'I always live in a quebrada [favela] and today I am here. So, you can be also here one day': Exploring pre-service teachers' perceptions of love for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds

‘I always live in a *quebrada* [favela] and today I am here. So, you can be also here one day’: exploring pre-service teachers’ perceptions of love for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds

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Abstract

In recent years, socially critical scholars have argued that love, as a moral basis for socio-critical work (Freire, 1987, 2005), should not be colorblind or power blind and that marginalized populations may understand caring within their sociocultural context; creating spaces for youth and teachers to challenge the racism, sexism, class exploitation, and linguicism imposed on their communities. While there is advocacy of love in education and physical education, there is little research that aims to explore how pre-service teachers’ conceptions change across time. The aim of this study was to explore pre-service teachers’ changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds. Participatory action research framed this 4-semester research project. Participants included the lead researcher, four pre-service teachers (PSTs) and 110 youth. Data collected included: (a) lead researcher’s field notes; (b) collaborative PSTs’ group meetings; (c) PSTs’ generated artifacts; and (d) PSTs’ focus groups and interviews. Data analysis involved induction and constant comparison. The PSTs understood that love was represented by: (a) creating democratic spaces for students to care for each other and their community; (b) trusting and understanding the students, and dreaming possible futures with them; (c) being the best teacher in order to facilitate students’ learning; and (d) making sure all students are included. We concluded that the PSTs’ embodied experiences of oppression and the reflexive experience lived in the activist approach created a space for the PSTs to see themselves in the

youth, reconnect with their own identity, and develop empathy and love for the diverse youth.

Keywords: *sport; activist approaches; participatory action research; critical pedagogy; love; youth*

Introduction

> In our last class I talked about what the kids expect from their lives. I said that they will face a lot of challenges and they will listen to a lot of 'Nos'. I said it because this is my story. I listened to many 'Nos'. I became a teacher and it is against all the statistics of my community... and I told them where I came from. I asked them: 'do you think I live in a wealthy place?' I do not live in a wealthy place. I live in a *quebrada* [favela[1]] and today I am here. So, you can be also here. I said: 'so in the path of your life you have too many 'Nos', but you have to understand that you will have a yes one day'. I tried to talk somehow, using my example that they will have difficulties in their lives, but they will have to learn from them (pre-service teacher quote).

Within this pre-service teacher's quote is the perception of love for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds in a sport context. In critical pedagogy, research has focused on love because it has been proposed as a moral basis for socio-critical work (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2001; Zembylas, 2017). Aligned with this idea, caring has been the central concept of some physical educators and researchers in their work to challenge the status quo and contribute to building a socially just society (Clark, 2019; Ennis, 1999; Hellison, 1978).

[1] Favela is a unique, low and middle-income, and unregulated type of slum in Brazil that has experienced historical governmental neglect.

For example, the field of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) has increasingly advocated for caring teacher-student relationships (Clark, 2019; Moen et al., 2019; Owens and Ennis, 2005). Many scholars in PETE have used Nel Noddings' (1984) concept of an ethic of care as the foundation for their interventions (Clark, 2019; Moen et al., 2019; Owens and Ennis, 2005).

In this study, we draw specifically on Paulo Freire's concept of love (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1987, 2005) to explore pre-service teachers (PSTs)' changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds. Although we acknowledge the ethic of care body of research in education and physical education, we agree with hooks (2001) that care is an ingredient of love. As she described, 'care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean that we are loving' (hooks 2001: 22). Love is both an intention and an action, which means that what constitutes loving acts depends on the other and the context (Lanas and Zembylas, 2015). We argue for a love that has a sociologically-informed theory and serves as a moral basis for concrete individual and collective actions towards transformation. We aim to extend to the PETE field the work of a number of education scholars in recent years who have attempted to investigate love in critical education (Chabot, 2008; Freire, 2005; hooks, 2001; Lanas and Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas, 2017), arguing that love can constitute an important pedagogical intervention in struggles against unjust social and educational structures.

Although PETE literature has demonstrated a growing interest in critical pedagogy (Felis-Anaya et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2019; Philpot, 2016b, 2019) and the pedagogical possibilities of an ethic of care (Clark, 2019; Owens and Ennis, 2005; Philpot, 2016a; Rovegno and Kirk, 1995), there is a lack of studies that discuss love, specifically a decolonizing concept of love. There is little research that aims to explore

how PSTs learn and experience this kind of love, how they change their perceptions, and what struggles they face. In PETE research, we also have a problem concerning a lack of decolonial scholarship (Clark, 2019). Building on this gap, we seek to extend this conversation using a decolonial concept of love by utilizing Paulo Freire's theoretical framework.

In the next section we will discuss the various understandings of love and define love as described by Paulo Freire. Then we will describe the activist sport approach and the emergence of love; we did not set out to explicitly find love as social justice in this project. We will then introduce the PSTs individually and share information about them that illustrates their experiences of love across time and how they changed their conception of love. We conclude that the PSTs' embodied experiences of oppression and the reflexive experience lived in the activist approach, created a space for the PSTs to see themselves in the youth, reconnected with their own identity and develop empathy, and love for the youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds.

Freirean concept of love: a decolonizing love

While all forms of love are possible, it is necessary to critique some of the dominants forms of love in education and physical education. First, it is necessary to challenge the idea that love equates to sacrifice and vocation. Based on the Catholic notion, it is argued that love requires sacrifices, giving up something; it is also connected with the idea of vocation: a calling from god (Freire, 2005). Second, it is important to recognize the danger of considering an alienated and romantic love. In that perspective, teachers have been incited to constitute themselves as agents of pastoral power (McCuaig and Tinning, 2010). The 'good' teacher is considered to be the one that offers the Christian pastoral caring. This understanding of love could reaffirm power relations, camouflaging ways of

controlling the students, serving patriarchal interests and reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. This can be considered a colonizer love that ties, controls, and masks the requirements of social justice and equity (McCuaig, 2012).

In contrast, in this paper, we draw specifically on Paulo Freire's concept of love. Freire's notion of love is different from the perspectives of many popular traditions. Freire argued that 'love is an act of courage, not fear… a commitment to others… [and] to the cause of liberation' (1987: 78). Freire believed in a 'decolonizing love' as the critical concept of ethic of care described by Chicana and Black feminists (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, 2017). For Freire, it is a love based in pedagogical dialogue, solidarity (commitment to others and commitment to the cause of liberation) and hope.

> Love is eminently and irrevocably dialogical. It is not an attachment or emotion isolated from the everyday world, including its tenebrous underside, but it emerges viscerally from an act of daring, courage, of critical reflection. Love is not only the fire that ignites the revolutionary, but also the creative action of the artist, who covers the canvas of thought and action with a palette of sinew and spirit (Freire, 2005: 30).

For Freire, love requires a commitment to dialogue and the capacity to take risks for the benefit of those we teach and for ourselves. One of the risks we must take as pedagogues is to 'relinquish oppressive practices in the classroom, such as the banking system of education, in which students are treated like empty receptacles' (Ty-ron and Ngangta, 2015: 33). Love demands that we utilize dialogue as a means of subverting dominant positionalities, since [love] 'cannot exist in a relation of domination' (Freire, 1987: 89). In that perspective, it is a political and radicalized form of love that is never about 'absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, or unceasing words of sweetness,

or endless streams of hugs and kisses' (Darder, 2002: 34). Love is struggle, 'hard and soft', and fighting for students, is reflective of the praxis (Daniels, 2012).

Freire also describes love as solidarity: a commitment to others and commitment to the cause of liberation (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1987, 2005). A love of solidarity is committed with the voices and perspectives of marginalized and non-dominant positionalities/perspectives, allowing us to recast power differences in our classrooms, even as it provides tools for dialogue, action, and hope (Ty-ron and Ngangta, 2015). Education is inherently political (Freire, 2005) and the choices we make as educators to move toward socially aware and activist stances have an important place in our classrooms and curricula, and for the children with whom we work. Love includes a strong and deep commitment to protecting, caring for, and empowering students in the face of social barriers and oppressions that surface in their everyday lives, as well as a political passion to inspire and support marginalized youth (Daniels, 2012). Solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this 'act of love' (Freire 1987: 35). It must encompass a revolutionary commitment to social inclusion and democracy (Freire, 1987).

According to Freire (2005), love is also connected to the hope necessary to persevere despite barriers. Freire defines hope as central to the transformative experience of education. Freire (2005: 2) takes this even further to argue that 'hope is an ontological need' because without it, our activism dies, as we can imagine nothing better than what we see before us. To enact transformation, hope is a necessary ingredient and its opposite, despair, leaves no room for activism or movement because of the sense of the overwhelming power of the obstacles in our way as educators (Daniels, 2012; Greene, 1995). Hope creates room for movement, for possibilities to create different outcomes, whereas despair simply shuts them down. In a pedagogy of love, teachers should stimulate creativity and imagination in their students as well as the capacity to better critique

surroundings and, thus, challenge inequity and injustice. It is important that transformation occurs at the micro level - small steps toward changing oppressive practices make a difference over time (Cook-Sather, 2002; Luguetti et al., 2019). The more teachers are willing to struggle for an emancipatory dream, the more apt they are to know intimately the experience of fear, how to control and educate their fear and, finally, how to transform that fear into courage (Darder, 2002).

The activist sport approach and the emergence of love

The activist sport approach made it possible for love to emerge as a form of teaching for social justice. An activist approach rest on the political premise that marginalized people may transform their realities through education, research, reflection, and action (Fine, 2007; Freire, 1987, 1996). It breaks the false consensus of complicity by interrogating and denaturalizing the conditions of oppression (hegemony) by working through issues of power and difference (Freire, 1987). This approach is based on the notion that merely showing the inequality of 'what is,' while necessary, is insufficient. Activists assert we must act in some way with our participants by imagining and exploring that which might be. As such, activist approaches work from the belief that transformation starts at the micro level in localized contexts.

Over the last seven years, we have developed an activist sport approach with and for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds (Luguetti et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2019). The approach was designed as a means of listening and responding to youth in order to use sport as a vehicle for assisting them in becoming critical analysts of their communities and developing strategies to manage the risks they face. This activist approach combines student centered pedagogy, inquiry-based learning centered in

action, an ethic of care, attentiveness to the community, and a community of sport as key critical elements (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1]

The five critical elements formed a patchwork of practice in this approach (Luguetti et al., 2017b). When attempting to co-construct empowering learning possibilities through sport for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds, these five critical elements should be considered 'non-negotiable'. Student-centered pedagogy is the ability and willingness of adults to listen to youth and respond to what they are hearing. Inquiry-based learning centered in action means to engage the youth in inquiry in order to help them better understand what facilitates and hinders their learning opportunities in sport and to imagine alternative possibilities. An ethic of care describes that the teacher' role is to show interest in, and respect for, the youths' lives outside of the sport context. Attentiveness to the community defines that it is essential to be aware of the problems that the youth encounter playing sports in order to make possible local actions. Community of sport means that it is necessary to create times for the youth to see other possibilities and this requires a collective action on the part of the community.

In this study, a process of Student-Centered Inquiry *as* Curriculum (Oliver and Oesterreich, 2013) was used as a means of working with the youth in order to better understand how to assist them to foster collective empowerment (Fine, 2007; Freire, 1987, 1996).

This paper is part of a larger project that aimed to explore researchers', PSTs' and youth's experiences of an activist sport approach for working with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds and to interrogate the ways in which a pedagogy of love emerged (Luguetti et al., 2019). In this paper, we specifically explored PSTs'

changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds.

Methodology

This study was a participatory action research (PAR) project. PAR supports the belief that knowledge is rooted in social relations, and is more powerful when produced collaboratively through action (Fine, 2007; Freire, 1987, 1996; Kemmis, 2006).

Context and participants

The project took place in a university in Brazil. The university is located in a socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhood. The lead author invited young people from two schools in the university's neighborhood to participate in this project. The young people came after school to the university to work with the PSTs. The PSTs volunteered to participate in the project and the classes were not linked to any unit they were enrolled in. All youth and PSTs were invited to participate in the research. Ethical approval for this study was received from the Ethics Committee (protocol number 2.258.880). All PSTs signed informed consent.

There were five participants in this study who came together with a common interest in learning to use an activist sport approach. Participants included a teacher educator (lead author) and four PSTs. The lead author (Carla) was a 35-year-old middle class Brazilian teacher educator with six years of experience using activist teaching approaches in a variety of physical activity settings in and out of schools, in both Brazil and the US. Her PhD research was an activist study with boys from socially vulnerable backgrounds in a sport context (see Luguetti et al., 2017b). Although Carla considers herself middle class in this study, she grew up in a community of low socioeconomic

status in her childhood and adolescence. Carla grew up playing soccer and flying kites with friends who lived in *favelas*.

At the beginning of the project the PSTs (three women and one man) were in their third semesters of a Physical Education (PE) teaching degree and had no previous experience with activist teaching approaches. Janaina (female) was a 27 -year-old low income black PST with two years of experience doing Martial Arts at a local club in her community. She came to the group with some experience in working with youth because she used to play with her son's friends on streets. Rodrigo (male) was a 28-year-old low income white PST who had come to the project with some experience in working with youth. He had nineteen years practicing Capoeira[2] and nine years of experience teaching Capoeira in a community program next to his house. Carol (female) was a 22 -year-old low income white PST with ten years of experience playing handball at a school close to where the project took place. She had no experience in working with youth. Roberta (female) was a 26 -year-old low income white PST who had no experience in working with youth. She was also a wheelchair user. The study also involved 110 boys and girls aged between 7 and 13.

Data gathering

The implementation of the activist sport approach lasted 20 months across 4 academic semesters (2017/2018). Youth participated in sports twice a week for one hour each day (total of 112 classes). Carla was responsible for the learning activities with the youth in the first semester (23 classes) while the PSTs were observing and participating with the young people. In the second, third and fourth semesters (33, 30 and 26 classes,

[2]Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance, acrobatics, and music. It was developed by African slaves in Brazil at the beginning of the 16th century.

respectively), Carla was observing and offering feedback while the PSTs were responsible for the learning activities with the youth.

Data collection included:

(a) *Lead researcher observations collected as field notes.* The lead researcher Carla wrote field notes after each class (98 pages) about the PSTs' and youth's experience of the activist sport approach. This data was used to inform the weekly collaborative group meeting discussions among the PSTs.

(b) *Collaborative PSTs' group meetings* (75 meetings). The structure of the meetings created an environment for PSTs to engage in conversations about their experiences using an activist sport approach in their teaching. All PSTs' group meetings were audio recorded and transcribed (612 pages).

(c) *PSTs' generated artifacts.* All PSTs' generated artifacts were collected, such as lesson plans, summaries of data collected from the youth, and shared materials on social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp (total of 249 pages).

(d) *PSTs' focus groups and interviews.* Two 20-minute individual interviews (second semester) and two 30-minute focus groups (third and fourth semester) were conducted with the PSTs. The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded for verbatim transcription (81 pages). After the first interview, we decided to use focus groups with the PSTs because of their dialogic potential. The focus groups align with the intent to co-construct the meaning of love. The interviews and focus groups were based on the experiences they faced in implementing the activist sport approach and the emergence of love. We asked questions such as: (a) What do you think you learned in co-creating an activist approach with youth? (b) Tell me a story about a challenge that you had co-creating an activist approach? How did you negotiate that challenge? (c) Tell me a story about something that helped in your learning? Why was if helpful? How

did it impact your decision making? (d) If you were to do this again what kind of help would you find useful and why?

Data analysis

Data analysis involved three steps and was approached using an inductive lens (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). First, Carla read all data sets and engaged in the process of coding aimed at capturing the PSTs' changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds. Through this inductive analysis, statements and ideas were developed as data was read and re-read. The second process of analysis involved constant comparison. The ideas that emerged in this process were co-created with the PSTs, considering them as co-researchers. For example, the collaborative group meetings and the focus groups were the spaces when this co-creation happened (Fine, 2007; Freire, 1987, 1996; Kemmis, 2006). The third and final process of analysis involved peer checking by the second author. Brent engaged in a process of checking the interpretations. Carla and Brent discussed the codes she had identified in relation to the research questions. Brent added credibility to the analysis by challenging the interpretations of the coded data and the construction of themes. In this phase, data was moved between different themes until a level of agreement was reached.

Although the data analysis included multiple data sources, we used the PSTs' interviews and focus groups in the results to present their experiences of love across time. In the co-construction of the meaning of love in their pedagogy we referred to Portuguese words such as '*amor*'[love], '*cuidar*' [care] and '*carinho*' [affection]. The PSTs utilized those words as synonymous in this project because we didn't have the language of a pedagogy of love. We did not set out to explicitly find love as social

justice in this project; a pedagogy of love emerged in the process of implementing an activist approach (Luguetti et al., 2019).

Results

This study aimed to explore PSTs' changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds. In this section, we will introduce the PSTs individually and share information about them that illustrates their experiences of love across time and how they changed their conception of love. The teachers understood that love is represented beyond safety concerns. For them, love meant: (a) to create democratic spaces for students to care for each other and their community; (b) to trust and understand the students and dream possible futures with them; (c) to be the best teacher in order to facilitate students' learning; (d) to make sure all students are included. Rather than attempt to show how all the teachers demonstrated love in all of its aspects, we selected examples that we believe are most illustrative of each aspect.

'I live in a quebrada [favela] and today I am here. So, you can be also here' (Janaina): love is to create democratic spaces for students caring for each other and their communities

Janaina was born in the same community most of youth were from: a socially vulnerable neighborhood. Janaina was the first undergraduate student in her family. In the first semester of the project Janaina said 'I'm proud of not being part of the crime and violence statistics of my community'. Janaina always spoke proudly of her success, but never in the sense of being an individual success. According to her, the project was a possibility to give back to her community what she had learned and the opportunities

it offered to her: a chance to open doors so that other young people might not be a part of crime and violence statistics in her neighborhood:

> In our last class I talked about what the kids expect from their lives. I said that they will face a lot of challenges and they will listen to a lot of 'Nos'. I said it because this is my story. I listened to many 'Nos'. I became a teacher and it is against all the statistics of my community... and I told them where I came from… I live in a *quebrada* [favela] and today I am here. So, you can be also here (Janaina's interview).

During the three semesters, Janaina has talked to her students about things that were not directly related to the sport classes. She has spoken about community events, changes in the neighborhood, and community difficulties due to government neglect. Janaina described their neighborhood as the 'forgotten land'. Janaina always had great communication with the children and young people. She connected well with them. She did not just describe the problems they face in their community, but also pointed out the social injustices. She believed her class could create spaces for the youth to be working toward liberation for the self and the community, as well as awareness of social injustices.

Although Janaina always valued the importance of critiquing social injustices and giving back to the community, she learned to create a democratic space with her students in order to achieve it. She understood that in order to create a community that would care for each other, she should be open to listen to youth's voice and share power with them. In the beginning of the project (semester 1), Janaina talked to, more than she listened to, the youth. In one of the first classes, Janaina was leading the activities and was talking to the young people about their behavior. Janaina was telling them how they should behave, and we reflected in our weekly meeting that it would be important to

listen to them and co-create a learning environment with them. In the second semester, Janaina started to value young people's voice and created a democratic space with her students. She understood that, for them to talk, she would need to listen and respond to their voices. At the end of four semesters, Janaina described how she entered in a deep affective relationship with the youth:

> The kids have become my children. I was in a very delicate moment of my life in this semester... I was finishing my final paper and I also had other personal problems. However, I had the commitment: 'they are waiting for me'... my commitment was with the young people and I had to be there for them. Although I needed to focus on my final paper, I could not leave the kids behind because they needed my presence. When I started here, I thought that as a teacher we know everything. This project changed my life… I understood the importance of listening to the students… when I learned to really listen to them and understand their needs... what I changed is that I have a very strong connection with the kids and with their parents. I changed as a teacher and the way I'm going to teach from now on is the way I learned here (Janaina's interview).

Janaina described the challenge of being committed to the youth and balancing her time in her academic life. It is important to notice that her strong connection with the youth made her suffer. Janaina's love is demonstrated through expressing and addressing concern for her students' futures, and fighting against ongoing structural inequalities. By shared her own story with the youth, she exemplified social transformation. Janaina's struggles helped the students to interrogate how their society reproduces, reifies and normalizes social injustices (Freire, 2005; Roberts, 2010). Janaina understood sport as a means to working toward liberation for the self and the community, as well as awareness of social injustice. Janaina's nurturing behaviors

included genuine dedication to listening to and understanding the kids, and offering them a safer space than perhaps they might encounter in their everyday lives (Daniels, 2012).

'Care is to know who these kids are, what they do outside of my class, and always believing on them' (Rodrigo): love it is to trust and understand the students, and dream possible futures with them

Rodrigo came to this project as an experienced PST. As with Janaina, Rodrigo was born in a socially vulnerable area. Rodrigo's experience with Capoeira helped him to overcome the barriers he faced in his adolescence and it was an important experience for him to understand love:

> I don't think I experienced care or love in my school. It was that soccer-only activity and since I was not a good player, I was always left behind. I do not remember the PE teacher giving me another alternative. However, I started Capoeira at 14 years old and I had a coach who took care of me and gave me another vision of the world. He helped me to learn and we became friends. He always helped me. He became 'a mirror' for me as a teacher. For example, I did not have the money to pay the tuition and he said, 'no problem, you help me out here at the gym and keep training'. I also could not afford to buy a uniform and he would say: 'take these pants that are good'. When I was able to grow up in life, I was able to give back some things for him as well. Today we are great friends. Sometimes we train some movements on the beach (Rodrigo's interview).

Although Rodrigo experienced love in the Capoeira context, he came to the project with the assumption that the coach/teacher should be the only person in charge of all decisions. In one of his first lessons, he organized the cones side by side and asked

the youth to stay next to the cones for 20 minutes. It was a lesson that highlighted the order and control Rodrigo wanted to have. In the first semester we reflected unceasingly how mess and chaos were also important pieces for learning as well as order. Carla was always repeating to Rodrigo ‘remember the idea of an organized messiness’. As the project progressed, Rodrigo started to understand the importance of trusting the youth and accepting the risk, in order to create a learning environment:

> There were several things I changed in this project, but one of the things I realize in the last two years it was trust... today I can understand the young people I work with and I trust them. I understand the kids… the quietest and most agitated kid. That kid who is quieter, maybe by asking questions in the way we learned in the project, I might know what it is in his/her mind and why is this kid behaving like that. That kid will not be that student that stays in the corner, and I will not worry. I've learned to worry more. In the past, I remember I just worried about the activities I taught. If the kids wanted to do or didn’t want to do, I would say: ‘I don’t care, they are fussy about the class’. Today I think differently. If my student does not want to do activity, he/she does not want it for some reason. I was quite an ignorant guy and I've changed a lot. I had to learn to be more patient and trust the kids (Rodrigo’s interview).

In the second and third semesters, Rodrigo had developed a deep affective relationship with his students. He understood the importance of youth’s lives and that sport could be a vehicle for assisting these kids in seeing other opportunities in their lives. Rodrigo learned and described in the last interview the importance of believing the student: ‘I am going to fight even though he/she does not do anything at all’. He stopped blaming the young people and he learned to believe in them:

> Care for me is to care for our students not just in the project, but also outside. It is not thinking only in my sport classes, but thinking about who this kid is and how he/she is living, what he/she is facing in his/her life… what are the difficulties this kid is facing. I think this is caring. And through that, discovering these difficulties, and through our class, the sport somehow, helps them. I think it is putting in this kid's head that they will always face many problems, but together it is possible to win. These kids are already listening to so much bad thing around them. So, I think the importance of the teacher would be this. It is about to care for the students outside of class... The intention is to create bonds of friendship with our students. Because we do not talk about the problems we face with strangers, we tell a friend. In the first year of the project, care for me was not getting hurt or not doing anything that the students could complain to their parents. Today I think differently. The care of not getting hurt is the minimum. And these things happen sometimes. Care is to know who these young people are, what they do outside of my class. The care of wondering why they behave the way they behave. This I learned from a year ago, it took me a while to understand it (Rodrigo's interview).

The reflexive process experienced in this two-year project helped Rodrigo to understand the importance of trusting students and dreaming possible futures with them. His previous experiences of care in Capoeira also might help this. Despite the oppressive situations he faced in his life, Rodrigo learned that trust and hope were ingredients for social change. Rodrigo showed a deep personal commitment to care for, and enter into relationships of solidarity with students that supports our humanity (Darder, 2002; Freire, 2005). Hope was connected to Rodrigo's pedagogy and it was the space created for him in overcoming difficult circumstances.

'We need to take care of them with regards to their learning': love is to facilitate students' learning

As with Rodrigo and Janaina, Carol was born in a socially vulnerable area close to the university. She was passionate about handball. Carol experienced love within the PE and sport contexts. Carol had a PE teacher that became her handball coach. The skills she learned in the sport context helped her to overcome the struggles she faced in her life:

> I was very happy about being cared for in my school… my PE teacher always taught us different sports and always cared about our learning. Over time he set up a handball team and became my coach. That's when I became interested in sports. He always motivated me, and we had several competitions in town or out of town. The school did not give the condition and opportunities to keep playing. For example, we did not have a bus to go to the games. My coach bought a big car: the one that fits seven people. Then he would take him and six players in the car and rent another to take the rest of the handball team. He always took money from his pocket. We usually paid half and he paid the other half of our uniform. He did all to help us. He took care of us (Carol's interview).

Since the beginning of the project, Carol described her high expectations in teaching her students. She was always brainstorming ideas of how to improve her pedagogy in order to help her students to learn:

> My care is always related to their learning and behavior. I'm careful regarding the activities that I plan for my students. They come to learn sports and I always make sure they are learning sport. I always plan the games to be fun for everyone because I do not like them to say that the activity is boring. So, I always care they

are having fun and learning something. I believe I learned in this project a larger repertoire of activities and games (Carol's interview).

Carol learned that her students would improve their skills in sport by playing games. In the first two semesters, she struggled to understand that games would teach tactics and techniques together. She also understood the importance of building relationships with her students to help them to learn:

> Caring for me it is to know what's going on with my students. Usually when we start the classes, the students arrive with a lot of news. And sometimes I don't have time to listen to them so much. It's not that I can't, or I don't want to listen to all kids, but I really don't have enough time. The kids come and say: 'the teacher in my school did it or in my house I did it'. So, we became friends with our students. They come to tell us what's happening, and it is very cool. Unfortunately, we cannot give that much attention. Sometimes we need to cut the student off and start the class, because they come to learn sports. Caring for me is this: to understand the student, listen to them and help them to learn… We need to take care of them with regards to their learning. We need to care about what they learn. Today we have a much broader thinking about care than we had in the beginning (Carol's interview).

Although Carol experienced oppression in relation to social class in childhood and adolescence, she experienced inclusion and a feeling of belonging in the context of sport. She described a powerful experience of care from her coach as a teenager. These early experiences of care were formative as Carol began to listen to young people and developed with them a relationship of friendship. Carol also described the challenges in balancing listening to students and offering activities so they can improve skills. Carol believed that teaching the best class could help her students become better people.

'In the beginning, I thought that caring was about not getting hit in the face with a ball or not pushing each other... care is beyond that' (Roberta): love it is to make sure all students are included

Roberta was a wheelchair user and she had experiences of exclusion in her PE classes. As soon as Roberta arrived in the project, we asked the university to build a ramp for her to access the court. Carla was surprised in the fact that she was in the third year of her PE undergrad course and she wouldn't access the court. Carla couldn't understand why the university took so long to put in this ramp. In her adolescence, Roberta was not a wheelchair user, but she described being heavily excluded in PE classes and sport contexts:

> I didn't experience care in my PE classes or in sport contexts. On the contrary, I was heavily excluded in PE classes. I was very shy, and I did not know how to play most sports. I would say that I would not play, and the teacher would say: 'that's fine, just stay sitting there'. Teachers never asked me why I did not want to do the activities. Was it because I did not know how to play? My teachers could have said: 'Come here and I'll teach you'. They have never said that. Sometimes we just walked on the beach. Since our school was near the beach, we had PE classes on the beach. So, the students on my class were playing soccer, playing volleyball, playing *frescobol* [kind of beach tennis]. However, my friends and I were not included. We were walking on the beach by ourselves. I really do not remember if I was given a point of being taken care of by my PE teacher (Roberta's interview).

Roberta's experiences of exclusion in PE and sport contexts and her embodied experience of oppression helped her to understand the importance of inclusion as a

meaning of love. Experiencing the reflexive process in the project helped her to improve her pedagogy in order to create spaces for inclusion. Roberta understood that love is represented in understanding the young people and including them in the activities:

> At first, I thought that taking care of the student was not letting him/her get hurt. Today I realize that it's not just that… Care is beyond that. For example, Caio is a boy who is always messing around by putting nicknames on others and does not respect most of the rules we co-create. Realizing this, I began to bring Caio closer to me. I would sit next to him and invite him to stay closer to me. I asked him to help me with the material and I always asked him about his school. He started telling me things. He told me that he has no one to play with... that his parents work a lot and that the older brother does not play with him. I was always careful to understand why he behaved in that way. As I talked to him more, I realized that he was changing, his behavior in class changed. I think it was because of the care (Roberta's interview).

Caio's case exemplified the importance of making sure everybody is included in Roberta's class. She was always concerned about the youth's participation. For example, she identified gender issues in the classes in our weekly meeting. Initially the majority of the PSTs could not identify that we had girls who were not engaged in classes, yet Roberta could point it out since the beginning. The weekly meeting helped her to develop pedagogical skills to include the youth. She understood that in order to include them, it would be necessary to invite them to co-create a class environment with her and show care rather than discipline.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore PSTs' changing perceptions of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds. For this purpose, we have proposed Freire's concept of love as a key component of critical education. In this section, we discuss: (a) how the PSTs' perceptions might represent a 'decolonized love'; (b) how the reflexive experience lived in the activist approach helped the PSTs' move from a deficit view of the youth to a critical approach, relinquishing oppressive practices; (c) how the PSTs' embodied experiences of oppression created a space for them to see themselves in the youth, reconnected with their own identity, and develop empathy; and (d) future directions.

Decolonizing love

Unlike the conception of love as a soft emotion or feeling, confined to the private sphere of family and/or romance (Chabot, 2008; Lanas and Zembylas, 2015; Wilkinson and Kaukko, 2019), we suggest that the PSTs' perceptions of love might represent a 'decolonized love'. The PSTs rethought their pedagogical practices to challenge their assumptions that perpetuated domination and social injustice. For example, they challenged the assumption that the coach/teacher should be the only person in charge of all decisions. They started to understand the importance of trusting the youth and taking risks in order to create a learning environment that could be extended to their community. This reveals that loving practice is both politically and socially constructed and contains the promise that such love can be a compelling political force that has transformative potential in struggles against social injustice (Zembylas. 2017: 32).

According to hooks (2001), in contrast to a commonly accepted assumption in patriarchal culture, love cannot be present in a situation where one group or individual

dominates another. Domination and love cannot coexist, because without justice there can be no love (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2001). A decolonizing love means that love is not something that can be treated in essentialist terms, but rather manifests differently in different spaces and places (Zembylas, 2017). The PSTs, Carla, and the youth, co-created a love that was context specific. Love emerges from the contextual challenges of lived reality in certain spaces and places rather than from abstraction. It constitutes a form of love that imagines a world in which ethical relationships are built beyond coloniality without ignoring the long history of colonization and oppression (Zembylas, 2017). It is a form of love that breaks the 'I' and entails a site for collective becoming where teachers or PSTs might admit they want to become different (Lanas and Zembylas, 2015).

The importance of reflexivity

The reflexive experience lived in the activist approach was essential in order to move the PSTs from a deficit view of the youth to a critical approach, relinquishing oppressive practices. In the beginning of the research, most of the PSTs did not value the young people's voices and the importance of love. Through our weekly collaborative group meetings, we reflected on their actions and they moved from a conception of love as 'don't get hurt' to a broader definition, aligned with the idea of social justice and equity[3]. Roberta described: 'at first I thought that taking care of the student was not letting him get hurt. Today I realize that it's not just that… care is beyond that'. The reflexive process allowed the PSTs to understand that love means creating democratic spaces for students to care for each other and their community (Freire, 1987).

[3] For more details about the reflexive process that occurred in the weekly meetings between Carla and the PSTs, see Luguetti et al. (2019) and (Luguetti and Oliver, 2019).

The PSTs started to trust and understand the students and dream possible futures with them. They understood the importance of facilitating students' learning and making sure all students are included. This two year project allowed the PSTs to understand that love is based in pedagogical dialogue, solidarity (commitment to others and commitment to the cause of liberation) and hope (Freire, 1987, 2005). The weekly collaborative meetings created a space where the PSTs could discuss their perceptions about love. It is important to highlight that it was a process that required time (e.g. a two-year project). This process was not a single course, which, according to Philpot (2019), would be insufficient to challenge the PSTs' beliefs regarding issues of social justice, or provoke a desire in PSTs to take action when they are confronted with inequities.

The embodied experiences of oppression

The PSTs' embodied experiences of oppression created a space for them to see themselves in the youth, reconnected with their own identity, and develop empathy. Their experiences of oppression created spaces for them to want to use their positions of privilege as a PST to give back to their communities. These experiences helped them to realize that we all have different opportunities that allow us to contribute to creating more socially just communities. The PSTs came from disempowered positions (e.g. social class and disabilities) which is different from most of the literature in PETE that has assessed predominantly white, middle-class PSTs in Western countries finding most were insufficiently prepared to work with students from diverse backgrounds (Clark, 2019; Philpot, 2019).

In our study, we believed that experiencing this activist approach validated the cultural knowledge the diverse PSTs brought and helped them translate it into a

liberatory pedagogy. The PSTs could affirm their own agency. PSTs benefited from this study by validating their cultural knowledge that they brought and the reflexive process helped them translate it into a liberatory pedagogy (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, 2017).

The PSTs experienced love as sacrifice in their childhood and adolescence. It highlights the danger of love. Vocation and sacrifice emerged in the PSTs narratives. Janaina described the challenge of being committed to the youth and balancing her time with her academic life: 'although I needed to focus on my final paper, I could not leave the kids behind because they needed my presence'. It is important to notice that her strong connection involved sacrifices. The PSTs were driven to become teachers, and for them, teachers should sacrifice themselves. This form of pastoral caring (McCuaig, 2012) represents a romantic love to control people and reaffirms power relationships: a romantic love to control people. According to McCuaig (2012), care in PE focuses on 'the softening of formal boundaries between the teacher and students' (864). It could be considered a romantic caring relationship which can serve patriarchal interests, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and engaging teachers and students with false universalisations (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McCuaig, 2012; Roberts, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, 2017). Emphasis on a non-critical love in PE and sport pedagogy may serve to camouflage the requirements of justice and equality (McCuaig, 2012).

Future directions

In terms of future directions, we raise the question: can love only operate for people living in socially vulnerable areas? In terms of the context, we identified that this pedagogy worked with youth and PSTs from socially vulnerable communities, creating

spaces for developing dialogue, solidarity, hope and imagination. However, we believe that the idea of pedagogy of love could be translate to other contexts. It is a pedagogy that aim to create spaces for empowerment by naming, critiquing and challenging/negotiating (micro transformation) different forms of oppression. In that sense, this pedagogy could be applied in other contexts where teachers aimed to repeatedly challenge inequities through micro transformation: small steps toward changing oppressive practices. We affirm Cook-Sather's (2002: 6) line of thought that we must be willing to 'take small steps toward changing oppressive practices even if complete change seems or is unattainable'. Such a pedagogy creates levels of agency and freedom. Future studies could explore this pedagogy in other contexts, creating spaces for youth and teachers to challenge the racism, sexism, class exploitation, and linguicism in their communities. We also believe that intersectionality should be considered in order to understand the complex forms of combined oppression that permeate different levels of PE and sport pedagogy (Felis-Anaya et al., 2018). This would require critical theoretical frameworks that retain the emancipatory aims of critical pedagogy, but apply their critique to social structures beyond capitalist theory, such as post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonial theory, and queer theory (Philpot, 2016a).

We also believe that teachers and PSTs do not have to come from a disempowered position to be able to deliver this kind of pedagogy. They need to develop attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to become competent in catering to linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students. This requires them to examine their own values and assumptions about working with youth who are different from them, recognizing their own privileges (Luguetti and Oliver, 2019). According to Fitzpatrick (2019) this is not a move that most teachers are drawn to make

688 because it is uncomfortable and involves questioning one's own place in social and
689 political hierarchies in order to displace one's own power. It is a process that requires
690 reflexivity in order to develop awareness of micro oppressions that allow for micro
691 transformations. We believe that PETE needs to work on PSTs' reflexivity in order to
692 help them to reflect on experiences of inclusion and exclusion in their lives to become
693 more competent in catering to linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students.

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