

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

Acceptance date: 19/11/2024

EXPERIENCE REPORT: DECONSTRUCTING INEQUALITIES AND AWAKENING INTEREST THROUGH ULTIMATE FRISBEE

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Abstract: This qualitative experience report describes an intervention carried out in 8th and 9th grade classes at a municipal public school in Feira de Santana/BA, with the aim of proposing actions that could help tackle problems involving gender inequality and students' lack of interest in Physical Education (PE) classes. The idea of constructing this didactic sequence arose in one of the activities of the discipline Problematics of Physical Education, of the Professional Master's Program in Physical Education (ProEF). The proposal was based on experimenting with and enjoying Ultimate Frisbee (UF), a sport with the potential to promote equity and the engagement of students in its realization. The intervention consisted of eight 100-minute classes a week, involving an initial round of discussion; exploration of UF; experiences and skills development; technical and tactical awareness; challenges and activities to deepen learning and stimulate student engagement; and a final game that was part of the culmination of the intervention with a UF championship between the classes. The intervention with UF showed that PE can be a space for social reflection, helping to promote gender equality and student interest.

Keywords: Physical Education; Gender Issues; Ultimate Frisbee.

INTRODUCTION

Physical Education (PE), traditionally associated with competitive and stereotyped sports practices, faces growing challenges to promote inclusion and engagement among students, especially in practical experiences of the content. In this context, gender relations and lack of interest in physical and sporting activities are relevant issues to be addressed (Goellner, 2010; Jacó, 2012; Altmann; Fernandes, 2014).

The elementary school phase is marked by a sharp decline in interest in practicing physical activities, as shown by several studies (Altmann; Fernandes, 2014; Jacó, 2012; Malvar, 2020; Aníszewski; Henrique, 2023). The problem of lack of interest, observed both in the school environment and outside it, requires the development of strategies to promote the engagement of adolescents in these practices.

When analyzing the school context, it can be seen that students are arriving at school institutions increasingly unmotivated in relation to their studies and physical and sporting activity. Even though they are present during practical experiences of PE content, many do not carry out, or only partially carry out, the proposed activities, while others prefer to use their cell phones and other electronic devices or carry out other activities during practical activities.

It can be seen that practical PE experiences are often restricted to traditional sports activities, disregarding the needs and interests of students. Therefore, classes in this curricular component need to address other elements of body culture beyond what has been established as sovereign content, such as the "fantastic quartet": soccer and/or futsal, volleyball, handball and basketball (Darido, 2001; Kunz, 2006; Silva, 2021; Mendel, 2023), seeking to develop new skills and interests in students, generating greater engagement in classes.

For Silva (2021), the specialized literature shows the existence of a hegemony that privileges traditional sports modalities in PE classes, perpetuating pedagogical practices that are not very diversified and that do not contemplate the plurality of bodily manifestations.

When analyzing sports coverage in the media, Darido (2001) highlights the inequality in the valuation of different sports. The author points out that soccer, volleyball and basketball, especially North American professional

basketball, receive most of the broadcasting time and are shown at the times and on the channels with the biggest audiences. This understanding is corroborated by Kunz (2006), who states that sport permeates contemporary society in an intense way, with the media playing a crucial role in disseminating this culture. The extensive coverage of sporting events, such as the Olympics and the World Cup, shapes the public's perception of sport and influences teaching practices in PE.

In the wake of this discussion, the historical legacy of PE as synonymous with sport and the media focus on the "fantastic quartet" can influence teaching practices, leading PE teachers to prioritize the teaching of these sports, limiting the diversity of bodily experiences on offer in schools (Kunz, 2006). Taking an innovative stance is the way to minimize disinterest, but we know that the journey is long.

Considering that most of the practical experiences of PE are related to sport, many girls do not identify with and feel excluded from traditional sports practices, which can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and gender inequality in the school environment, which is another problem faced, or made invisible, by teachers of this curricular component.

Based on a literature review and a case study in a municipal public school in Feira de Santana, Bahia, we will present action strategies for implementing Ultimate Frisbee (UF) in PE classes, with the aim of proposing actions that could help tackle problems involving personal relationships, gender inequality and students' lack of interest in PE classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

UF, a sport that combines elements of American soccer, basketball and rugby, has its origins in a university game in the United States, around the 1960s. According to Lettnin et al. (2021), university students in Pennsylvania used the pie tins from Frisbie's to throw, giving rise to the name of the disc and, later, the sport. This playful and spontaneous practice evolved over the years, giving rise to an organized sport with defined rules, which has won fans in several countries. The history of UF shows how a simple game can turn into a sport with millions of players around the world.

UF is a team sport that takes place on a rectangular court measuring 100m x 37m, divided into two end zones. The aim of the game is to score points by receiving the puck in the opponent's end zone, similar to American soccer. The dynamics of the game combine elements from different sports: the free movement of the players without possession of the puck, characteristic of basketball, contrasts with the ban on running with the puck, similar to rugby. Intercepting the puck, touching the ground or leaving the playing area results in a change of possession, adding a strategic component to the game (Lettnin et al., 2021).

According to the same author and collaborators, the sport is described as versatile, which can be practiced in men's, women's or mixed teams, in open or closed spaces. "It should be noted that the sport does not distinguish between the male and female sexes, as it seeks equity between them, promoting various mixed category competitions" (Lettnin et al., 2021, p.10).

This profile of the possibility of mixed games was one of the reasons why we chose UF, as it can enable greater female participation. In addition, the sport stands out for its non-contact nature, where intentional physical contact is penalized. The prohibition on run-

ning with the puck and the possibility of interceptions require players to be precise in their passes and to read the game well, which can favor female protagonists.

Women's participation in sports throughout history has been marked by a constant struggle against gender barriers. Altmann and Fernandes (2014) point out that the codes and rules of sporting practices have historically been built from a male perspective, excluding and marginalizing women who dared to venture into this field.

This exclusion manifested itself in various ways, such as denying access to sports facilities and equipment, creating discriminatory rules and devaluing women's performances. Women who insisted on taking part in sports were often seen as transgressors and challengers of the prevailing social order. Goellner (2007, p. 149) states that "[...] competitiveness and exclusion are the objects of attempts to perpetuate sporting physiological binarity and sportivized male empowerment."

Over time, women have led various resistance movements and claimed their right to participate in sport. According to Goellner (2021), by claiming the right to be in sport, women challenge the prevailing norm and expose, through their difference, the fragility of discourses and practices that try to legitimize male supremacy. This female presence in sport destabilizes the power mechanisms that perpetuate machismo, misogyny, sexism, racism, ableism and heteronormativity (Goellner, 2021).

Through hard and persistent struggles, they have achieved important progress, such as the inclusion of women's sports in the Olympic Games and the creation of specific leagues and championships for women. Despite the progress made, there is still a long way to go to ensure full gender equality in sport. Women still face challenges such as lack of visibility in the media, the pay gap with men and the persistence of gender stereotypes. UF could be a useful

pedagogical tool in dismantling gender issues.

Casemiro (2024) points out that UF plays an important role in the integral formation of the individual. By promoting values such as fair play, respect and self-discipline, the sport can contribute to the development of more aware and engaged citizens. The practice of UF goes beyond mere sport, offering players the opportunity to learn and develop skills that will be useful throughout their lives.

Casemiro (2004) and Lettnin et al., (2021), point out that the most striking feature of sport is that it doesn't need a referee (official competition or not).

The lack of referees in UF means that conflicts are resolved through understanding the rules, loyalty, honesty and ethics, in a communicative interaction in which the players seek consensus through dialogue, preserving their values and interpretations/ understandings, without disregarding their opponent's opinion (Lettnin et al., 2021, p. 21).

From this perspective, UF differs from other sports in that it is self-arbitrated, i.e. the players themselves are responsible for applying the rules and resolving conflicts, breaking "[...] with some paradigms, making each player responsible for knowing the rules, with the aim of complying with the regulations, based on respect for the opponent and fair play (Casemiro, 2024, p. 27). Thus, conflict resolution and the application of the rules take place collaboratively, with the participation of all the players involved.

The National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) regulates that the organization of sports activities at school can be based on a classification model that considers criteria such as cooperation, interaction with the opponent, motor performance and tactical objectives (Brasil, 2018), classifying sports into five categories: mark, precision, technical-combinatorial, net/rebound court, field and bat, combat and invasion or territorial.

This approach allows for a selection of content that breaks with the hegemony of sport, transcends the traditional “fantastic quartet” and allows for greater diversification and coverage of sporting activities, such as UF, which falls under invasion or territorial sports. It’s worth noting that the BNCC includes invasion sports as curricular content from the 3rd to the 9th grade of elementary school, which should encourage the diversification of bodily practices.

Mendel (2023) states that the lack of diversification of the content taught in PE classes is an important factor in keeping students away from classes. Corroborating this thought, Lettnin et al. (2021) state that repetitive classes cause disinterest among students, pointing out that innovation in the school environment is essential to motivate them.

Given this scenario, we corroborate Lettnin et al. (2021) when they state that UF has great potential to be used as a pedagogical tool, being presented as innovative content in PE, breaking with traditional content. The practice of the sport in schools can contribute to the development of social and emotional skills, as well as helping to promote values such as citizenship, justice and tolerance, which are so scarce in our society today.

METHODOLOGY

The general aim of this research was to present action strategies for overcoming the problems of gender relations and inequality and student disinterest through UF in PE classes.

The research was carried out at the Chico Mendes Municipal School in the city of Feira de Santana, with the participation of 108 students, aged between 13 and 16, enrolled in the final years of elementary school, specifically in the 8th and 9th grades, totaling four classes, in the 1st cycle of the 2024 school year. Data collection took place during the

months of March and April and involved, in addition to systematic observation and notes in the field diary and the use of records made by the students through a subjective question at the end of the class in which the perceptions in relation to the practice of sport and the sensations experienced during the classes were recorded.

As a pedagogical proposal, the UF was worked on by addressing themes that corroborated knowledge of sports practice and discussions about gender inequality in PE classes. The 100-minute classes were distributed according to the didactic sequence presented below.

Class 1: Discussions on the video “Invisible Players”. Presentation of the proposed intervention in PE classes: deconstructing inequalities and arousing interest through UF. Survey of students’ previous knowledge of UF. Video: history and characteristics of the sport. Practical experience of the content: getting to know objects, learning the fundamentals and basic rules (the disc, passing, receiving, finishing, *fair play*).

Lesson 2: Reflection on coeducational actions that reflect gender equity in UF. UF movements: learning the basic fundamentals (cutting, defense, attack, team spirit, *fair play*). Small games (4v4 and 5v5 + 1 technique/o).

Lesson 3: Video: tactical-technical awareness. Tasks aimed at developing specific tactical-technical elements (keeping possession of the puck). Initial UF game (7v7 + 1 technique/o)

Lesson 4: Tasks aimed at developing specific tactical-technical elements (defending and attacking). Initial UF game (7v7 + 1 technique/o).

The students were asked to organize a self-arbitrated UF Championship. The class was divided into two teams, which competed against each other (8th1 vs. 8th2 and 9th1 vs. 9th2). Afterwards, the winning teams from each class played in the final (8th1st vs. 9th2nd), while the teams with the lowest scores played an additional game (8th2nd vs. 9th1st). Each team consisted of 6 players, 3 girls and 3 boys. The game lasted 10 minutes, with two 5-minute halves and a 3-minute break/substitution. The team with the most points won the match.

Lesson 5: UF final match: disputes and selection of mixed teams.

Lesson 6: Organizing the UF Championship.

Lesson 7: UF Championship.

Class 8: Conversation round: challenges and possibilities with UF at school.

Data collection, carried out through participant observation and the application of a subjective question, took place over a period of two months. During the observations, which took place in the classroom and on the court, the behaviors, interactions and events relevant to the research were recorded in a field diary.

According to Minayo (2019), participant observation is an essential part of fieldwork in qualitative research. Along these lines, we will carry out participant observation with field diary entries.

The field diary is a methodological tool in which we can record “all the information that is not part of the formal interview material [...]” (Minayo, 2019, p. 65) for later analysis of the experience of the researcher and the participants.

Also as a data collection tool, the students were asked to answer a subjective question that asked them to describe in detail their experiences in UF, describing the challenges they faced, the lessons they learned and the

most significant moments that contributed to their personal development, as well as the difference they perceived between practicing UF and the sports traditionally practiced in PE classes, emphasizing gender issues. 92 responses were collected.

Through the descriptive question, the student had “[...] the possibility of discussing the topic in question without being bound by the question asked.” (Minayo, 2019, p. 59). Along these lines, the flexibility in formulating open-ended questions allows topics to be explored in greater depth, adapting to the answers and insights that infer the “conscious or unconscious reasons for certain attitudes and behaviors.” (Minayo, 2019, p. 60)

In order to protect the privacy of the participants, a system of pseudonyms was used in this research. Each student selected a term from the sports dictionary (UF) to represent their identity in the publications, and was allowed to repeat the term up to three times, accompanied by a number (for example: *backhand1*, *backhand2*, *backhand3*). This measure guarantees the anonymity of the participants without compromising the data analysis.

The procedures for analyzing data in field research are fundamental to extracting meaning and valid conclusions from the information collected. According to Gil (2019), although analysis and interpretation have different meanings, they are intertwined: analysis aims to organize the research data in such a way that it makes it possible to answer the research problem; and interpretation aims to connect the analysis to other knowledge obtained, seeking to verify all the multiplicities of determinations of the phenomenon studied, making it valid and meaningful.

In this sense, this research will use thematic or categorical content analysis, according to Bardin (2015). This type of content analysis aims to break down the text/messages into units, themes or categories based on analogical reorganization.

The data collected was gathered and categorized by the approximations or divergences in the “speech/behavior” of the participants in this research, observing the frequency (or absence) that a given term/behavior appears, analyzing its meanings and significance in relation to the research problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data collected through participant observation, the field diary and the descriptive question applied at the end of the didactic sequence, presented below, allows us to discuss the effectiveness of the proposed activities and their implications for teaching practice and the development of students through interventions with UF.

During the participant observations, we noticed a significant evolution in the group dynamic. Initially, interactions were more individualized, with each student focusing on their own actions. Most of the boys participated more in the play and preferred to throw the puck to other boys on their team. That's why we interrupted the class and started a dialogue about what we had discussed in the video “Invisible Players” and what we were materializing in class.

During the activities, some girls complained that they weren't receiving the disk and other boys pointed out that they also needed to position themselves to receive it. This demonstrates the need to provide equal opportunities for bodily practices. It is necessary to point out that the lack of ability is related to inequality that transcends the courts.

According to Cruz and Palmeira (2009), instead of combating gender stereotypes, PE often reinforces them by perpetuating the idea of “pseudo-male superiority” based on the supposed superior performance of boys in physical and sporting activities. This view, however, ignores the fact that the differences observed generally stem from boys' greater motor repertoire, the result of a greater num-

ber of experiences in this area.

These reflections highlight the social roles culturally established for boys and girls and how they influence engagement in sports practices. It is therefore necessary, in collaboration with the students, to think of proposals to give girls a greater experience of bodily practices and consequently a greater performance in the practices of the elements of body culture in PE classes: games, sports, dance, gymnastics, wrestling and adventure bodily practices (Brasil, 2018).

The absence of a referee at UF was highlighted as a reason for curiosity and the desire to take part to see what it was like to play at school without someone refereeing the game. This absence requires the players to take responsibility for applying the rules. Cassemiro (2024) points out that, in the event of infractions, dialog and the search for a consensus between all those involved are fundamental to resolving the problem. This characteristic of sport promotes the development of social skills such as communication, negotiation and conflict resolution.

Another interesting aspect recorded in the field diary was the way the students dealt with success and failure. After a successful play, the celebration was contagious, with shouts of joy and hugs among the teammates. On the other hand, after a losing move, some students showed resilience, quickly reorganizing themselves for the next action, while others gave up. This ability to deal with emotions and learn from mistakes was part of the conversation circle as a way of encouraging them not to give up in the face of obstacles, not just in the UF game, but as a fundamental form of personal and social development for adolescents.

In this vein, Lettnin et al. (2021) point out that the practice of UF promotes a profound personal transformation in athletes, developing values such as *fair play*, respect and ethics. These values transcend the sporting environment and can have a positive influence

on social relationships and the practitioners' sense of responsibility.

When analyzing the students' answers to the subjective question, it was observed that the students showed great involvement with the topic, constructing reports rich in details and emotions. This freedom of expression, as suggested by Minayo (2019), allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, revealing nuances and particularities that would be difficult to capture through closed questionnaires.

The analysis of the reports showed that we need to discuss gender relations in bodily practices and encourage girls to take part, creating an environment in which they feel safe and respected, as well as giving them the opportunity to experience bodily practices beyond the "fantastic quartet".

The analysis of the data in relation to the perception of the girls brought reports that indicate belonging in the proposed activity, as can be seen below:

"I've never been much of a soccer fan. I think it's too hectic and competitive for me, but frisbee was very different! I really liked the lightness of the game, how everyone helps each other and the importance of working as a team. In soccer, I always felt a bit out of place, but in frisbee I fit in really well. It was fun learning the strategies and trying to make the most beautiful passes and the championship was great, we had a lot of fun!" (Frisbee1).

"The kids always want soccer, basketball. I think we've always played soccer since sixth grade. I was never very good at sports, but I felt more comfortable with frisbee, it's a more relaxed sport and you don't have to be so strong to play." (Disc3).

"Frisbee helped me overcome my shyness. At first I was very quiet, but as time went by I became more relaxed and I even managed to get out of the way of the disc, I was so excited: I can do it. The team believed it and so did I." (End zone3).

"I love the strategic part of frisbee. It's like a game of chess, but with more movement. The boys just want to play soccer and I don't like it, I don't know." (Zone defense1).

The girls' reports on UF reveal a series of positive perceptions and feelings towards this sport, contrasting with previous experiences with other sports, such as soccer. From this point of view, we agree with Mendel (2023) when he states that repeating content in PE classes is like watching the same movie over and over again. The lack of novelty and the monotony of the activities lead students to lose interest in the subject, making withdrawal inevitable.

The students' accounts reveal some points in common, such as lightness and fun, as they highlight the lightness of the game, the importance of teamwork and the fun provided by UF, in contrast to the competitiveness and excitement they perceived in soccer; inclusion and belonging, as they reported that UF provided a more inclusive environment, where they felt more at ease and able to participate actively, overcoming difficulties such as shyness and lack of ability in other sports and; the development of skills, reporting the development of skills such as teamwork, strategy, communication and overcoming challenges, such as making passes and evading marking.

The boys' reports indicate the importance of offering a wider range of possibilities for motor activities in Physical Education classes:

"I've always been more of a footballer, kicking a ball is my passion, but frisbee surprised me a lot. At first, I thought it would be a bit silly, even dogs play on the beach. When I started playing, I saw that it was much more strategic than I had imagined. I had to think a lot about the moves, pass the puck in the right place and avoid others catching it. It was nice to get to know a sport that was so different from soccer and to see that I was good at it too (...)." (Backhand1).

"I thought frisbee was only for girls, but when I played I saw that it was much more physical than I thought. I had to run a lot and jump to catch the disk." (Play defense2).

"Frisbee showed me that I can be good at sports other than soccer. It was a really cool experience." (Offense2).

"I learned the importance of teamwork and to trust my teammates and the girls too, the championship was a great opportunity to put into practice everything we learned in class." (run to the end zone1).

The students' accounts reveal some common points, such as exceeding expectations, in that most of the participants initially underestimated the sport, but were surprised by the complexity and fun of UF; the development of new skills, since the sport provided the opportunity to develop skills such as strategy, teamwork, communication and motor coordination. The breaking down of stereotypes observed in the students' narratives was reported, showing that UF can be practiced by people of different profiles and that it requires both technical and physical skill

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results show that UF has the potential to help promote gender equality, respect for differences and the development of social and motor skills in PE classes. By recognizing and repudiating gender prejudices, the participants showed significant progress in terms of building more balanced and positive interpersonal relationships. With this in mind, we can see that the practice of UF can promote a reduction in gender stereotypes, which can go beyond the walls of the school and reverberate in society. There is also a need to propose pedagogical actions that are geared towards greater diversity in the choice of elements of body culture and the development of a safe and welcoming environment that guarantees all students involvement in bodily practices, seeking to overcome gender issues, evolving towards the repudiation of any and all discriminatory attitudes in the social scenario.

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