

Toward an understanding of the democratic reconceptualization of physical education teacher education in post-military Brazil

By: Gylton Da Matta, K. Andrew Richards & [Michael A. Hemphill](#)

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17408989.2013.837438>.

Abstract:

Background: Teacher education, including physical education teacher education (PETE), around the world remains highly autocratic and content focused [Apple, M. W. 2000. *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*. New York: Routledge]. Scholars in physical education [O’Sullivan, M., D. Siedentop, and L. F. Locke. 1992. “Toward Collegiality: Competing Viewpoints among Teacher Educators.” *Quest* 44 (2): 266–280] as well as in and education more broadly [McAllister, G., and J. J. Irvine. 2000. “Cross Cultural Competency and Multicultural Teacher Education.” *Review of Educational Research* 70 (1): 3–24] have noted the limited opportunities for the discussion of democratic practices, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education. However, since the fall of the military dictatorship, Brazil has had the opportunity to reconstruct teacher education with a focus on democracy. Many of these changes have been influenced by the philosophy of Paulo Freire [1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum; 1985. *The Politics of Education*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey; 1998a. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield; 1998b. *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview] whose conceptualization of democracy embraces an interactional perspective. Through the eyes of Gylton, a PETE student, this study depicts new possibilities for democratization in PETE. Participants: Gylton, the first author of the article, was the primary participant and Maria served as an informant. The setting of the study was Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), a large university in Brazil where Gylton was a student and Maria was a faculty member. Method: A qualitative design structured around the tenants of existential phenomenology was adopted. Gylton and Maria were participated in two semistructured interviews [Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage] and follow-up telephone interviews and email correspondence. Findings: The data analysis revealed that Gylton’s experiences during childhood had a profound impact on his initial appraisals of the purpose of democratic practices in PETE. During his time at UFMG, Gylton

experienced a shift in his consciousness and came to realize the importance of democratic practices in PETE. Gylton engaged in transformative action at the micro- and macro-levels through his exposure to democratic practices. Interactions with Maria led Gylton to resist the authoritarian system of education and reconceptualize the role of physical education.

Keywords: democratic education | PETE | citizenship education | international schooling

Article:

Historically, the institution of schooling at the levels of K-12 instruction and higher education has been characterized as being highly autocratic and discipline-focused (Apple 2000). Students tend to be taught to submit to teacher authority and have little space to exercise their sense of agency and autonomy in decision-making in schools (Ayers 2003). This trend is somewhat perplexing, especially in countries which emphasize freedom and democratic participation (Biesta 2006). Over time, critics of education have called for sweeping reforms to promote child-centered and democratic pedagogies (Apple 2000). Many of these criticisms have led to recommendations for reform efforts that aim to promote democratic practices and empower children through education. However, such reforms will be necessarily limited without concurrent changes in the process of teacher education (Apple 2001).

Traditionally, teacher education has operated under the functionalist assumption that the knowledge and skills deemed most necessary to the preparation of teachers can be disseminated through a unidirectional exchange in which the instructor teaches and the students learn (Apple 2001; Darling-Hammond 2010). Little space has been available for the teaching of democratic practices, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education (McAllister and Irvine 2000). This has been no less true of physical education teacher education (PETE), which has tended to emphasize skills and knowledge in sports and physical activities over critical and reflective approaches to education (O'Sullivan, Siedentop, and Locke 1992). While concern persists, there is some evidence to indicate that teacher education programs are exploring options outside of their autocratic traditions. Critical pedagogical approaches to learning offer important strategies for challenging preservice teachers to reconsider taken for granted assumptions related to social justice and equity in both PETE (Ruiz and Ferná'ndez-Balboa 2005) and teacher education more broadly (Bartolome' 2004).

Practical examples of teacher education programming that aims to empower students in the education process are available. One such example is the radical democratization of Brazilian teacher education that followed the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1985. Along with faculty in other disciplines, PETE faculty created new possibilities for dialogue and critical approaches to learning in physical education through teacher education programs. It was believed that, in order to reshape the landscape of physical education, it was necessary to implement spaces for discussion, dialogue, reflection and action at the teacher education level. As noted by Jennings and Da Matta (2009, 215), teachers and teacher educators worked together

‘to question the present system of physical education and re-create it in ways that honored students’ voices, shared authority, and sought to effectively address the needs of all students’. Through this study we sought to understand the process through which PETE was reconceptualized in post-military Brazil by examining the lived experiences of Gylton, a PETE student, who was involved in the process at the micro- and macro-levels. Our inquiry was focused around the following research questions: (1) What aspects of Gylton’s biography and his experiences as a PETE student shaped his orientation toward PETE? (2) How did Gylton make sense of his lived experiences during the fall of the military regime and the subsequent democratization of PETE? and (3) What role did Gylton play in the democratization of PETE within and beyond his university campus?

The radical democratization of Brazilian education

Military oppression, education, and resistance

On 31 March 1964 a military dictatorship that would dominate Brazil for 20 years began in the Brazilian state of Belo Horizonte (Myers 2008). During the regime, the government media constantly highlighted the need to privatize essential sectors of society such as education, health, housing, and public safety. In the views of the right-wing military regime supporting public services, public education and boosting social security was considered as a Marxist agenda (Freire 1998a, 1998b). This propaganda was perpetuated through schools where students were taught the ideologies of the dictatorship, which limited opportunities for open discussion. Freire (1989) explained that the social institution of schooling in Brazil during the dictatorship was used to control and dominate the citizenship. Public education was constructed as a tool of oppression or a system ‘of interrelated barriers and forces that reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain group in ways that effect their subordination’ (Kendall 1992, 4).

In addition to education more broadly, sport and physical education played a key role in perpetuating the values of the dictatorship and oppressing individual freedoms. Sports were primarily used as tools of control and domination and were constructed as a privilege for the rich and gifted (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b, 2009). In most Brazilian state capitals, dark or brown skinned players who were indigenous to the region were not allowed to participate in local soccer clubs. Women and the poor were not allowed to participate in clubs or Olympic sports leagues (Freire 1989). Beyond oppression, sports were also used as tools of manipulation and a means through which to pacify the citizenship and alienate them from the realities of life under military rule. The conceptualization of sport as privilege and the values of the military regime were perpetuated in physical education classes. The discipline of physical education focused on ‘elite performance and athletic skills through a military model of routine, order, competition, and discipline’ (Jennings and Da Matta 2009, 223).

During the military dictatorship, many philosophers and educators, including Paulo Freire, spoke out against the regime’s oppressive and totalitarian practices. This opposition came

in the form of strikes and public displays against the regime as well as attempts to educate and empower the masses. Understanding that schools were one of the primary sites of social oppression, Freire (1967, 1970) developed social literacy methods aimed at challenging the practices of the regime, while also educating children to think freely and openly question existing social structures. While such resistance took place throughout the country, the city which showed the most opposition was Belo Horizonte. During the 1970s, an intellectual resistance movement was initiated at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) in Belo Horizonte. The government responded without remorse with acts of violence and forced key leaders in the resistance movement into exile (Jennings and Da Matta 2009).

The beginnings of democracy

In the early 1980s, the resistance to the military regime as well as an international economic crisis resulted in the weakening of government control. In 1985, the military government finally toppled and the dictatorship withdrew (Gorostiaga Derqui 2001). With the fall of the regime, Brazilians had an opportunity to rebuild their state around the principles of freedom and democracy (Myers 2008; Jennings and Da Matta 2009). However, when the dictatorship withdrew, Brazil's political, social, and economic structures were left in ruins. Violence, inflation, unemployment, and civil unrest were high and continuing to rise (Mendonça, 2001). As with social structures more broadly, the Brazilian education system was crippled; left with nothing by the remnants of the military regime. According to Freire (1998a, 1998b) the schools were empty, abandoned, and with few usable resources. School policies remained extremely authoritarian and it did not seem as if schools were capable of providing a quality education.

While some of the momentum toward democratizing Brazilian education began prior to the collapse of the military government (Silva 2006), the reform was greatly fueled by the institution of national political democracy and the Federal Constitution of 1988, which specifically highlighted the need to democratize public education (Mendonça, 2001). Despite the destitute state of the Brazilian educational system, state officials specifically targeted education as a site for social transformation because it was viewed as a way in which the needs of traditionally marginalized populations could be addressed (Wong and Balestino 2003). The newly formed constitution perpetuated the movement to decentralize school authority and led to innovative policies such as the open election of school administrators (Myers 2008; Jennings and Da Matta 2009). Entire cities, districts, and states began to democratize their educational systems as is evidenced in research conducted in Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, and São Paulo (O'Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998; Jennings and Da Matta 2009). Subsequent government policies (Minister of Education and Culture 1999) have reinforced and strengthened the democratic practices that were instituted during the 1980s, such as the development of student governments and the open election of school principals.

When the military regime ended, physical educators saw the need to reconceptualize and rebuild physical education and school sports in a way that differed from the oppressive practices

of the past (Freire 1989). Jennings and Da Matta (2009) note that physical educators engaged in a range of democratic reforms, which included facilitating *colegiados* (representative bodies responsible for major fiscal, administrative, and curricular decisions in schools), promoting weekly pedagogical dialogues among faculty, and advocating for the popular election of school administrators. Jennings and Da Matta (2007a, 2007b) examined the role of physical education teachers as agents of change – individuals who are able to alter the status quo and bring about social transformation – who shaped school curricula through shifting socio-political contexts and worked daily to bring about lasting change.

The philosophy of Paulo Freire

Prior to the conception of the military regime, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire developed an inquiry-based approach to education that taught both children and adults to re-examine their own lived experiences and the ways in which these experiences coincided with their social realities (Freire 1967, 1970). His critical approach to education taught marginalized populations, such as the poor, women, and indigenous peoples, how to resist and deconstruct the oppression they experienced in the world around them. Thus, as people were taught to read they were also taught to critique their environment, which Freire referred to as ‘reading the word and reading the world’ (Freire and Macedo 1987, 35).

After the military regime took power, Freire was sent into exile as his views were interpreted as subversive by the government (Freire 1989). Freire lived in exile outside of Brazil until after the fall of the military regime at which time he was asked to return home and serve as the Secretary of Education in São Paulo. Upon his return, Freire was instrumental in helping Brazilians to question the authoritative and oppressive school practices left behind by the dictatorship. He argued that if Brazil wanted to advance as a democratic society, one primary goal should be the democratization of schooling. Freire began working with teachers, administrators, and community members in São Paulo toward the democratization of education (Torres 1998; Gadotti 2004). He also recognized that a transformation in public education would only be possible with a parallel reform in teacher education that acknowledged the political and philosophical battles that occurred daily in public schools (Freire 1985, 1998a, 1998b).

Freire’s democracy as a guiding framework

Freire (1985, 1998a, 1998b) conceptualized a form of democracy that was interactional, ethical, and culturally relevant. Specifically, he believed that ‘democracy is ... the product of interaction, the interaction of a system and its institutions with the cultural context and people who make it real’ (Stevick and Levinson 2007, 2). He believed that teachers were responsible for transmitting democratic values to children and that they should embody the principles of democracy they emphasized in their classes (Freire 1985). Related to the conceptualization of democracy is the space for ‘*abertura*’, or opening, through which individuals are empowered to enact social

transformation via bottom-up change. The concept of abertura began during the military regime in special locations and spaces called as bubbles of freedom, such as federal universities and private property, where the military police did not have access (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b).

Also central to the development of Freire's conception of democracy was conscientização or social/critical consciousness (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b). As explained by Jennings and Da Matta (2009, 217), Freire described conscientização as 'a process of dialogue grounded in one's lived experiences, reflection on the social and political conditions that produce oppression and inequity, and taking action to break the reproductive cycle that maintains the status quo'. Important to both abertura and conscientização is the central role of dialogue in shaping new beliefs, actions, and practices (Freire 1970; Hooks 1989; Ladson-Billings 1994). Such discourse supports teachers and learners in consciously reflecting upon themselves as compassionate and democratic educators and contributing agents in a transforming society (Freire 1998a, 1998b; Skukauskaitė 2007).

From a Freirian perspective, social action is viewed as one of the fundamental goals for education and social transformation is grounded in the local actions of individuals working together to alter the status quo (Freire 1970, 1985, 1998a, 1998b). This process embraces the notion that individuals engage critically and deliberately in debating local issues with the intent of unmasking invisible ideologies embedded in institutional structures and processes. By doing so, individuals, community leaders, and school teachers lay the groundwork for new understandings and actions on a personal and social level. This is a process referred to by Freire (1970, 1993) as praxis and involves both reflection upon critical events and actions to right injustices. Adopting an orientation toward praxis helps to facilitate the examination of knowledge as well as how and with what purpose knowledge is developed (Habermas 1971). Freire referred to his approach as a humanizing pedagogy and emphasized its role in positioning students as subjects who actively make meaning of their lives and the world around them rather than as objects who passively receive content from teachers (Jennings and Smith 2002). In many ways, Freire's perspective aligns well with that of Laker's (2000, 2001) vision for physical education, which embraces personal and social responsibility, moral education, and citizenship.

In Freire's (2007) view, a humanizing pedagogy breaks down hierarchies and emphasizes a non-dichotomous student-teacher relationship. However, Freire's work is not without its critics. Post-structural scholars have noted that Freire's conception of power fails to recognize the individual's sense of agency in negotiating power relationships (Ellsworth 1992). These scholars have noted that, even in the direst of circumstances, those who appear to be entirely powerless and fatalistic still have some measure of power. This is often exercised through covert actions such as sabotage, observance of banned cultural or religious ceremonies, and by being generally uncooperative (Blackburn 2000). Freire seems to assume that the oppressed have no power to change their own realities and are in need of assistance from an outsider who possess the secret formula of a power to which they must be initiated (Rahnema 1992). Scholars have questioned Freire's assumption of a single type of oppression and his abstract and ill-defined

goal of liberation (Weiler 1991). According to critics, Freire seems to present his liberating pedagogy as a universally applicable and absolute solution to oppression regardless of the cultural or religious context in which the population is situated (Ellsworth 1992).

Despite notable limitations, the impact of Freire's philosophies and his contribution to the field of critical pedagogy is undeniable and is considered seminal (O'Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998; Banks 2001). While the process of democratization in education has been influenced by the work of many intellectuals in and outside of Brazil (Giroux 1997; Greene 2009), Freire's work was chosen as the guiding framework for this study since it is particularly relevant to the Brazilian context and because the participants in our study specifically mentioned Freire's philosophies as being important to their conceptualization of democratic practices in PETE.

Method

Existential phenomenology

As a research group, we have both insider and outsider perspectives on the democratization of Brazilian PETE. Growing up in Brazil during the dictatorship, the first author, Gylton, also served as the participant in our study. He witnessed firsthand the oppressive force of totalitarianism and, as a student studying physical education at UFMG, found himself at the center of the movement toward democratization after the fall of the military regime. This gave Gylton a unique insider's perspective of the processes and *abertuas* that allowed for the democratization of Brazilian PETE. In contrast, the second and third authors, Andrew and Michael, approached the study from the perspective of outsiders. They have earned advanced degrees in physical education at American universities where they had been exposed to the work of Freire (2007, 2009), Fernandez-Balboa (1998), and other critical scholars. However, having never been to Brazil or experienced the extreme forms of oppression that had been commonplace during Gylton childhood, Andrew and Michael were unable to understand the particular relevance of Freire's philosophy in the reformation of Brazilian PETE.

As a result of our insider– outsider understanding, we believe that existential phenomenology presented a useful perspective through which to frame this investigation. Existential phenomenology brings together insider and outsider perspectives by blending ethnography with autobiographical analysis (Wieder 2003). Existential phenomenology relies heavily upon the notion of subjectivism as an essential perspective to the inquiry method (Green, Camilli, and Elmore 2006). With a heavy focus on understanding individual experience, existential phenomenology often incorporates reliance upon the phenomenological method and/or the infusion of existentialism into the analysis of individual experience. Key concepts in existential phenomenology include intentionality, emergent dialogue, and the hermeneutic circle.

Intentionality refers to the phenomenological dictum that experience and the objects of experience are in unity. This requires that lived experiences can be examined in relation to the specific context from which they emerge as opposed to in isolation. As a result, researchers using

existential phenomenology view their conceptual categories for explaining the data as being secondary to the participants' understanding of their own experiences (Føllesdall 1982). Emergent dialogue relates to the need for interviews to be largely guided by the participants as opposed to the researchers (Polkinghorne 1989). As a result, while we did use some broad interview questions to focus the dialogue, a strong emphasis was placed on allowing participants to guide the discussion. The hermeneutic cycle refers to the back and forth interpretative process researchers use by relating part of a text to the whole. As the researcher develops a more complete understanding of the data, interpretations are continuously revised (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1990). As both participant and researcher, Gylton engaged with Andrew and Michael in an ongoing analysis of the data-set until the final themes were reached. This allowed for a blending of our perspectives throughout the analysis process.

Setting and participants

The setting for our research was Belo Horizonte, a city in the mountains in the state of Gerais in Brazil. In the city of Belo, there are 175 municipal schools that serve predominantly the working poor and working class populations. Although in recent years a rising middle class has emerged in Brazil, as with many other cities, Belo is best characterized as consisting of two distinct social classes of people: those with great wealth and those without any wealth (Jennings and Da Matta 2009). UFMG is located in Belo Horizonte and is the reference point from which Gylton understands his involvement in the democratization of PETE. UFMG was initially founded in 1927 as a state-subsidized private institution. It remained in the state system until 1949 at which time it was federalized. A school of physical education was added to the university in 1969, after the rise of the military dictatorship.

The first author, Gylton, served as the participant in our study and the Director of the School of Education at UFMG, Maria, was interviewed as an informant. At the time when data were collected, Gylton was 46 years old and employed at a large, research-intensive university in the Western USA. Gylton received his doctorate in physical education from a university in the South Eastern USA. He earned an undergraduate degree in physical education from UFMG and taught physical education in Belo Horizonte for 10 years before coming to the USA. As a teacher, Gylton was very much involved in the democratization of physical education at his school and was elected as vice principal twice.

Maria was a physical education teacher prior to the dictatorship and became a PETE faculty member in 1972. She went on to be elected to the position of Director of the School of Education in 1992. Before transitioning to administration, she taught multiple methods courses for preservice physical education teachers at UFMG. It was in these courses that Gylton first interacted with Maria and she began mentoring him. During the military regime, Maria was an outspoken proponent of democracy. It was her dream to see Brazil transformed from an oppressive, totalitarian state into one which embraced freedom and democracy. She was involved

in the realization of this dream in 1988 when she was appointed to the committee charged with writing Brazil's first democratic constitution after two decades of military dictatorship.

Data collection

Our primary data collection consisted of two retrospective interviews with both Gylton and Maria in order to understand how Gylton experienced the fall of the military dictatorship, the subsequent rise of democracy, and the implications of these processes for Brazilian PETE. The first interview with Gylton and Maria proceeded in a semi-structured format so specific topics could be addressed, while also providing significant flexibility for interviewees to introduce topics they viewed as relevant to the discussion (Patton 2002). The second interview was much more unstructured and provided Gylton and Maria with an opportunity to expand upon initial discussion topics and introduce new information. All of the interviews lasted between two and three hours and were scheduled at times and places that were convenient for interviewees. Follow-up questions were also posed via email and telephone in order to ask participants additional questions and to check for the accuracy of emerging themes. All of the interviews were recorded for transcription. Researchers took notes during phone interviews, which were also transcribed, and email correspondence was imported directly into a word processing program for analysis.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

All of the data were analyzed using in-depth thematic analysis (Glesne 2010) and constant comparison (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Through thematic analysis, we individually read, reread, and analyzed interview transcripts in search of recurring patterns. We employed a combination of deductive and inductive analyses as our process was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, but we were open to new ideas beyond those which were derived from Freire's work (Patton 2002). Through individual analysis, we each developed our own interpretive framework in order to summarize and explain the data. These frameworks were compared at a subsequent research meeting in which each of us described our approach to the analysis. During this meeting, it was determined that the three interpretive frameworks highlighted many of the same issues and, with minor modifications, we were able to come to consensus regarding a framework that we believe best explained Gylton's experiences.

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the data, we made several methodological decisions prior to the initiation of the study (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Member checks were conducted by asking participants to review emergent themes and provide feedback through the second interview, phone calls, and emails. By interviewing both a PETE student and PETE faculty member, we were able to collect data from different perspectives which allowed for the triangulation of our data and a more complete exploration of the democratization of PETE at UFMG. The strategic use of multiple coders, who had a combination of insider and outsider

perspectives, allowed for researcher triangulation. Our varying viewpoints spurred additional dialogue that allowed us to further explore, substantiate, and re-examine preliminary themes.

Results and discussion

Through our collective analysis of the data, we constructed a narrative account of the collapse of the authoritarian model of PETE and the reconstruction that followed. This reconstruction, guided by the ethos of democracy, is explored through the eyes of Gylton and Maria, who experienced it firsthand. In order to set the stage, a condensed version of Gylton's biography is provided prior to proceeding into the remainder of the narrative. When quotations are used the speaker will be identified and a reference will be made to the number of the interview or whether the statement came from an email or phone conversation.

Setting the stage: Gylton's biography

Gylton was born one month after the military dictatorship commenced. Born into a low-income family, his parents worked multiple jobs in order to support Gylton and his five brothers and sisters. Tragedy struck when Gylton was nine. His sister committed suicide and then one month later his mother passed away. Despite family hardships, he became a successful student by studying hard and becoming dedicated to his schoolwork. As he explained, 'I could accept [my social position] or engage in studying by myself, start getting good grades and acquiring the knowledge that could help me in the future' (1).

In reflecting on his education during the dictatorship, Gylton recalled that there was a strong 'emphasis on routine, learning the correct answers, strict obedience, and public ranking of students' according to test scores' (2). Most students from low-income backgrounds did not have opportunities to attend highly competitive college preparation schools, but as a successful volleyball player, Gylton earned a scholarship to a prestigious private school where he was able to study for the college entrance exam. He recalled that

I did not get into a prep-school because of my grades, but because my [volleyball] club had a sports partnership with that school. I thought that my public education was good, but ... we had no resources, no equipment, no labs, and our library was nothing compared to the Promove [private prep-school]. (Email)

In order to pay the fees that accompanied entrance to the private school, Gylton achieved a highly competitive job as a clerk in a public bank in Brazil. He explained that

I got a job at a public bank that hired office-boys ... I took a test [to qualify for the position] ... we were about 3000 teenagers under 18 years of age who were candidates and I got the 34th place. That job provided the means for my success in school. (1)

By 1983 Gylton's work at the bank had paid off and he was able to save enough to begin his studies in physical education at UFMG. Then, in his second year of college, his professors went on strike in protest of the dictatorship.

Gylton's biography provides him with a rather unique perspective relative to the organization of social groups in Brazil. Having been born into poverty he developed an understanding for what it meant to live in the lower social strata. This is a vantage point that would go on to influence his understanding of the movement toward democratization. As Gylton explained, 'when, my professors got in a strike to fight for education, better salaries and for better quality of life ... being from a poor family, I understood what they were talking about' (2).

During the time of the military regime, education was used primarily as an oppressive tool in order to teach members of the lower social strata to submit to the rule of the dictatorship (Freire 1989; Kendall 1992). Higher education was typically reserved for members of the ruling class and systematic barriers were put in place to prevent the lower class from accessing university education (e.g. entrance examinations and high cost of tuition). Through this process, the military government was able to maintain ideological dominance and the maintenance of the status quo (Freire 1970, 1985). Despite family hardships, Gylton was able to overcome his humble beginning by becoming a successful student. Sport performance seems to have facilitated this process by opening educational doors that may have otherwise been closed to someone in Gylton's position (Freire 1989). Through his physical abilities, Gylton was granted access to sport and the accompanying cultural capital that was typically reserved for the upper classes (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b, 2009). As he explained, this had a definite impact on Gylton's ability to climb the social ladder and gain access to opportunities in higher education.

The impact of the resistance movement on Gylton's level of consciousness

The university strike at UFMG in the mid-1980s was scary, confusing, and challenging, but also liberating for Gylton. It was an uneasy and uncertain time to be a Brazilian educator or student studying education. Important to the formation of Gylton's consciousness as an aspiring educator was a movement that began at UFMG to protest the military regime. This was highlighted by a faculty strike that brought the entire university to a standstill in 1985. The purpose of the strike was to request that the government allocate additional funds to education and repeal Institutional Act Number Five¹ (De Rossi 2003). According to Gylton, Institutional Act Number Five was 'a pervasive, and oppressive law ... [that] legitimized the government to repress freedom, to censor any gathering in public places, and to condemn any initiative different from what the government had established for education, social activities, sports, and arts' (2).

Initially, Gylton was reluctant to join the resistance movement as he saw the strike as an impediment to his graduation. His goal was to complete his degree and get a job teaching physical education so that he could better support himself, and he viewed the strike as a barrier. Additionally, he feared the political consequences for getting involved as activists were often persecuted by the government (Jennings and Da Matta 2009). Despite his fears, Gylton's

reluctance to become involved in the resistance became shaken through interactions with university faculty, including Maria. He recalled that ‘some of my best teachers told us: You guys must participate in the assemblies and voice your opinions’ (1). After observing a series of lectures and open forums at which educators, including Maria, voiced their resolve, he noted that ‘I felt compelled to be part of it. I was scared to death, but I had to do something too’ (Email).

While interactions with faculty members and the observance of demonstrations led Gylton to question non-involvement, it was a conversation with Maria that pushed him into action. Gylton recalled telling Maria: ‘I don’t care who wins this political battle. I just want this to be over and I want to come back to study and graduate on time’ (1). Maria explained that ‘we must have faith. If we don’t win and you graduate, your salary will be so low that after one year you will quit teaching. Our officials must value education’ (2). This conversation resulted in a change in Gylton’s thinking that would change the course of his education. He described it as a ‘shift in my consciousness’ (1). As he explained, ‘I knew I could not stay home during the strikes I had to go and participate at the assembly sites ... I knew they were trying to transform authoritarian schools into democratic and also that they were fighting for better education’ (2). This is just one example of the many ways in which Maria served as a mentor for Gylton as he attempted to navigate the changing political and social contexts that surrounded the resistance movement.

Gylton’s first years at UFMG were trying and difficult times. Having emerged from a culture of poverty, it is not surprising that Gylton was reluctant to initially question the messages of the military regime. The education that he was exposed to as a child taught him to be subordinate to authority and to accept the doctrine of the government (Kendall 1992). However, through his engagement with fellow students and faculty members, including Maria, Gylton was able to find his personal abertura through which he was able to recognize the legitimacy of the resistance movement (Freire 1985). UFMG appears to have facilitated this process by acting as a bubble of freedom in which Gylton could interact with other students and faculty, including Maria, who were also becoming involved in the struggle for freedom (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b). Interacting with Maria was the specific impetus for Gylton to more critically examine the realities of the oppressive world in which he lived. This highlights the interactional nature of democracy and the importance of dialogue in facilitating social transformation (Freire 1970, 1985).

Planting the seeds of democracy

As Gylton’s consciousness began to shift, his involvement in the resistance and strikes quickly increased. It was through his participation that he began to realize the true nature of the physical education he was exposed to as a child. As with education more broadly, physical education and sport were used as tools of oppression – mechanisms intended to immobilize individuals and force them into subordination (Kendall 1992; Jennings and Da Matta 2009). Students who were weak were quickly excluded because the model emphasized competition and the ethos of

winning. This approach to physical education transcended all levels of education and was pervasive at UFMG. In reflecting on the faculty that taught in his department, Gylton recalled that ‘our best teachers participated in social discourse, but most were from the military and were very authoritative’ (2). This is corroborated by research which indicates that many PETE faculty members were tied into the government and some even held military appointments (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Maria added that ‘the education was the back bone of the military regime ... the schools were the foundation of the dictatorship along with the sports that alienated the population ... and this included teacher education’ (Email).

Gylton’s realization of the true nature of physical education in the military regime along with support from Maria and other progressive teacher education faculty helped him to realize the importance of becoming involved in the resistance movement. Maria recalled that

across the whole nation the government federalized all physical education schools [in higher education] ... the government ideology had this premise to develop elite athletes to promote high performance success, but on the other hand they had the idea that through sports they could control the [university] students. (2)

Gylton no longer felt that he could remain neutral and believed that getting involved in the promotion of democratic practices was the only way for him to make an impact. He learned that ‘education is not neutral. I realized that I could not sit on the fence ... [I had to stand up for] teaching toward participation, toward freedom, democracy, and toward meaningful experience in schools. I had to become an agent of change’ (2).

Gylton’s resolve to become involved in the democratic reformation of PETE at his university continued to be supported through Maria’s guidance and leadership. While the military regime was weakening, Maria organized a seminar course that highlighted international perspectives on physical education philosophy. Gylton recalled the course as being extremely influential in the development of his personal and professional identity. He reflected that ‘during this in-depth, interactive seminar we had several discussions ... about the role of sports during the military period, and the perspective of a liberating physical education projected to impact ... achievement in schools’ (1). In discussing her approach to PETE, Maria explained that the seminar was ‘designed to discuss the role of physical education in the reconstruction of a more humane and democratic society in Brazil ... because at that time, the most powerful tool of propaganda for the military regime was sports’ (1). Reflecting further on the experience she insisted that

we had to prepare teachers who could critically confront the realities of the country [e.g. poverty, homelessness, hunger] ... but first, they had to confront their own stereotypes and authoritarian views ... so in the 80’s and 90’s we created ... the spaces for democratic practice called ‘bubbles of freedom’. (2)

It was through those bubbles of freedom (Jennings and Da Matta 2007a, 2007b) that Gylton continued learned what democratic approaches to physical education might look like and the methods for promoting them in PETE.

The seminar courses Maria organized furthered the development of Gylton's sense of conscientização by providing him with the information need to critique the current state of education in Brazil and a safe environment in which to engage in dialogue (Freire 1970; Jennings and Da Matta 2009). Maria's approach to conducting the seminars parallel's Freire's position that one of the fundamental goals of education is to help individuals better understand their realities and take social action to work toward correcting injustices (Collins 2000). Maria was working toward the development of praxis (Habermas 1971; Freire 1993) by encouraging her students to question their own pasts and reflect upon how they could become agents of change in their current social worlds. Implicit in her discussion was Maria's hope that she would help to create in her students a humanizing pedagogy that positioned them to take action to break the reproductive cycle of oppression in Brazil (Jennings and Smith 2002; Souto-Manning 2006). Gylton's interactions with Maria as well as his participation in the seminar series seemed to have furthered the development of his consciousness and helped him to question many of the taken-for-granted elements of the oppressive reality in which he was raised.

Reconstructing PETE in post-military Brazil

On 15 March 1985, the authoritarian regime officially ended when the civilian Gylton Sarney took office as President (De Rossi 2003; Souto-Manning 2006). Gylton viewed this as an extremely important step toward the democratization of physical education through PETE. Although she also rejoiced in the opportunity for democracy, Maria was quick to remind Gylton of the challenges that the transition would bring. The values of the military regime were heavily engrained within the purviews of many educators, making the shift to democracy more challenging than simply ending the government's rule. As she explained, 'we wanted to create space for dialogue and democracy ... we had to reconstruct our views of schooling and deconstruct 30 years of domination, authoritarianism, and dictatorship. The only way to do it was with critical dialogue' (1). For Maria, 'the ideology of dominance was a hidden feature that prevails in the whole school system, from kindergarten through teacher education, and needed to be deconstructed and rebuilt at all levels ... we had to humanize schools' (Phone Call).

For both Gylton and Maria, physical education had an important role to play in the reconceptualization of schooling. Maria believed that this movement had to begin in PETE. She noted that 'we were committed to change the schools and the universities that prepared those physical education teachers whom would work in those schools' (1). Gylton recalled observing that one way in which this occurred was through the strategic and intentional replacement of retiring PETE faculty members. When PETE faculty who were remnants of the military regime began to retire, their positions were 'intentionally filled with instructors that had democratic, diverse, and progressive views of the world ... as director of education, Maria helped make this

happen' (2). Soon physical education at the university went far beyond sport and, according to Gylton, 'became a key subject to form and develop critical citizens' (2).

Brazil's new constitution reinvented the purpose of schools as places in which citizens were to be prepared to participate in a democratic and diverse society. Maria noted that the faculty at UFMG believed that PETE should have a role in that process and 'wanted to include future teachers in the interactive process of decision making ... but there was no space for it ... we had to create it' (1). Gylton's involvement in the democratic movement on the UFMG campus is indicative of how such democratic space was created. He provided the student voice as a representative to his academic department and was eventually elected president of the student body. From these positions, he recalls participating in praxis: 'I had to discuss the new curriculum ... political perspectives for initial requirements for PE teachers' (2). This initial involvement led to Gylton's role as a national representative of physical education curriculum and instruction. Maria recognized Gylton's impact in the shaping of the new curriculum for physical education. She insisted that 'he participated and helped to organize it [the new physical education curriculum] as student body representative. That was the first step' (Phone Call).

Through his involvement both on and beyond the UFMG campus, Gylton was given the space to exercise his voice and participate in the conceptualization of new physical education in post-military Brazil (Freire 1993; Collins 2000). Among many others involved in the reform movement, Gylton was able to become a participant in the movement toward democracy by becoming empowered to take authentic action (Stevick and Levinson 2007). This is particularly powerful given that Gylton was still a student while serving as a national representative for physical education and instruction. Gylton's educators helped him to develop the critical consciousness necessary for challenging the status quo and helping to re-envision physical education from a humanizing perspective (Freire 1970; Ladson-Billings 1994).

Conclusions and final thoughts

This study sought to understand the democratic reconceptualization of PETE through the eyes of Gylton, a physical education student who grew up during the military dictatorship and witnessed firsthand the university strikes and protests that contributed to the collapse of the regime. Gylton's biography demonstrates that he was able to overcome childhood hardships and break the cycle of poverty by getting admitted to UFMG where he studied to become a physical educator. Interestingly, Gylton credits his background in volleyball for helping him get into a college preparatory school that facilitated his entrance into college. At UFMG, Gylton experienced a shift in consciousness from having a somewhat ambivalent stance relative to the strikes to becoming an active participant in the quest toward social change. Maria played a key role in facilitating Gylton's shift in consciousness by helping him to question the status quo and facilitating the development of his sense of agency as a participant in the process of social change.

According to Freire (1993), social changes are only possible when there are authentic, bottom-up changes in education. However, without reforms in teacher education, changes to the practice of education in schools are unlikely. Imig and Switzer (1996) note that changes in higher education are difficult and often face institutional, ideological, and sociological barriers that often inhibit authentic educational movements. These difficulties may be even more complex when discussing democratization, which involves the concepts of power, privilege, and knowledge that are grounded in traditional practices and ideologies which inhibit change (Shor 1992; Westheimer and Kahne 2004). Our investigation indicates that, given the proper set of actors and circumstances, such social transformation is possible.

Despite important criticism related to Freire's conceptualization of power (Ellsworth 1992), our investigation highlights the practical importance of his theories and teachings. Freire's scholarship helped to provide Gylton and Maria with actionable strategies to pursue challenging and changing their realities as well as the language to explain their efforts. This illustrates the importance of Freire's work in the lives of some of the actors who participated in the reconceptualization of PETE in Brazil. It is challenging to find any theory of educational change that does not contain at least some imperfections or theoretical oversights. Thus, it may be more appropriate to consider the ways in which a theory has had a traceable impact on practice. In this particular investigation, it became apparent that the work of Freire was both theoretically and practically meaningful to the actors who participated in the investigation.

Examining the radical democratization of Brazilian PETE requires a broad discussion of the processes and practices both teacher educators and preservice teachers experienced, and depicts the dialectical narrative of Freire's (1993) idea of praxis. In the current investigation, Gylton and Maria engaged with others in a critical process to unmask invisible ideologies embedded in their daily lived experiences (Ladson-Billings 1994; Stevick and Levinson 2007). They were able to reinvent themselves as agents of change at the micro- and macro-levels by adopting liberating pedagogies, exercising conscientização, and changing their context through critical dialogue and action (Freire 1970, 1993).

The initiative to promote a more democratic approach to Brazilian PETE is a theoretically important phenomenon and merits further investigation. Gylton and Maria's narratives demonstrate that democratic practice in PETE can become a reality. If these changes can occur in Brazil, there is the possibility that they can be replicated elsewhere. However, if PETE is to recognize its potential to be democratically liberating, teacher educators and administrators must be willing to question their long-held beliefs. This begins with a reevaluation of the role of physical education and school sport in schools and society (Laker 2000, 2001). Understanding of the role of PETE and physical education in the larger movement toward democratic education in post-military Brazil and the implications of this experience for other countries is a key direction for future research. Investigators should also examine the degree to which the humanizing, democratic vision of physical education is instilled in PETE students and the impact it has in Brazilian schools. Finally, researchers may want to expand their investigations beyond PETE in order to better understand the role that PETE faculty played in

the larger process of democratizing Brazilian higher education. This would help in understanding the role of PETE faculty and students in the larger movement toward social change.

Note

1. Institutional Act Number Five was passed by the Brazilian Military Government in December 1968 in response to protests of the military regime. The act gave the government the right to detain citizens without legal cause (i.e. it suspended habeas corpus) and to directly intervene in the actions of states and municipalities. The act also increased the power of the executive branch of the government by shutting down other government functions through a forced recess and declared a nation-wide state of emergency. Institutional Act Number Five led to widespread student protests, which were met with violent action on the part of the government. The act was eventually repealed in 1978.

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