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Storying the Physical Education Teacher Education Experience

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Abstract

We used narrative inquiry as both phenomenon and method to engage pre-service teachers (PSTs) with diverse stories of physical education (PE). Specifically, we explored how PSTs' stories interact, resonate, and bump with others' diverse stories. We found that having participants engage with diverse stories of PE alongside their own enabled them to think about implementing strategies that may foster social justice in gymnasium spaces. Utilizing critical autobiographical work in this way allows participants to practically engage with the multiplicity of stories and experiences in PE. Following, they are able to negotiate their own stories alongside diverse narratives within their practice.

Keywords: narrative inquiry; physical education teacher education; social justice; pre-service teachers; physical education.

Résumé

Nous avons utilisé le récit narratif à la fois comme méthodologie et phénomène pour engager des enseignants en formation initiale dans l'écriture et la lecture de divers récits d'éducation physique (EP). De façon plus spécifique, nous avons exploré comment l'histoire personnelle d'un enseignant en formation se compare à celles, très diverses, d'autres enseignants. Nous avons appris que cette confrontation a permis aux enseignants en formation de penser à mettre en œuvre en gymnase des stratégies pour favoriser une justice sociale. L'utilisation de ce type d'autobiographie critique permet aux participants de s'engager avec une multiplicité d'histoires et d'expériences en EP. Cet engagement permet une négociation entre leur histoire personnelle et divers récits dans leur pratique.

Mots clés : récit narratif; formation initiale en éducation physique; justice sociale.

Introduction and Background

As teacher educators, we recognize the importance of preparing pre-service teachers (PSTs) to teach in socially just ways. Addressing issues such as racism and sexism impacts students' learning and beliefs (Macdonald, 2002). Further, it is critical to educate PSTs to make changes to the historical inequities within education that may inhibit students' access and opportunities to be physically active for life (Macdonald, 2002). We aim to enhance PSTs' abilities to adapt and evolve to emergent social issues in their teaching of physical education (PE). However, *how* to operationalize and implement these teachings can be approached differently based on teacher educators' lived experience, theoretical perspectives, and ontological commitments (Hennig et al., 2020). In our previous research, like others (Dowling et al., 2014; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Tinning 2002, 2004), we have challenged those who have long assumed that critical pedagogies, rooted in critical theory that encourage students to critique structures of power and oppression, are the most appropriate for teaching PSTs about matters of social justice (Hennig et al., 2020). The critique of these pedagogies is that oftentimes they do not implicate the students within the issues, or offer practical applications (Dowling et al., 2014; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Tinning 2002, 2004). Furthermore, some have positioned these critical approaches to ironically be oppressive (Ellsworth, 1989).

Specifically, we have positioned the use of stories (autobiographical narrative inquiry) under the umbrella of transformative pedagogies to offer a unique way for physical education teacher education (PETE) PSTs to analyze their personal stories and implicate themselves within social justice issues (Hennig et al., 2020). While transformative pedagogies are rooted within critical theory, they have been defined as including social constructivism along with critical pedagogies, with a focus on actively including the participant within the social issues being critiqued (Tinning, 2017). We see these methods as ways to enable students to come to critique their own stories within larger systemic social issues, thus connecting them within the process. In this paper, we explore how PSTs' stories interact, resonate, and bump with others' diverse stories of PE, such as stories surrounding gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and body size. We argue that this interaction between the self and others' stories is a practical experiential opportunity for PSTs to extend their thinking about fostering socially just PE.

Stories have been used by others in teacher education (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as well as within PETE (Dowling et al., 2014), however it is the exploration and analysis of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that we see as unique—particularly within the PETE discipline. We see inquiring into stories (e.g., narratives, vignettes, case studies) as an opportunity for students to validate their knowledge and experiences and reflect on how their individual stories may differ from others'. "Stories allow people to create parallels and connections, contrasts and contradictions in relation to one another" (Hennig et al., 2020, p. 669). This paper follows three elementary generalist PSTs in a PETE class, through their own autobiographical inquiry process. We focus on how PSTs' stories interacted and resonated with stories surrounding common sociocultural issues including equity, diversity, discrimination, and oppression (Hill et al., 2018).

We follow a pragmatic ontology, aligned with Dewey's (1958) belief that experience *is* knowledge and knowledge is relationally constructed through our past, present, and future (Schaefer, 2014). In our years of teaching, we have encountered diverse situations involving social

justice issues. As PETE professors and researchers our experiences and areas of research range: Hayley, 10 years in the field, engages in research surrounding inclusion of students who experience disability in PE and practitioner professional development; Doug, 25+ years of experience in the field, explores social justice issues with PSTs through Deweyan philosophy, meaningful PE, and narrative inquiry; and Lee, 10+ years in the field, researches around preparing PSTs to create socially just PE spaces. Our personal impetus for this work is to support our professional growth so that we may address these challenges and share knowledge with PSTs. Also, sharing our research and understanding into how transformative pedagogies might assist students' engagement with social justice concepts may help the field to think differently.

Research in PETE on learning to teach in socially just ways is receiving renewed attention (Blackshear & Culp, 2021; Flory et al., 2014; Landi et al., 2020; Ovens et al., 2018; Robinson & Randall, 2016). Unfortunately, multiple (mis)conceptualizations of what social justice means and looks like in action can result in the term becoming an empty signifier. We want to be clear that we are working from the following definition provided by Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2018):

(social justice 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. (p. 463)

Social justice education in the past has usually been part of the 'hidden curriculum' rather than a formal undertaking (Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). While there are multiple reasons for this, research has shown that PE PSTs are typically high-performance athletes with fit bodies who are unaware of dominant discourses that have shaped their experiences in sport and their identities (Tinning, 2004). Although this stereotype of PE PSTs may differ from those PSTs who are elementary generalists (DeCorby, et al., 2005), it is our belief that the stereotypes and perceptions of PE are still prominent with this population. PSTs may be uncritical and unsympathetic towards broader social issues and have a conservative conceptualization of teaching PE (Evans et al., 1996; Fletcher & Temertzoglou, 2010; Macdonald & Kirk, 1999). The technocratic focus within PETE around sports, skills, and motor development, while important for future physical educators, does little to disrupt the aforementioned dominant discourses.

Research Design

Theory

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, specifically the principles of *continuity* and *interaction*, grounds this work. Experiences are on a continuum; our past experiences inform our present and, therefore, our future (Dewey, 1938). Experiences are not just temporal but are relational and interactive, including people, places, and social context (Casey et al., 2018; Clandinin, 2013). Our study explores PSTs' own experiences alongside others' stories of discrimination and difference as a way to uncover the diversity of stories that exists in PE. Engaging PSTs in an autobiographical narrative inquiry process provides a continuity of experience that will interact and inform their future beliefs and practices (Dewey, 1938). PSTs' experiences are not static but will continue to be influenced based on awareness of issues and interaction with diverse stories.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry provides a space for participants to engage in a storied understanding of experiences—their own and others. It is not only a conceptualization of what experience is, but a way to study experience; it is both phenomenon and method (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). We employed autobiographical narrative inquiry with three participants. The process involved: (a) students creating timelines and providing artefacts of their experiences with PE and PETE; (b) writing stories around pivotal moments highlighted in their timelines; (c) reading non-dominant narratives of PE; and (d) student inquiry and written reflections alongside personal stories (see Hennig et al., 2020, 2022 for further context).

This approach enabled us to explore participants' stories in-depth and learn how they interacted and interpreted others' diverse stories of PE. Learnings from our previous research indicated the complexities of the autobiographical narrative inquiry process *during* class time with time constraints and a lack of opportunity to encourage in-depth reflection (Hennig et al., 2020). Therefore, the process of this study was completed outside of class time, to engage with the participants' stories and carefully explore the three-dimensional space: social, temporal, and place (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

Participants

PSTs were recruited through a presentation to a curriculum and pedagogy class for elementary PE. All students in the class were asked to participate, keeping in mind that narrative inquiry requires a small sample of 1–6 participants; we consider this a convenience sample. The criteria for participation included: (a) being enrolled in an undergraduate pre-service Bachelor of Education program, (b) completed or currently completing an elementary PE course, and (c) willing to engage in the autobiographical narrative inquiry process. Three participants volunteered via email. The participants included: Taylor, (female) grew up on an acreage and was passionate about track and field; Jessica (female), came back to do her education degree after a previous career and was passionate about dance; Derek, (male) played hockey and guitar with the support of his family and is a rare male PST in elementary.¹ The extent to which social justice was discussed in each of their courses was unknown but evidence from the research process indicates students received some information across the program.

Data Collection

Two primary researchers worked alongside the participants for three months. Hayley worked with Jessica and Taylor and Doug worked with Derek. Data were gathered through a series of conversations and a detailed, three phased autobiographical narrative inquiry process (Table 1). Conversations, written tasks, readings, and researchers' field notes were all used as data sources.

¹ All participant names are pseudonyms.

Table 1
Research Process

Underpinnings²	Processes
<i>The thing about stories is that is all we are.</i>	<p><i>Timeline</i> Participants were asked to create a timeline or chronicle of experiences throughout their life that they identified as being significant in shaping their decision to become a teacher (and a teacher of PE).</p> <p><i>Conversation 1</i> Participants individually met with a researcher for an initial conversation to discuss the timeline, inquire into the moments on their timeline, and identify potential narrative sources.</p>
<i>Understanding our own stories to live by as well as the institutional, cultural, familial stories we all live in.</i>	<p><i>Construction of Narratives</i> Participants wrote two or three narratives, expanding upon their descriptions from the initial conversation to add in context to the stories; narratives were refined via back-and-forth feedback email communication with the researcher.</p> <p><i>Conversation 2</i> Participants met with the researcher for another conversation to share their refined narratives, talk deeper about the insights from their experiences on their path to teaching PE and how these may have increased their willingness to teach in a culturally responsive way, and engage in more socially just forms of PE.³</p> <p><i>Conversation 3</i> Participants met with the researcher to use the commonplaces—temporality, sociality, and place—to think <i>with</i> the stories and to discuss the threads woven throughout the narratives.</p>
<i>Re-telling and re-living our stories and the stories of others.</i>	<p><i>Thinking with Stories of Equity and Difference</i> Participants were introduced to the three stories from Dowling et al. (2014; see Table 2) and encouraged to read, reflect, and then place these stories alongside their own.</p> <p><i>Final Conversation</i> Participants met with the researcher for a fourth and final conversation where questions around identity and normative discourses were discussed as well as if/how the process of writing narratives and engaging in the research may have enabled them to situate themselves differently within stories of PE.</p>

² The headings in this table are taken from Clandinin's (2013) book *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*, to help the researchers and participants to engage with the narrative inquiry process.

³ Culturally responsive: being aware of various cultural characteristics, social justice issues, diverse experiences, and perspectives of others to teach effectively and meaningfully to all individuals.

As indicated, we used (with permission) three stories from Dowling et al. (2014) text, which was designed to confront and identify equity and issues of difference through narrative method. Participants read these to stimulate discussion and think through the diverse narratives laid alongside their own stories (Table 2).

Table 2

Diverse Stories from Dowling et al. (2014)

Story Title ⁴	Details
Whitney	“ <i>Miss Whitney</i> ’ and <i>Miss, are you a terrorist?</i> ’: <i>Negotiating a place within physical education</i> (p. 78). Features a pre-service teacher in her practicum being discriminated on her race and identifying issues of power. The story includes elements of sexism, racism, gender stereotypes and rules, cultural dress, and body image.
Charlie	“ <i>It’s not for the school to tell us Charlie... after all, to us you are healthy big</i> ” (p. 119). Story of a student that doesn’t fit the mold of what the teacher is doing in PE, what fitness looks like, and the traditional PE program or normative practices in PE.
Making the grade	“ <i>Making the grade</i> ” (p. 130). Shares a story of clashes between teacher and student expectations featuring assessment practices, body image, gender, and physicality.

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry examines experience through the three-dimensional narrative space which simultaneously explores the personal/social, temporal, and place. As such, we move from personal feelings, hopes, and dispositions (inward) to existential social conditions (outward), to an examination of temporality (both backwards and forwards: past, present and future), and finally, to a consideration of place, attending to “the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51). The three dimensions and the interactions between them constitute the space where our research lives.

Transcribed conversations, as well as other data sources (notes, reflections) were analyzed through the three dimensions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Fluid reading, which refers to reading and rereading the data in an organic way, as opposed to a thematic analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), was followed by temporally placing each participants’ reflections over time. This served to allow the researchers to pull common threads together into a series of thoughts and perceptions. We then wrote these collected threads into narrative accounts for each participant. The accounts document the process of searching for plotlines (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), narrative threads, themes, and tensions that arise in the context of the participants’ experiences, other research, and theoretical work (Christensen, 2013). We chose to focus on the participants’ interactions with the three stories (Dowling et al., 2014). Therefore, the following section uses the entire narrative account as context, but hones in on the stories, paying attention to the status quo, cultural responsiveness, and a shifting willingness to engage in socially just PE. As such, all the quotes are from the fourth interview discussing teaching social justice and laying their own narratives alongside others’ diverse stories.

⁴ These short titles will be used to refer to the stories.

Results

Taylor

Taylor grew up engaged in the outdoors with her family. She was active and enjoying things like playing football with her dad and brother. Having a strong relationship with her family influenced her experiences with physical activity and desire to pursue teaching. Taylor emphasized the importance of bonding with others and having a sense of belonging as a young student and a teacher by attending to social-emotional safety and being known. These elements through Taylor's narrative account provide insight into her belief system and philosophy as a PST, which impact how her stories and understanding of diverse stories were interpreted.

Taylor was to read through each of the stories provided (Dowling et al., 2014) and think about them alongside her own. I (Hayley) asked her to share what she thought/felt and to consider in relation to her own experiences or as a future teacher how these stories might impact what she does and how she feels about teaching PE. One thing Taylor highlighted from *Whitney*, was this idea of “just survive”:

I thought of times I guess in my own life where I was like, ‘I just want to get this over with. I just need to survive it.’ And that's not necessarily a place where you can thrive. So that's kind of what hit me there was just, for whatever reason, if you feel like you're in a survival mode instead of, well, maybe feeling safe, yeah, you can't really show up or participate or enjoy.

She brought back the idea of a safe place and feeling safe which came out in her own stories. I asked Taylor if she thought these feelings of “just get it done” and “survive” would fade after she was done being a student teacher or if this might be something that follows *Whitney* because of her race. Taylor described,

Before I was like, ‘Okay. Well, even if [practicum] sucks, I just have to survive. I just have to do the weeks and I'll make it.’ But then once I got [to the school], it was like I can breathe. Right? When I saw what [practicum] actually was. So I can't imagine actually the stress that would have come if I had to feel [what Whitney did] every day of my practicum. But it's nice, I guess, that there's an end in sight. For [Whitney], it was the end of that I think that they were dancing.

In the second part of *Whitney*, she goes home to her parents and they voice their opinion that there aren't many Muslim teachers but there are more in medicine so she should change professions. Taylor thought that it was impactful when the girl in the story described how teaching was an opportunity for her to educate other people and change the negative attitudes towards race. Taylor also highlighted that there was a target on the girl in the story because of her head-scarf. It was meaningful to her and she said, “Because all my friends wear head-scarves. So to think that they would have a target on them because of that is a little bit stressful.”

Next, we discussed *Charlie* and being “big healthy.” Taylor pointed out how Charlie didn't necessarily fit into what fitness looks like and the traditional PE program. But if Charlie had the opportunity to do kick boxing in the class, he could show them his success. Charlie's story seems indicative of some of the normative discourse in PE class so I asked Taylor how might reflecting on the story impact what she's going to do in her future teaching. Taylor shared that she will provide diverse opportunities for students, using their interests to decide on activities, and ensure everyone can demonstrate success in an activity they enjoy.

I think that it's kind of reaffirmed things that I've learned in the curriculum classes about how you need engaging activities but also ones that are diverse, and so, yeah, not doing the standard fitness testing or even necessarily soccer, basketball, whatever. Maybe redefining what it looks like and maybe even looking at your students' interests and saying, 'Okay, this kid likes kickboxing. Why don't we do it together as a class?' Or, 'What do you like?' because exposing kids to things that their classmates like is interesting because maybe they'll get involved and invested as well.

Discussing *Making the Grade* brought up issues of body-image, feeling self-conscious, and self-image.

It's not even just self-image in the fact of being proud of yourself but what other people think.... And she wants to dance with Theodore but she's afraid that he might reject the offer. And so, the thought of rejection. I mean it might have just been a small theme there... maybe, just personally fascinates me because why would you put yourself out there again? That's kind of a form of rejection, I guess. So, to put yourself out there, that you want to go to the dance with that boy or whatever.... I think that the rejection piece is actually quite powerful.

Taylor identified with the rejection in this story and said, "I feel like, for me personally, because people's expectations matter for me, that's because those people matter it's just about her not wanting to let people down. So, I identified with that." I think there's something to say about how we set expectations for our students in PE and how we evaluate them to ensure there are opportunities for success. In this story, the teacher's attitude and practice wasn't helping everyone succeed. Taylor explained,

Is our goal that they point their toes perfectly, or is it that they're putting themselves out there and trying something new? I would want my students to participate and try something, and even if they don't do it perfect, who cares? You did something you hadn't done before.

I asked Taylor how these stories might compare to her own stories, to social justice and her future as a PE teacher? Taylor described that she must be a role model and create a culture in her class where her students feel comfortable to participate.

When it comes to PE, people already come with their guard up, like it's out of their comfort zone already, right? To be moving in front of people, to be doing things they don't know how to do... then to add on the extra barrier of, 'Yeah, I have to worry about... having a target on me because I don't fit the mold for whatever reason.' Whether it's your body type, race that just adds one more thing that makes it harder to, yeah, put yourself out there.... So, to just take away the fear of failure and just say, 'Hey, failure's okay because you're trying and you're doing something that you didn't do before.' So that's actually your success.

Jessica

Jessica grew up dancing and her parents enrolled her in a plethora of other activities in her youth. Activity was important to her parents, and they instilled that in her growing up, which has contributed to her active lifestyle now and passion for PE. In my discussions with Jessica, it became apparent that she highly valued the learning she could receive from others, opportunities to negotiate risk safely, and making personal connections. Jessica immediately recognized that

there were themes in the stories we read. In *Whitney* she pulled out issues of sexism, racism, gender stereotypes and rules, cultural dress, and body image. She was aware of how these issues could impact her as a teacher and started to think about how she would approach them.

Something that I noticed was just to be cognizant about... all the elements that impact perception of PE and of learning PE, like the boy who was just saying, 'Well, I just want to know what we're going to be doing.'.... I guess as a teacher, and just being aware of all the perceptions and misconceptions and what kids might be thinking of [and] just being aware of how many different ways it can be perceived, and so I guess yeah, like being as transparent with kids, about what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Jessica talked about making content meaningful to the students and shared that these situations and issues could impact student attitudes to PE. She compared her own past experiences to her outlook on PE now.

For me I mean had I had different styles of teachers and their different methods and activities, I might have had a completely different outlook on PE growing up.... I just so happened to have a lot of male teachers who were very traditional in their belief that the sports and track... there wasn't a lot of variety or even openness to different ideas. So that's why I didn't really particularly like physed. And it turns out that I do like it, but just not your traditional sports.

Jessica was disappointed to read in *Charlie* about the negativity that was associated with PE and the stance that the school/teacher had towards the subject.

I'm just surprised that the school would be spinning it [health] in such a negative way or such a, 'Oh, we're going to call it health.' And we're measuring kids at this age on their body mass index.... I never remember that. I never once felt like I was, like, ever remember us doing things like that or having my teachers put that emphasis. Never.

Jessica compared Charlie's experiences with her own and pointed out that it wasn't just about the students in the class. There also wasn't any communication with parents for 'buy-in' and to enable parents to support their kids from home. Jessica was forward thinking and explained how knowledge-sharing with parents is an essential aspect of students' learning and progress towards active healthy lifestyles.

I (Hayley) asked Jessica, "What else would you have done if you were the teacher and this was the model your school was going for?" She replied,

I think as a teacher, in terms of getting the rest of the staff to, like how can we approach this as a school? Should we host an evening where it's not just information sessions, but it's like the reasons why the school is doing this? The benefits of it, just as a, yeah, to get everyone on board and more so drive home the positivity of it. And then also having things done on a daily basis in physed. So not just like, we're going to do assessment, we're taking your results because then we're going to measure to see if you're whatever. But talking to kids at every lesson, and every unit of how does this play into the big picture?.... What's the purpose of this? So not having them test their levels, but like so how do we stay healthy? And how do we keep active? So just having a more holistic approach so that they understand what they're doing, and why, so if they like something they can take initiative on their own to do more of it... that means they're going to be healthier and continue that outside of school, past school.

Jessica's beliefs demonstrate her thoughtfulness and maturity as a PST. It was evident that she was passionate about students, but she was also starting to think about the bigger impact PE can have on their life.

When discussing *Making the Grade* Jessica said some of the social justice issues she saw were “body image, gender, physicality.” She talked about people's perceptions in relation to different activity levels and body image and explained that if we are teaching cartwheels, “why are they important? Is it for flexibility or why?” She emphasized that we have to start teaching people to understand the reasons behind why we teach content. One example she brought up was teaching about how gender might play a role in student ideas of body image and what's portrayed or if you're short versus tall, how do we set students up for success. This led to us having a conversation about evaluation and assessment—skill versus attitude. Jessica spoke briefly about the challenges of assessing students in PE because it's hard to watch skills, gauge ability and attitude, and monitor improvement. This was the first time I felt Jessica wasn't quite sure how to approach something in her teaching of PE. I asked her, “when you're thinking about these different narratives and these different social justice issues, how does that impact you becoming a PE teacher?” She answered,

So, it makes me more mindful of the activities that I choose and just the way I teach because I know for myself when I taught in my practicums, I did not teach hockey.... I mean, not to say I would never teach it, but I chose not to because I had the negative experience where I'm like, ‘No, I was forced, and that was the only choice that I was given.’.... If the majority of people don't like it, then I'm not going to force them to play it and grade them based on that. I tried to keep as much variety in the units as possible and to do stuff that I wasn't given a choice to do, so we did yoga... I mean even though I love yoga, I'm like, at this age they don't want to do breathing. So, I tried to use music, or we did poses with stories to make it more interactive and more fun.

Jessica's reflections on the stories led to an awareness to be mindful of activity choices and teaching approaches. She also shared how she might deal with issues like body image and confidence, explaining that she was,

trying to do things that I wasn't really given the opportunity to do, to make it more engaging for them and not for them to like physed, and try some things on their own and take risks and stuff like that.... I think it's with, not just school, but everything, social media, younger girls especially, having those body image issues so young. It really breaks my heart to overhear them in the hallway. And so, to have them look at themselves in the mirror at the age of elementary school... just being very aware that that does happen and is going through their mind and just doing my best [to teach them] that is not the focus of this, and I'm kind of just taking any opportunity to talk about that stuff in a positive way, or everybody's different, and it doesn't matter.... Are you having fun? Are you pushing yourself? Are you being a risk-taker? Are you gaining confidence? Those kinds of things take the focus off of the physical body part of it, and more on the internal feelings.

Jessica also thought it was important to be aware of gender stereotypes and not perpetuate them. She explained, “just because you're a girl doesn't mean you're better at dancing.... Show them videos where they have the opposite sex, that they wouldn't think, do something, or bringing in a teacher.... Just showing them that it doesn't have to be always X. That it can look different.” When Jessica thought further about these stories, her own, and teaching her future students, she emphasized how important it is to be relatable.

I think just like finding out what's important to the kids, and what's relatable for them like, 'Okay. Yes. You say we're going to be healthy, and what does that mean?' But really, healthy to us as adults, and what that means as health is different to them. So, I guess picking apart that word when you're teaching kids about it, and getting their perception of what does that mean? Telling them what you think it means, like holistically framing that as a class so that they get it. And just focusing on it in different ways, in a more well-rounded way.

Derek

Derek grew up playing a lot of hockey, other sports, and playing guitar. As a male PST in an elementary education program, Derek is a rarity. It is apparent that he is a thoughtful and considerate person. He spent countless hours volunteering at the school he used to go to with a male teacher who was (and is) a mentor to him. Our conversations were relaxed and comfortable with Derek needing no prompting to share his thoughts. We solidified some of our connections as we talked sports, being male teachers, and teaching elementary school PE. The focus of our final conversation was on Derek's reflections and we spent most of our time breaking down the stories of 'others.' Although he may have thought of these differences before, the three stories themselves really brought home the need for us to be able to empathize and hopefully move to compassion with those whose PE and life story are different from ours.

Our discussions flowed into further development of his 'neighbourhoods' concept. We discussed each person having their own 'neighbourhoods'—like sports or music—and we can choose to reach out and visit these with students. We talked about reaching out to those outside 'where we live' and making intentional connections. Although the term never emerged literally, there was a definite social justice flavour to our conversation. Reaching out, or even just recognizing, the 'other' was a good first step. For example, as we dove into the narratives (Dowling et al., 2012), Derek and I (Doug) discussed the concept that in *Whitney*, teaching is so much more than 'dance.'

The one quote I wrote down was, 'Becoming a teacher means a hell of a lot more than just teaching kids how to dance.' Right? So, she understands that you need to make a difference in someone's life. Right? And she's going to, not the extreme I guess, but she's going way out of her way to teach the kids about her religion and that it's not all looks that matter kind of thing. So that part was pretty cool just to see she actually cares. She wants to educate people on different societal issues, I guess.

The rude nickname that the woman in the story was given (*Whitney*, because she's darker like Whitney Houston) struck a chord with both of us and led to a conversation about identity and disruption. Derek shared a story of a girl in his junior high named Chastity. The teacher called her 'Chastity-belt' the whole year. Derek shared that he loves to give kids nicknames as well but *Whitney's* story caused him to rethink how these labels might stick, and not in a good way.

From the idea of teaching 'the other' our conversation flowed to the purpose of PE itself. The catalyst for this conversation was the second story, *Charlie*, about the obese kid who didn't fit in PE class, but loved to climb trees and feel strong (Dowling et al., 2012).

They all just sit there and play on their iPads and stuff. And they're the ones who are decently obese so I don't even think I would start with body image alone and even talk to them about that. I think I would start with just playing different games, teaching them different ways to be physically active, right? Because even if they're not playing sports, we kind of touched on it last week, you can go outside and you can ride a bike, right? If they

want to, they can go kick a soccer ball in the field behind their house. I'd start with physical activity and then build up through healthy living and stuff like that because I would honestly don't know what I would do with the body image portion of it, so I think I would just kind of stick to physed and find a way to incorporate body image into that, in some sort of way.

I began to feel a sense of discomfort from Derek. Not about 'the other' but about how to meaningfully address and connect in PE. Was he capable? Derek recognized that, as teachers, relationships and understanding are important, and I think he would feel confident one on one with a student that is different from him. I think that the discomfort arose more in the context of a whole class or curricular shift. We dove into his reservations on how to actually 'deal' with some of these issues in PE class (obesity in particular, based on *Charlie*).

(Doug) Do you think we can have the same impact on some of the issues from these stories like body image and misinterpretation of religion and gender stuff?

(Derek) I think we could. It's just a matter of how you go about it. Again, going back, honestly, I wouldn't know how to handle it too well. Because I haven't had the experience.

But I think there's a way for sure. I just don't know the right way, I guess.

Derek certainly recognized the potential impact of teaching and relationships on kids. PE is so much more than 'in the gym'. It's also about physical activity for life, relationships, socialization, people skills, and perhaps social justice. Derek shared an indicative story of tossing a football around with a student and the relational impact that small actions can have. His story epitomized the opportunities we have as teachers to go beyond the curriculum and actually teach kids what is important for life. The things they will remember forever—how we treated the kid in the wheelchair, how we respect our colleagues, how we stand up for justice—it all matters.

People just don't understand teaching. They don't understand the magnitude of being a physed teacher and how much it can impact a child's life with leading a physically active life. Teaching them a sport, even if you don't know it, you indirectly do it, you teach them a sport in gym class. All of a sudden, they love that sport and maybe they go sign up to play that sport.... I've been a teacher for five weeks and I've already had an impact on this kid's life somehow. Right? So that was pretty cool.

Derek does think we can make a difference (through enacting social just principles and practices) but is still uncertain and uncomfortable about the *how*.

You see the progress that society's making with—not really in these stories, with racial stuff, but you see the society is making progress with race, kind of. Making progress with homophobic slurs and the gay community, LGBTQ. So, I think we can make strides in teaching the right body image, incorporating it into—it's kind of incorporated into the health unit. Right? But I think with cross-curricular stuff, you could find a whole bunch of ways to incorporate it.... Impact students' lives somehow. Kind of bring up the pop culture. Say, 'That's not what you need to be looking at.' Do that kind of stuff. But how to do it? I don't know. And that's something where even for me talking right now that I should probably figure out. If I'm going to be a teacher.

He also made a brilliant point that it is hard to talk in abstractions and 'what ifs.' We both agreed that it is much better to address these things with an actual group of kids that you have developed relationships with. Context is important as we don't have to deal with all of society's issues, just these 25 kids':

When you get your own class that focus would narrow because you're not looking at all of society. You're not looking at all of the schools that we're looking at right now. You're

looking at 25 kids, kind of thing, and then you know where to kind of base your teaching off of.

Discussion

Across the three narrative accounts, we see that the stories of *Whitney*, *Charlie*, and *Making the Grade*, when laid alongside those of PSTs, help to extend thinking about fostering socially just PE spaces. We agree with Fernandez-Balboa (1997) and Robinson and Randall (2016) that education can help create a better world by addressing issues such as racism and inequity through a pursuit of justice and a commitment to change. In our paper (Hennig et al., 2020), we argued that “narrative understandings of students’ lives provide a different and fundamental starting point for instructors (and PSTs) to understand who students are and therefore what they need to learn to become effective teachers” (p. 11). Addressing issues of social justice within PE becomes *available* through narrative in ways that are not accessible through critical pedagogy. Much like the call for a modest pedagogy (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Tinning, 2002), which discourages Enlightenment thinking and includes student subjectivity, we have found that using narrative inquiry with a pragmatic ontology honours the experiences and stories of PSTs. This allows us to engage PSTs in discussion, reflection, and (most importantly) action to change embedded social issues in PE. Interacting with stories of others made PSTs think about their approaches and practices in PE. From the results, each participant made similar comments about how they would teach or approach PE differently (not only for the social justice issues but also reflecting on their own teaching philosophies and pedagogy). All the participants expressed the need to model positive behaviours towards PE, create a safe space for their future students, and centre their practice on who the students are. It only seems fitting that teacher educators create that same positive and safe experience for their PSTs to allow them to engage deeply with diverse stories of PE, improve pedagogy, and teach toward more socially just PE.

As we’ve argued here and in previous papers (Hennig et al., 2020; Hennig et al., 2022), critical pedagogies in education, although able to ask uncomfortable questions, unsettle and make people aware, oftentimes do not provide any practical solutions and strategies for implementation (Tinning, 1991). This is not to say that others are not trying to provide PSTs ways forward but is a general critique of critical theory which critical pedagogies are rooted within. For PSTs, who will be entering schools in the very near future and assuming control of their own PE classes, the process described above leads to contemplation on their own stories, reflection on stories of ‘the other’, and a determination of future action to make pedagogical change. Garrett (2006) describes:

In the context of PE teacher preparation programmes, the process of storytelling can create a safe context for student teachers to focus on lived experiences and challenge taken-for-granted understandings. It can provide an opportunity to live through another’s experience and reveal worlds that are otherwise closed. (p. 344)

Transformational pedagogies are by their very nature different from traditional approaches such as Sport Education. Providing PSTs the opportunity to ‘unpack your own self’ then engage in a facilitated ‘unpacking of unfamiliar stories’ allows their own experiences and reflections to open them up to those of others. Embedding reflexivity within PETE programs enables connections, alignment, and a deep understanding of the self (Garrett, 2006).

In this research, we were able to go in depth with three PSTs—well beyond the constraints of limited instructional time and institutional barriers found in PETE. While this paper outlines a process that took place outside of class time, past papers (Hennig et al., 2020; Hennig et al., 2022)

have engaged students in this process during class time and found similar results. It should be noted that this did not come without pushback from the students who often did not see this process as part of becoming a PE teacher (Hennig et al., 2020; Hennig et al., 2022). For example, students saw the process as outside of their preparation of becoming a teacher, or perhaps not fitting within their technocratic understanding of teacher preparation. It should also be noted that this process, in class or out of class, is time consuming and takes away from the many other aspects of teacher preparation (curriculum, instruction, assessment) that are often the focus of PETE programs. Nevertheless, the process enabled us, as PETE instructors, to also reflect on the stories and the impact, now and in the future. The PSTs' reactions to the stories made us aware of essential content for PETE programs and reminded us of the importance of continuous professional development for PSTs, in-service educators, and ourselves as teacher educators. Several key learnings identified next stood out to us from the PSTs' narrative accounts in relation to teaching towards more socially just PE.

Cultural Knowledge and Understanding

When discussing *Whitney*, Taylor described the target on Whitney for having a head-scarf. Teacher educators and PSTs need “cultural competence” so that they may recognize and interact using appropriate communication with individuals from diverse cultures (Lynch et al., 2022) to understand the meaning and value of diverse cultures and traditions. Lynch et al. (2022) suggest that educators nurture and support cultural competence by (a) recognizing and celebrating all cultures, (b) inquiring into and opening spaces for dialogue about individuals' families and backgrounds (culture, religion, etc.), and (c) sharing their own cultural traditions with others. We've learned it's important to be explicit about our understanding and knowledge in relation to issues of social justice. This enables us to learn from others, limit assumptions, and do our part by seeking professional development and other experiences to improve our understanding of diverse stories.

Choice of Language and Dialogue

Derek shared a story about a teacher in his youth giving a nickname to a student ('Chastity-belt') and discussed the nickname in *Whitney* due to her resemblance to Whitney Houston. Teacher educators and PSTs need to be aware that the chosen language and discourse we use reveal assumptions, values, and understandings (Spencer et al., 2020), greatly impacting others. The language we use (or do not use) are direct actions (or inactions) that impact student experience and sense of belonging. We need to be mindful and more educated about language; we must also be accountable to the language we use to ensure we're representing individuals and groups appropriately to avoid the segregation and labelling that may cause harm. Spencer et al. (2020) suggest the best practice is to speak with and use language that has been given consent from those individuals themselves. This makes it more critical to engage in regular dialogue with students and families to get to know them. As Jessica brought up when discussing *Charlie*, the lack of knowledge-sharing with parents should be at the forefront of our PE practice. However, it should not only be about sharing information (e.g., for parents to understand the reasons behind why we teach what we teach) but also to learn alongside families to educate ourselves.

Purpose of PE

The participants shared examples from the diverse stories that related to *what* and *how* we teach in PE. When Taylor and Jessica discussed *Making the Grade*, Taylor mentioned the point of

assessment (e.g., needing to get 10/10 serves in volleyball) and Jessica spoke to ‘gendered’ activity choices and stereotypes of activities in PE. When discussing *Charlie*, Derek spoke about the impact PE teachers have on students’ lives and the importance of having relationships with students to discuss societal issues. The impact teachers have on meaningful (Beni et al., 2017) and educative (Dewey, 1938) experiences in PE and how we define, choose activities, and approach teaching them to our students should depend on who those students are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, holding to the pragmatic nature of our work, we’ve shared some reflective prompts (Table 3) based on the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These prompts can be used for journal reflections, discussion posts, table talks, and other pedagogical methods to engage PSTs to unpack their own stories of teaching and PE while also considering other narratives that may be similar, slightly different, or widely divergent.

Table 3
Reflective Prompts

‘Common Places’	Prompts for student reflection on personal experiences	Prompts for students to engage with the stories
Temporality: The past, present, and future of experience: continuity and interaction.	What has been your relationship with physical activity—past, present and future? Consider the continuity of your past experiences of PE, the present, and how those might impact your future as a teacher of PE?	Explore how the character in the story relies on past experiences to ‘get through’ the present? How might those interactions impact their future desire to take PE or be active later in life? How might an experience of racism or sexism in the past influence and change a child’s life in the future?
Sociality: Broad social structures, personal conditions, and relationships.	Who is the biggest influence in your life and why? Describe a time when you may have been ‘coerced’ into sacrificing something you believed in due to a social norm.	Consider how ‘school norms’ (dress, culture, rules) might not <i>work</i> for everyone. Reflect on how the personal relationships in the story impede or support their development.
Place: Where the experience happens and the places that are storied in experiences.	Where do you feel most free and uninhibited? Why? Tell me a story about a place that ‘matters’ to you.	How does ‘place’ play a role in the character’s story? How might PE or the gym (sports field, etc.) be a place of pain and suffering instead of joy and accomplishment?

We are aware that PSTs can push back against this type of process in seeing it as a shifting of the rules in regard to educational institutions, and content that does not fit their imagined stories of PE (Hennig et al., 2022). We are also aware that it is a time-consuming process that is difficult to truly engage in with large class sizes and limited number of courses and class time dedicated

specifically to PE pedagogy. However, transformative pedagogies, like narrative inquiry, offer both theoretical and pragmatic ways for PSTs to experience the bumping of their stories with ‘others’, and perhaps ways forward in positioning PETE as a discipline that sees PE *as* social justice.

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