

Conceptualising Social Justice and Sociocultural Issues within Physical Education

Teacher Education: International Perspectives

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Abstract

Background: Physical education (PE) and physical education teacher education (PETE) have a substantial literature base that advocates for students to develop a critical consciousness, appreciate multiple perspectives, and engage in actions to enhance social justice (Tinning 2016). Analysing sociocultural issues, critically reflecting on beliefs, knowledge, biography and values, and developing a sense of agency to enact change, have been recognised as an integral part of the PETE knowledge base for some time (Fernández-Balboa 1997). However, there remain differences in how social justice itself is conceptualised and enacted. Social justice is aligned heavily with critical and ‘post’ theories where taking action for justice, democracy and power are central; but social justice is also found in humanist beliefs in student-centredness and equality and has been co-opted by neoliberal forces that promote individual responsibility. While a lack of consensus is not in itself a problem (Bialystok 2014), diverse definitions might contribute to confusion (Randall and Robinson 2016) and lead to uncertainty over what and how to teach for social justice.

Purpose: In order to work towards greater certainty around concepts of social justice in the PETE community, this project sought to map variations in definition and conceptualisation of social justice and sociocultural issues among physical education teacher educators (PETEs) and physical education and sport pedagogy (PESP) educators, as part of a wider project on social justice and sociocultural perspectives and practices in PETE.

Methods: PETE and PESP faculty (n=72) in North America, Europe, and Australasia engaged in an in-depth interview, during which they were asked how they define social justice and sociocultural issues. Additional information about participants’ social identity was collected. A constant comparative method of analysing participants’ definitions mapped a range of concepts building on the theoretical framework of neoliberal, humanist, critical and ‘post’ approaches to social justice.

Findings: The data demonstrate that there are a range of understandings about sociocultural issues and social justice. Most commonly, some participants articulated a humanist approach to social justice by encouraging their pre-service teachers (PSTs) to have awareness of equality of opportunity in relation to gender, sexuality and/or racism. Less prevalent, but strongly stated by those who conceptualised social justice in these terms, was the importance to take action for democracy, empowerment or critical reflection. The terms diversity and equality, framed in neoliberal and humanist discourses, were most commonly used within the United States (US), while critical pedagogy and alignment with critical and ‘post’ theories were more prevalent in Australia and New Zealand.

Conclusion: Differences exist in the ways social justice is conceptualised in PETE. While this can be attributed to the influence of local issues, it is also reflective of what intellectual tools, such as humanism or critical theory, are available for problematising social issues. The range of non-critical concepts found raises concern that PSTs are not getting the tools to enact social justice or tackle sociocultural issues.

Key Words: teacher education, physical education, social justice, sociocultural issues

Introduction

For years, scholars have argued for the importance of physical education teacher educators (PETEs) to educate pre-service teachers (PSTs) about equality (e.g. Evans 1993), sociocultural perspectives and issues (e.g. Cliff 2012) and critical pedagogy (e.g. Fernández-Balboa 1997; Philpot 2016). There is substantive physical education (PE) and PETE literature that advocates for students to develop a critical consciousness, appreciate multiple perspectives, and engage in actions to enhance equity, democracy and social justice (Felis-Anaya, Martos-Garcia, and Devís-Devís 2017; Tinning 2016).

The quest for social justice in all education sectors (including PE) is complex, in part, due to differences in understandings of the concept and the relevance of context to any conceptual understanding (Blackmore 2013). Bialystok (2014, 418) recently described social justice as a ‘nebulous’ or ill-defined term generally progressive in nature and based on a ‘robust notion of democracy.’ What is currently done in classrooms in the name of education for social justice and the tangible outcomes of social justice oriented education are often unclear. In regard to the education sector, Hytten and Bettez (2011, 8) claim,

[T]he more we see people invoking the idea of social justice, the less clear it becomes what people mean, and if it is meaningful at all. When an idea can refer to almost anything, it loses its critical purchase, especially an idea that clearly has such significant political dimensions.

Returning to the context of PETE, Randall and Robinson (2016) propose that the diversity in definitions of social justice might contribute to confusion and result in PETEs being unsure what to teach, in turn leading to variation in what PSTs take to schools. Although our schools continue to become more diverse within our global society, sociocultural issues are typically not a salient component of the ‘overt’ PETE curriculum (Cliff 2012) and social justice is not

consistently enacted. This paper, part of an international project investigating social justice in PETE, explores how 72 PETEs across seven countries conceptualised social justice and sociocultural issues.

Theoretical positions for conceptualising social justice

There are a range of movements and theoretical perspectives through which social justice can be conceptualised. These range from psychological perspectives such as humanism, to a focus on the impact of capitalism on society (critical theory) and more recently to cultural explanations of inequity toward groups (e.g., feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, whiteness theory). The wide range of theoretical positions, such as those identified above, have formed the basis for social justice focused pedagogies such as action research (Carr and Kemmis 1986), critical reflection (Smyth 1989), and transformative pedagogies (Ukpokodu, 2009). These perspectives, along with the growing influence of neoliberalism on social justice, will be discussed.

Humanism ‘has at its core the belief that human interests and dignity should be of primary importance’ (Marshall 1998, 289) and focuses on ‘self-actualisation’, a psychological theory that prioritises self-fulfilment of human needs. Maslow (1943) posits that self-actualisation needs such as morality, creativity, and problem-solving sit at the top of the needs hierarchy. A humanistic educator attends to both the learning and emotional needs of each individual in their classroom, ensuring that teaching provides equality of opportunity through personalised education, and working within the constraints of their classrooms, schools, and communities to cater to the needs of the students they teach. Humanism is based on trying to gain equality for the most disadvantaged individuals through uneven distribution of resources to those (individuals) who need it most. Culpan and Bruce (2007) describe the socio-critical New Zealand curriculum as drawing from humanism; this approach may be

limited as it works within capitalism and therefore does not challenge the structures that create oppression.

This critique of a humanist social justice approach is based in a second lens for theorising social justice stemming from the Marxist critical theories of the Frankfurt School. Critical theory focuses on economic explanations of oppression, advocating for taking action against structures that lead to class domination. McLaren (1998) proposes that globalisation and capitalism are the most significant structures of social control that lead to international class domination. Advocacy for social justice stemming from the critical theory tradition differs from humanism as the focus is taking action on structures that discriminate against specific groups in society. Critical pedagogues challenge socially constructed structures that oppress marginalised others, rather than simply doing their best for students within these constraints.

Academics have also called on 'post' theories as theoretical lenses for explicating social justice. Similar to critical theory, 'post' theories call for action on structures that create social injustice. A central tenet of 'post' theories is that knowledge is socially constructed rather than objective. For example, postmodernism advocates for the deconstruction and problematisation of knowledge through questioning the dominant representations of knowledge and knowers, challenging assertions of what is considered right and normal. As such, post theories raise questions about critical theory perspectives such as empowerment (Ellsworth 1989). Cho (2006, 126) suggests that 'post' theories provide a 'language of possibility' that moves away from economics to culture, shifting theories about the infrastructure (the unity of the productive forces and the relations of production), to the superstructure (particular historical systems of beliefs, religious, juridical, political...).' Problematising this, Kincheloe and colleagues (2011, 165) propose that critical pedagogues need to focus on understanding how class 'interacts upon multiple groups and sectors in

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various historically specific ways.’ Nevertheless, Lather’s (1998) position that ‘post’ theories are part of the ‘big tent’ of critical approaches remains compelling for PE scholars working broadly on the ‘critical project’ or transformative pedagogies (Tinning 2016), as will be discussed in the next section.

Recent examination of social justice as a concept draws predominantly from critical and ‘post’ theories. According to Bell (2016), social justice goes much further than examining difference and diversity, to a deeper analysis of the systems of power and privilege that contribute to social inequality. While social justice cannot be captured by a single definition, some characteristics include democracy and political participation (Bell 2016; Bialystok 2014); understanding of power, oppression and empowerment (Bell 2016; Kincheloe 2007). Bell (2016) proposes that social justice is both a process and a goal. In this conceptualisation, the process of social justice should include democracy and dialogue, enabled by opportunities to critically examine institutional, cultural and individual oppression. Goals for social justice include empowerment, equal distribution of resources and social responsibility (Bell 2016; Hackman 2005).

A not-so-new, but growing international force that challenges all theoretical positions on social justice stems from neoliberal ideology. At a superficial level, neoliberalism aligns with humanism due to a focus on self-actualisation and individualised education solutions through choice (e.g. private schools, outsourcing education). Neoliberalism is marked by deregulation, open markets, economic liberalisation and privatisation in the belief that free markets can mitigate economic and social problems (Ross and Gibson 2007). In education, the emergence of charter and free schools, league tables, competition for students and standardisation of curricula are symptomatic of neoliberal ideology. The neoliberal mantra is that governments should be about providing opportunities and, to succeed, citizens need only to take personal responsibility for their own outcomes (Ross and Gibson, 2007). Neoliberal

thinking positions individual responsibility rather than social responsibility as a means of equity and justice. According to Bialystok (2014), if social justice is not well defined from a critical perspective, neoliberalism may try to co-opt it for its own aims.

Concepts of social justice in PETE

Issues of social justice in relation to PE began to gain traction in the mid-1980s with critiques of PETE and PE teachers (e.g. Evans, 1986; Kirk, 1986; Tinning, 1985) and the identification of the hidden messages inherent in PE (Bain 1990). The epicentre of research for social justice in PE and PETE at that time can be traced back to Deakin University in Australia where David Kirk and Richard Tinning worked in conjunction with a broader group of academics to conceptualise ITE aimed at social justice, democracy, and equality. Notwithstanding the prominent reference to critical theory in the seminal literature of the Deakin Diaspora (Rizvi, 2011), neither critique nor pedagogies based on Marxism or capitalism feature prominently in subsequent PE and PETE literature focused on social justice (Evans and Davies, 2008). This is consistent with Tinning's (2002) call for a 'modest' critical pedagogy that resists exploitation within capitalism rather than resisting or rejecting capitalism.

Literature concerning social justice in PETE confronts issues related to gender equity, diversity, and challenging unjust practices such as motor elitism (Tinning, 2002). This scholarship primarily calls on post theories such as Critical Race Theory and feminism. A recent review of 15 years of socio-critical PE and PETE research (Felis-Anaya, et al. 2017, 1) reports that most of the research in the review stemmed from 'a postmodern ontology'. This is not to suggest a consensus position. Fernández-Balboa (2017) argues that the social justice agenda in PE is weakened as critical activists fragment their struggles into specific cultural battles.

In the last decade, scholars in PE and PETE have critiqued the growing stamp that neoliberalism is imposing on PE and PETE (Macdonald 2011; Fernández-Balboa 2017). This draws attention to the impact that the free market and a focus on individualism and competition – central tenets of neoliberalism – have on PE. Fernández-Balboa (2017) claims that PE embodies neoliberal values through practices such as outsourcing, recontextualisation of concepts such as health, and the ‘scientisation’ of education research. While neoliberalism promotes upward mobility for individuals, Azzarito, Macdonald, Dagkas and Fissette (2017) suggest that the inequities perpetuated in PE as a result of neoliberalism impact most significantly on students from lower socioeconomic and cultural minority backgrounds.

Literature that explores how self-identified critical PETE scholars understand social justice is instructive on the nebulous nature of the concept. Muros Ruiz and Fernández-Balboa (2005) report that of the 17 teacher educators they interviewed, all of whom claimed to practise a critical pedagogy, more than half did not understand the main principles of critical pedagogy. Philpot (2016) reports that teacher educators in a New Zealand PETE programme underpinned by a critical orientation had understandings that varied from a focus on challenging dominant taken-for-granted assumptions about health, PE and sport, to privileging democratic principles through student input in curriculum planning and assessment, to reflection on pedagogy choices. As critical pedagogy is only one way of approaching education for social justice, these studies suggest that even those who espouse a social justice orientation do so in different ways, for different groups, and to a greater or lesser extent. These multiple theoretical perspectives on social justice, and the concern that they are misapplied or misunderstood, prompt the aim of this paper: PETE and PESP educators’ conceptualisations of sociocultural and social justice issues were explored.

Methodology

We conducted a critical interpretive qualitative research study, which was based on our social constructivist and transformative worldviews (Creswell 2014). Specifically, the broader project, of which this paper represents one element, researched with PETE and PESP educators concerning how they understand their professional world and identify their subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell 2014).

Setting and Participants

The participants were 72 PETE and PESP educators who work in 46 PETE and PESP programmes across Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US (see Table 1 for breakdown by country). Purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994) was utilised to recruit participants who identified as a physical and/or health educator in an ITE or PESP programme. Some initial participants were already personal contacts of the researchers, while others were found through snowball sampling (Creswell 2014). Email invites were sent out to mailing lists or through a search for relevant educator contacts on institutional web sites. PETE and PESP programmes were included in the remit as some of the participants' education systems have a 3+1 route into qualified teacher status involving an undergraduate non-teacher education specific degree followed by a graduate teacher education programme. Participants did not need content knowledge of, or experience with, sociocultural issues. Participants had a wide range of professional experiences, which varied with: length of time in the profession (ranging from one to over 30 years), the type of institution employed (e.g., teaching/research-based, small/large institutions), educational backgrounds and subjects taught. All participants in this analysis are from, or currently work in, white majority, English speaking nations apart from one Swedish PETE. Predominantly they identified as white, which reflects the field in general (Flintoff, Dowling and Fitzgerald 2015). Permission to conduct the study was obtained through researchers' Institutional

Review Boards/Ethics Committees and informed consent was granted prior to the start of the study.

[Table 1 here]

Data Collection

Data were collected through an informational survey, one-to-one semi-structured interview and course materials, such as syllabi, reading lists, and assessment instructions. The data utilised for this paper are from the informational survey and interviews. Seven members of the research team conducted pilot interviews with 10 participants in the US, three in the UK and two in New Zealand in autumn 2015. Based on the data gathered from the pilot, the informational survey was developed and the interview guide revised for clarity following research team discussion. The remainder of the research was conducted in 2016 by the eight members of the research team. All eight are PETE or PESP educators in higher education institutions. Data from the pilot and research studies are utilised in the analysis.

Informational Survey

Upon agreeing to participate in this research study, each participant completed an informational survey to provide context and background knowledge about themselves, which included geographic living experiences, educational degrees obtained, professional positions held in higher education, and a social identity profile.

Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews of between 30 and 90 minutes commenced after the completion of the survey. The participants were asked 20 primary questions, with follow up probes as needed. Questions for the one-on-one interviews focused on educational background; beliefs, understanding and perspectives about social justice and sociocultural

issues; and pedagogy within PETE programmes and courses related to social justice and sociocultural issues. The interviews occurred in person, by Skype, or over the phone, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in over 1,000 pages of data.

This paper concentrates on the interview conversations regarding participants' definitions of social justice and sociocultural issues. Specifically, they were asked:

1. How would you define social justice? How would you describe sociocultural issues?
2. What is your understanding and knowledge about social justice and sociocultural issues?

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

All interview data were imported into NVivo by the lead author and responses to the research questions and subsequent prompts concerning definitions and concepts of social justice and sociocultural issues were identified and isolated. Analysis initially involved content analysis through deductive coding to four categories: a range of social justice concepts, social movements, alternative names for social justice education, and sociocultural issues. Codes and categories were devised according to the literature informing the study, and inductive coding added further codes to these categories. This process resulted in over 50 individual NVivo codes for various social justice concepts (e.g. equity), over 25 for sociocultural issues (e.g. racism), 12 for social movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter) and eight for alternative names for social justice education (e.g. critical pedagogy). Organised in this way, and taking Bell's (2016) construction of social justice as a goal and a process, data were interrogated for their alignment to neoliberal, humanist, critical, and 'post' perspectives and discourses influencing understandings of sociocultural issues. Informed by concepts of discursive positions (Jager and Maier 2009), any participant's position is one potential position that they might express and a participant may take up different positions at different

times. Peer debriefing followed in order to check the categorisation and refine the meaning of the categories. The informational surveys were concurrently reviewed to support and enhance the description of each theme by comparing and contrasting participants' backgrounds.

Trustworthiness of this research study was ensured by engaging in conversations among the researchers that questioned one another's perspectives and interpretations, recording in our researcher journals, and maintaining an audit trail. All names are pseudonyms. For participants who are quoted in the following sections, the country in which they live, and where relevant for migrating educators, their region of origin, is noted.

Findings

In the following sections, we report on the participants' conceptualisations of sociocultural issues and social justice. We categorise their expressions of social justice as neoliberalist notion of individual responsibility; humanist awareness of diversity; from critical or 'post' perspectives, examining and challenging injustice; and taking action for justice. Finally, we address some national differences in the conceptualisation of sociocultural issues.

Sociocultural issues were described by the PETEs as the issues that create a need for social justice. The most commonly discussed sociocultural issues were ethnicity/race/racism, gender, sexual orientation, class/socioeconomic status, and the body (disability and/or obesity). A smaller number talked about home life, religion, political participation, education access, and bigotry in general. Although some alluded to an additive model (King 1988), whereby gender *and* class *and* race are sociocultural issues, only one participant, Tracy (European living in the US), who researches social justice and equity, mentioned the intersectionality of sociocultural issues; for instance, how gender intersects with class and/or race in manifestations of inequality. One other, Jeff (UK), who also has sociocultural research

interests, noted his own experiences in academia are a result of the combination of his social identities as white, cisgenderⁱ, straight, middle-class. He indicated how this has provided him with privileges in attaining his academic position, and how his perspective might affect the way he teaches about social justice issues in PE and sport contexts.

For social justice to be not merely a goal (Bell 2016), it must be something that is enacted. The responses from the participants convey different conceptions of what social justice is, and what teaching for social justice may include. For the purpose of this paper we focus on the variation in conceptions of social justice.

Neoliberalism in concepts of social justice

A small number of participants in the US and UK described a perspective on social justice which might be seen as reproducing privilege or a discourse of an entitlement society. They stated that it is important to ‘cover’ sociocultural issues, and were able to mention equal opportunities or create a ‘laundry list’ (Henry, European living in US) of a number of ‘isms’, such as sexism or racism, but did not account for disparities in opportunity or outcome or explain structural causes of discrimination. Some participants felt that society is generally equal and so they have no need to challenge structural injustices: they were ‘neutral’ on issues of justice because some people are ‘way too sensitive’ (Cliff, US); that is, ‘we’re all the same’ (Larry, US), and as a result ‘not getting involved’ is preferable (Erica, US). For example, Lucy (UK) commented that we need equal opportunities, but, reflecting on what she saw as insurmountable barriers to equality, questioned, ‘is it realistic for that to happen?’ Others constructed discourses associated with individual responsibility. For example, in the following quote Nicholas (UK) discussed ‘not really liking an entitlement-type society’:

[I]f you want to achieve something then I thoroughly believe in presenting opportunities and allowing people to take those opportunities. I have quite a strong

sense of individual responsibility...Because [my partner and I] both had to work quite hard for what we've got.

The conversation with Nicholas may indicate that he held generally liberal political views, but this quote draws upon neoliberal perspectives on equal opportunity and could be interpreted as reflecting a position of privilege. He expressed his experience of growing up in a rural working class environment and being the first member of his family to go to university, subsequently discussing how his experience of working hard shaped his perspective on individual responsibility. This position reflects recent common approaches in neoliberal educational discourse valorising individual merit (Stewart 2017).

Humanism in concepts of social justice

Many participants' knowledge and beliefs about social justice drew on humanistic discourse. Specifically, they articulated that social justice required the acceptance of diversity and difference and a greater understanding of equality.

Accepting difference and diversity

For nearly half the participants (including half those in the UK or US), social justice meant having the ability and capacity to accept differences and diversity of individuals. Allan (US), for example, emphasised the need to be sensitive to a diverse student body, whereas Beth (UK) believed in 'allowing people to engage in the practices they want to engage in, without restrictions.' Jodie (UK) highlighted the importance of tolerance and not judging one another based on differences, and Carrie (US) 'getting outside your bubble.' Alli (UK) stressed the importance of accepting other people's perspectives even when they differed from your own. Alli learned this lesson from a student's response to the 9/11 attacks in the US: 'it taught me a lot about listening and having to accept other people's perspectives even

though I didn't agree with them...And it's the notion of not judging somebody too quickly just because you wholeheartedly disagree with them.'

Brian, who was born and raised in Japan and has lived in the US since he was 19 years old, described the differences and challenges of holding different personal and professional views on diversity. He contrasted his personal feelings about diversity with how he managed to talk about diversity in his professional life. He described his personal feelings about diversity as inherited from his Japanese cultural heritage, which he acknowledged is 'old fashioned...and that Japan is behind 30 years in knowing diversity terms.' He only shared his personal diversity views at home with his wife, where they could be more critical about other Asian ethnicities such as Chinese and South Korean. However, in Brian's professional life, he refrained from sharing his personal biases of other social identities and emphasised the importance of accepting differences through his teaching and research.

Awareness and understanding of equality

The individualism reflected in accepting difference relates to perspectives on understanding fairness and equality. Some noted a responsibility in 'making sure that everybody's taken care of' (Eric, US) or a duty to 'look out for the underdog' (Calvin, US). Corinne (US) considered social justice to 'advocate for the benefits of those individuals who aren't or haven't been traditionally treated fairly,' although she places responsibility on society in general, rather than seeing it as something she could enact herself. While Corinne focused on the term 'fairness' in her definition, many participants emphasised the importance of equal opportunities for all individuals. Kate (US) linked her understanding to Lady Justice, 'where scales are equal, or scales are even ... In allowing individuals, whatever their context is, to have the same opportunities that others might.'

Emphasis was sometimes placed on being aware of ‘cultural norms’ (Henry, European living in the US) or how ‘the decisions we make influence this pocket of people or that pocket of people’ (Kate, US), rather than critical theoretical perspectives on social justice education that examine marginalisation in terms of power or structural inequalities, that may be interpreted as in line with a critical theoretical perspective on social justice education. Similarly, Gary’s (UK) conception of social justice focuses on working within, rather than challenging, the norms of society:

You’re accountable to the people, to the norms and values of that group, and if you transgress them, you have an opportunity to show that you can change, or that you realise that you’ve misdemeanoured and you can come back to it. And that the actions of the group always try to positively promote those values.

Critical and ‘post’ theories in social justice

Some participants conceptualised social justice in terms of analysis of structural power, taking action for democracy and equity; and critical self-reflection, indicating they took up positions aligned with critical and ‘post’ theories. These concepts are outlined in turn in the below sub-sections.

Examining and challenging power and injustice

Acceptance of cultural diversity was also found in positions taken up by educators who further defined social justice as having an understanding of one’s own privilege and the realities of others within dominant structures and ideologies. Russ (US) elaborates,

Understanding the different world views of different groups, for example, understanding history and current social context from the perspective of men and women, from people of different sexualities, races, ethnicities, nationalities...social

justice also has to have a big component of equity and understanding historical forms of oppression and the ways in which power has leverage by certain groups over other groups.

Russ' description, which encapsulated a range of participants' definitions of social justice, focused on being aware of how power works to disadvantage some and advantage others, aligns with critical and 'post' theorising of social justice. Similarly, Pamela (UK) critiqued the notion of equality of opportunity by noting how it sets up 'big dreams but they can't achieve it because culturally or economically...they are socially prevented from doing that and I think it's quite a misleading idea.' Christine (UK) provided a clear example of the difference between equity and equality through the metaphor of a running race, '...imagine being in a running race, and one person has got a clear track and the other person has got a hurdle in the way and a puddle and...some chains to crawl under.' She continued by stating that in this imaginary scenario, although the two runners had an equal opportunity to start the race, their different experiences during the race would provide a barrier to equity of outcome. This leads us to concepts of social justice that move toward challenging existing systems and enacting change. Equity can be seen, as Calvin (US), Susan (UK) and Lara (Sweden) described it, in terms of fair treatment and distribution of resources. Jeff offered a distinction between the concepts of fairness, equality and equity:

I think the starting point is to think about the definition of equity as opposed to equality... We often get blind-sided by the appearance of fairness in an equal society where everyone is treated the same under the law...Becoming aware of social justice is about understanding more than just the formal, legal frameworks that guarantee us some rights...It's about looking at how the structures of society, our cultural norms, and other things that are not entirely reducible to formal state institutions or individual free will still have an impact on shaping our fortunes.

Jeff's understanding of social justice sheds light on the notion of power regarding relationships and socially constructed dominant ideologies that lead to individuals being privileged or oppressed. For example, Gina (US), Sarah (NZ), Tara (US) and Tracy (European living in the US) discussed how power can be localised and fluid, playing out in relationships among colleagues, between teachers and students and in a variety of social contexts. In the following quote, Sarah suggested that,

There are power relationships everywhere...who is advantaged, who is disadvantaged, who has a vested interest in maintaining power, who has a vested interest in trying to create change or who is marginalised.

Tracy, outlining her own perspective on power relations, proposed that teacher educators should focus analysis of classrooms on how they are 'viewed from the bottom'.

Frank (US), Louisa (New Zealand) and Ruby (Chinese living in Australia) acknowledged their privileges and suggested it is imperative for teachers to create learning opportunities for their students that allow them to become aware of their own privilege(s) due to their social identities and position within society. Tara turned the focus on herself and noted that she and others in a position of power have to recognise 'our inherent implicit bias' and 'try to mediate bias in teaching'. Diane (Australia) named overcoming barriers to rights explicitly as 'our work...to enable every child to have access to learning.' Katie asked 'how do I make it so that this is a fair world?' [emphasis added]. Calvin (US) talked about overcoming discrimination by 'taking action if you do see it, you can call people out'. These examples suggest that for these PETEs, in challenging structural injustices, emphasis is placed on interactions between individuals, such as peers, or teachers and students.

PETEs used examples that might oppose PSTs' own beliefs in order to teach them to challenge their own beliefs. Georgia (US), for example, described her attempt to teach LGBT issues at 'a religion-based institution':

I've been warned, students are gonna fight you against this because it's not their belief. [I would say to them] you may not believe in a certain thing, but you can at least...want them [LGBT people] to be healthy.

Paul (US) described developing a conceptual model to help 'eliminate obesity biases' and considered different teaching strategies for PSTs working with overweight students. This construction 'eliminate obesity bias' is a change from the more mainstream 'eliminate obesity,' which works to make fat people invisible (Calogero, Tylka, and Mensinger, 2016). However, these examples suggest that these participants presumed a privileged PST, not a student who might be experiencing marginalisation themselves. In this context, black and minority ethnic, LGBT or fat PETE and PESP students may remain marginalised because action is not taken for their democratic engagement. This constitutes a hidden curriculum in PETE and PESP. Tom (US) raised a problem with the current demographic make-up of PSTs which can partly illuminate assumptions of a privileged PST:

The teaching profession is...very white, and we have students who grew up primarily in middle class backgrounds who are looking to get into teaching, and they don't have a lot of experience with racial-ethnic diversity, working with people of colour, people who are different than them in fundamental ways. And they don't understand how to teach them or how to talk to them.

Taking action

For a small number of participants, taking action was an explicit part of their understanding of social justice. The specific groups who were disadvantaged appear to be secondary to the process of being socially just (Bell, 2016). Many of the participants who advocated for social justice as taking action avoided identifying a hierarchy of specific social justice issues. They did not divide issues into separate entities, as some critical pedagogues have accused ‘post’ theorists of doing (Fernández-Balboa 2017). Marie (US) proposed that her understanding of social justice is ‘being aware of equity and inequity in many different areas, communities and societies and being active in that space.’ Bernard (Australia) and Jeff (UK) provided succinct examples of the importance of taking action. Bernard claimed that social justice is ‘trying to challenge inequity or equity and do something about that. So it’s got an action to it...it’s sort of activist standard rather than a passive researcher, observation.’ Jeff drew attention to the notion that being socially just is more than avoiding being the oppressor, or ‘more than just being not-racist. You’ve got to be anti-racist, pro-active. You’ve got to try and change.’

Connor (American living in New Zealand) was clear that although educating for social justice can be context specific, social justice is *action* against injustices. He stated,

I don’t know if you could technically have one definition of [social justice] but I think that working to eradicate inequality for specific areas, such as gender, race, sexuality, colonialism and things like that...social justice education is actually trying to eradicate social inequalities.

Henry (European living in the US) and Celia (US) were cognisant of how they took action for equity rather than providing equal resources and opportunities to all students. Henry offered:

Let’s say, you and I are in a physical education class and you are a high-skilled youngster and I’m a low-skilled runt, we should not be treated equally. In other

words, the learning conditions technically should be different for you compared to me; you should be working on different things than I should be working on. So if I am asked to do the same as you are, I'm being treated equally. Equitably, I think, is where the teacher makes an attempt to try and get me to be successful from the point where I am versus from the point where you are.

Henry's example presented a similar sentiment to the image of the running race described earlier by Christine (UK), but Henry also articulated the importance of doing social justice work in addition to recognising inequality. In a similar manner, Celia highlighted how teaching for social justice necessitates unequal distribution of resources to enable equitable outcomes. She proposed, 'when we talk about social justice as equitable it's "what can I do so that all my students can be successful?"' The salient point for these two participants is the need for educators to act to provide equity, or to act beyond raising awareness through sociocultural content on their courses. For these PETEs, an *unequal* distribution of resources may be needed for the purpose of social justice (Marshall 1998).

Similarly, Ruby (Chinese living in Australia) spoke about building an environment for her own PESP students who she saw as disadvantaged:

I guess my understanding is, in a pedagogical sense, how can I include all of my students to understand their rights and their strengths?...Because a lot of my students in [University], they always define themselves as not as good as others...so I try to in my class talk about stereotypes, social justice, in terms of who they are, how they can empower themselves.

Contrasting this with Tom's (US) earlier problematising of the typical PST, this raises questions whether social justice content and sentiment in PETE does, and should, change depending on the life experiences of the PSTs themselves; that is, teaching about, and for,

social justice with privileged students or with disadvantaged students might look different.

Ruby's perspective informs teacher educators that facilitating the empowerment of marginalised students might require particular pedagogies that are different to those designed to engage privileged PSTs in recognising social justice and sociocultural issues as a valuable element of learning to teach.

One way of dealing with this focus on pedagogy over curriculum content is to see social justice as a process of critical reflection as a way to take action (Smyth 1989). Ava (US) expressed this point about moving away from content delivery; suggesting that educators need to stop talking and do more asking:

I think the first way to train teachers is to not talk at them or teach them about diversity...have them explore their situation because we throw teachers into the deep end pool and don't really train them at all how to do this ...cause how can we teach diversity when every school is different?... [We should take] into account diversity of skill, of culture, what the students can bring...we should stop talking and start asking.

While still framed by an understanding of the concept of diversity, Ava's belief about the need to ask questions suggests a more critical approach, of reflection and action, firstly by paying attention to one's own situation. For some of the participants, taking action needed to involve both outward action on societal structures and social norms but equally, an inward focus on the values and beliefs of themselves as PETEs through delving into their own biographies (Fernández-Balboa 1997). For these participants, social justice involved critically reflecting on the implications of how they exercise power in their classrooms and taking action to address their biases. Marie similarly advocated for self-reflection,

If you're engaged in social justice, I think that you are interested in understanding and raising awareness for yourself and/or others about the realities that other people live in every single day and being aware of your own background and the benefits that you've gotten or challenges that you faced and also being interested and hearing the experiences of others. And thinking about what that means and then being active in the space in different ways to try to change that.

June (Canada) took a broader view beyond herself, proposing that collective groups of PETEs within a single programme must reflect on the implicit and explicit values that underpin PETE curricula. She suggested,

It is really important that programmes go through the process of thinking what the values and beliefs are for that programme...Is it just PE or are we talking about PE in the context of developing good, democratic citizens? I would say that's our responsibility.

Connections to social movements and national contexts

There was modest explicit connection to the critical project in the sense of naming critical theory, critical pedagogy or Marxism. A small number of participants, including a majority of those from New Zealand, were able to explain being informed by critical pedagogues such as Freire, or to problematise the universalist notions of critical pedagogy (Lather 1998). Some participants discussed at length, social justice concepts in theory and practice, raising debates over democracy (June, Canada; Ruby, Chinese living in Australia); empowerment (Tracy, European living in the US); creating and nurturing connectedness (Diane, Australia); and collectivisation (Gary, UK). Some of these theoretical debates reflected participants' interest in the theoretical basis of a critical perspective of social justice and subsequent concerns raised by 'post' perspectives (Fernández-Balboa 2017; Lather 1998). There was further

reference to a range of 'social movements', shaping participants' conceptions and informing their knowledge.

While there were some differences between countries, it is difficult to tease out any national differences in conceptualisations of social justice and the centrality of different sociocultural issues. Connor noted, 'a sociocultural issue from New Zealand is very different than a sociocultural issue from the US.' Susan (UK) pointed out that merely having a sociocultural perspective might not be enough to tackle social justice, because 'not all sociocultural perspectives...ask questions about power relations...it's a homogenous term for a set of perspectives that actually could be quite conservative and structural-functionalist.' In this comment, Susan demonstrates the perspective that activism is valuable, not merely offering sociocultural content. Some issues were manifested in specific examples of activism or rights-based movements in national contexts. For instance, race lenses from different countries were mentioned as informing positions on sociocultural issues: Black Lives Matter, institutional racism and civil rights in the US; anti-Islamophobia, immigrant rights and Brexit issues in the UK; and tackling socioeconomic disparities and attacks on cultural expressions for Māoriⁱⁱ and Pasifikaⁱⁱⁱ students in New Zealand and for indigenous Australians. These brought to the fore, tensions between marginalised or oppressed groups in each country and political/state systems or other groups in society, that participants taking up a critical or 'post' social justice perspective found concerning. Ruby claimed that in Australia, although gender and to some extent sexuality have been accepted as lenses for examination, race is 'not an easy topic to talk about' because people think they are being criticised. Louisa, a White New Zealander with Pasifika family members, said '[this] can't help but influence your thinking around social justice: why are Pacific and Māori people at the bottom of the heap all the time?' These discussions were potentially influenced by the racial and ethnic backgrounds of

the participants or their personal experiences of race or whiteness; they reflect the discursive position of being troubled by issues of injustice affecting others/Others but not oneself.

Conclusion

Most PETEs interviewed, across all countries, could identify some issues of (in)equality, diversity, and (in)justice that existed within their own contexts. Eleven participants pointed out that social justice is a broad term; accordingly, their own descriptions remained nebulous. This echoes Breunig's (2011) study with educators who struggled to pinpoint an exact definition. Reflected in the findings above, some participants' definitions did not fit neatly into one category (neoliberal, humanist, critical or 'post'); instead they expressed views reflecting different theoretical stances. It is not our aim to highlight this as inconsistency or contradiction. Rather, a broad range of definitions in itself is not a negative and testifies to the big tent (Lather 1998) and the application of critical, transformative and justice-oriented concepts to a range of sociocultural issues and perspectives. Equally, we cannot be too critical of those participants who 'only' drew from humanistic or neoliberal ideas and did not align themselves with *enacting* social justice, because the question they were asked was how they define social justice and their understanding of sociocultural issues.

Some variation in what stands for social justice education and sociocultural issues in PETE may result from responses to local, regional or national political/social/economic issues. At times context is constructed as central to definitions of social justice, but there were few, if any, examples of dividing social justice in specific cultural battles (Fernández-Balboa 1997). However, with a small number of exceptions, the substantive difference in perspectives lies in differences between scholars with and without educational backgrounds and research interests in sociocultural issues, or who were in a national context that put social justice at the fore. The language of sociology was less frequently present with educators in

the US. They were more cognisant of sociocultural issues as an object of study than social justice as action. Many European and Australasian scholars were cognisant of critical theory and related issues of power, democracy, and equity; for problematising knowledge through social concepts; and creating change in schools. While we recognise that this dichotomy is simplistic, it is a salient heuristic of the breadth of understandings of social justice. If non-critical concepts are associated with social justice, such as a focus on diversity, equality of opportunity, and individual responsibility, PSTs may not get the tools to *enact* social justice or tackle sociocultural issues through taking up critical and ‘post’ theories. Stewart (2017) warned that by focusing on diversity and inclusion, colleges (and teacher educators) have avoided having to confront the need for institutional change. This neoliberal framing of social justice as an issue to be solved within existing structures may appease policy makers keen to demonstrate their commitment, but it is our belief that tackling social justice issues requires openness to the possibility of addressing structural inequality. Teaching *for* social justice in PETE occurs at the nexus of an awareness of local, national and global social issues, understanding of social theory, humanistic teaching based on a genuine concern for individual students, a reflexive approach to one’s own values and beliefs, and a focus on actively leading change for more equitable outcomes. There were examples of conceptualisations of social justice that took into account local or national context. According to the participants who implicitly or explicitly drew from critical and ‘post’ theories, social justice education should focus on taking action against oppression and inequitable power relations, and creating learning environments that support democracy. As Bell (2016) notes, social justice is both a goal and a process, not just a method for teaching. Emphasis should be on exposing the social, economic, and political factors that produce marginalisation, and producing a critical consciousness that perceives injustices, and then taking action (Breunig 2011).

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ⁱ Relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.

ⁱⁱ The indigenous people of New Zealand.

ⁱⁱⁱ A term coined by the New Zealand government to describe migrants from the south Pacific islands.