

USA-Brazil Cross-Cultural Study of Sports and Social Inclusion

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Abstract

In every country, school is considered an essential factor in the development of children, citizens, and the country as a whole. In developing countries such as Brazil, however, the number of school dropouts is very high. In developed countries such as the United States, there is an urgent need for pedagogical improvements. Participants were thirty-four high school students from four different schools, divided into low-income and high-income groups in both countries. This study is an investigation of the influences of sport in schools in that it challenges understanding how sport is identified in its social inclusion in Brazil and in the United States. The intention of this study is to demonstrate how sport can develop its role to contribute to social inclusion under Freirean perspectives.

Keywords: Sport and social inclusion; Sport in schools; USA-Brazil; Cross-cultural study

1. Introduction

Sport is a social and cultural phenomenon. Sport is increasing interest and involvement in the North and South American societies. As McLaren writes (1994), education is a form of culture. Baseball is a form of culture. Therefore, the sociology of sport often successfully clarifies the synchronic associations that exist, for example, between race and sport or gender and sport. They take what they study from the flow of time, they are unable to shed light on the associations that explain how and why such patterns are socially generated and how and why, under specific conditions and for specific periods of time, they persist or undergo structured processes of change (Dunning, et al., 1993).

Sport is one of the most important sociocultural phenomena in the world. Actually, the social importance of sport is connected with the significant development of the athletic movement, increasing the number of people participating in and watching the spectacular world of sports. Its social significance when connected with education, participation, and performance can be interpreted as a distinctive democratic opportunity for humanity as a whole. At least in sport-participation level, people with some exceptions, with or without talent, from every social economic status, even with physical limitations can participate and enjoy sports.

Sport can be a part of the democratic system by eventual participation of the population in all ages, genders, and levels and can reflect social inclusion and motivation. Furthermore, sport can exert a foundation for socialization of the minorities or underprivileged classes. For many poor people, sport appears to be one of the few allowable and available opportunities for success in perceived racist and oppressive societies (Teich, 2002). Historically, however, sport also reflects socioeconomic and ethnic differences, assuming its magnitude as a type of imposition and repetition of the status quo. A cultural history of sport should illuminate persistent themes in human nature, such as interpersonal relations and the uses men and women make of their power over others (Mandell, 1984). Its participation is limited by discrimination and preconception which provide important questions about its relevance to society. For example, during the Roman Empire, 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 keep 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 low social classes, play sports to entertain those people who have money to buy expensive tickets or pay-per-view transmission (Müller, 2004).

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). 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 (Talamini & Page, 1973).

In Brazil and in the United States some students are out of school or unmotivated with the educational process for many different reasons, such as economic problems, social problems, or problems related to curriculum. Significant research has been produced which supports the importance of sport to entertainment, to improved health, and to people's lives, especially in schools where sport is inherently beneficial to youth by its potential contributions for the social, psychological, physical, and ethical development of youth (Talamini & Page, 1973). Therefore, at-risk students' behavior must be addressed through the adequate connection between the school and students' outside environment. However, only a few studies identify the structure and practices supporting sport as a social promoter. In addition, there is not an articulated connection between society and school with sport to translate research into practice. Furthermore, sport in school should be a motivational factor to keep students and to motivate them academically during the school years, thus reducing the number of dropouts and grade retention. This study offers a conceptualization for sport connected to education under a cross-cultural perspective with the objective to understand particularities of each culture.

Educators strongly advocate the role that sport can play in the wider social policy agenda, particularly in the areas of academic motivation, social inclusion, and health. Sport offers many potential social benefits to individuals and communities. Sport can be used as a tool to initiate social change. It is a way of encouraging people to participate in sport while simultaneously tackling a pressing social problem and keep out of problems.

Moreover, programs of sport can be involved, not only in individual, but also in community development. According to White and Rowe (2000) participation in arts and sport has a beneficial social impact. Arts and sport are inclusive and can contribute to neighborhood renewal. They can build confidence and encourage strong community groups and make a real difference to health, crime, employment, and education in deprived communities.

This study offers a conceptualization for sport connected to education under a cross-cultural perspective with the objective of understanding the characteristics of each culture. The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze, using qualitative methods and Freirean theories, the relationship between sports and its cultural and educational influences in Brazilian and U.S. societies. In addition, this research demonstrates how sport can develop its role to most effectively contribute to the promotion of social inclusion.

2. Methodology

This is qualitative research under an ethnography approach, meaning that the qualitative analysis focuses on the process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behavior (Schwandt, 2007), uses also interviews as qualitative data strategies to collect information and critical hermeneutics as a methodological approach to analyze the information. The ideological framework used in this research is based on Freirean perspective, which determines the focus of inquiry. This study is held to be cross-cultural - or cross-national - and comparative; therefore, I may call it comparative ethnography. The idea is to examine particular issues in two countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different sociocultural settings, such as schools, customs, traditions, lifestyles, using the same research instruments either to carry out secondary analysis of national characteristics and data or to conduct new experimental work.

In each country, I chose two schools in the same city (El Paso, TX, USA and Blumenau, SC, Brazil). I decided to interview students from two different schools in each country, according to students' SES (Socio-Economic Status). In El Paso I chose Irvin High School (78.5% economically disadvantaged student body) and Franklin High School (22.3% economically disadvantaged student body). In Blumenau, I chose Colégio Estadual Luiz Delfino (public school composed predominantly of low-income students) and Colégio Bom Jesus (private school predominantly composed of high income students). Two groups of students from the same school were surveyed. One was a group of student/athletes and another, was a group of regular students.

Interview results are composed by specific group of four participants each, and results reported from two groups from the same school, one group with students and another with student/athletes, in the same city. Therefore, I have eight divided groups, from low and high SES and regular students or student/athletes. The participants consisted of thirty-four male and female high school students (18 in El Paso, TX, USA and 16 in Blumenau, SC, Brazil). They ranged in age from 15 to 17 years. The participants were divided into low-income (or economically disadvantaged) and high-income groups. So that the participants would be roughly representative of students in this age range, students were not specifically selected for their involvement in a specific sport or sports. High school students were chosen because they were at the time in their life where sport and academic should be used for transition for college or profession.

This research used the same qualitative information approach in both countries; therefore, this study enabled the possibility of comparisons at the same level. It showed the cultural and educational differences between them and the effects of different political and economic circumstances. These questions focused on their descriptions of the school; characteristics of student and student/athletes; their beliefs and expectations; and sport that contributes or not to learning opportunities. For anonymity, the names of the interviewees do not correspond to the real name. For references on the interviews transcriptions below: PS meaning Public School and PR meaning Private School (Brazil) and LI meaning Low Income and HI meaning High Income (U.S.)

Following, I present the analysis of information collected in Brazil and in the U.S. through the observations and interviews. Subsequently that, I used a comparative ethnography based on similarities and differences that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of participants' viewpoints. From the process of analysis and interpretation, important ideas were translated into themes under a Freirean framework. The qualitative results within the next section represent American and Brazilian students' and student/athletes' beliefs regarding the benefits of sport to improve their lives.

3. Similarities and Differences between Students' Beliefs Concerning Sport Benefits and Drawbacks

3.1 Emerged Themes from Brazilians

In Brazil, I identified emerging themes throughout students' interviews and my observations. These themes are important to explain the fundamental theme because they demonstrate how sport can be a tool to promote social inclusion. These themes were organized into broad categories for a comprehensive content analysis. There is a common sociological perception in Brazil that the only social mobility poor people have, especially the dark-skinned ones, is through soccer, music or drug traffic. In Brazil through interviews and observations in relation to sport as used to promote social inclusion, the following themes emerged:

3.1.1 Sport Keeps You Out of Trouble – It was a consensus of all participants that sport can block social problems. Students explained that sport filled their leisure time rather than using that time for drugs and violence for example. Andréia (PR), a white 15-year-old girl, commented about the social benefits of sports. She said, "Sport is good to keep people busy during idle time, and not doing drugs for example." This concept is not new in Brazilian society, and the idea is simple but very powerful. Young people with more time available, especially those living in poverty, are more suitable to be involved in something problematic or illegal, such as drugs, very common in *favelas* (slums). They are tempted either to start using drugs at an early age or start doing drug traffic because they can earn much more money in the drug business than in regular, low paying jobs. Consequently, there exists a war between *traficantes* (traffickers) to control a specific area. This war between police and *traficantes* and between gangs of *traficantes* results in a large number of fatalities.

The number of homicides in Brazil is higher in the population between 15 to 25 years old, predominantly those involved in the world of drug traffic. Robson (PS) comments this sad reality. He said, "It is very hard for kids doing sports to go home and see their father drunk or drugged. This is very hard, and maybe kids give up on sports." João Victor (PR) commented, "They think about sport and won't have time to think about drugs, they know that if they use drugs, they will have problems in sports". As Freire (1998a) points out, the future of young people is problematic and not already decided fatalistically, and there is a lot of fatalism around these communities. Fatalism insists that we can do nothing to change the march of social-historical and cultural reality because that is how the world is anyway. We cannot falsify realities, but education and sport can help students see what is inevitable, what cannot be changed in the way of technical training, or can transform the way of critically understanding their reality.

If teachers are cultural workers, they must create the possibilities for the production of knowledge, not transferring, which strengthens the conviction of the importance of the political-pedagogical task (Freire, 1998b) then transform fatalism into hope by promoting critical consciousness.

Independently from the social, gender or racial context, participation in sport can keep students in school and prevent problems related to idle time, such as drugs, violence, pregnancy, boredom, obesity, and provide a lifelong orientation to wellness. Because sport is a subject that many young people enjoy, schools should increase students' participation in sport to promote and expand educational opportunities. Sport is not an end in itself, but is a vehicle that can promote educational and social opportunities.

3.1.2 Cultural Identity– Cultural identity and the relationship with education and educational practice have to do with the fundamental issues of curriculum. Freire (1998a) explains, just as the presence of the cultural factor, alone, does not explain everything. In truth, cultural identity and freedom has a lot to do with the relationship between what we inherit and what we acquire. Therefore, cultural identity must be discussed in schools. The example of that teacher which used *futebol* (soccer) to get the attention and promote literacy is an illustration of the relationship between cultural identity and school with impressive results. Teachers respecting cultural identity are promoting learning and reinforcing what is natural for students in relation to their lives.

Many comments were related to the importance of sport for students' development as well as the cultural importance of sport in societies. Anderson (PS), a regular student at Luiz Delfino, is a white 16 years old boy. He said, "I think sport is very important for our development. It is a part of our culture. I feel good when I play sports." Culture is a very important topic in my research, and I asked what he means by "our culture." He said, "Well, like soccer everybody is "bind on the *telinha*" (little screen- slang for TV) to watch the *seleção* (Brazilian national soccer team). Brazilians are fanatics for soccer and when *seleção* plays, all the nation stops to watch, literally. Culture can make the connection between the concrete and theoretical contexts. Educators need to know what happens in the world of students (Freire, 1998b). Therefore, if children love sport and dream to be professional athletes, teachers must know their dreams and relate more to what is important in students' lives. Teachers do not need to transform themselves into kids. Felipe (PS) commented, "Teachers here don't care about sports, we have a lot of homework and stuff. It is very hard afterwards we are tired and still have homework to do. Teachers do recognize that sport is important for me." Based upon the results from the participants' opinions in both countries, it appears that the sport and education they currently see in the societies is a reflection of their cultural connection. As Anderson (PS) said, "Sport is a part of our culture" school must also be a part of students' culture.

Teachers must recognize the cultural identity of their students. Pedagogical activities used in physical education and sport must be connected to the cultural identity of students. Sport is no longer an activity without meaning and becomes a way to produce academic and social knowledge.

3.1.3 Socialization – Sport is a significant part of our social order. Sport sociology explains how people interact with each other in a sport setting to determine how the process of sport affects their development and socialization, or how people fit into society (Freeman, 1992). Sport helps young people to be accepted in small groups at school. Children understand the importance of teamwork and citizenship in this inclusive process. Andréia (PR) said, "Sport helps to socialize people, and they learn how to work as a team." Sport socialization is the process whereby individuals learn skills, values, attitudes, norms, and knowledge of sport roles either directly or indirectly through social systems (Weigand, 2000). Unlike many classrooms, sports can make children the authors of their own culture because they practice it and are involved in it. I followed the idea and asked Isabela about the socialization that happens in sport. She said, "Competition happens but should be used to integrated and respect, especially with children." She explained one of the most important concepts in sport was personal development and the relationship among people. Participation is essential in any democratization process (Tubino, 2001) and sport may be used as a democratic way to socialize people with balance and cooperation.

André (PR) believed, "I like the idea that in some competitions all athletes stay in the same place. This is cool because they can be more integrated. They are still in competition, but they are also friends and living as a group." Sport can be a part of the democratic system by the eventual participation of the population of all ages, genders, and levels and can reflect social inclusion and motivation. Furthermore, sport can exert a foundation for socialization of the minorities or underprivileged classes.

The great challenge is to increase the opportunity for all young people to develop and enrich their lives through sport while in school. Even individual sports such as swimming, people can feel included because they are competing each other and with their own limitations.

3.1.4 Social Justice – Many problems regarding sport and education are related to the lack of resources of the public education system and showed social inequalities and differences between public and private schools. Students from the public school criticized the situation and showed their frustration. Robson (PS) mentioned, “Unfortunately Brazil is like that...in other countries you don’t need to choose to stop sport to play. You can keep playing if parents have more money and can support you.” When compared with the U.S., public education in Brazil is in a calamitous situation, from the state of buildings and the classrooms to the quality of the teaching. As Freire (1998a) points out, “How is it possible to ask of the children the minimum of respect for their material surroundings when the authorities demonstrated such absolute neglect of and indifference to the public institutions under their care?” (p.48). School’s environment is very important, and students recognized they are not valued. If authorities do not care about buildings, probably they do not care about education as a whole. Students’ emotions and desires are limited because of a lack of resources. It is resistance to the abusive abandonment in which the poor have to live (Freire, 1998a) and this resistance keeps these students alive.

Problems in public education in Brazil are connected with a lack of investments, inefficient administration, and social inequality. Public schools are in very bad shape and demonstrate the ugly picture of Brazilian education. Some educators believe that the politicians who can manipulate an illiterate population cause this situation. Freire calls this process “dehumanization”. This denies the possibility to educate human beings, promoting injustice, exploration, oppression, and violence of the oppressor (1970). Unfortunately, this historical process blocked the progress of the country. However, it is starting to change, because the population recognizes the importance of education and feels the necessity to fight for improvement in education. Maybe this desire and hope will make Brazil increase its economic, social, and cultural development, with the objective to promote social equality.

Problems in sport and education in Brazil are related to the social and economic development of the country. To achieve the same level of social development, Brazil needs to learn with the U.S. and promote long and sustained political, social, and economic development (Secco, 2002). Until this goal is reached, students are missing the full opportunity and potential contributions that sport can make towards social inclusion and academic success. As Coakley (1990) theorizes, there is a link between sport participation and upward social mobility. However, relatively few people share the benefits of the link, and in the vast majority of the cases, the benefits are not great. Furthermore, the influences of sport in school, college and professional levels are variable according to the social differences, which is one of the biggest problems that Brazil needs to deal today.

The concern to address equality, equity, and/or inclusion can be associated with two things: difference and fairness (Penney, cited by Hayes & Stidder, 2003). Social justice is also a gender issue because it must address equality between the sexes. Women in sports in Brazil are still discriminated against. Since Brazilian society is extremely *machista* (sexist), men have more space and recognition than women do in sport. Women have less opportunity in sport, and many girls that participate in this research put less importance on sport. Priscilla (PS) said, “I am a girl, maybe we cannot live only in sport. Then we need to live with something else. Then for this reason education is important.” She recognizes the fatalism of the limited opportunities that girls have in sport rather than boys.

Society in general still discriminates against female athletes by giving less attention and resources to female sports. Freire (1998b) calls that “democratic disposition” where the school must approach the authoritarian tendency, racist or *machista*, as the denial of necessary humanism. The good thing is that sport has significant potential to address social equality and change the perpetuated gender-stereotyped behavior. Public policies in the U.S., such as Title IX and “No pass no play”, are developed to promote sport connected with education and to promote gender equality in schools and colleges. Federal funding is designed to increase women’s participation and keep academics more important than sport. The realities, however, are not apparent, and women have not enjoyed equitable opportunities in sports. In addition, many schools are promoting athletes without academic skills.

Although, women have not enjoyed equitable opportunities in sports, female sports in U.S. colleges and schools became more inclusive because of the imposition of some policies, such as Title IX.

Since the passage of the legislation prohibiting discrimination based on gender in educational institutions receiving federal money, the number of females competing in college sports has increased fivefold, and the number in high school athletics has multiplied nine fold (Smith, 2004). It is important to mention that policies to promote equality and academic importance through sport were developed by social groups and educators not by sport people. It is very hard to interpret social justice in a society that needs to impose these kinds of policies to promote equality. We need policies as a mechanism to promote democracy. Nevertheless, democracy is difficult to promote, and democracy is not made by policies only but with reflection and practice.

3.1.5 Sport Is an Opportunity for My Future – What can happen when people suffer a combination of associated problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdowns? Many teenagers in Brazil are suffering from the lack of optimism because of their situation. Sport, however, is sometimes associated with fun and important for kids. They see it as an opportunity to change their realities. Many sport heroes, essentially in soccer, stimulated the myth of social rise through sport. These heroes serve as propaganda for social mobility in societies that produce misery, but also as a mechanism that makes it possible for a few talented individuals to climb in society (Carrano, 2000). I asked the participants how the situation in Brazil was, and Robson (PS) stated, “Unfortunately Brazil is like that. You need to choose to stop or work, sometimes you can’t keep playing because your parents don’t have money.” Social promotion is limited by the lack of opportunities in Brazil. Many teenagers give up sport to go to school or to work.

Sport develops a collective imagination that boys and girls from low classes see as an open door for social rise (Carrano, 2000). One can believe, “If someone from my *favela* can succeed in sport, why not me?” This is only a false dream for the majority and the situation can promote false *conscientização* (consciousness). Artur (PR) said, “Better soccer players in Brazil came from poor, from *favelas* where now kids want to be like their heroes.” I asked if that situation was just a dream or could be real. Isabela (PR) said, “It can be real depending on the individual ability, if this person is a good player, and has this dream he/she can be whatever he/she wants. It is an opportunity.” Arbena (1988) comments for children and the young of the poorest social classes, financially underprivileged features or institutional bracket, soccer has an importance in their daily lives beyond simple recreation. The important point is to give the opportunity for all to achieve their dreams, but teachers, coaches, and parents need to prepare children under a real and true *conscientização*.

The idea is that they need to have the same motivation in education as in sport. They mentioned that the dream is difficult but they must try to realize it. Isabela responded, “I think this is good because if you don’t have an objective you will never follow it. For example, if you don’t have the dream to be a professional athlete you will have sport just for fun, not for an objective”. The last comments of this group showed the clear vision that students have about the importance of sport in their lives but also their limitations for future dreams in sport. Unfortunately, sport and music seem to be the only options that many people in Brazil believe can change their social situation. Many people believe that school is not necessary to achieve those goals. The participants understand the importance of sport but they put education in first place. They understand that sport may help education and recognized the difficulties to play and do well in school. Felipe (PS), a basketball player, originally from the west part of the state, came to Blumenau to defend the city in the state championships. He left his city to play for Blumenau and received a little support for this. The city pays rent, food, transportation and regular costs for books or material. He talks about the dreams, difficulties and the dilemma to be an athlete and student at the same time, “People at the end of high school, or even before that think to choose to go to work or do sports. The majority will choose to do sports, but sport does not have a lot of incentives. They will not make money doing it, and then they need to choose work to bring money home”.

The next question I asked was about sports in college, and many athletes believed in this possibility, in spite of the restricted scholarships for sports in country. Felipe (PS) said, “I think college will be possible because of sport.” With few exceptions, poor people in Brazil do not have an opportunity to use sports to apply for a scholarship in an institution of higher education. University sports are almost non-existent in Brazil. No policies are related to sports and funding for sports as in the U.S. Therefore, sports exert less importance as a social and educational promoter in Brazil than in the United States. The sponsors of Brazilian players do not lend support to the typically American notion that professional sport offers easy routes of mobility for their players. Sport exerts a great influence on Brazilian society. However, it can be more effectively used in schools to improve students’ knowledge and opportunities, especially for underprivileged children.

With this perspective, sport can exercise its function against social exclusion. The society, through schools, should promote the opportunity that sport provides to athletes and poor people.

3.2 Emerged Themes from Americans

In the U.S., I identified emerging themes throughout students' interviews and my observations. The fundamental theme is to understand sport and its importance for social inclusion. These themes were organized into broad categories for a comprehensive content analysis. Americans have different common sociological concepts than Brazilians. In the U.S., students rarely dream to use sport as the main opportunity to achieve fame and fortune. Some students from low SES mentioned that option, but they have a clear picture about the limitations they have to reach that point. Their option is stronger when they mentioned using sports to get college scholarships. In the U.S. through the interviews and observations in relation to sport used to promote social inclusion, the following sub-themes emerged:

3.2.1 Sport Keeps You Out of Trouble— This theme appeared in Brazil and was the same in the U.S. The concept in the U.S. was the same as in Brazil: people with more time available may start using this time for something awful. Desmond (LI) was an African-American originally from the Chicago area. He looked very sharp under his "black power" hairstyle and he came with the point "Sports keeps you out of trouble." I thought to myself, this will be a good conversation, and asked him to tell me more. He said, "Well, if I am not doing basketball, probably I am doing something else, getting in trouble. Basketball is pretty much my life." I asked again, what his life could be without sport and he said, "I know I will probably be in trouble, because I am originally from Illinois, and I used to be in a lot of trouble. To keep me away from trouble I go play basketball with my friends. Now I care more about me". This is a theoretical comment but seems very important for this student. I had the impression that sport is central and, in some way, made a difference for this student. I perceived he was the only black on that basketball team composed predominantly of Mexican-Americans, and he was accepted in that group because of his ability to play, not because of racial stereotype. For Desmond (LI), basketball is not only a modality of sport; it is the transformation that he expects to happen in his present and future. An activity provides an education free from racial discrimination. He understood his social reality and used basketball to feel better about himself and gain respect from others. Maybe he felt important only in sport, nowhere else.

The importance of sport is shared by other students and must be recognized by adults. Our recognition and respect of students' identity and culture are fundamental conditions for the effort for change. Freire (1998b) states "My presence *in* the world, *with* the world, and *with* other people implies my complete knowledge of myself" (p.52). Students recognized they were made by history and are reinventing their own history by understanding themselves.

3.2.2 Socialization—Regular students in a group seemed very introverted. Perhaps, because the issue of sport is not an issue they like to talk about. Also, they were timid in their comments, and they didn't like to do sport because of the feeling of being alone. I had confirmation when Ben (HI) started talking. He said, "I like to go skating. Skating is a more individual thing. It can't really be like a team. I like to keep away from the mainstream." In comparison, athletes believed that sport is a great tool to be included in school and with friends. I asked if sport then helps you to make more friends, and Jordan (LI) said, "That has happened with me. I was so shy, so timid and sport brought me out of it. You are more confident in yourself. You begin to express yourself more and definitely it is because of sport". When you feel good about something, it is because you are confident in it. Students feel good in sport because they are doing some activity with pleasure and autonomy. People learn more when they have more autonomy. Students' curiosity is explored in sport in its diverse aesthetic, linguistic, and syntactical expressions (Freire, 1998a).

Athletes feel the pressure in sport, but they also feel respected because of their autonomy and identity. Consequently, they have more friends and recognition. Hiliana (LI) stated, "I love playing. I think it helps me a lot in my stress level. I feel pressure during the game and practice, but it's a good pressure." She expressed her opinion with self-confidence. This kind of opinion can make a different future because of self-confidence that is grounded in professional competence (Freire, 1998a). They are doing sport and they seem to be engaged in it, they recognize their identity, the recognition of what we are in the practical activity – sport – in which we engage (Freire, 1998b).

3.2.3 Sport for Scholarship – Earning scholarships for college is an example of social inclusion through sport. Many students have this goal and are working on that. Many student/athletes, however, recognized their lack of talent and probably are not achieving this level. Sergio and Javier (HI) have the idea to get scholarships for college, but they are not sure about their skills “if we could, it would be awesome, but probably not.” Sergio (HI) said, “Sport is a good thing now, but I don’t think I will play in college or at the professional level. I think it would be awesome, but I don’t think we can make it.” Other athletes have a clear vision of their ability and are sure about the scholarships. Matt (HI), a baseball player from Franklin HS, a 17 year old, Mexican-American, agreed, “We keep playing sports we love and, we can continue in our education by going to college.” Jordan (LI) said, “I think we need to be able to balance in our life. If your life is just sport and you get hurt or something, you don’t have a backup plan”. These students are using sport to construct their future. They know their destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed and for which they must assume responsibility (Freire, 1998a).

I followed the reasoning and asked the relation to sport and their future. That was the last question. Ryan (LI) said, “The next level of our goal will be a college athlete and to be professional; getting paid to play a sport that I love, hopefully I will stay in college long enough to get the degree.” Ryan (LI) added after few seconds thinking, “If my sport doesn’t continue going on for me, I always have a backup plan. My education is always a good thing for me. If you do not have education, you have nothing to follow. I will continue to play in the future. If not, I will be ok.” They are dynamically preparing for their future with the conviction they will succeed at their vocation for greatness and not mediocrity (Freire, 1998a).

3.2.4 Sport Is an Opportunity for My Future – I asked participants how they started playing, and many started because of the influences of media or their families. Matt (HI) mentioned, “I started watching all the professionals playing on TV and I want to be the same way, the same person, enjoy the game, my family started, my cousin played baseball as much as I did. I just follow their steps.” According to Weigand (2000) researchers have found that individually, parents, teachers, and peers can promote children’s motivation in sport and in physical education.

Another important topic they mentioned was the relation they have with coaches. Good coaches/teachers can become effective role models and students can learn ethical values for the future. Freire (1998b) hoped that, teachers/coaches will maintain their commitment to freedom and their desire to create, as they must if they are going to fully assume their role as teachers/coaches. As educators, coaches must have the ethical principle that they are working with young people. Because of the excitement that students have in sports, coaches exert a huge influence in their lives. Player demonstrated the ability to learn, and coaches demonstrate the ability. Both are engaged in sport and become subject and not simply object. The dream to reach professional sports is almost unthinkable for many Americans, but I found that people from minorities have this belief. For Freire (1970), the oppressed must see that the limitations of their freedom are not inevitable, but are the result of actions taken to construct and maintain an unjust world. The dream moves us for better, and educators must respect students’ dreams. Coaches and teachers as cultural workers become crucial to explore and provide opportunities for students by increasing possibilities to empower dreams.

4. Discussions and Final Considerations

In relation to social inclusion in education, the objective of sport in school, through PE classes, must demonstrate that it is used as socially inclusive. It should provide sport opportunities as well as the ability to structure an inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. Sport Education has been identified as the model with the greatest potential to provide sustained evidence of the socially inclusive nature of PE and school sport (Hayes; Stidder, 2003). To reach this status, more funding is necessary making PE and school sports a greater priority within government policy. The results obtained throughout this study and the researcher’s insights acquired throughout the implementation and interpretation of findings led to recommendations to promote inclusion in PE and sport. By effective implementation of sport classes based on critical understanding of sport importance and issues inspired by Freire’s theories demand strong commitment from the stakeholders in both countries.

To promote social inclusion through sport in society and school one must develop a critical understanding of the politics of social class divisions and the limitations of social inclusion. Students from a low social class have less enthusiasm and interest in school. This conception is very clear in El Paso and Blumenau schools. In Irvin HS and Luiz Delfino (low SES) my perception was that students and teachers have very low expectations and lack enthusiasm. I recognize the level of expectation in Franklin and Bom Jesus (high SES) is completely different.

Moreover, in my opinion, student/athletes were very excited about sports, and I perceived that excitement was also higher regarding education.

Brazilian students from low SES showed that school is an example of social injustice. They suggested an adequate school infrastructure and financial support for schools was needed, and said that teachers should be better paid. They recognized that their school did not promote social justice at all, and they felt discriminated by the low expectations of the teachers and administrators. Yet American students from low and high SES believe that social justice is already being promoted in society because of the opportunities available, such as college scholarships and jobs, but they did connect this social justice to school responsibility. My impression is that Brazilian students in general are more concerned about social inequalities, perhaps, because inequalities are more visible than in the U.S. Freire (1998b) states, lower-class majorities not only feel that they have been exploited since Brazil was invented, but also join together in feeling they are being exploited.

I perceived that “poor” students recognized their existential situation, and in which they could recognize themselves, they said what they really felt (Freire, 1970). As one said, “In our gym when rain wets everything, we have these problems in public schools.” There are two aspects to this frustration. One, they verbalized their frustration and the connection between their low expectation and the reality of school with the feeling to be exploited. Two, they recognized their ability and believed they need more respect and the same chance that students in private schools have.

Student/athletes from high SES in both countries recognized the importance of sport for future, but associated it with scholarships in college and not at the professional level. Brazilian and American students mentioned that without sport, their life would probably be in jeopardy.

Comparing educational and sportive structures in both countries can be an example explaining differences between “developed” countries to “underdevelopment” countries. Teachers’ preparation and salaries, facilities, and structure are very different in the U.S. and Brazil. Only El Paso, for example, has more synthetic track and field runways than Brazil. Franklin HS in El Paso has better buildings than some of the best universities in Brazil. I felt the struggle for social justice during the interview with students from low SES. High SES, however, did not show any concerns about social inequalities. I had to recognize that low SES groups had clear and important comments. They showed their critical and clear vision about the problems they were facing and their high expectation to change this sad reality without conformism. Freire (1970) said this is the procedure of *conscientização* of the situation, which recognizes the condition and through action prepares men and women for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.

Brazilians have the art to live with faith. Their hope for better days is present even in improbable places. Poor youths have the dream to achieve professional sports. This dream is almost impossible for the majority, but we as humans survive and are moved by dreams and we dream for an equal and fair society. In the U.S. youths’ dreams are more attainable. They know with hard work they will achieve success in their careers. They understand how difficult it is to succeed in professional sports, and they use sports to get a higher level of education to then transport them to professional jobs. This reality is different from Brazil because of the limited number of opportunities that are offered for higher degrees and professional skills.

Most student/athletes from the U.S. believe that sport can lead to scholarships in college. They recognize this is a great opportunity, and they work with this goal. However, they believe that to follow a career in sport is still a distant option. In Brazil, sports in college are very rare. Very few colleges offer scholarships for student/athletes. Therefore, most youths have a strong belief that they can succeed at a semi-professional or professional sport to change their realities.

“Sport can save or change my life” is a dream for many youths, poor and rich, but it is improbable for the majority. Sport for Americans provides academic motivation, but for Brazilians it provides social inclusion. But, this is not clear and very well acknowledged. As this study shows, in the U.S. sport has all it needs to promote inclusion and social justice. In Brazil, the situation of education is very sad, and, in many aspects, is contributing to social exclusion and social injustice.

Sport exerts significant influences in schools. These influences were analyzed in two different panoramas. (1) The United States, which uses the power of sport to provide opportunities for students to go further to get an education at the university level. Moreover, the U.S. supports and promotes sport excellence at the highest level of international competitions.

(2) Brazil, which uses a reduced amount of money, promotes, and develops sports under a different structure. It has talented people who need more attention and an adequate structure in school to explode as an “Olympic Nation.”

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