

# The Politics of Body Capital within Neoliberal Social Reproduction Systems: Freirean Critical Pedagogy Principles in Brazilian Schools

**Antonio Jose Müller**

*Universidade Regional de Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brazil*

**César Augusto Rossatto**

*University of Texas at El Paso, Texas, USA*

## **Abstract**

*Sports in our society are a source of enthusiasm for many people, reflecting their cultural values and at times social tensions. Body capital development in different countries follow the local culture and politics. Since schools tend to reproduce the culture at large, sports are also one intrinsic representation replicated. Physical education or sports education as it takes place in schools or in the streets can assist in the development of social inclusion and academic motivation. However, this is challenged when school systems merely reproduce neoliberal social hegemonies. In Brazil, this is evident, since educational institutions now follow standardized programs copied from the U.S.A., revealing an urgent need for school reform to address, raising curricular and pedagogical implications. Remedial programs cause an increase in at-risk behavior among students, with detrimental social ramifications. This study offers a new conceptualization of the connection between sports and education within a Freirean perspective. The article builds awareness of the role sports play to promote social inclusion and academic motivation. Critical pedagogy tend to look at conscientização (awareness) as a mental process, but by incorporating the ontological and corporeal aspect of sports into the educational process, the kinesiology-as a study of the principles of mechanics and anatomy in relation to human movement- can take on new dimensions and be revolutionary and innovative.*

**Keywords:** Politics of body capital, Critical pedagogy, Freirean principles in sport, ontological and corporeal aspect of critical physical education.

Sports are one of the most important sociocultural phenomena in the world; some examples are the World Cup and Olympic games. The social importance of sports is connected to the significant development of athletic movements or body capital, increasing the number of people participating in and watching the remarkable world of sports. A plethora of economic interest and social mass media manipulations follows, consistent with each country's opportunity for political gains or even underlying racist or prejudice predisposition. The commercialization of sports is unmistakably present, especially within realms of neoliberal political structures, where athletes become marketable “products” and the spectators the

consumers. In addition, in Brazil, in the past, dominant groups historically have used sports, *novelas* (soap opera) and ‘carnival’ as micromanaging occasions to enact and carry out unwanted and non-popular policies.

On the other hand, sports can be a healthy and much needed aspect of social and or physical and intellectual development. Its social significance when connected with critical education, participation, and performance can be seen as a distinctive democratic opportunity for humanity as a whole. At the sports-participation level, people (with some exceptions), with or without talent, from every social economic status, including those with physical limitations, can participate and enjoy sports.

Sport is also a popular expression of both individual feelings and of people’s culture, including those from specific regions, ethnicities, or religions. Yet the ontological and corporeal aspect of sports are generally underplayed in critical pedagogy, which tends to look at *conscientização* (awareness) as a mental process; when in reality arts and sports in general are part of human existence and natural expression. Sport is a difficult subject to subjugate, and education is such a difficult field to cultivate that a frequent criticism of both, since the difficulty of integrate both which has also been brought to the point of to increase the level of interest and performance of one, should decrease the level of the other one. Sport is not a perfect tool. It brings about anxiety and frustration. It asks us not to rely on our certainties. Sport makes us rethink the world, subsequently; sports and education must continuously understand and redefine it.

Sport is not a perfect means for that educational purpose. It brings about anxiety and frustration. It asks us not to rely on our certainties. Sport can be a source that facilitates students’ ability to rethink the world. In sports, people are engaged to work for results, for better performance and to work with others as a team. This kind of practice may prepare students to improve their ability to rethink and to relearn the world.

However, sports can both reflect and reproduce social inequalities; thus, it can be argued that, it can be used as well to transform realities, especially in the *favelas* (slums) of Brazil. Sports are seen as a way out of poverty or at least an alternative to drugs or gang banging. Besides its problems related to social circumstances, sport serves as the context for important everyday experiences, and it is related to every major sphere of social life within a society (Coakley, 1990). People can introduce initiatives, community activities, collective rather than individual values, self-determination and so forth, that could permit participant members to exercise ownership over their own life, destiny and history and transform their lives and communities (Donnelly, 1996; Rossatto, 2005).

Thus, this study seeks to examine the relationship between Freirean principles and students’ interest in sports and its benefits. How can educators increase students’ school engagement by using sports within Freirean perspectives and pedagogies?

Freire (2000) states that people have inherent talents that can be expressed in many forms in artistic as well as sportive forms. Therefore, anyone can be an artist or athlete, perhaps with just different degrees of ability. Sociologists explain how people can interact with each other in sports settings and therefore determine how this process may affect their development and socialization in society (Freeman, 1992). Functional theory stresses the functions that education serves in fulfilling a society's various needs. Perhaps the most important function of education is socialization. Socialization is one of the main objectives of sports, which is an active process of learning and social development. If children need to learn the norms, values, and skills they need to function in society, then education is a primary vehicle for such learning and sports is the vehicle for such socialization.

Just like school, sports also reproduce social stratifications and society's cultural values and structures. U.S. soccer, for instance, is played by middle class people; however, in Brazil soccer is the sport of the poor for the most part. In fact, children in the *favelas* play soccer on the streets with balls or any material that resembles a ball, like empty cans. In addition, in Brazil, the body movements and body capital used in sports at times transcend into and become legitimized behavior, socially constructed in society. People internalize the idea of taking advantage of others, as if the person is "dribbling" the ball with the other person/`player', without remorse. This is as if the `dribbling'/ taking advantage of is publically accepted, the victims even get blamed for allowing it to happen. The predator feels superior as a smarter actor and the target, the defeated `player' is seen as foolish. Just recently in Brazil, the concept of bullying had been widely introduced to counteract this kind of abuse.

Sports' social phenomena are often related to social institutions, such as school or other organizations (like clubs), and their social processes, such as the development of social status or prestige within a group or community. As noted in the previous paragraph, in Brazil, although every social group plays soccer, it is associated more with those from poor backgrounds, whereas, in contrast, in the U.S. it is mainly middle class communities that play soccer. Despite variables such as these socio-economic variables, it is relevant to notice how sports affect human development with its social aspects. The more activities students were involved in, the better they scored on a range of positive outcome measures. This advantage was more pronounced for students in leadership activities and clubs or interest groups than for those in sports or performing activities (Lamborn et al. 1992). In reality, however, in some countries there is a sort of fresh wonder, a pleasure in the heroism, theatrical spectacle, and poetic inspiration that lays awaiting happy journalistic exploitation of sports events. As a case in point, the World Cup's narratives are very different from country to country, depending on the audience population, education or economic levels and technical advancement.

Education and sports play a critical role in this area, as it will provide opportunities to learn the history and culture of one's own and other societies, which can cultivate the understanding and appreciation of other societies, cultures and religions. Particularly for young people, education and sports provide the opportunity to instill values of respect and appreciation of diversity. At the same time, education and sports can empower those who are

marginalized or excluded from participating in discussions and decision-making to feel more included. This is so, since sport is a form of social participation, and social participation is the act of engaging in society's activities. It refers to the possibility to influence decisions and have access to decision-making processes. Social participation creates mutual trust among individuals, which forms the basis for shared responsibilities towards the community and society (United Nations, 2009), as well in sports.

Sports can reflect social inclusion and interactions that promote motivation or collective encouragement. Sports can exert a foundation for socialization of minorities or underprivileged groups. For many poor people, sport appears to be one of the few allowable and available opportunities for success in racist, sexist, and oppressive societies (Teich, 2002). In some countries, such as USA, sports are associated with education and many people can receive scholarships from sports and then reach a better social level by using sports for gaining a degree and for further professional activity. According to Singer and May (2011), sports and schooling are inextricably linked in many societies today, and therefore, it is important to reflect upon how the structure and function of interscholastic sports, and the practices in which individual actors (e.g. athletes, coaches) engage, might impact on high school athletes, especially those who come from low-income neighborhoods and see sports participation as their 'meal ticket' to upwards social mobility. In other countries, such as Brazil, sports can promote upwards social mobility through the wealth that professional athletes can make during their careers.

Historically, however, sports have also revealed socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic differences, where hegemonic structures are reinforced as a type of imposition and reproduction of the status quo. The cultural history of sports gives enough illustrations of persistent patterns and tendencies of learned "human nature", such as interpersonal relations and how men and women use their power over others (Mandell, 1984). Participation in sport is limited by discrimination and prejudices, which provide important questions about its relevance to society. For example, during the Roman Empire spectacles, gladiators were used to enforce the law by killing prisoners of war, criminals, or Christians. This setting of human beings to kill one another in public for entertainment was a dreadful savagery to maintain the order and maintain social class divisions (Grant, 1967). The adoption of a realistic attitude about this aspect of gladiatorial brutality is even more necessary in our own twenty-first century where black athletes, mostly from lower social classes, play sports to entertain those people who have money to buy expensive tickets or pay-per-view transmission.

Besides its problems related to social circumstances, sports serves as the context for important everyday experiences, and it is related to every major sphere of social life within a culture (Coakley, 1990). Modern sport is a firmly established social and cultural institution and, like public education and the mass media, sport serves many functions for different individuals, groups, and society as a whole (Calamine & Page, 1973). These social spheres include family, school, and religion. Sports exerts a great influence on the life of a person by developing personality and character and, consequently, contributing to 'good' citizenship

(Coakley, 1990). As a result, there is no doubt that the social benefits of sports are attracting the interest of scholars around the world. Sport is a social model that is part of the educational experience during childhood and adolescence into adulthood.

The development of sports has created an enormous influence in Brazilian culture. People can utilize their talent in arts, sports and intellectual endeavors to become upwards socially mobile. Large numbers of Brazilians are profoundly influenced by sports in some way or another. Particular attention is paid to the potential contributions that sports can make towards social inclusion and academic success. This interest could be better connected to improve education and promote social mobility, by using sports to increase school enrollment, retention, and access to education. As Coakley (1990) theorizes, there is a link between sports participation and upward social mobility. However, relatively few people share the benefits of this relationship, and in the vast majority of the cases, the benefits are not great. Furthermore, the influences of sport in school, college and professional levels vary accordingly to the social differences. For example in some countries, sports are a major marketing tag for educational institutions.

Yet, many educators strongly advocate that there can be a positive role that sports can play in the wider agenda of public policy making, particularly in the areas of academic motivation, social inclusion, and health. Sport offers many potential social benefits to individuals and communities. Sports may be applied as a tool to initiate social change. It is a way of encouraging people to participate in sports while simultaneously tackling a pressing social problem and avoid falling prey to ill social behavior. In Brazil, soccer was sport for the white community first; blacks playing had to use white powder to cover up their Black identity. By the same token, at UTEP (The University of Texas, El Paso) African Americans were the first to play Basketball, which made a difference to help the team win a famous and historical national championship. A movie (*Glory Road*) was made depicting this unprecedented legendary success. Now African Americans had (or were allowed to) cross the previously established racist barriers and occupy an important space, not only in basketball but also in other sports. Some racist structures had been dismantled, which had previously prevented equal opportunity for all ethnic groups- even though racism still prevails.

Through sports, a great number of people can be helped to change their lives for the better. The benefits are significant for children and adolescents since physical activity and sports are crucial to physical, social, motor, and emotional development. With this perspective, sport benefits across cultures in the area of childhood and lifelong health; in the area of learning and academic achievement; in the areas of citizenship and democratic access; and in the areas of leadership and motivation. For example, in sports, young people can learn valuable skills related to the quality of life: intra-personal and inter-personal communications, determination, perseverance, confidence, leadership, citizenship, goal-orientation, motivation, and personal satisfaction (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002).

This positive way of conducting kinesiology is easier said than done. However, within a Freirean juxtaposition it is important to question just what are the dominant and subordinate

versions of a curriculum for kinesiology. Whose version of “correct technique,” is used? Whose interest does it serve? Do people watching develop a “passive spectators” attitude? Who is empowered to feel agents of their own histories? And who doesn’t? When including students, can they become actors and players?

In this way, Freire’s philosophy of education is put into practice with an immense impact because student start to exercise their agency. The transition from spectators, passive, to “players”, active, can improve learning and collective empowerment. Therefore, students can be an active, and not passive, part of their learning experience and can claim the benefits of more active student engagement. Educators can explore this critical approach and transform theory into praxis and vice versa because of the social relevance and adaptability of sports, and arts, and by exploring issues ranging from racism, sexism, and social exclusion. As a result, sports and arts reflect self or collective consciousness and people become part of a cultural context by empowering their talents. We questioned one high school student/athlete about sport and power. Cesar specifies one example: “When I was a little child in school, there was tension between the city and rural children. The city children felt superior to farm children. In a soccer championship, the urban students from my classroom organized a team and left me and the other farm boys out, as if we were second-class players. Therefore, we organized a second team with those left out, and we ended up winning the championship. We definitely wrote history in our own way.”

### *Conscientização*

Freire’s main concept of education as a form of liberation is the idea of *conscientização* (awareness), as a critical approach of reality, and not separated from the notion of utopia. In this awareness, education must humanize to transform, but while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation (Freire, 1980). He believed that discussing this distinction would lead illiterate people to discover that they are makers of culture as much as literate people are. According to Freire (1970), people are oppressed due to their lack of critical knowledge. He proposed an education as means of liberation, and through education, one may develop the *conscientização* (Portuguese word meaning critical consciousness/awareness with action). A learner moves toward a critical consciousness process when education has this “liberator” spirit, by making sense of a contextualized world in critical reading as an ongoing process. People see a direct connection of schooling and their reality. They can see a relationship of their background and the big picture of the educational project as it is insightful to their lived experiences. Sports can be part of this big picture, when it connects to students ontological experiences, as they go about their corporeal action or expression promoted by physical exercise.

Schooling must be associated to students’ local culture and daily life experiences too before learning can be expanded to new horizons to understand other forms of body capital and its politics within universal cultures. The body capital politics does not have to be based a monoculture and monopolized as countries with hegemonic advanced economies try to promote. Freire (1994) explains, when children get to school, they may bring with them an

understanding of their own world in many different dimensions. Their origins and their culture are the beginning of the knowledge they get from the world as time goes by.

*Conscientização* means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness, in particular, critical awareness of oppression, being an "object" in a world where only "dominant subjects" have power. The process of *conscientização* involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming an agent of history with other oppressed "subjects," becoming part of the process of changing the world (Instituto Paulo Freire, 2004).

Another connection between education and sports would be possible through a Freirean pedagogy of adults' literacy. According to this schooling, illiterate learners make use of words that are related to their daily lives to learn how to read and write not only about the words, but how to read the world and how to write their own histories; especially, to be able to be politicized about what affects their lives, to be engaged in political issues under a critical discernment. The words used, which are drawn from *generative thematic*, or problem posing, can also be linked to sports and have the same objective of teaching the alphabet used by students in school. Freire (1970) comments that the pedagogy of the oppressed as a humanist and liberating pedagogy is no longer a pedagogy from the oppressed but is transformed into a pedagogy of women and men in a permanent process of liberation. Sports can also facilitate this kind of liberating expression, especially when both children and adults become free through their own action and manifestation of body language that can challenge existing neoliberal ideologies. A neoliberal linear monocultural immobilizing discourse restrictive ruling of a specific sport narrows this possibility. Freire defines (1970) freedom to create and construct, to admire, taking risks and learning as an adventurous experience.

For sports to have a better connection with school and society, it also needs to build a relationship within other widespread forms of body capital. As the regional comes from the local, the national comes from the regional, and the continental from national. In the same way, the worldly comes from the continental as the dimensions of an individual's contextual reality to recognize the interaction and achieve a clearer perception of the whole in a more holistic way (Freire, 1970). Therefore, it is rather limiting to only be confined to a neoliberal parochial mentality; a narrow focus lacks to see the value of a more global vision. This cannot be obtained only through mechanical training, which is a common practice and characteristic in some sports, but by embracing a critical understanding of context as an historical, political, social, and cultural being (Freire, 1994).

### **Pedagogy of Desire**

School should promote the knowledge related to the culture, desire of its students, and thus, become a pleasant place. According to Lacan, (cited by Rossatto, 2001), the pedagogy of desire focuses on the relationship between the symbolic (curriculum) and the real (the students' world). Children express great interest in playing, so the implemented curriculum is designed around outdoor field trips (sports).

Through the entertainment provided by sports, there can be an evolution for their learning. If students enjoy the subject of learning, they probably will learn better as well as having an open mind for new knowledge. Freire (1998) suggests, “What students discover by themselves is usually retained for life.”

In sports, students can also develop ownership over their learning experiences when sports are fun, enjoyable, with intrinsic emotional motivation. In such context, didactics must be an educational constructive adventure. Teachers respectively attuned to the joy, fun, pain, humor and metaphor of their students can be intellectual leaders rooted in the local culture. A lot can be discovered about students’ classroom behavior by observing and investigating playground socialization, sports participation, or after-school activities. By understanding and using pleasure, sports can facilitate in socialization constructions and psychological insight into personality formation; the learning styles and motivational dynamics of young people being impacted positively in the best of their chances (Kincheloe, Slattery, and Steinberg, 2000).

One of the applications of this idea is related to a kinder culture approach and popular culture. According to Kincheloe et al., (2000), “Kinder culture and popular culture exert specific influences, affecting maps that emerge in the social context in which children encounter these cultural expressions”. In a phenomenological perspective teacher or P.E. mentors must understand the students’ cultural reality to connect it to curriculum in order to produce a new positive meaning and knowledge in the classroom, gym, or in any sports fields. Adults must understand the connection between sports and students’ culture, perception, and desire, which can promote the schools’ transformation. The insights into school’s hidden cultural rules can be surprising and even profound, and the acting on an accepting of such cultural dynamics can transform school (Kincheloe, et al., 2000).

Curriculum has the potential to transform students’ reality. Curriculum theorizing is critical to the development of programs, which are receptive to social and cultural changes in society. Sports in school become part of the required curriculum via physical education classes, and of course, sports are often major extracurricular activities (Curry & Jiobu, 1984). School, through physical education classes and interschool sports programs, serves as significant socializing agents for youth people. During late childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, it is frequently the peers, rather than the family, who serve as the most powerful socializing agents for sports involvement (Seefeldt & Vogel, 1986).

In order to minimize these factors school could be more related to specific culture or students’ culture. School could minimize the gap between students’ interest outside of school and their interest in the curriculum of school. To illustrate, one teacher in Brazil was working with retained students from remedial programs. She lacked the appropriate experience and students had very limited reading and writing development. One day she perceived that students were talking enthusiastically about soccer. Therefore, she bought a sports journal and started reading to the students. The boys started to pay attention and then the girls started to ask about the game or their favorite teams. The teacher began to use the sports journal as



what Freire calls “generative themes.” For the first time, the teacher gave a meaning for reading and writing literacy, which never happened for the students. “Zico made a goal”. This sentence (utterance) was much more relevant to them, “Grandmother saw the grapes”. Consequently, due to the successful advancement of the class due to this transformation, all the students had been promoted to the next level and learned how to read and write not only the words but the world of sports to which they intimately related (Alves, Garcia & Carrano, 2000). The passion for soccer developed an opportunity for kids to learn how to read and write because they conducted their own literacy.

The curriculum must respect cultural backgrounds that students bring with them when they go to school. As Freire (1998) says, “why not establish an ‘intimate’ connection between basic knowledge considered to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals?” (p. 36). Curriculum has the potential to increase motivation since it can take advantage of the student’s life experiences and stimulate students to be present and participate in the learning process, which could make the school an authentic place of “student-centered instruction.” Curriculum theorizing is critical to the development of programs receptive to social and cultural changes in society. This can be the missing component that connects what children practice and enjoy to what is taught in the school curriculum, and a variety of activities that closely relate to the customs and traditions of local life and culture should be incorporated (Rossatto, 2001).

Furthermore, the curriculum can encourage and foment interest in education even in unmotivated communities, where students do not perceive the importance and relevance of school, because it represents a different world to the reality they live on a daily basis. School must be linked to a student’s local culture in order for them to develop a concrete and wide vision of the world we live in, challenging the differing combinations of social, individual, physical, and mental developments. Freire (1994) explains that when children get to school, they bring with them an understanding of the world, in many different dimensions and according to the social class to which they belong. The places where they come from and the cultural context where they live are the beginning of their knowledge bases. Moreover, Freire was convinced that a curriculum for student achievement should be a process of analyzing reality, so the student could become critically conscious of their situation because some children cannot see the connection between classroom activities and their daily lives. Sports is an important subject in some students’ lives; one that could promote academic opportunities for them.

### **Projeto Axé: Sports for Street Children**

One of the very important connections between culture and popular education has been used in Salvador, Bahia. *Projeto Axé*, a non-profit organization, takes credit for removing thousands of children from the streets through *emancipatory* education. The project reinvents the curriculum to incorporate a variety of activities closely related to the customs and traditions of local life and culture (Rossatto, 2001). One may include a sports-education relation with Afro-Brazilian local cultures, where the *Capoeira* (Brazilian martial art which

combines music and rhythms) was incorporated into the school curriculum, as was samba and other *batucada*—*afroxé* (drumming). Freire got the idea from the popular culture and used it as a means to stimulate children to study. In other terms, he observed kids playing *Capoeira* in the streets instead of being at school. He then suggested introducing this practice inside the school, so that the street children, who hardly agree to traditional monotonous schooling, could play within their regular classroom schedule and remain motivated to stay in school rather than on the streets.

It should be relevant to point out that these children were literally living in the streets, and, therefore, did not attend school. Through his project, Freire could bring them back to school. His philosophy of self-reliance that involves the cultivation of ethics through aesthetic and cultural local body capital had the power to translate into one form of sports, like *Capoeira*, that can offer a transformative way of giving back to the children their dignity and equipping them with tools they needed to positively improve their lives. *Axé* thus focuses on what the children know and enjoy, music, dance, and sports, rather than assuming what they need (Morin, 2000). This kind of program had been adopted successfully in many other schools (public and private) in Brazil.

Participants in these kinds of programs are re-integrated into society as functional and dignified citizens. The program content is based on self-motivation, creativity, critical thinking, and dialogue about real issues associated with life on the streets, where they learn to write their own stories and books. The children establish their learning pace as they gain knowledge through collective engagement activities, which incorporate percussion, dance, art, culture, entertainment, and literacy classes. This kind of schooling has enormous significance for children. They learn to transform their personal life stories into an evolving educational experience that contains new life possibilities. This positive educational experience exposes issues related to community organization, and provides opportunities for upward mobility to those most in need (Rossatto, 2001).

When Freire's principles are associated with local community's sports, as well as arts and folklore, learners have a great potential to improve the development of learning ability. This learning experience can promote and foment interest in education in communities that lack motivation, where students do not perceive the importance and relevance of school because it represents a different world to the reality they live day-to-day. By incorporating these updated pedagogic techniques, we may be able to stimulate and reach out to these students.

### **Interdisciplinary Approach through Sports**

Freire (1970) explains that human beings socialize through dialogue. Through critical exchange of ideas, people explain their accepted source of wisdom and awareness learned with real world praxis. Sports promote socialization and, therefore, can promote consciousness. As well as in dialogue, people can express their feelings and attitudes with athletic expression and experiences. Sports are a thematic topic included in the students'

context. It should also be included in the curriculum through interdisciplinary studies, where each discipline explores the same topic but in a different area of interest.

As it was mentioned above, incorporating Freirean principles in sports would use the same generative words as a starting point within constructivist theories. However, at times this praxis is not limited to words only, but is a cultural generative characteristic to stimulate learning. For example, soccer can be applied to explain historical, geographical, or economic aspects for students in Brazil, in geography, history, or math classes. Using a local culture and what students enjoy in their daily practices outside the school helps in the learning process inside the school.

The interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approach aims at relating sports to other subject matters, expanding from there, linking to one another. In each of them, one may say that the connection is very attractive and at times not as stated below (Müller, 2011):

Sciences – Study physical education and the human body; physiology, anatomy and human biology.

Languages (English, Portuguese) – Expressions related to sports, compositions having sports as a main theme, dictation using sports issues, grammar exercises within the topic of sports.

Foreign Language – Expressions, words, other countries' grammar.

Mathematics – Games and athletes' statistics; ball velocity, time, length and speed calculation.

Geography – Geographical characteristics of the world and locality; localization and climate, temperature, races, ethnicities; economic and political aspects of sports; influences of sports related to the cultural and social context; Olympics; world, continental and national championships

History – Mythology, history of the Olympics and political intricate, historic context of sports in a specific country; history of the sports related to the political and social contexts.

Arts – Beauty of sports, mythology, sports influences on arts, music, anthems.

Religion – Respect to religious culture in sports, in different regions through examples set by athletes from different religions.

### **Constructive Critiques to Freirean Approaches**

Freirean ideas and concepts are important and powerful; therefore, they generate controversies, critiques, and provocative viewpoints. Freire's theories are helping to deconstruct the school as a reproduction of the status quo and promote social justice. As Dewey (1964) explains, school today present tendencies that fortify social inequalities.

Exactly for this reason, challenges in the schooling experience appear disconnected to Freire's optimism and theoretical dreams where education is an element of transformation and teachers are cultural workers.

Freirean philosophical background was based on Greek philosophers, Marxist social theory and the Christian model. It is very hard to understand Freire if readers did not suffer or are not suffering the oppression that he fought in Brazil and in poor countries in Africa and Latin America. His theory of *conscientização* depends on some sort of transcendent view of reality of each individual coming to see what is real and authentic (Elias & Merriam, 1980). To understand oppression we must be inside of it, not outside of it; therefore, oppressed people can find hope, liberation, and love in his words as the same as oppressors can find revolutionary ideas that can generate violence. Even in powerful and economically developed countries, when reading Freire, many want to identify as oppressed, when in reality, people could also identify mainly with privileges experienced by oppressors.

Another critique is the fact that Freirean approaches use dualities and binary theories, creating a vacuum in addressing ideas of revolution, specifically in terms of men and women, black and white, working class or rich, or to a particular society and economic context. As readers, one can understand social change and possibilities, but without identifying who the oppressor is, it is harder to promote revolution. When the oppressor is named it is easier to expose and confront the represented oppressive structures and actors accordingly. At the same time it is needed a vision of wider and holistic perspective of reality and context that oppressed people to not rely mainly on binary versions. Systems of oppression cannot be simplified; a combined intricate web of complexities is what keeps people subordinated. Today, influences of positivism, neoliberalism, and postmodernity are making it much harder to decode what are the reactionary, conservative, and exclusionary ideologies, with their systemic structures that are most affecting people's reality and existence.

Critiques to Freirean initiatives is part of *conscientização* exercise. In an interview with Cesar Rossatto, Freire said, "Don't copy me reinvent me" (Rossatto, 2005). Perhaps to some degree, many of our academic current plans and dreams are founded on Freirean revolutionary principles and influences. However, even without Freirean theories, one must deconstruct white patriarchal and capitalist hegemonic privileges with their discriminatory and oppressive identities and practices. Nevertheless, by being critical of our own existence, identities, current and future endeavors, we are able to bring about better critical consciousness, where we can practice what we preach.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Sports**

Critical pedagogy facilitates a way where education can provide means for liberation since critical-thinking and problem-posing processes are intrinsic to critical learning. Though Freire would say education does not transform the world education transforms people, people can transform the world. Critical pedagogy deconstructs mainstream pedagogies using critical theory. Critical pedagogy represents a reinforcement methodology of

*conscientização*. Freire redefines critical forms of thinking where men and women can use their own world experiences to be and become part of a democratic world. But, again, how about sport? Freire calls on students to be active participants, to link awareness with practice (hooks, 1994). Within this framework, critical pedagogy must emphasize wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. Sports in relationship with or embedded in critical pedagogy can be an educational instrument to empower people. The challenge is to situate this practice within the pluralistic and diverse world we live in, and understand how sports can be linked with critical pedagogy to embrace the peculiarities and uniqueness of local culture, with its aesthetics and social values.

Many researchers have found that sports, when presented and organized properly, makes a significant contribution to the social and moral education of young people and is an effective way of producing benefits for both the individual and the society. Sports-education is applied on regular basis in school in different countries with the objective to provide integral and complete development through physical-cognitive connections. However, its connection with critical pedagogy is not very well recognized or explored by many scholars and educators/coaches. Since there is a lack of specific literature, it is often a challenge to explain the relationship between critical pedagogy sports.

Critical pedagogy can be present in sports when the participant makes decisions and find solutions to solve a game problem. Decision-making is common in sports, especially in team sports, students or athletes need to make decisions almost every second during the practice or game. For example, a volleyball player will have a successful outbreak if he/she *reads* the game situation. Depending on what kind of setting, opposite block position, player's relation between the ball and his/her approach, is what will define the player's best decision. This decision-making process is a *critical* part of the game, which coaches call tactical intelligence. The dynamics of this context can be best understood within players' best critical analysis of a given game situation and make pre-eminent decisions.

Thus, Freire asserts that critical education must be democratic, dialogical, anti-bias, *emancipatory*, dialectical, and it must generate knowledge, through *conscientização*. Müller (2011) gives an example of how can sports bring life these principles. They can be associated with the following principles:

Democratic – Sports participation is one of the most democratic activities. People, with some exceptions, with or without talent, from every social economic status, even with physical limitations can participate and enjoy sports. In contract, many competitive sports are also very exclusive or exclusionary, even in school.

Dialogical – In sports, students have a unique opportunity to have an experimental trial in the development of co-operation, unity, and organization with respect to cultural synthesis. These concepts can be utilized to define teamwork. Moreover, co-operation and unity are essential to be successful in sports. Organization can be the way that a coach prepares his/her

team for practice. Cultural amalgamation can serve as people's appreciation of a particular sport according to their cultural, historical, and regional heritage.

Anti-bias – Sports is a method that invokes a type of conversation that provides participants with a group-therapy space for praising one another. Through sports, participants have the possibility of developing a consciousness of their own historical realities and learn to exercise them. In this, humans are self-educated through their interactions with their work and life experiences.

Emancipatory– People on sports team fight for the same purpose. Sports can promote emancipation as a common goal where they must seek to live with others in solidarity. Moreover, underprivileged students can use sports to promote a better quality of life. Students who participate successfully in sports usually receive more respect in school. Participation in sports may also open doors of opportunity by helping students earn a scholarship for college, or by preparing them to become professional athletes. Thus, sports are a way in which people can climb into higher economical or educational levels.

Dialectical – In contrast, to most regular classes, the teaching approach in sports is based on practice. Frequent practice helps develop the knowledge of the game. As Freire said, “A person learns how to swim in the water, not in a library” (1970, p.137). This is a very dynamic, spiral, and infinite process where students can develop theory in practice because in every game or practice, they are confronted with new and different situations. They can also learn from their praxis.

Knowledge Production – Understanding the rules and techniques of the game and learning to respect partners, opponents, coaches, and referees can be effective ways to prepare students' social skills to become positive and productive members in their society. Children are excited to play, and this can promote a perfect environment to produce knowledge as they can familiarize themselves also with the politics body capital and stakeholders' criteria. On the other hand, educators may not need to test students in sports fields to evaluate them, because their knowledge and skills are demonstrated in real ways.

Conscientização – In sports, people show their feelings by body language or gestures. It is an authentic form of communication in a given individual moment. This is a learning process converted in “body dialogue” with coaches, parents, and teammates. Sports are a celebration of life in a unique expression of feelings where people develop their own identity and experience problems, history, and culture. It is an overdose of critical pedagogy if participants learn to question how things are, ask question such as, who are benefiting from sports? Whose interests are served? The money and market base control with capitalist predatory practices in some cultures and the politics of body capital where some succeed and some do not.

## Conclusion

Sports can be an instrument to promote *conscientização* and help people challenge oppression and racism and their history in many societies characterized by alienation and oppression.. Sports can be an agent in transforming society, since some successful athletes who come from excluded, colonized and deprived minorities can and do become role models of hope against oppression in their communities. The great challenge is to increase the opportunity for all young people to develop and enrich their lives through sports while in school. Teachers need to have a sound sociological understanding of how race, ethnicity and racism operate within society, school and in the curriculum. Critical pedagogy must be utilized to enhance social justice, decrease discrimination and promote ethnic integration in society, eliminating racism using anti-racism curriculum and critical education in school.

Sports can provide the connection between culture and a true democracy and can promote critical pedagogy in the form of an altruistic and social activity. Sports can be used as a tool to transform school and the world into what Freire dreamt about, where everyone can seek a world less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanized, more humane and more just.

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### Authors' Notes

**Antonio Jose Müller** is Associate Professor in the College of Education at Universidade (University) of Blumenau, in Brazil. His research focus in critical pedagogy, teacher education and sports in schools. He is a former Brazilian National Volleyball team and coached volleyball in Brazil, USA and Saudi Arabia. He teaches History of sports and research methods in the College of Physical Education. He also teaches in the college of graduate school teacher preparation, Freirean Theories Program.

**César Augusto Rossatto, Ph.D.** is Associate Professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. He is author of numerous publications including: *Engaging Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Possibility: From Blind to Transformative Optimism*. He is founder of Paulo Freire SIG at AERA (American Education Research Association). He is founder and chair of the



International Conference on Education, Labor and Emancipation <http://academics.utep.edu/confele>. He is a UCLA graduate. Courses he teaches include: critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, education for social justice, and sociology of education. He is committed to dialectic and dialogical education and praxis for the liberation of disenfranchised groups. He is also well versed on Paulo Freire's work, critical temporal theory, social context of education, organizational politics, international and urban education with deep familiarity with U.S. and Latin American cross-cultural issues. His main research interests are: Ethics, religious influences and immigration, the U.S. and Mexican border within the context of Globalization and Neo Liberalism, social relations and Brazilian identity formation in United States and its implications to schooling, the phenomenon of fatalism and optimism in contrast with social classes' differences, the effects of racism worldwide.