The facilitator's role in supporting physical education teachers' empowerment in a professional learning community

Gonçalves, Luiza, Parker, Melissa, Luguetti, Carla and Carbinatto, Michele Viviene (2020) The facilitator's role in supporting physical education teachers' empowerment in a professional learning community. Sport, Education and Society. ISSN 1357-3322

The facilitator's role in supporting physical education teachers' empowerment in a professional learning community

Gonçalves, Luiza Lana

School of Physical Education and Sport, University of Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
University of Sao Paulo, School of Physical Education and Sport, Av. Prof. Melo de Moraes, 65, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, Brasil. Phone: +55(33)991800740
Corresponding author: luizalana@hotmail.com
Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul[1], Faculty of Education, Block 8, Cidade Universitária, Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil.

Parker, Melissa

Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick. Physical Education and Sport Sciences, P-1008, Ireland. Phone: +353 61 234674. Email: missy.parker@ul.ie

Luguetti, Carla

College of Sport and Exercise Science at Victoria University, Australia
Room 135, Building L, Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Ballarat Rd, Footscray VIC 3011, Melbourne, Australia. Phone: +61 3 99195981
Email: Carla.NascimentoLuguetti@vu.edu.au

Carbinatto, Michele

School of Physical Education and Sport, University of Sao Paulo. Department of Sports. Av. Prof. Mello Moraes, 65 - Cidade Universitária, CEP: 05508-030 - São Paulo – SP, Brazil. Phone: +55(11)981069890. Email: mcarbinatto@usp.br

[1] This study was financed in part by the Fundação Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul – UFMS/MEC – Brazil.

The facilitator's role in supporting physical education teachers' empowerment in a professional learning community

Physical education (PE) researchers demonstrate the benefits of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) through the cultivation of professional learning communities (PLCs). Furthermore, this body of research reflects teachers' empowerment as a current concern in the literature about PLCs. Although the importance of teachers' empowerment in PLCs is recognised, there is much to learn about the facilitator's actions to create spaces for empowerment. The purpose of this paper is to explore the facilitator's actions in supporting PE teachers' empowerment in a PLC. Action research framed this project in Brazil. Participants included six PE teachers, a facilitator, and a critical friend. Data sources included daily observations and reflections from weekly meetings with the teachers and the critical friend. Data were analysed using inductive and thematic methods. By engaging a Freirean view as a theoretical framework, it was understood that the teachers needed to empower themselves to survive in their reality, learn in order to be recognised at school, and act to change their micro-context. Accordingly, three themes represented the facilitator's actions to support teachers' empowerment: (a) creating a horizontal relationship with teachers through dialogue; (b) understanding and respecting teachers' learning; and (c) struggling with teachers in their reality as an act of solidarity. These facilitator actions contributed primarily to building a democratic space where the teachers could name, critique, and negotiate the barriers they faced. Although creating spaces for teachers' empowerment provided the opportunity for improving teachers' PE knowledge, these spaces fundamentally supported teachers in seeking better professional conditions, organising themselves as a community, and pursuing social change.

Keywords: dialogue; solidarity; learning communities; continuing professional development; revolutionary leader; progressive teachers

Introduction and theoretical framework

The facilitation process is recognised as central to the accomplishment of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers that intends to

improve the physical education profession (Lawson, Kirk, & MacPhail, 2020), and create spaces for teachers' empowerment (Luguetti, Oliver, & Parker, 2020). CPD has been described as 'all the activities in which teachers engage during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work' (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 3) and the current literature reflects the importance of a transition from the notion of individual and prescriptive teacher development to collaborative CPD. Collaborative CPD refers to programmes where more than two teachers are encouraged to share their learning and mutually support each other (Cordingley et al., 2015). Due to documented improvements reported in global research, professional learning communities (PLCs) have become one of the most used strategies to enhance successful and collaborative CPD (Cordingley et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2014; Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017). Within these PLCs, the facilitator's role is understood as crucial to communities nurturing and evolving (Goodyear & Casey 2015; Hunuk, 2017).

Teacher reflection through inquiry, collective problem solving, and learning in a community (Toole & Louis, 2002) are only a few of the internationally recognised benefits of PLCs to teachers' CPD (Parker & Patton, 2017). Scholars have recognised that PLCs seemed to overcome barriers such as time, location, and cost in teachers' CPD (Armour & Yelling, 2007). Moreover, teachers who participated in a PLC developed a sense of community, a positive view about their professional growth, and shared empowerment (Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017). PLCs have as foundation: (a) the assumption that knowledge is situated in daily experiences and teachers learn better when they reflect critically about their experiences; and (b) the enhancement of teacher and pupil learning (Vangrieken, et al., 2017; Vescio, et al., 2008). It is acknowledged that within PLCs, diverse characteristics might contribute to weakening the collaboration inside communities (Toole & Louis, 2002) and reinforce callous habits

rather than enabling transformative learning (Keay, 2009; Watson, 2014). It is argued however that despite the recognised challenges, PLCs might hold the key to real transformation once change in institutions is initiated by the conscious confrontation of competing values (Kennedy, 2014; Watson, 2014).

Physical education (PE) researchers have investigated characteristics of collaborative CPD through the cultivation of PLCs (Patton, Parker, & Pratt, 2013; Hunuk, 2017). PE CPD is characterised as: (a) based on teachers' needs and interests; (b) understanding learning as a social process; (c) including collaborative opportunities within PLC; (d) ongoing and sustained; (e) viewing teachers as active learners; (f) improving pedagogical skills and content knowledge; (g) facilitated with care; and (h) focused on improving students' outcomes (Armour, Quennerstedt, Chambers, & Makopoulou, 2017; Elliot & Campbell, 2015; Parker & Patton, 2017). Furthermore, the importance of facilitators during teachers' development in a PLC is acknowledged (Poekert, 2011; Goodyear & Casey 2015; Hunuk, 2017).

Facilitators are persons, teachers, teacher educators, or other professionals who mediate PLCs (Hunuk, 2017; Patton, Parker, & Neutzling, 2012; Poekert, 2011). To be effective, facilitators must understand the institutional pressures, cultures, and expectation that separate them from teachers (Fletcher, Beckey, Larsson, & MacPhail 2020). Within the role of facilitation, the importance of understanding teachers' contexts, listening to their voices, enhancing their self-esteem, observing and being observed during their practice, and building a community of teachers are seen as essential for teachers' development (Patton et al., 2012). In PLCs, the presence of a facilitator who dialogues with the teachers, analyses their context with them, and mediates negotiation among members is important, for example, for initiating and maintaining the PLCs (Goodyear & Casey, 2015). In turn, facilitators' perceptions of

106 successful CPD identify the importance of focusing on student learning, considering
107 teachers as learners, and being attentive to teachers' empowerment (Patton & Parker,
108 2014).

109 Teachers' empowerment is a current topic in the literature about PLCs.
110 Investigating a PE teachers' PLC in disadvantaged schools, Tannehill and MacPhail
111 (2017) demonstrated that teachers' empowerment was linked with competency and
112 responsibility for their own growth. Teachers increased their autonomy in teaching and
113 learning, self-efficacy, and their focus on students while they improved their capacity to
114 examine their own teaching practice (Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017). In other studies,
115 teachers felt empowered when they perceived that their work was influencing the
116 context (Atencio, Jess, & Dewar, 2012), they experienced peer acknowledgement and
117 confidence to pursue capacity building (Parker, Patton, Madden, & Sinclair, 2010), and
118 they were able to identity their learning needs and solve their own problems (Parker,
119 Patton, & Tannehill, 2012).

120 Although the importance of teachers' empowerment in PLCs is recognised
121 (Atencio et al., 2012; Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017; Parker et al., 2010), facilitator
122 actions to create spaces for empowerment in PLCs has received less attention. In order
123 to attend to this gap, this study explored the facilitator's actions in supporting PE
124 teachers' empowerment in a PLC. Specifically we sought to answer: What was the role
125 of a facilitator in supporting PE teachers' empowerment within a PLC in one Brazilian
126 school? We employed Freire's conception of teachers' empowerment and a
127 revolutionary leader (Freire 2005a, 2005b) as a possibility for understanding the
128 facilitator's role as social agent in cultivating a PLC.

A Freirean view of teachers' empowerment and a *líder revolucionário* [revolutionary leader]

Paulo Freire was a remarkable Brazilian educator and philosopher who, amongst many insightful proposals for educational arena, contributed to understanding teachers' transformation and change during CPD. He affirmed that teachers' development happens through a judicious analysis of their practice (Freire, 1998, 2005b) and the critical reflection provides teachers with a comprehension about this practice. With an increased consciousness about their reality, teachers should fight for social justice, not in isolation, but collectively. They also should battle for ongoing professional development as their right; a professional development that provides opportunities for living the experiences and tensions of their praxis, and the possibilities to transform it (Freire, 2005b). During the process of development that involves scientific preparation coupled with struggling to overcome social injustice, teachers learn through a dialogical process of reflecting on their practice and acting politically. Dialogue is a social praxis where people share their experiences. It is the encounter of people who, by reflecting and acting, transform their world. It is not only problem-solving, it aims to express the voice of the oppressed as a fundamental condition for human emancipation (Freire, 2005a). As Freire so eloquently stated:

> We must scream loudly that, in addition to the activism of unions, the scientific preparation of teachers, a preparation informed by political clarity, by the capacity of teachers, by the teachers' desire to learn, and by their constant and open curiosity, represents the best political tool in the defence of their interests and their rights. These ingredients represent, in truth, real teacher empowerment. (2005b, pp.14-15)

Freire's statement about teachers' empowerment opens an avenue to argue that the CPD process is not only about knowledge acquisition, but rather it is about reimaging teachers as activist professionals (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Sachs, 2016) or what Freire called 'a progressive teacher'. According to Freire, progressive teachers should act as agents of transformation and dedicate their profession to overcoming social injustice, as they should be transformative of practice and critically conscious. Freire (2005b) led us to understand that while being a progressive teacher is urgent in the educational context, also recognised is the presence of challenges and conflicts such as teachers' fight for their rights as professionals and for public recognition.

Freire (2005a, 2005b) affirmed that teachers have much more than content knowledge to teach, or what he called a banking education. They have to teach their students through their example of fighting for fundamental changes in the education system, against authoritarianism and in favour of democracy. Teaching practice is inherently associated with teachers' interpretations about what is going on in their schools, 'how they understand competing agendas, pose questions, and make decisions; how they form relationships with students; and how they work with colleagues, families, communities and social groups' (Cochran-Smith, 2009, p. 454). Thus, teaching involves teachers understanding about and being activist agents in their context.

The facilitators, or those in charge of education who Freire called leaders, should be *líderes revolucionários* - revolutionary leaders, the person who engages in a critical intervention with people in their reality in order to transform that reality through praxis. They establish permanent dialogue, using this dialogue as a humanization pedagogy (Freire, 2005a). The revolutionary leader does not go *to* the people to bring the knowledge to them, but through dialogue unveils the situation *with* the people. Yet, more than discussing the situation with the people, the revolutionary leader proposes

action *with* them (Freire, 2005a). The leader creates spaces for people to critically perceive the reality that oppresses them, and what becomes the first action to surmount oppression. After this, the second action is to transform reality and to create a new situation (Freire, 2005a). In this sense, facilitators and teachers as leaders and people, act with solidarity.

Solidarity is an act of love that involves humility, hope, trust, and courage. It is where the leader enters into the situation of '*the other*', fighting at their side, understanding and sharing the oppressing situation of those whose voices are silenced (Freire, 2005a). Fighting beside teachers also encompasses the facilitator's or leader's consistency between words and deeds; boldness to confront permanent risks; radicalization to increase their action; faith in the teachers; and the courage of love (Freire, 2005a).

Methods

This research was part of a larger action research project that cultivated a PLC with PE teachers in Brazil. The underlying premise of action research in education hinges on strategic actions to improve teachers' practice, through a spiral cycle of planning-acting-observing-reflecting, involving those responsible for the practice (Carr & Kemmis, 2004; Freire, 2005a). Action research was chosen for this project as it creates spaces for changes in individuals and groups by understanding teachers' practices and the situation in which they live (Carr & Kemmis, 2004) while allowing teachers and facilitators to address grand challenge of meeting the needs of teachers *together* (Fletcher et al., 2020). Such research is a process that involves dialogue, critical reflection, and action in and about people's situation(s); it is participants' praxis in the cause of their reality (Freire, 2005a).

Context

In Brazil, teachers are paid less than other professionals with the same degree level, and they are in a group of professionals who receive the lowest salaries in the country. Almost half of the teachers in the country are without teaching contracts and are not permanent teachers, which further limits their work rights, salaries, and stability (Gatti, Barreto & André, 2011). Full-time schools are seen as one way to reduce education inequities and increase the quality of public education systems. Those schools extend school time from four to seven hours or more per day, and affect approximately 15.5% of students in the country[2] (Brasil, 2010).

This study took place in one full-time public school in Governador Valadares, Brazil. The city is located in south-eastern Brazil and it is classified as one of the most violent cities in the country for young people, being ranked 62nd (among 5570 Brazilian cities) in terms of youth vulnerability in the country (Brasil, 2015). The school was built in 2014 and initially, it was focused on youth sport training. In 2018, although the youth sports training project had finished, the teachers continued working in this school and using the sports facilities, even without pedagogical and financial support from the municipal administration. Currently, the school accommodates almost 700 students aged 9 to 14 years old.

Participants

[2] According to 'Observatório do Plano Nacional de Educação' (Observatory of National Education Plan). Data from 2017, see https://www.observatoriodopne.org.br/indicadores/metas/6-educacao-integral/indicadores

Participants included six PE teachers (see Table 1), a facilitator (pseudonym Laura[3] – lead author), and a critical friend (pseudonym Mary – second author). Four of these teachers had been teaching together in this school for five years. Ethical approval for this study was received from the Ethics Committee of the first authors' university (number 2.441.430). All teachers signed letters of informed consent.

[Insert Table 1 near here]

During the course of this project, the facilitator's positionality changed. Although she began as an outsider with the group, she transitioned to an insider position as the project progressed. Laura was 33 years old when this project began. She is a PE teacher educator in Brazil who investigated teachers' development in this city beginning with her Master's degree. Laura had been a PE teacher in a municipal school earlier in her career. In addition, she already knew these teachers and this school since she is from the same city and completed her undergraduate degree at the same university as most of the teachers. Moreover, she knew this school because she had previously coordinated a course there. This proximity facilitated Laura's access to the school and after talking with the municipal coordinator, the principal and the teachers, it was agreed to have her on school site for a year to work with the PE teachers. Laura was supported by her critical friend, Mary.

Mary is a Canadian teacher educator who had worked for over 35 years in universities in both the United States and Ireland. She had been working with teachers' professional development since 1976, and specifically with PLCs since 2010, when she

[3] Names were changed at this early version to preserve the peer review integrity.

was researching this phenomenon in different contexts and countries. Mary helped Laura with the weekly analysis of her observations at the school. She acted as a critical friend who was constantly challenging Laura to see the phenomenon through another lens, analysing the situation from the teachers' perspective.

A critical friend is a person who, although does not know the context of action, provokes their friend with questions, provides other data analysis options, and offers critiques of the friend's work (Costa & Kallick, 1993). Being a capable reflective practioner, this person creates spaces for supporting their colleague and negotiating shared understandings (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009). The critical friend is an outsider of the group, who helps people act more prudently and critically during the research and to move toward transforming reality (Carr & Kemmis, 2004). The critical friend and facilitator – in this case, built an honest relationship based on truth and commitment with the cause (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009; Costa & Kallick, 1993).

Data gathering and design

This action research took place over one academic year (2018). In terms of design, for one semester Laura was embedded in the school on a full-time basis. The cycle of action research occurred according to the following design: every Tuesday the PLC met to plan PE decisions and discuss teachers' learning. During the week, the PLC acted and observed the decisions previously made and teachers brought these observations to the next Tuesday meeting. On Fridays, Laura discussed critical incidents with Mary, which served as a debriefing session and allowed reflective planning for the upcoming days. During the second semester, Laura was not based in the school, but the group maintained the weekly meetings by Skype and Laura maintained weekly meetings with Mary.

In the first six weeks of the research, Laura acted as a participant observer (Patton, 2002). During this time, she observed teachers' interactions with each other, with the administration, and with teachers outside of PE. Laura observed their behaviour during their classes, engaged with the school problems and, in short, became part of their daily routine. After this period, she became the group's facilitator. Laura helped teachers with their daily routine, which involved collective decisions, tasks, and discussions. She mediated negotiations between the teachers and the administrative staff regarding events and teachers' requests. Depending on the teachers' needs, Laura also organised different activities with them, which included workshops, learning experiences, and projects.

The larger project, that encompassed the current one, included multiple data sources: meetings with the teachers; researchers' meeting; individual teachers' interviews; field notes generated by the facilitator's observations; social media records; and the artefacts that the PLC produced. Although all data helped to compose the larger research project, for this present paper we used the weekly meetings with the teachers and the critical friend, and the field notes as primary data sources.

Weekly Meetings

Two types of meetings were data sources. The weekly meetings with the PE teachers (21 in total), which happened in the scheduled period reserved for teachers' extra class work. The researchers' meetings, which occurred by *Skype* each Friday (26 in total) and were recorded and transcribed verbatim in English, while the teachers' meetings were recorded and transcribed in Portuguese (total of 555 pages).

Field notes

Field notes were recorded by the facilitator throughout the project (65 entries - total of 141 pages). There were two types of field notes guided by the questions: What are the teachers' actions in this PLC? and What are the facilitator's actions while supporting them? The first type of field notes registered teachers' routines; school context, and teachers' interactions, behaviours, and lessons taught. The second was a researcher' journal, where the facilitator's concerns, impressions, thoughts, and decisions were reported.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Data analysis

Data analysis involved inductive and iterative analysis using thematic analysis methods (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). Through the interaction between data and researcher interpretation, inductive analysis of the data constructed themes (Patton, 2002). The analysis was accomplished in several steps. First, meetings between Mary and Laura were read by both of them separately, and they made comments in the margins about issues that they had discussed. These notes were general ideas about future possible codes. Next, Mary and Laura coded interesting data extracts with labels that they could identify with their understanding about the meaning. Following that, they read other data sources, mainly the field notes and transcripts of meetings with teachers from the same week as the researchers' meeting under analysis, to understand if the codes made sense. Mary and Laura then went back to each researchers' meeting and confirmed or changed the codes. They repeated this process with each researchers' meeting, and finally, Mary and Laura grouped the codes into themes that responded to the research question (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 near here]

Trustworthiness

To attend to the research question of this study, different trustworthiness criteria were adopted: triangulation of the data sources, prolonged engagement, presence of the critical friend and member checking. Triangulation of the data sources was intended to describe the phenomena through different perspectives, and the prolonged engagement from the researcher's immersion in the field (Cho & Trent, 2006). The presence of the critical friend encouraged researcher reflexivity and challenged data interpretation (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Member checking occurred when each week the facilitator gave back the community's previous reflection through drawn schematics and checked with the teachers about the themes discussed. It was a reflective process, generating insights and checking contradictions (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Results

Three themes represent the facilitator's actions in supporting PE teachers' empowerment: first, creating a horizontal relationship with the teachers through dialogue; second, respecting the teachers' learning; and finally, struggling with the teachers in their harsh reality as an act of solidarity.

Creating a horizontal relationship with the teachers through dialogue

Public schools in Brazil face structural challenges that influence CPD actions. At the beginning of the academic year, there was a lack of sport equipment, shortage of teachers, and an ineffective teaching schedule. Laura's field notes indicated, 'The teachers have assumed many roles inside the school, but the situation is chaotic' (Field

notes 6). On several occasions, because of the shortage of teachers, the students left school early or simply went to the football field and stayed there with the PE teachers acting as supervisors. When Laura arrived at the school, however, she was assertive in relation to what she should do *for* the teachers. She wanted to organise meetings, build the curriculum of the school, and provide the teachers with PE content knowledge. During a meeting with her critical friend, she reflected on her actions:

> Laura: I am doing an agenda [for] the first meeting, I will send it to you, and you could help me. What do you think?
>
> Mary: Do they want an agenda? Did they ask you to do this? Does their meeting generally have this agenda? I would be careful of making it too formal. […]
>
> Laura: In truth, the teachers told me in interviews, they want meetings organised, you know? They want to do a meeting in a meeting room. They want an agenda; they want… but I understand what you said.
>
> Mary: Where is the median, where is the compromise? Here is an agenda, but not so formal […]. Let's talk about these things. Where we start, where we will go with this. (Researchers' meeting 5)

Although Laura was acting with good intentions from the start, it was not what teachers needed. Laura had to learn to construct a horizontal relationship through dialogue and open a democratic space that placed the teachers at the centre in order to understand them. Her first action was to be accepted by the teachers. Laura described: 'Rodrigo asked me what I was doing there, what I was researching. If I was observing the students or them [the teachers]' (Field notes 2). Thus, Laura had to deconstruct teachers' perceptions of her as someone who came from a university environment to tell them how they should teach. She dedicated herself to showing the teachers the equal relationship that she desired to create with them.

Initially, Laura addressed the teachers' needs by joining with them in completing their daily obligations. Together, the group structured the PE space so that the teachers were able to teach. They cleaned the equipment room and pool, and organised PE equipment. However basic, these small actions helped the teachers to feel secure enough in the school to achieve their work. They needed to survive their harsh reality and Laura was there to support them in doing this. They appreciated that they had been listened to and that they were then part of the re-building process.

> Mary: So, you know that what you are telling me Laura is that the time you spent in school in the last 3 weeks has paid off. Because they trust you, and you made it a social situation. Even if you were getting materials or you were doing other things. It was not like real meetings, it was an informal kind of environment, an easy environment to talk, because you are doing things at the same time. It is like having many people in your kitchen and you make food and talk at the same time. That is what you did there. It happened maybe by chance, but it happened, and it was very good. That is the start.
>
> Laura: And I think the teachers recognised it, because in the end the teachers talked, 'Okay, now we have a meeting, now we start something'. They repeated many times, 'All meetings have to happen like this…' (Researchers' meeting 5)

The facilitator also helped the teachers during their classes and built a social relationship with them. They had lunch together and talked about their personal struggles. In the end, the teachers understood that Laura was not there to control or supervise them. Vitor said 'Laura is here just like a midfielder player, only receiving the ball and passing it' (Teachers' meeting 8). It became clear that she helped them to create democratic spaces of dialogue.

Laura learned how to put the teachers at the centre of the process by truly listening to them. Mary however had to help Laura understand how important it was to let the willingness to change come from the teachers and not from her. The community learned together that there were more urgent things, such as solving daily problems, improving their work, and learning together, than developing a PE curriculum, Laura's initial idea. When a democratic space was created and the teachers had an equal opportunity to talk, they led the facilitator to understand what was important for them; their comments included:

> You contacted the group to know more about us. Pedro and Simone said that everybody here was so sad, so worried […]. We arrived and you asked us. Then we just let off steam about our situation. (Vitor, Teachers' meeting 21)

It was through this dialogue that the facilitator and teachers learned and grew by understanding their differences (Freire, 1998). Laura came from university, but was open to live the teachers' lives and listen to their voices. The teachers accepted her by understanding her intention of transforming the community in a democratic space (Freire, 1998). The democratic spaces created, contributed to improving teachers' empowerment to face their challenges and learn together.

Understanding and respecting the teachers

Laura had to learn to respect the teachers' context, which involved the learning pace of the PLC, including how teachers learned best and the teachers' motivations to do it. Due to the teachers' difficult conditions, their learning pace was different than the inexperienced facilitator thought it should be. Laura had to learn to respect that the teachers' concerns were not always related to PE content knowledge, but instead, about how to survive in the harsh reality of the school. Pedro reflected 'You asked: "how do

you believe that the meeting should progress?" Then I answered: "You should give us a time to cry about the week". And we are always doing it here' (Teachers' meeting 9). She was creating safe spaces, where teachers could take risks, spaces that later became discursive learning spaces.

At another point, Laura should have understood how teachers learned better. During the first workshop that she conducted with the teachers, Laura brought academic texts for the teachers' discussion. André first reacted, 'Oh my God, do I have to read all this?' (Teachers' meeting 6). Mary had advised Laura beforehand about this situation, but she had to live those experiences to understand the teachers' situation:

Mary: It is like school for them. They do not want that. They may get it later, but not now.

Laura: Yes, I understood. I put the entire text on the *WhastApp* group and some pictures of the meeting, but nobody said anything yet. But it is okay, if someone wants to see the text and their photos, they are there.

Mary: So, did you change the reading for the next meeting? Good, it is okay. (Researchers' meeting 11)

By knowing the teachers better, the facilitator started to believe in the teachers' capacity for building something that was important to them, and moreover, their ability to learn and transform their reality. For example, when the research project started, the teachers were facing a problem regarding lack of recognition inside the school. Then Laura asked: 'Why do classroom teachers want to punish children by removing them from PE classes?' and 'How can we make PE something that is recognised and respected in this school?' (Teachers' meeting 1) that generated a group discussion.

Repeatedly, Laura used this strategy: pose questions, encourage teachers to talk, and choose where they would like to go with the idea. She took notes about their

discussion, organised their ideas, and afterwards, brought the content back to them. This process produced another discussion by the group. It generated the teachers' reflections and self-recognition. As Simone said, 'I am thinking about things I did not think anymore […] Because of it, sometimes we have to come back and study, because even we do not recognise what we do every day' (Teachers' meeting 2). The teachers lacked the opportunity of discussing and reflecting, and they began to feel recognised when they had the chance to engage like this.

These opportunities generated an autonomous way of thinking about PE. In their meetings, teachers began to reflect on their own practice and relocate themselves in the school. They understood that investing in their work was also a way to be recognised. Following these understandings, the PLC developed workshops about PE approaches, teachers organised a lesson structure and invested in learning new teaching strategies. Jair pointed out, 'during the observation of Rodrigo's class, I can learn many things that work for Vitor, for Simone, but I have never thought about it. So, it is professional learning, and it is in practice' (Teachers' meeting 4). They were thinking autonomously how to improve their teaching and learning and the willingness to learn had come from them.

Struggling with the teachers in their hard reality as an act of solidarity

Laura became part of the group, learning and developing with the teachers. Yet similar to the teachers, she had 'ups and downs'. It was not an easy task to create this democratic space and put it into practice. Laura had to learn how to respect the teachers and act with solidarity with the PLC, which would make her part of them.

During the project, Laura learned by experimenting with the balance between pushing teachers' learning while giving them space to develop. When the teachers

complained incessantly about school life, she acted more directly, reminding them of the community's trajectory and target. Other days she apologised and showed understanding for their complex lives. Laura recounted:

> We have millions of problems. […] This is a teacher's life. Either you make your life hell and look only at the problems, or you think about doing something. What I proposed was to make something with you… we should think of solutions. I think we are progressing. (Teachers' meeting 11)

Laura acted according to her feelings. She was open to the group changes and was assertive about the group direction. However, she felt insecure, lost, and at other times, desperate. In speaking with Mary, she indicated: 'I am in this vacuum with the teachers', and Mary highlighted 'Yes, I liked the piece of the lecturer's letter where it said "in that moment I realised that Laura is part of the group, she is an insider hoping for change"' (Researchers' meeting 12). The facilitator was constantly worried about the teachers' situation, then she acted with solidarity and lived the struggles with them. She wrote about her personal journey:

> I am afraid about going to Ireland in July. I would like to spend more time here at the school. On the other hand, I know it is important to my Ph.D. The things at the school are so slow. In addition, we faced the truckers' strike, so the lecturer came to the city but could not offer the workshop. There was a sequence of events that left me worried about getting out of the school earlier. I will talk to Mary and analyse the best decision. (Researcher's journal May, 2018)

Acting with solidarity also contributed to creating democratic spaces for teachers' empowerment. The teachers were acting as an independent group and being voice of resistance in the school. In their last meeting, the teachers analysed the benefits and problems of being this resistance voice:

Pedro: I feel the strength we have when they [administrative staff] ask us simple daily things. They are thinking twice before asking something [of] us, before saying something, before imposing something on us. Now they know there is resistance on the other side.

Laura: Yes, I agree. We do not need to be waiting for someone. As a group, you know how to organise yourselves. You know your needs and you are able to walk by yourselves.

Vitor: But I think this is the problem. Our independence. They do not want autonomous people here.

Simone: Nobody wants it. They want us like that: 'if you want me to stand up, I stand up. If you want me to sit down, I sit down'.

Laura: But… is everything okay in being an autonomous person? Is everything okay in being the resistance voice?

Vitor: For me, it is okay… I want more than that!

Simone: [shook her head in neutral signal]

Pedro: I will say the same thing as Vitor. It is the most important moment… maybe it is not a bad side… maybe it is the correct side. […] Sometimes we are very worried about doing this or doing that… For example, when I had the opportunity to be the opposition voice here, saying what I was thinking about, I did it. I think, when you hide yourself it is easier for the person exploiting you. (Teachers' meeting 22)

The teachers started to act to change their reality. They organised themselves to attend workshops out of school, they conducted a raffle to collect money to clean the swimming pool, and they added their voices to school discussions. They also recognised the top-down actions by which the school overwhelmed them, and they no longer

accepted this situation. For example, Simone was able to analyse the big picture of Brazilian education, and the teachers' context as well:

> If the federal and municipal education system was not responsible for us, the administration of the school should support us a little bit. Then, do we have to stand here just listening to the Coordinator's complaining? As if we did not make anything. As if we did not know anything. Is she [coordinator] the owner of the knowledge?' (Simone, Teachers' meeting 22)

Laura was listening to the teachers, and she also shared their concerns. She recognised that they had experienced abandonment many times during their professional lives, as André confirmed: 'The only school where we have the chance to speak and discuss is here. In other schools, PE teachers are nothing, we do not have a voice' (Teachers' meeting 12). Therefore, Laura could not abandon them; she was one of them. She lived their struggles; she knew of their struggles relevance and she acted to help teachers help themselves. Furthermore, the teachers recognised these actions as her most important facilitator attribute. Pedro summarised:

> We have to say thank you. It is not because we are in front of you, but many times we talked about your commitment with us, your willingness to help us. It helped us so much, helped us to be stronger. (Pedro, teachers' meeting 21)

In a sense of togetherness, the facilitator assumed the posture of struggling with the teachers to face the social barriers that surrounded their lives. Together, they created a community and empowered themselves to try to transform various forms of oppression they lived (Freire, 2005a).

Discussion and conclusion

This research explored the actions of a facilitator in supporting PE teachers' empowerment in a PLC. This study extends what is known about teachers'

empowerment in PLC (Atencio et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2010; Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017), by exploring the facilitator's actions to create spaces for empowerment. Based on a Freirean view of teachers' empowerment and of revolutionary leaders, we suggest that empowerment entails the fight for teachers' interests and rights against social injustices.

We recognise that there may be other factors not investigated which influence teachers' empowerment, such as teachers' political context and their history in the school. We noticed however that teachers' empowerment and facilitators' actions, instead of occurring in a cause-effect process, happened in parallel tracks. On one hand, teachers needed to survive in their reality, to learn in order to be recognised, and to act to change their micro context. On the other hand, the facilitator acted to create spaces and support teachers through dialogue, respect, and solidarity. We discuss the findings of this investigation in three ways: (a) acting through dialogue when teachers needed to survive; (b) acting with respect when teachers decided to learn; and (c) acting with solidarity when the community needed to fight against social injustices.

Acting through dialogue when teachers needed to survive

Freire (2005a) argued that the role of oppressed people is to liberate the oppressor. It seems there was a reciprocal liberation in the PLC's development. While Laura was helping teachers liberate themselves, the teachers were liberating her from an oppressor position. Before this project started, her intention was to go to the school and explain to the teachers the best way to teach PE. Laura's motivations did not however match the teachers' needs. In the harsh reality within which they were immersed, teachers needed to empower themselves to survive. In this context, Laura's knowledge and her willingness to change their context *for* them were not enough.

Through the process of living with them, studying the facilitation literature, understanding Freire's ideas about democratic education and, with the support of a critical friend, Laura became the person who understood the difference between building *with* the teachers instead of *for* them (Freire, 2005a, 2005b). She learned to act through dialogue, developing a horizontal relationship with the teachers and creating democratic spaces for their empowerment. Teachers felt supported, heard and secure to keep fighting to survive.

Acting with respect when teachers decided to learn

Teachers were empowered to keep learning, which would enable their recognition in the school. Although, Laura had the knowledge to help the teachers, she had to learn how to respect teachers' needs, pace, and ways of learning. This research emphasised that, regardless of a teacher's precarity, before any teacher is able to change their practice, their needs must be addressed. As Freire (2005b) pointed out, the first step in organising a CPD program is to understand teachers' reality and base the program on this reality. Understanding this necessity was a difficult task for her, since Laura came from the university environment with different contextual and cultural norms (Fletcher et al., 2020), and tended to force university pacing on the school. It took a long time to respect teachers' precarious situation and its impact on their learning.

The facilitator's learning process has been examined by previous studies (Hunuk, 2017; Luguetti et al., 2020). In this context, we emphasised that if the teachers were empowered to learn, to become the revolutionary leader that they needed, required Laura to learn how to structure the PLC, to create spaces for the members' learning, and to respect them as subjects, trusting in them (Freire, 2005a, 2005b). Accordingly, a

facilitator needs to be an educator who has genuine humility and is not afraid of revealing his/her own ignorance (Freire, 2005a). The person in charge of education (in this case the facilitator) is being formed or reformed as he/she teaches, and the person who is being taught forms him/herself in this process. In this sense, being a facilitator is not about transferring knowledge, it is about creating possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge (Freire, 2005a)**.**

Acting with solidarity when the community needed to fight against social injustices

In this research, teachers began to themselves to operate as progressive teachers (Freire, 2005b). They fought for their right to be heard and their interest to keep teaching and learning. In the same way, the facilitator was becoming a leader who was struggling together with the teachers in their reality. As well as the teachers, Laura was an insider hoping for change. Without noticing, she acted in solidarity with them and their conditions, fighting on their side. In the same way, the critical friend acted with solidarity, struggling with the facilitator throughout her transformative learning. It takes time for a critical friend to understand the context of the people supported and to be able to consider their needs and desires (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Barkville & Goldbaltt, 2009). In this research, Mary did not know how to deal with that precarious reality, but she acted with humility and respect and was open to learning the community's context in order to support Laura through her situation. Often, teachers are oppressed people who are not aware of their reality, and then they reproduce the social condition in which they are immersed (e.g., see Lavoura & Neves, 2019). Though, as an oppressed people, they have the task of fighting for authentic liberation. The facilitator and the critical friend joined the struggles *with* teachers in order to surmount their conditions, acting with courage and faith in the teachers as well as love (Freire, 2005a).

In this movement for change, the facilitators, or the revolutionary leaders, according to Freire, have an important role. In this project, instead of reinforcing old habits in school, the facilitator's role was to support the PLC to achieve social transformation at a micro level, enabling transformative teachers' learning (Keay, 2009; Watson, 2014). The facilitator created spaces for teachers' empowerment through dialogue, respect, and solidarity. Creating spaces for teachers' empowerment gave them the opportunity to improve their PE content knowledge, capacity building (Parker et al., 2010), and autonomous teaching/learning (Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017). This present study however adds that being empowered and acting as a progressive teacher encompasses more than being independent and autonomous to drive one's learning of content knowledge. It also demands teachers' empowerment to survive, to learn, and to act. Through these processes, teachers fight for better professional conditions and reflect on their development by organising themselves as a community, conscientious of social change (Freire, 1998, 2005a). Moreover, it was understood that the teachers were living the experience while understanding and reflecting on it. This discussion opens an avenue to understand in future studies teachers' praxis (Freire, 2005a) and their embodied knowledge (Craig et al., 2018) in a movement for social change.

Additionally, whereas the importance of facilitators in collaborative CPD with PLCs has been recognised (Parker et al., 2010; Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017), and the effectiveness of CPD has been associated with student learning (Parker & Patton, 2017), the present study adds another dimension to this understanding. When addressing the complexities of being a democratic facilitator in a socially vulnerable situation such as in Brazil, it was obvious that underlying needs must be addressed before focusing on other concerns that could include student learning. These teachers faced difficult conditions and harsh realities in their professional lives. Thus, they needed to empower

themselves to change their context. As a result, the facilitator's actions primarily contributed to building a democratic space where the teachers' community could name, critique and negotiate the barriers they faced.

The facilitator's role in supporting PE teachers' development offers a unique perspective in PLC studies. It extends the body of knowledge in the area by demonstrating the experience of how a democratic facilitation process can be developed in order to create spaces for teachers' empowerment. It was understood that is essential to support teachers while they collectively struggle for their rights and urgent that teachers act to defend their rights for better conditions in their pedagogical work (Freire, 2005b). Additionally, it is crucial to understand that dealing with such action for social justice, seems a pre-condition to focusing on students' learning. In this way, future studies might investigate the situations of teachers and how the process of education might result in changes in teachers' work conditions.

REFERENCES

Armour, K., Quennerstedt, M., Chambers, F., & Makopoulou, K. (2017) What is 'effective' CPD for contemporary physical education teachers? A Deweyan framework, *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(7), 799-811.

Armour, K. M., & Yelling, M. (2007). Effective Professional Development for Physical Education Teachers: The Role of Informal, Collaborative Learning. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 26, 177–200.

Attencio, M., Jess, M., & Dewar, K. (2012). It is a case of changing your thought processes, the way you actually teach. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 17(2), 127–144.

Baskerville, D., & Goldblatt, H. (2009) Learning to be a critical friend: from professional indifference through challenge to unguarded conversations, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 205-221.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A.C. Sparke, *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* (pp. 191-206). New York, NY/London, UK: Routledge.

Brasil. (2010) Decreto – lei nº 7.083, de 27 de janeiro de 2010. Dispõe sobre o Programa Mais Educação [Law n. 7083, January 27th 2010. About More Education Program]. *Diário Oficial [da] República Federativa do Brasil*. Brasília, DF: MEC.

Brasil. (2015). *Índice de vulnerabilidade juvenil à violência e desigualdade racial 2014* [Youth vulnerability index related to violence and race inequaliy]. Brasília, BR: Presidência da República.

Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (2004). *Becoming critical: education, knowledge and action research*. New York, NY/London, UK: Routledge.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2009). Toward a Theory of Teacher Education for Social Justice. In A. Hargreaves, el al. (Eds). *Second International Handbook of Educational Change* (pp. 445-467). London, UK: Springer.

Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., … Coe, R. (2015). *Developing Great Teaching: lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development*. Teacher Development Trust.

Costa, A., & Kallick, B. (1993). Through the lens of a critical friend. *Educational Leadership, 51*(2), 49–51.

Craig, C. J., You, J. A., Zou, Y., Verma, R., Stokes, D., Evans, P., & Curtis, G. (2018). The embodied nature of narrative knowledge: A cross-study analysis of embodied knowledge in teaching, learning, and life. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 71*, 329–340.

Day, C., & Sachs, J. (2004). Professionalism, performativity and empowerment: discourses in the politics, polices and purposes as CPD. In Day, C., & Sachs, J. (Eds), *International handbook on the CPD of teachers* (pp. 3-32). UK: Open University Press.

Elliot, D. L., & Campbell, T. (2015). 'Really on the ball': exploring the implications of teachers' PE-CPD experience, *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(3), 381-397.

Fletcher, T., Beckey, A., Larsson, H., & MacPhail, A. The research and development challenge. In A. MacPhail, & H. A. Lawson, *School physical education and teacher education: Collaborative redesign for the twenty-first century*, (pp. 141-152). New York, NY/London, UK: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Freire, P. (2005a). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th ed.). New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (2005b). *Teachers as cultural workers: letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

Gatti, B. A., Barreto, E. S. de S., & André, M. E. D. de A. (2011). *Políticas docentes no Brasil: um estado da arte* [Teachers policies in Brazil: a state of art]. Brasília, Br: UNESCO.

Goodyear, V. A., & Casey, A. (2015). Innovation with change: developing a community of practice to help teachers move beyond the 'honeymoon' of pedagogical renovation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *20*(2), 186–203.

Hunuk, D. (2017). A physical education teacher's journey: from district coordinator to facilitator. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 22(3), 301-315.

Keay, J. (2009). Being influenced or being an influence: New teachers' induction experiences. *European Physical Education Review, 15*(2), 225–247.

Kennedy, A. (2014). Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice. *Professional Development in Education, 40*(5), 688–697.

Lavoura, T. N., & Neves, R. (2019). The educational purposes of Physical Education - curricular dialogues between Brazil and Portugal. *Motriz: Revista de Educação Física*, *25*(2), e101991.

Lawson, H. A., Kirk, D., & MacPhail, A. (2020). The professional development challenge: achieving desirable outcomes for students, teachers and teacher educators. In A. MacPhail, & H. A. Lawson, *School physical education and teacher education: Collaborative redesign for the twenty-first century*, (pp. 141-152). New York, NY/London, UK: Routledge.

Luguetti, C.N., Oliver, K., & Parker, M.A. (2020). Facilitation as an Act of Love: A self-study of how a facilitator's pedagogy changed over time in the process of supporting a community of learners. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education,* 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2019-0193

Parker, M., and K. Patton. (2017). What research tells us about effective continuing professional development for physical education teachers. In C.E. Ennis, *Routledge Handbook of Physical Education Pedagogies,* (pp. 447-460). New York, NY/London, UK: Routledge.

743 Parker, M., Patton, K., & Tannehill, D. (2012). Mapping the landscape of communities
744 of practice as professional development in Irish physical education. *Irish*
745 *Educational Studies*, *31*(3), 311–327.
746 Parker, M., Patton, K., Madden, M., & Sinclair, C. (2010). From Committee to
747 Community : The Development and Maintenance of a Community of Practice.
748 *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *29*, 337–357.
749 Patton, K., & Parker, M. (2014). Moving from 'things to do on Monday' to student
750 learning: physical education professional development facilitators' views of
751 success. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *19*(1), 60–75.
752 Patton, K., Parker, M., & Neutzling, M. M. (2012). Tennis shoes required: the role of
753 the facilitator in professional development. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and*
754 *Sport*, *83*(4), 522–532.
755 Patton, K., Parker, M., & Pratt, E. (2013). Meaningful Learning in Professional
756 Development: Teaching Without Telling. *Journal of Teaching in Physical*
757 *Education*, *32*, 441–459.
758 Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.) USA:
759 SAGE.
760 Poekert, P. (2011). The pedagogy of facilitation: Teacher inquiry as professional
761 development in a Florida elementary school. *Professional Development in*
762 *Education*, *37*(1), 19–38.
763 Sachs, J. (2016). Teacher professionalism: Why are we still talking about it? *Teachers*
764 *and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 22(4), 413–425.
765 Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research:
766 problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International*
767 *Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *11*(1), 101–121.

Tannehill, D., & MacPhail, A. (2017). Teacher empowerment through engagement in a learning community in Ireland: working across disadvantaged schools. *Professional Development in Education*, *43*(3).

Toole, J. C., & Louis, K. S. (2002). The Role of Professional Learning Communities in International Education. In P. Leithwood, K. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* (8th ed., pp. 245–280). Springer.

Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher Communities as a Context for Professional Development: A Systematic Review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 47-59.

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*(1), 80–91.

Watson, C. (2014). Effective Professional Learning Communities? The Possibilities for Teachers as Agents of Change in Schools. *British Educational Research Journal* 40 (1), 18–29.