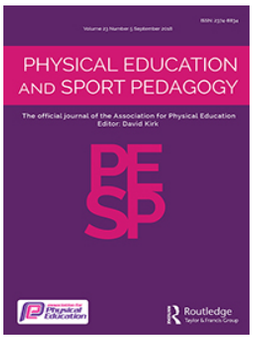

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Moving forward with social justice education in physical education teacher education

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Social justice has been steadily gaining traction in physical education (PE) and physical education teacher education (PETE) for more than 40 years. During that time, scholars have argued for the importance of explicating the hidden curriculum (Bain 1975, 1985; Dodds 1985; Fernandez-Balboa 1993; Kirk 1992), educating pre-service teachers (PSTs) about equality (e.g. Evans 1990), sociocultural perspectives and issues (e.g. Cliff, Wright, and Clarke 2009; Flory, Tischler, and Sanders 2014), critical pedagogy (e.g. Fernández-Balboa 1997; Philpot 2015) and most recently, taking action through social justice initiatives (Felis-Anaya, Martos-Garcia, and Devís-Devís 2017; Tinning 2016). A growing body of PETE literature has highlighted issues such as racism (Fitzpatrick 2013; Legge 2010), body image (Kirk 2006; Tinning and Glasby 2002), gender (Brown 2005; Dewar 1991; Dowling 2009), and motor elitism (Evans 2004; Mordal-Moen and Green 2012); however, limited research has focused specifically on how social justice education (SJE) is enacted in PETE programs around the globe, particularly within the current neoliberal culture.

The aim of this special issue is to explore how sociocultural and social justice issues are addressed and implemented in PETE programs internationally. In particular, emphasis has been placed on the similarities and differences across a global teacher education context related to multiple socio-political networks and assemblages (e.g. national, program, and individual) and the influence they have on best practices in PETE related to social justice. How teacher education programs address sociocultural issues and social justice varies but may include, a field experience, a 'stand-alone' course, or as part of their overall mission statement (Flory and Walton-Fisette 2015). Research regarding the effectiveness of teaching sociocultural issues to PSTs is mixed. Some research cites that many PSTs are unchanged by courses addressing issues such as cultural diversity (Banks 2001; Sleeter 1995). Other education experts suggest a more individual approach to these issues that examine personal histories in relation to beliefs and interactions (Cochran-Smith 1995; Martin 1991). Regardless, it seems that addressing sociocultural issues with PSTs is challenging because of the various beliefs, prejudices, emotions, and feelings of resistance that individuals may experience related to these issues (Brown 2004; Storms 2014), both at the pre-service and instructor level.

Thus, this special issue seeks to underscore the need to examine how teacher educators approach teaching for sociocultural issues and social justice within their PETE programs. Specifically, this issue presents work that examines how a variety of PETE programs in Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States integrate sociocultural issues and SJE. To ably position and support the five papers included in this special issue, we believe it is important to provide some historical context of the evolution of social justice in PE and PETE. In the following sections, we begin with the hidden curriculum from the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s and then delve into SJE, particularly in PETE over the past two decades. We conclude this special issue with a response

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paper written by Mary O'Sullivan as she provides an insightful analysis across the five papers through the lens of PETEs as public intellectuals and activists in a global teacher education context.

Hidden curriculum

Building on Phillip Jackson's (1968) seminal work on the hidden curriculum, Linda Bain (1975) began to investigate teachers' inconsistencies with their behavior, organization, procedures, and expectations on how these implicit acts impacted students. At the time, Bain suggested that teachers may not be knowledgeable about their stated versus implied values and thus needed self-reflection to increase their level of awareness (1975). A decade later, Bain's (1985) work related to the hidden curriculum focused on the dynamics of power, privilege, patriarchy, and ideology not only in regard to teachers but also on the process and culture of schooling. At this time, the relationship between schooling and society was being explored, specifically how teachers within schools had the potential to reproduce social inequity and engage in transformation to create change (e.g. Griffin 1983; Kollen 1983; Martinek 1983), and approaches to PETE to foster a critical pedagogy (e.g. Kirk 1986).

Although the focus on the hidden curriculum gained traction from scholars in PE during those 10 years, critical pedagogues (e.g. Fernandez-Balboa 1993; Kirk 1992) argued that the term and notion of the hidden curriculum was too broad, overstretched, and potentially meaningless. In an attempt to provide a different, yet more enhanced perspective on hidden agendas, Dodds (1985) formulated the functional curriculum – four levels of curriculum that operate at the same time in PE programs. We provide the four levels below (Dodds 1985; Casey 2017; Kirk 1992); however, it is important to reiterate that these levels do not occur in a hierarchical or sequential order; rather, they may occur simultaneously and/or some levels may be present whereas others may not:

- *Level 1 – Explicit Curriculum* – 'official curriculum', public, part of curriculum mapping (e.g. school programs, syllabi, policy documents)
- *Level 2 – Covert Curriculum* – teachers' unspoken, non-public agenda – qualities that are rarely, if ever, acknowledged in school documents or lesson plans; yet, are consciously and intentionally communicated to students when carrying out the explicit curriculum
- *Level 3 – Null Curriculum* – Ideas, concepts and values that could be included in the explicit and covert levels, but are left out. 'What is not there in physical education classes interacts somehow with what is there' (Dodds 1985, 93).
- *Level 4 – Hidden Curriculum* – Unexamined or unexplained processes and pedagogy of teachers; reflexive aspects of speech, action and organization at an unconscious level – a complex term to grasp.

The work of Bain and Dodds certainly highlighted the complexity of schooling and identified the significant inequities that were espoused and fostered within a 'functional' curriculum. The notion of the hidden curriculum was a complex concept to grasp for most administrators and teachers. To further this notion, Kirk (1992) argued that we, PETEs, needed to center more on discourse and ideology in a way that allows us to engage in teaching and learning as a cultural practice, which will help guide us in identifying the hidden agendas. Fernandez-Balboa (1993) supported Kirk's critique of the hidden curriculum arguing that it is selective and influences what we choose to pay attention to and ignore, thus, influencing our vision to explore other possibilities. Fernandez-Balboa (1993) poignantly advocated that

> We are not only professionals, we are citizens, thus, we cannot dismiss our responsibility to struggle for justice and democracy, nor can we underestimate our creative power for novel action. We *do* have the capacity to become human agents of change; transformation *is* possible. (p. 249)

Over the past 15 years, scholars have not utilized the hidden curriculum as a framework for their research; instead using it as an intentional way of making meaning of findings and supporting

arguments made in discussions. For example, Napper-Owen et al. (1999), Solmon and Carter (1995), and Rønholt (2002) all identified how their findings perpetuated and replicated the hidden curriculum. Fisette (2011), Fisette and Walton (2015), and Wilkinson and Penney (2016) also explicated the hidden curriculum within specific themes in the findings, highlighting the need to engage in discourse and research on socio-critical issues. This increased focus on the critical perspective builds upon our initial understanding of the hidden curriculum from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s to our current scholarly emphasis on social justice issues and inequities. In the following section, we explore how PETE research has focused more recently on social justice and transformative pedagogy related to teacher education programs.

Social justice

Social justice has been described as being 'too nebulous and versatile' to be narrowed down to a single concept and consists of a multitude of 'discursive and pedagogical practices' (Bialystok 2014, 148). Situating social justice work in historical and political discourses bereft of a single essential definition raises questions regarding the meaningfulness of such work (Hytten and Bettez 2011; Rizvi 1998). Indeed, ambiguity in the concept of social justice can lead to a 'dilution of social justice education' (Hackman 2005). While social justice is a concept and/or orientation that is embraced, and indeed championed, by many teacher educators and teacher education programs, a clear definition of SJE is paramount in discussions of SJE in PETE. Our conception of SJE aligns with that of Bell (2016) and Hackman (2005). We believe that effective SJE is both a goal and a process, where educators create a democratic environment that empowers students to actively engage in their education, understand the roles power, privilege, and oppression play in their lives, and through critical reflection how they can challenge and/or disrupt the status quo.

We also find Hytten and Bettez's (2011) framework an interesting heuristic in considering the wider body of work in social justice. Hytten and Bettez (2011) divide SJE into five, often overlapping, strands: Philosophical/conceptual, practical, ethnographic/narrative, theoretically specific, and democratically grounded.

- *Philosophical/conceptual* strand includes work that focuses on a philosophical or theoretical meaning of justice with a goal of defining the associated terms, concepts, and claims.
- *Practical strand* focuses on what social justice looks like in practice including conditions and/or competencies for schools or education programs, model or program descriptions, and criteria or frameworks for assessment of outcomes.
- *Ethnographic/narrative strand* focuses on the lived experiences of various stakeholders engaging with social justice or, indeed, injustice. The goal of work situated in this strand is to highlight participant(s) experience with social justice and increase understanding the impact on all stakeholders.
- *Theoretically specific strand* includes work that is informed by 'theoretical positions that are connected to specific leftist and/or radical movements within academia' (Hytten and Bettez 2011, 16). Work grounded in critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, cultural studies, feminism, poststructuralism, and democratic education among others, is situated within this strand.
- *Democratically grounded strand* considers the 'fundamental purposes of education in a democratic society' (Hytten and Bettez 2011, 19) and focuses on problematizing oppression and empowering individuals and communities.

It is important to note that work located within and across these fives strands is often interrelated and overlapping rather than restricted to just one strand. Indeed, it is through this framework that we later consider the five papers included in this special issue. Before doing so, we first explore how SJE has been researched and positioned in PETE.

While there has been a recent call for revitalizing the social justice agenda in PE (Azzarito et al. 2017), there is some notable work that has been conducted on social justice in PETE programs around the globe. Although there have been mixed results of teaching for social justice in teacher education as noted by Banks (2001) and Sleeter (1995) and in light of Dowling, Fitzgerald, and Flintoff's (2015) assertion that enacting SJE within a neoliberal climate is difficult, the possibilities of engaging in SJE in PETE exists. Moving beyond what Penney (2002) has termed the 'single issue' approach, we highlight the following studies as examples of engaging in SJE in PETE both from an individual faculty and programmatic perspective. Benn and Dagkas' (2006) work on an initiative to provide single-sex PE for Muslim women enrolled in a Post Graduate Certificate in Education primary course was, to our knowledge, the first to consider the importance of alternative programing within PETE based on Islam. Clark, Heaven, and Shah (2016) provided insight into social justice in PETE programs at historically Black colleges and universities from the experiences of Black American PETE faculty, an area that has been greatly overlooked within the PETE community in the United States. Enright et al.'s (2017) recent work reports the lessons learned through a participatory action research project that engaged PSTs as pedagogical consultants in an effort to democratize PETE and represents a notable shift in engaging students in the co-construction of PETE. Dowling (2009), Flintoff, Dowling, and Fitzgerald (2015), and Dowling, Fitzgerald, and Flintoff's (2015) narrative work documents the journey of PETE faculty engaging in SJE within their respective PETE programs (Norway and the UK) and affords possibilities for others interested in exploring their own position in SJE. Philpot's (2015, 2016) analysis of a critically oriented PETE program in New Zealand and its influence on undergraduate PE students' beliefs about social justice is one of the few endeavors to explore SJE at a programmatic level.

Moving forward with SJE in PETE

Over the past four decades, we have developed a rich history of research conducted on the hidden curriculum, social justice and SJE in PETE, which supports Fernandez-Balboa's statement (1993) that we, PETEs, have the capacity to be active agents of change and engage in transformative pedagogical practices. Many scholars before us have paved the path to engage in this work, which was recently built upon by Robinson and Randall (2016) who provided rich theoretical content related to social justice and pedagogies for change and the *transformative pedagogies* section in the recent Handbook of Physical Education Pedagogies (Ennis 2016). In much of this work, specific social issues have been the center of the published research situated in a particular historical and political context, thus, providing another supportive measure as to why it is so difficult to define social justice as a single concept. Each of the five empirical papers published in this special issue explores PETE from a broader viewpoint, particularly from a political, curriculum, and/or pedagogical perspective. Furthermore, each paper addresses one or more of the five strands identified by Hytten and Bettez (2011).

The first three papers are a result of a collaborative research study of scholars from England, New Zealand and the United States. These papers explore how social justice was conceptualized and enacted in PETE. Situated in the philosophical/conceptual strand, the first paper by Hill and colleagues, is an attempt to work towards greater certainty around concepts of social justice in the PETE community. The project sought to map variations in definition and conceptualization of social justice and sociocultural issues among PETEs. The data presented by Hill and colleagues offer a range of understandings about sociocultural issues and social justice, which supports Bialystok's (2014) argument that defining social justice as a single concept is complex, challenging and potentially impossible. In particular, some participants articulated a humanist approach to social justice by encouraging their PSTs to have awareness of equality of opportunity in relation to gender, sexuality and/or racism. Less prevalent, but strongly stated by those who conceptualized 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. After reading this paper and using Bell's (2016) argument that social justice is both a goal and a process, we are left to consider how PETE programs can continue to include humanistic and neoliberal ideas, yet move towards a curriculum that enacts social justice?

The second paper by Ovens and colleagues explores how the multiple socio-political networks surrounding PETE shapes the possibilities for engaging with social justice and sociocultural issues for PSTs. Situated in both the theoretically specific and practical strand, the findings from this study illustrate how the complexities of enabling SJE and sociocultural issues within PETE were enabled or constrained across the national, programmatic, or individual level. The ways in which these assemblages interacted produced variations in curriculum time, which in turn, influenced how SJE and sociocultural issues were enacted in the different PETE programs. The authors highlight the importance of understanding the socio-political networks associated with PETE and that advocacy for SJE must move beyond pedagogical practices alone to consider macro level policies. The paper by Ovens and colleagues raises the question, how does a PETE program that embodies the 'perfect storm' of individual, programmatic, and national conditions to enact SJE influence PSTs' understanding of sociocultural issues and the use of SJE in their own pedagogical practices?

In the third and final paper of the collaborative research study, Walton-Fisette and colleagues focus on the pedagogical practices that PETEs utilized when teaching about sociocultural issues and for social justice. In this study, which is situated in the practical strand, the authors draw on transformative pedagogy (Ovens 2016; Ukpokodu 2009) as a framework for theorizing the data and highlight the pedagogical practices espoused as those that engender transformative learning. This was certainly demonstrated by participants who intentionally and explicitly planned learning experiences that focused on SJE in advance. However, many participants used teachable moments as a means to educate PSTs about sociocultural issues without intent or potential purpose. In sharing divergent pedagogical practices, the authors shed light on the resistance and constraints PETE faculty faced within their courses if, and when, they teach for equity and social justice. Similar to the work of Hill et al. and Ovens et al. shared above, the findings identify that there are PETEs enacting social justice and engaging in transformative pedagogy, yet, there are still many PETE programs and faculty that are limited in their intentional and explicit approaches. How, then, can PETEs be more transformative and intentional when teaching about social justice issues within their pedagogy?

The fourth and fifth papers of the special issue are both situated in Australia's health and physical education teacher education (HPETE) programs. Both papers by Enright, Williams, and Sperka, and Shelley and McCuaig respectively focus on issues of social justice in one particular HPETE program.

Enright and colleagues consider the how, why, and to what effect various agendas and stakeholders shape HPETE programs, which in turn impacts the explicit and implicit content and values taught and experienced by PSTs. Situated in both the theoretically specific and democratically grounded strands, using Bernstein's (2000) theory of pedagogic practices, this paper explores the ways in which one Australian HPETE program has worked to create equity-centered structures and curricula. Drawing on data from an ongoing project, Enright and colleagues crafted three vignettes to illustrate the complexities of engaging with equity-centered, socially just or democratic HPETE. Working within the constraints imposed by both external and institutional structures to create possibilities for a critically democratic HPETE are highlighted and discussed. The transformative, activist work presented in this paper illustrates how HPETE programs can provide opportunities to engage in socially just, democratic practices. The work by Enright and colleagues raises the question regarding how PSTs make sense of these socially just, equitable, and democratic practices in ways that enable transfer to their own pedagogical practice?

Shelley and McCuaig's paper, situated in both the practical and theoretically specific strands, presents one contemporary PETE educator's proclaimed use of critical pedagogy as a strategy to raise and confront social justice and sociocultural issues within an Australian HPETE program. Furthermore, these authors explore the pedagogical approaches that were enacted and in alignment with the

tenets of critical pedagogy and what students made of these endeavors. This paper documents the rationale behind, and enactment of, four pedagogical strategies delivered within the HPETE courses of this PETE program. As shared in other papers in this special issue, Shelley and McCuaig document the complexity and compromise that ensued within realities of a complex teacher education learning space. In light of their analysis, the authors suggest that challenging and disrupting PETE students' values and knowledges through critical pedagogies continues to be an unpredictable and dangerous project, but still poses a valuable strategy for productive, albeit it modest, pedagogical work. Thus, we are left wondering how PETEs who do not espouse a critical perspective engage in such complex and challenging transformative pedagogies in an attempt to deconstruct students' values and beliefs?

O'Sullivan's response paper sheds light on the complexity of engaging in SJE, both pedagogically and with empirically based research. She highlights how there has been a shift in PETE research where many scholars are engaging in research that can be grant supported, which, for most social justice work, is not the case. O'Sullivan is hopeful that the scholarship in this special issue, along with other recent publications, will allow us to revive teacher education research. She cautions us; however, that although we are engaging in socially just scholarship, we continue to have over-representation of White faculty and students from predominantly White institutions. O'Sullivan suggests that the authors in this special issue view teacher education as a learning problem, whereas, education reform identifies the issue in teacher education as a policy problem. As she navigates us through numerous constructs (e.g. policy, dipositions, content knowledge) that may influence how SJE is integrated in PETE programs across the global context, she supports our commitment to fostering social justice in our teaching and learning practices.

Concluding remarks

We are optimistic and hopeful that the scholarship presented in this special issue on SJE in PETE will provide opportunities for future discourse, pedagogical practices, and scholarly endeavors that address social justice and social inequity in PE. We collectively believe that transformation and change is possible. We challenge you to join us in this transformative and action-based endeavor.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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