attendance. By design it rewards participants for being self-motivated and attending on their own accord. Through their programming, the organisation aims to combat violence and encourage social inclusion; a key component of their mission is enrolling and supporting children in school. All participants have access to after-school tutoring led by youth leaders and after one year of participation, young participants qualify to participate in a school support program that includes school supplies (e.g. notebooks, book bag) and academic scholarships. In addition,

parents are invited to monthly seminars that relate to the topics the children are studying.

The organisation applies sport as a strategy to recruit participants, but also to encourage ludic play in their routine schedule. A variety of sports or games are offered at each location depending on what is popular, socially acceptable, and suggested by participants. Sometimes players are organised by sex or age, but often, players are integrated. At Chévere, where the number of participants overwhelmed the staff, football scrimmages or non-scoring games were commonly played. At Bacano, where leaders frequently ran practices and student social workers led discussions, games were organised with a specific purpose and theme that connected to a post-play conversation. Due to the organisation's stability and extensive community networks, it lends itself to support the community in a variety of ways beyond their stated mission, such as improving basic infrastructure (e.g. phone lines, field), providing access to medical specialists, and hosting clothing sales. Below we examine how critical pedagogy and donor conditions are experienced in the SDP organisation.

Critical pedagogy in a Colombian SDP organisation

The revelation of three themes became apparent when analysing the data through the lens of critical pedagogy. The first theme is the establishment and process of maintaining a nurturing environment (i.e. program culture) that enables participants to question knowledge. The second theme expands on the first, unpacking the significance of an internal culture of mutual learning and the social process of expressing and learning to practice empathy. The third and final theme, drawn from critical pedagogy,

is the impetus for change. In this, we identify the development of an internal horizontal power structure and the mission to create social change through collective action.

As addressed above, a culture of violence that is normative and reproduced through micro social and macro social relations currently exists in the research locations. To actively combat this, the organisation's leaders and employees have cultivated a culture that focuses on love, equality, and respect, features that are highlighted in critical pedagogy.[20] One staff member noted in an interview that although participants regularly witness violence in their homes and in the neighbourhood, they do not bring violence into the organisation:

> We are an open organisation where there has never been a person injured by a bladed weapon, nor have we had to call the police to intervene in a conflict. We have been working for [many] years in the community, and no one can say 'In VIDA they have called the police.' (Staff member, Chévere, Gloria Laura)

Although participants' physical safety in this context is critical, the safe space the organisation seeks to cultivate also concerns a psychosocial space constructed through social relations.[21] A 'safe space' culture allows participants to voice their opinions without fear of repercussions. The organisation's peaceful culture is evident in the way people interact, as they demonstrate affection through hugs, smiles and appreciative language. Below, a coach discussed how the organisation is a place where participants and community members know they can speak freely and will be listened to, and how it has become a metaphorical home for the participants whose days are riddled with stress and violence.

A child abused, abandoned. [For example] mum and dad are working or mum and dad aren´t looking after the children, so there are children walking by themselves in the street as if they were adults. The conditions are difficult…VIDA is a foundation where many children can come and find a home and they find people to listen to them and they feel like they´re being heard. We can also help children with problems they face on the street. (Staff member, Chévere, Julio)

Many participants and parents referenced the organisation as their 'family'. One female participant in her early twenties who joined the organisation because she was looking for an outlet from her abusive parents noted she felt socially included from her first day when she was given a nickname and asked how she was doing. The nickname created a significant memory that resulted in her feeling special and led to years of continued voluntarily participation. During the discussion, she said: 'I grew up with them. This is my family and she is my mum. I've known her eight, nine years' (Participant, Chévere, Lourdes). Daniela, a participant in Bacano, made a similar statement:

It's not easy to change a person's life. It's something wonderful to come to a place and gain confidence in yourself, [confidence] that your parents did not provide you. Then you find a teacher or teachers and you feel love and you feel that you are changing and you begin to look at your life differently.

Numerous players, including Daniela, mentioned that they went from being violent and using curse words to having a purpose and feeling confident. A part of this

transformation, one player noted, was that the organisation supported her on and off the field:

> When my brother died, they were there and they kept me company, which was good support. After that I had an accident where I was hospitalised and they were there to look after me so it made me feel as if someone was supporting me. It can't be 100% support [they can't do everything] because there are lots of children, but they do help. (Participant, Chévere, Ana Maria)

As demonstrated through the words of Lourdes, Daniela, and Ana Maria, a nurturing and supportive environment, one where children can experience a reprieve from the stress of their everyday reality, creates an opportunity for participants to gain a new perspective on their role in society and permits them to question their behaviours and the normative violence that is embedded in and perpetuated by the local culture.

In both Chévere and Bacano field offices, the staff and leaders employed mutual learning techniques, concentrating on values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect. These techniques and values were demonstrated through participant and employee interactions, as well as in dialogue. In an interview, a staff member was asked what a typical day is like in his position. In his reflection, he responded that he learns from the children each day. He also used the phrase 'mutual learning', demonstrating the implicit application of a significant component of critical pedagogy in his practice.

> Each day in VIDA we have different learning experiences. Every child teaches you something. I also, as a professional and as a human being, have the opportunity to teach them something. So it is a mutual learning…We use sport

as method, because sport becomes the excuse or the opportunity for them to trust in you and they feel confident to be open and talk about their lives with their problems and their special situations. As a professional and as a human being, I have to think how I can guide the children with their problems so they can find solutions, but at the same time making sure they have a relaxed day. (Staff member, Chévere, Julio)

In the same interview, Julio addressed the importance of being empathetic and how 'When you generate empathy, put it this way, it is when there is already a more emotional relationship with the person who is in front of you'. He later noted that it is common for teachers in local schools, who experience extreme stress in their jobs, to respond to children with threats and that the culture in the local schools is one where bullying and violence is normative. Through his position, he has watched children learn and reproduce anti-social and positive behaviour, but he tries to learn why the children feel the need to threaten others and how to cultivate empathy. His words and actions demonstrating mutual learning and empathy were common traits embodied by staff members in both Chévere and Bacano.

As previously addressed, the organisation's methodology implicitly focuses on self-motivation and mutual learning, which encourages youth leaders to hold themselves accountable as they transition into the roles of youth leaders and coaches. The youth leaders identified themselves as role models in the community, which they believed made them active agents in creating social change. One leader defined the position as 'a person who has authority in this place, in the community and the idea is that he or she is an example for kids to follow - to help the children in many ways and do good things,

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really good!' (Participant, Chévere, Valentina). Another participant indirectly remarked on mutual learning and the expectation for her to educate younger participants:

> Because I am older now, these days I don't spend much time here. Nevertheless, they support me and I also support them. If they need something done, for example, if they need someone to do the training with the children, then sometimes they give me a group of children and I try to teach them what I have learned here. (Participant, Chévere, Lourdes)

And a third leader, Diego from Bacano, expressed his experience as a leader as transformative for him and his community.

> When I started as a leader I didn't see myself as different to others in the community, but people started appreciating me, giving me affection, a family tie to the community. People started calling me 'profe' [a word of respect, like coach]. Profe! This happened to me! Now every time I arrive, I receive a hug and kids say, Profe, I love you! So I've received a lot of satisfaction and joy and it makes me want to continue to work for my community.

These examples demonstrate that the organisation is actively working to engage participants and employees to be dynamic mutual learners. Power within the organisation is never static but always being negotiated, particularly by youth leaders who are developing skills and acquiring new responsibilities as role models. The notion of ownership of social change was reinforced after a field practice when Lourdes, a

leader in Chévere, said to the children 'You decide who you will become through your actions'.

VIDA also employs a program called DECIDO. One of the program aims is to empower youth leaders with the skills to continue operations (in some capacity) if the organisation can no longer operate. In strategic design, youth leaders were given more voice and responsibilities in program operations. It was evident through the daily rituals (e.g. group lunch included anyone who wanted to join the table) and language used that the field office staff aimed for a horizontal power structure where everyone felt comfortable to share their opinion.

To date, there are more than 100 trained leaders nationwide. Trainings occur throughout the year. A typical training lasts one week. Participants receive permission from their schools to voluntarily attend from 8am-4pm daily and are provided meals. Leaders participate in activities that hone in on both hard and soft teaching skills. For example, in one activity leaders wrote down two leadership goals and presented the goals to the group. They then posted them on the wall with their colleagues' goals and everyone worked to find common themes and active solutions. Goals ranged from personal, with one leader stating he had trouble speaking in front of people, to logistical, with another stating he needed more balls to run drills. Below is an observation of a staff member addressing the leaders:

> 'How can we be more supportive with school? What processes can be more helpful? Let us know what you need and like. We want to hear your ideas.' She then explained the concept of a process. They talked about Tomas being new and shy and Juan Julio mentioned how two years ago he couldn't speak, but now he can't stop! (Field notes, Chévere, June 2015)

As noted in the field notes above and below, activities encouraged leaders to speak candidly about everyday challenges in the neighbourhood, which led to open discussion on how to mitigate these challenges and how the organisation can be more effective. The trainings were not limited to the classroom. In groups, leaders and coaches presented an exercise to the group, and then demonstrated it on the field. Afterwards, everyone returned to the classroom to discuss the theory and reasoning for the exercise they created, as well as what worked and what did not. It was clear that the participants' ideas were wanted, respected, and heard. Leaders were given feedback, but they also gave feedback to the coaches and social workers, revealing a horizontal power structure within the organisation.

In addition to listening to the youth leaders, the organisation takes local input seriously and actively reaches out to the community. An annual community-based analysis determines local social challenges as understood by the community. The organisation's psychologist associated with the respective field office collates these responses and selects the values to be taught through field activities by the coaches and youth leaders. Below, a staff member discussed this process:

> So we have some institutional values such as a sense of belonging, honesty, respect and tolerance. In addition to these, we add other sub-values that are related to those…We identify the needs of those values in the community, beside the children, through a small survey for example "what are the values that should be the most practiced in the community?" and at the same time we include their parents. (Staff member, Chévere, Gloria Laura)

Through daily rituals signifying caring and kindness, a strategy that includes mutual learning, and by challenging power structures through engaging with youth leaders and community members, the organisation demonstrates their implicit application of critical pedagogy and commitment to the pursuit of stimulating collective social change.

The practices discussed above highlight the centrality of the human element in critical pedagogy. They stress the need for educators to have a deep understanding of the participants and the broader contexts of their lives. It is through this intimate knowledge that educators can discuss meaningful problems that are grounded within the everyday struggles experienced by participants. Hope, humility, trust, and respect are critical within a mutual learning and collaborative process in order to move beyond the power imbalance of the traditional teacher-student relationship and toward collective action.[22] Yet, the wider context within which the organisation operates, and specifically the donor-recipient relations that both enable and constrain SDP practices, affect the extent to which such a process can be effectively cultivated. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Donor relations and the new 'normal'

The beginning of the SDP movement included grassroots organisations that implemented ad hoc methodology using sport to improve the lives of vulnerable citizens. VIDA is an example of this as over time it has honed its mission and adapted it to the climates of various diverse and vulnerable communities throughout Colombia. With public endorsement from the UN, donors from various industries invested in SDP and in VIDA, bringing new opportunities.

Newfound visibility and international recognition from marketing campaigns and corporate sponsorship positively impacts the organisation in many ways. For example, donors have assisted the organisation with building extensive networks that have resulted in VIDA receiving recognition through international awards. Participants, leaders, and employees have been and continue to be afforded travel opportunities. Many leaders proudly spoke of their cross-cultural experiences traveling to the United States, South Africa, England, Latin America, and throughout Colombia to demonstrate the organisation's methodology and to learn from others. These events include sports-based festivals, science-focused competitions, SDP/NGO conferences, and professional football games (e.g. World Cup and the Premiere League). Moreover, more than ten percent of young participants currently receive school support and each year between five and ten leaders per location receive academic support to attend university or a career-focused tertiary program (e.g. cooking); one leader is currently studying at a community college in the United States. Donors have also provided athletic and office supplies; one example being indestructible soccer balls.

As noted earlier, critical pedagogy has been questioned about its ability to empower and demarginalise people in the face of structural constraints under which it operates. This issue is clearly demonstrated in the tensions and incongruences between VIDA's pedagogical approach and the aims of the institutional settings in which the organisation is embedded. The strength in their efforts, as argued in this paper, is their implicit application of critical pedagogy, which permits staff and participants to practice mutual learning and empathy within a safe and nurturing environment. Except for a single interaction with one foreign donor, the term itself was not used.

In the current 'normal' donor-NGO relationship, the SDP organisation is completely dependent upon the donor. Corporate sponsors contribute the bulk of the

VIDA's funds. As conditions are attached to these donations, the 'soft power' dynamic and sustainability of these relationships must be critically questioned. A staff member addressed how the organisation changed when corporate sponsors became involved:

> VIDA's goals were to act in ways that benefited the population, and for much time they did not talk about sustainability. Now they have to meet business requirements. There are businesses that are great supporters but most want to demonstrate their business mission. (Staff member, Chévere, Camila)

As Camilla noted, VIDA must adhere to various agreements with corporate sponsors. In turn, VIDA must negotiate its boundaries and priorities, a gradual process that may become 'normal' while slowly impacting aspects of critical pedagogy.

> In some cases, the donor will submit requirements, such as using the logo, having banners with the logo, applying activities proposed by them…And the reality is that there are many companies that have conditions for their resources. I believe this is normal. As long as [VIDA's] objectives are not affected and respect for the local populations is maintained. (Staff member, Chévere, Camila)

But what happens when 'normal' becomes an everyday challenge? When asked about day-to-day challenges, a staff member did not mention community issues, but instead, highlighted the weight of the donor-recipient relationship:

> Challenges? Especially for the [main] headquarters and in general for VIDA, is that we always need to get sponsors, it is our daily challenge as a big institution

like we are, because we live off charity. We live with those contributions, so we

always need to propose new strategies for them to help us and trust us with the

money they are delivering. We need to show them the way that we work and in

that way they believe in our work, because there are many institutions that also

work for children. (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

Although staff members may see this relationship as 'normal', there is an evident power

imbalance taking place as VIDA is reliant upon and thus vulnerable to their donors.

Technically, VIDA does have the option of rejecting donor demands, but the reality of

refusal is losing the donor and jeopardizing the organisation's existence. Moreover, the

competition among NGOs for funding is fierce, which gives more power to the donor.

The power relations between donors and SDP organisations affect the design

and delivery of the organisation's programming at various levels. This relationship

requires a negotiation of how success is defined such as in the adoption of donor-driven

quantifiable targets and performance indicators. The primary indicator of success from

the viewpoint of the donor is often quantitative and focuses on the number of

participants engaged in the program. One employee noted:

Funding is good, but frequently only covers basics; it is not sufficient for staff

and the quality of the program, but we can still generate 'figures'. It is more

important for them to show figures than to say that we changed the lives of five

children. (Staff member, Chévere, Camila)

The donor's definition of what success is impacts the extent to which critical pedagogy

can flourish, as noted in the example below concerning participation numbers. One staff

member, Camila, addressed that the 'provisions and requirements often limit VIDA's processes', while another employee reasoned that meeting donor requirements while maintaining the organisation's mission is an arduous process:

> Each person who gives money includes his or her own conditions. We have to adapt, so we have to sell them our proposals. They know that they are helping with a football [program] in vulnerable populations, nevertheless they ask specific conditions. That's why we have to accommodate their wishes without losing our mission. So they don't tell us what we should do, for example, they don't say do sewing, clearly, because it is not our institutional profile, but if they tell us, we want 80 more boys participating, which is in line with our operational objective, then we have to start to look for more children because that's what they want. (Staff member, Chévere, Lorena)

In the above quotation, the interlocutor cited the requirement to recruit more participants. An increase in participation numbers is an easy quantifiable marker of success, but it may be a deceiving marker of success. When there are 'many children and groups for a single coach, the quality is lost,' argued Camila. A statement seconded by Julio, a staff member in Chévere, during a separate discussion. This was further endorsed by a parent who in informal discussion noted that she no longer sends her children to the field because of lack of supervision (Field notes, June 3).

Fluctuating participant numbers was a recurring challenge discussed among VIDA's staff in both Chévere and Bacano. This gradually threatens the elements that make critical pedagogy work: the relationship building that takes place through direct human interaction and dialogue.

We seek for children to have growth spaces, where they can improve their reading comprehension ability, math skills, and have a playful recreation space that allows them to learn…Last year we only had an intermittent space of one day a week in which there were 1, 2, or 3 children maximum. From the month of March the number grew and multiplied. We had 40 children, but we could not cater for more. New children arrived everyday who wanted to belong, however, because of our facilities and human resources, it is not possible to expand more, but we are willing and we want to look at other types of strategies. (Staff member, Bacano, Pedro)

Quickly increasing participant numbers presents multiple concerns for applying critical pedagogy. First, VIDA prefers participants who are intrinsically motivated: children who are committed to the program and open to learning and sharing. Second, VIDA's staff actively works with participants to cultivate a relationship based on trust. The field offices are not equipped for sudden increases of participants, which lead staff members to inherit multiple roles and be overextended: 'in the office there is not enough money and the person who is coordinator is also the psychologist. Two jobs. Your time is too short to give [participants] individual attention' (Staff member, Chévere, Camila). In other words, the critical contact time between participants and staff members is reduced.

It is clear that because of an increase in both donors and funds there has been regular expansion in the number of offices throughout Colombia, resulting in more areas being reached. But the sustainability of these expansions must be questioned. Many donor requirements do not affect the organisation as a whole, but rather specific

field offices. For example, at Chévere and Bacano, a number of staff members were on short term casual contracts to support specific projects. Staff members regularly exuded stress about the unsustainable positioning of projects reliant upon short-term funding. Additionally, a few years ago due to financial constraints, one field office (neither Chévere nor Bacano) was closed; yet, the following year, a new field office was established in a new location in coordination with support from a local government office, an international bank, and an international business.

Donor-NGO relationships come at a cost as community needs set against donor expectations become complicated, and top-down and local goals come to exist in tension or become blurred. If NGOs such as VIDA worked in more stable environments, like donors, the weekly challenges could be predicted and resolved in a sustainable manner. However, they do not; their trials are unpredictable and often dire, requiring troubleshooting and as a result, delaying discussions on sustainability. VIDA operates under constant pressure to maintain positive relations with a large number of donors with various agendas and stipulations. A high expectation for the organisation is to meet conditions that support donors' marketing goals; this, coupled with donors' little insight into the local climate impacts sustainability, and thus critical pedagogy.

Conclusion

This paper shows that critical pedagogy is implicitly alive on the ground in Colombian SDP, and that it supports participants to develop new ways to think and act and to assert a sense of their capability to participate in development. Yet, the findings also bring to the fore tensions and contradictions which influence the extent to which critical pedagogy can flourish in SDP practice, and hence, resonate with critiques of critical

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pedagogy which question its ability to empower and demarginalise people in the face of structural constraints, such as the complex and precarious relationship with donors. Donors, focused on (quantifiable) results, have limited insight into the day-to-day challenges these organisations face; worse, they often remain unaware of the triumphs achieved on a regular basis because of quantitative checklist evaluations that fail to capture complex pedagogical experiences. One consequence is that critical pedagogy is underplayed and not highlighted to donors by the organisation due to risk of losing funding, as a critical SDP approach may be unappealing to donors.[23] Moreover, the nuances of 'soft power' in this unbalanced relationship becomes 'normal' and over time may not be identifiable or questioned by staff.

These findings have relevance beyond the geographic focus of this paper. The unequal power relations between donors and SDP organisations have been well documented, inspiring calls for more systematic and sustainable approaches to SDP governance.[24] This issue has direct relevance to critical pedagogy and its role in development practice. A key goal of critical pedagogy is to challenge and help transform the power relations that shape social inequalities. This goal involves not only helping participants become aware of the forces that shape their lives, but also creating the conditions for new arrangements where power is distributed equitably.[25] While SDP practitioners are acutely aware of the donor-recipient relations that shape the parameters of their work, these conditions are rarely questioned within the delivery of SDP despite the fact that they are part of the structures that shape participants' lives. Changing this situation would require donors to become more active, open-minded players in the discussion rather than the relationship being restricted to donor-driven instigation and design and grant/report processes.

The above raises a critical question for future SDP policy, practice, and research: how can SDP governance and donor-NGO relations be reconfigured to better support the contribution of critical pedagogy toward SDP outcomes? This question is of particular import to current efforts to standardise SDP frameworks and methodologies. Critical pedagogy suggests that such standardisation is unlikely to achieve social transformation, and that donors should first learn about the community and the needs and aspirations of participants before they can make quantitative demands.[26] A focus on flashy reports, telling donors what they want to read, risks dehumanising the critical development process that SDP programs applying critical pedagogy seek to achieve. At the same time, SDP organisations are challenged to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of their methodologies, and see this as an opportunity to have fewer conditions placed upon them.

In order to effectively incorporate and embed critical pedagogy into SDP, it is essential to rethink and reconfigure the power relations between donors and NGOs examined in this paper. This will arguably require a system that shifts at least some power away from the donor and places it in the hands of the organisation. Long-term grants without strings would be beneficial as the organisation would not need to constantly troubleshoot, but could plan, focus their efforts and have more freedom and autonomy. Open communication, including critical reflection, without the organisation losing the donation would also be helpful to enhance mutual learning. And quality in-kind donations such as goods or services needed and requested by the organisation, rather than second-hand materials of assorted value and international volunteers with little local knowledge or training, could improve power relations. Through these avenues, better conditions could be created to allow critical pedagogy to thrive and to help improve SDP's contribution and integration towards development outcomes.

Notes

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[1] Banda and Gultresa, "Using Global South Sport-for-development Experiences"; Kidd, "A New Social Movement."

[2] Lindsey, "Governance in Sport-for-development"; Giulianotti, "Sport, Transnational Peacemaking, and Global Civil Society."

[3] Giulianotti, "Sport, Transnational Peacemaking, and Global Civil Society"; and Donnelly et al., "Sport for Development and Peace."

[4] Levermore, "The Paucity of, and Dilemma in, Evaluating Corporate Social Responsibility for Development through Sport"; Jeanes and Lindsey, "Where's the Evidence?"

[5] Spaaij and Jeanes, "Education for Social Change?"; Jeanes and Spaaij, "Examining the Educator"; and Darnell, "Ethical Challenges and Principal Hurdles in Sport-for-development Work."

[6] Giroux and Searls Giroux, "Challenging Neoliberalism's New World Order," 21.

[7] Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 128.

[8] Chambers, "Paradigm Shifts and the Practice of Participatory Research and Development."

[9] Leonard, "Critical Pedagogy and State Welfare," 162.

[10] Giroux, "Lessons from Paulo Freire."

[11] E.g., Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?"; Gabel, "Some Conceptual Problems with Critical Pedagogy"; and Burbules and Berk, "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits."

[12] Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 108-109.

[13] Darder and Mirón, "Critical Pedagogy in a Time of Uncertainty," 7.

[14] Escobar, *Encountering Development*; and Macrine, *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times*.

[15] Revista Semana, "Proyecto Victimas."

[16] World Bank, *Word Development Indicators*.

[17] Pallitto and O'Campo, "Community Level Effects of Gender Inequality on Intimate Partner Violence and Unintended Pregnancy in Colombia"; and Daniels, "Tackling Teenage Pregnancy in Colombia."

[18] In 2016, The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reported more than 6 million Colombians were displaced due to conflict, equivalent to 1/8th of Colombia's population.

[19] References (local policy reports) withheld to maintain anonymity of research sites.

[20] Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers*.

[21] Spaaij and Schulenkorf, "Cultivating Safe Space."

[22] Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers*; Ledwith, *Community Development*.

[23] Spaaij and Jeanes, "Education for Social Change."

[24] E.g. Lindsey, "Governance in Sport-for-development.""

[25] Aronowitz, "Foreword."

[26] Spaaij and Jeanes, "Education for Social Change?"

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