

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

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25 **one day': exploring pre-service teachers' perceptions of love for youth from**  
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27 **Abstract**

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

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

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

53

## 54 **Introduction**

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

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

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

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

76 In this study, we draw specifically on Paulo Freire's concept of love (Darder,  
77 2002; Freire, 1987, 2005) to explore pre-service teachers (PSTs)' changing perceptions  
78 of love as they worked in an activist sport project with youth from socially vulnerable  
79 backgrounds. Although we acknowledge the ethic of care body of research in education  
80 and physical education, we agree with hooks (2001) that care is an ingredient of love. As  
81 she described, 'care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean that we  
82 are loving' (hooks 2001: 22). Love is both an intention and an action, which means that  
83 what constitutes loving acts depends on the other and the context (Lanas and Zembylas,  
84 2015). We argue for a love that has a sociologically-informed theory and serves as a moral  
85 basis for concrete individual and collective actions towards transformation. We aim to  
86 extend to the PETE field the work of a number of education scholars in recent years who  
87 have attempted to investigate love in critical education (Chabot, 2008; Freire, 2005;  
88 hooks, 2001; Lanas and Zembylas, 2015; Zembylas, 2017), arguing that love can  
89 constitute an important pedagogical intervention in struggles against unjust social and  
90 educational structures.

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

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

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

110

#### 111 *Freirean concept of love: a decolonizing love*

112 While all forms of love are possible, it is necessary to critique some of the dominants  
113 forms of love in education and physical education. First, it is necessary to challenge the  
114 idea that love equates to sacrifice and vocation. Based on the Catholic notion, it is argued  
115 that love requires sacrifices, giving up something; it is also connected with the idea of  
116 vocation: a calling from god (Freire, 2005). Second, it is important to recognize the danger  
117 of considering an alienated and romantic love. In that perspective, teachers have been  
118 incited to constitute themselves as agents of pastoral power (McCuaig and Tinning,  
119 2010). The 'good' teacher is considered to be the one that offers the Christian pastoral  
120 caring. This understanding of love could reaffirm power relations, camouflaging ways of

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

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

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

138 For Freire, love requires a commitment to dialogue and the capacity to take risks  
139 for the benefit of those we teach and for ourselves. One of the risks we must take as  
140 pedagogues is to 'relinquish oppressive practices in the classroom, such as the banking  
141 system of education, in which students are treated like empty receptacles' (Ty-ron and  
142 Ngangta, 2015: 33). Love demands that we utilize dialogue as a means of subverting  
143 dominant positionalities, since [love] 'cannot exist in a relation of domination' (Freire,  
144 1987: 89). In that perspective, it is a political and radicalized form of love that is never  
145 about 'absolute consensus, or unconditional acceptance, or unceasing words of sweetness,

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

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

161 According to Freire (2005), love is also connected to the hope necessary to  
162 persevere despite barriers. Freire defines hope as central to the transformative experience  
163 of education. Freire (2005: 2) takes this even further to argue that 'hope is an ontological  
164 need' because without it, our activism dies, as we can imagine nothing better than what  
165 we see before us. To enact transformation, hope is a necessary ingredient and its opposite,  
166 despair, leaves no room for activism or movement because of the sense of the  
167 overwhelming power of the obstacles in our way as educators (Daniels, 2012; Greene,  
168 1995). Hope creates room for movement, for possibilities to create different outcomes,  
169 whereas despair simply shuts them down. In a pedagogy of love, teachers should stimulate  
170 creativity and imagination in their students as well as the capacity to better critique

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

177

178 *The activist sport approach and the emergence of love*

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

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



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

197 [Insert Figure 1]

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

211         In this study, a process of Student-Centered Inquiry *as* Curriculum (Oliver and  
212 Oesterreich, 2013) was used as a means of working with the youth in order to better  
213 understand how to assist them to foster collective empowerment (Fine, 2007; Freire,  
214 1987, 1996).

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

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

221

## 222 **Methodology**

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

226

### 227 *Context and participants*

228 The project took place in a university in Brazil. The university is located in a  
229 socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhood. The lead author invited young  
230 people from two schools in the university's neighborhood to participate in this project.  
231 The young people came after school to the university to work with the PSTs. The PSTs  
232 volunteered to participate in the project and the classes were not linked to any unit they  
233 were enrolled in. All youth and PSTs were invited to participate in the research. Ethical  
234 approval for this study was received from the Ethics Committee (protocol number  
235 2.258.880). All PSTs signed informed consent.

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

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

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

260

### 261 *Data gathering*

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

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<sup>2</sup>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.

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

269 Data collection included:

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

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

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

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

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

294

295 *Data analysis*

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

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

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

319

## 320 **Results**

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

332

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



392 included genuine dedication to listening to and understanding the kids, and offering  
393 them a safer space than perhaps they might encounter in their everyday lives (Daniels,  
394 2012).

395

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

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

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

414

415 Although Rodrigo experienced love in the Capoeira context, he came to the  
416 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

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

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

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

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

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

465

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

515

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

562

563 **Discussion**

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

573

#### 574 *Decolonizing love*

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

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



589 dominates another. Domination and love cannot coexist, because without justice there  
590 can be no love (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2001). A decolonizing love means that love is not  
591 something that can be treated in essentialist terms, but rather manifests differently in  
592 different spaces and places (Zembylas, 2017). The PSTs, Carla, and the youth, co-  
593 created a love that was context specific. Love emerges from the contextual challenges of  
594 lived reality in certain spaces and places rather than from abstraction. It constitutes a  
595 form of love that imagines a world in which ethical relationships are built beyond  
596 coloniality without ignoring the long history of colonization and oppression (Zembylas,  
597 2017). It is a form of love that breaks the ‘I’ and entails a site for collective becoming  
598 where teachers or PSTs might admit they want to become different (Lanas and  
599 Zembylas, 2015).

600

### 601 *The importance of reflexivity*

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

613           The PSTs started to trust and understand the students and dream possible futures  
614 with them. They understood the importance of facilitating students' learning and  
615 making sure all students are included. This two year project allowed the PSTs to  
616 understand that love is based in pedagogical dialogue, solidarity (commitment to others  
617 and commitment to the cause of liberation) and hope (Freire, 1987, 2005). The weekly  
618 collaborative meetings created a space where the PSTs could discuss their perceptions  
619 about love. It is important to highlight that it was a process that required time (e.g. a  
620 two-year project). This process was not a single course, which, according to Philpot  
621 (2019), would be insufficient to challenge the PSTs' beliefs regarding issues of social  
622 justice, or provoke a desire in PSTs to take action when they are confronted with  
623 inequities.

624

625 *The embodied experiences of oppression*

626           The PSTs' embodied experiences of oppression created a space for them to see  
627 themselves in the youth, reconnected with their own identity, and develop empathy.  
628 Their experiences of oppression created spaces for them to want to use their positions of  
629 privilege as a PST to give back to their communities. These experiences helped them to  
630 realize that we all have different opportunities that allow us to contribute to creating  
631 more socially just communities. The PSTs came from disempowered positions (e.g.  
632 social class and disabilities) which is different from most of the literature in PETE that  
633 has assessed predominantly white, middle-class PSTs in Western countries finding most  
634 were insufficiently prepared to work with students from diverse backgrounds (Clark,  
635 2019; Philpot, 2019).

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

638 liberatory pedagogy. The PSTs could affirm their own agency. PSTs benefited from this  
639 study by validating their cultural knowledge that they brought and the reflexive process  
640 helped them translate it into a liberatory pedagogy (Antrop-González and De Jesús,  
641 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, 2017).

642         The PSTs experienced love as sacrifice in their childhood and adolescence. It  
643 highlights the danger of love. Vocation and sacrifice emerged in the PSTs narratives.  
644 Janaina described the challenge of being committed to the youth and balancing her time  
645 with her academic life: ‘although I needed to focus on my final paper, I could not leave  
646 the kids behind because they needed my presence’. It is important to notice that her  
647 strong connection involved sacrifices. The PSTs were driven to become teachers, and  
648 for them, teachers should sacrifice themselves. This form of pastoral caring (McCuaig,  
649 2012) represents a romantic love to control people and reaffirms power relationships: a  
650 romantic love to control people. According to McCuaig (2012), care in PE focuses on  
651 ‘the softening of formal boundaries between the teacher and students’ (864). It could be  
652 considered a romantic caring relationship which can serve patriarchal interests,  
653 reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and engaging teachers and students with false  
654 universalisations (Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009;  
655 McCuaig, 2012; Roberts, 2010; Sosa-Provencio, 2017). Emphasis on a non-critical love  
656 in PE and sport pedagogy may serve to camouflage the requirements of justice and  
657 equality (McCuaig, 2012).

658

#### 659 *Future directions*

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

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

681         We also believe that teachers and PSTs do not have to come from a  
682 disempowered position to be able to deliver this kind of pedagogy. They need to  
683 develop attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to become competent in  
684 catering to linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students. This requires them  
685 to examine their own values and assumptions about working with youth who are  
686 different from them, recognizing their own privileges (Luguetti and Oliver, 2019).  
687 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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