

## **Taking action for social justice in HPE classrooms through explicit critical pedagogies**

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### **Abstract**

*Background:* A focus on equity, democracy and social justice in HPE is pertinent in an era where there are growing concerns about the impact of neoliberal globalization and precariousness of society (Kirk 2020). Although there is advocacy for teaching approaches in HPE that address issues of social justice, there is limited empirical research of teachers enacting critical pedagogies in HPE classrooms.

*Purpose:* To identify school HPE teaching practices that promote social justice through practical enactment across three different participating countries.

*Participants and Setting:* The investigation involved classroom observations of and post-lesson interviews with 13 purposively selected high school health and physical education teachers from three different countries. A total of 20 HPE lessons were observed. The participants included seven male and six female teachers ranging in age from 25 to 55 years with between 3- and 25-years teaching experience. The setting for data collection was compulsory co-educational practical HPE classes with 13-15-year-old students in four schools in New Zealand, four schools in Sweden and three schools in Norway.

*Data Collection and Analysis:* This study employed Critical Incident Technique (CIT) methodology (Flanagan 1954), involving data collection through exploratory observations and stimulated-recall interviews (Lyle 2003). The classroom observations focused on identifying incidents that appeared to be addressing issues of social justice. The use of a multi-national observer team was a key principle of the study and was based on the proposition that local researchers familiar with context come with taken-for-granted assumptions about teachers' practices. Data were analysed through a six-phase thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2013). This involved three stages: individually, collectively by the researchers in each country, and finally through the whole multi-national research team.

*Findings:* The data analysis resulted in three primary themes; (1) relationships, (2) teaching for social cohesion, and (3) explicitly teaching about and acting on social inequities. This paper uses critical pedagogy as a lens to report on the third theme. In this paper we present three subthemes; (1) Teaching as 'equity not equality', (2) promoting marginalised groups (3) and teacher critical reflection as examples of explicit critical pedagogies taking action for social justice in HPE.

*Conclusions/ Implications:* Although, the findings presented in this paper are examples of explicit teacher actions that aim to address social inequity, we suggest that teaching for social justice requires teachers to *take action* on social inequities and also to *teach about social injustice* to prepare students to become agents for change and act on social inequities themselves, beyond HPE.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, health and physical education, Critical incident technique

## **Introduction**

A focus on equity, democracy and social justice in HPE is pertinent in an era where there are growing concerns about the impact of neoliberal globalization and precariousness of society (Kirk 2020). While the relationships between neoliberalism, precarity and health and wellbeing are complex and nuanced (Kirk 2020), the growth in rising inequality are well-documented (see, e.g., Pinker 2018). These concerns raise questions about how educators can best support students living in these societies. Although teachers cannot totally compensate for some of the socio-economic structures in society that create uncertainty of employment, growing income disparity and child poverty, it is the belief of our research team that teachers can and should play a role in creating more equitable outcomes for all students. Their ability to do so requires them to have an understanding of the equity issues facing their students and an empathetic disposition toward social justice. This in turn requires an alignment of socio-political networks between teachers, schools, and teacher education programmes, to better prepare teachers to recognise and develop teaching practices that address social justice issues. Previous research in both initial teacher education (ITE) and physical education teacher education (PETE) has reported on strategies for helping to prepare teachers to engage with issues of equity and social justice in school classrooms. This study builds on this research from a different starting point; the school classroom. With a focus on increasing our understanding of what we, for this investigation, have called ‘social justice pedagogies’, our group of researchers embarked on an international cross-cultural study called {insert name} that sought to identify school Health and Physical Education (HPE) teaching practices that promote social justice across the three different participating countries. In previous publications, we have reported on how HPE teachers have built strong and caring *relationships* with students (Moen et al. 2019) and taught for *social cohesion* (Smith et al. 2020). In this paper, we draw on critical pedagogy as a heuristic to present examples of how teachers act on *social inequities*.

## **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy can be traced back to the critical theories of the Frankfurt School and the writing of Brazilian Paulo Freire (Tinning 2019a). As the name implies, critical pedagogy moves beyond critique. Rather than being a theory of practice, critical pedagogy is better thought of as a practice

of theory based on the principles of equity and social justice. Critical pedagogy has a transformative agenda at its heart. The ‘critical’ in critical pedagogy evokes a complex array of dispositions, values, suspicions, and questions relating to power inequities and how they lead to privilege and marginalisation (Philpot, Smith, and Ovens 2019). When a pedagogy is described as being critical, it generally refers to the cultivation of a consciousness oriented towards problems associated with power, equity and social justice in ways that can lead to advocacy and community action (Wright 2004). Recently, Kirk (2020) described critical pedagogy in the context of physical education as ‘concerned with the organization and alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment in ways that render physical education inclusive, fair and equitable as an embodied experience for young people’ (101). When applied in the context of physical education, critical pedagogy seeks to address issues of equity related to, for instance, body image, gender, inclusion, ableism, racism, and sexism.

There have been several recent accounts of critical pedagogy within PETE including visual methodologies (see, e.g., Fitzpatrick and Enright 2017); narrative inquiry (see, e.g., McMahon and Penney 2013); embodied experiences of ‘pedagogies of discomfort’ (see, e.g., Shelley and McCuaig 2018); Freirean pedagogy (see, e.g. Philpot 2016); negotiated curriculum and marking (see, e.g., Lorente and Kirk 2013; Ovens 2017); and activist sport pedagogy (see, e.g., Luguetti, Kirk and Oliver 2019). These approaches have been summarised in reviews by Fitzpatrick (2019) and Ovens (2016). A recent book (Walton-Fisette, Sutherland and Hill, eds. 2019) that strives to ‘provide PETEs and PE teachers with tangible lesson and activities that can be implemented into [their] lessons’ (x) provides examples of learning activities that attend to a wide range of social justice issues. Although this emerging body of literature provides a number of learning activities for critique *of* the physical education/physical activity/sport environment (what Tinning 2019a recently referred to as ‘sociology of the body’ [95]), there are few examples of critical pedagogies that can be enacted in a practical physical education environment (Walton-Fisette, Sutherland and Hill 2019).

While critical pedagogy has been an attractive pedagogical ideologically for HPE for a number of years now, research that explores the enactment of critical pedagogies *in* school HPE is conspicuous by its lack of abundance. We know little about the impact that critical pedagogies in PETE have had on teachers’ practices (Kirk 2020) and we know even less about how social justice is addressed in school HPE. Recently, Tinning (2019b) noted that a key issue for educators who

are dispositionally aligned with critical pedagogy, is that neither the Frankfurt School nor Freire specify how they should or can move from critique to transformative practice. There have been several calls in HPE to identify possible practices that can be employed in the name of critical pedagogy (Kirk 2020; Shelley and McCuaig 2018). Some these are highlighted in the large body of activist pedagogy research led by Kim Oliver (see, e.g., Oliver and Kirk 2015; Oliver et al. 2015). This research provides detailed accounts of critical pedagogies in school PE classes and students' responses. These interventions range from co-constructed teaching between the researcher and teacher and a school-based PETE programme involving PETE students. As such, the strength of these studies lies in their reports on how teachers *might* practice and how students respond to these teaching practices rather than how teachers are *taking action on* social justice issues in HPE.

Two studies of individual teachers in classrooms (Fitzpatrick and Russell 2015; Lynch and Curtner-Smith 2019) illustrate the limited knowledge we have of what teachers are doing in the name of teaching for social justice. In both studies, creating an environment focused on nurturing trusting relationships, the use of student voice, studying critical topics and the use of alternative assessments were identified as key teaching strategies that enacted critical pedagogy. Both studies identified teaching practices that involved group work and problem solving with a minimal focus on major sports. In addition to providing students with genuine opportunities to make meaningful decisions around their learning, both teachers deliberately tried to expose the inequities located in the hierarchical power relationships within schools and their own practices.

The cluster of similarities in the findings are striking given the differences in methodology and context. The Fitzpatrick and Russell, (2015) investigation involved an ethnographic study in which the first author spent an extensive period of time in 'Dan's' classroom in a 'multi-ethnic, low socioeconomic high school in Aotearoa New Zealand', of mainly Pasifika and Māori students, who are recognised as being socio-economically marginalised ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (160). As such, this remains one of the few 'observed' accounts of an HPE teacher teaching for social justice. In contrast, Lynch and Curtner-Smith (2019) reported on the practice of a teacher in an elementary school in a small town in the Northeast United States, described as a being a 'Republican area' (368), with primarily Caucasian students (85%). The authors collected data through interviews, conversations social media and documents. However, the two studies also highlighted some differences. Lynch and Curtner-Smith (2019) identified the practice of

restorative justice as a key pillar. Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) identified how the teacher ‘Dan’ challenged dominant notions of societal norms by dressing up, wearing pink clothing and ‘deliberately discussing his emotions and thoughts about gender’ (166).

This study builds on these findings through observations of, and interviews with 13 HPE teachers across three different contexts. The overall research question that guided the study was ‘How do HPE teachers’ pedagogical practices address social justice?’ The specific aim of this paper is to report on one of the key themes identified in the data, ‘explicitly teaching about and acting on social inequities’. In order to do so, we use critical pedagogy as a heuristic to describe how the teachers in the study explicitly taught for social justice through privileging equity over equality, promoting marginalised groups of students, and demonstrating criticality through reflection on themselves and their teaching practices.

## **Methodology**

Education for Equitable Health Outcomes – The Promise of School Health and Physical Education’ (EDUHEALTH) was an international collaboration project between HPE teachers and PETE researchers from Sweden, Norway and New Zealand. The broad aim of this project was to contribute to an understanding of how HPE teachers address social justice in their classrooms and ultimately to share good examples of practices that privilege social justice with HPE and PETE communities. The project employed a ‘bottom up’ approach using Critical Incident Technique (CIT) methodology (Flanagan 1954) involving observations and semi structured interviews with HPE teachers in the three participating countries.

CIT is a qualitative research approach often represented by related terms such critical incident analysis, critical incident report or critical incident reflection (Butterfield et al. 2005; Viergever 2019). CIT starts with the assumption that not all incidents are equal; some are exponentially more important to the intended outcomes than others. The strength of CIT is its focus on ‘things’ that matter in a particular activity (Viergever 2019) as it enables a researcher to identify the significant factors that contribute to the success or failure of a particular event or practice (Flanagan 1954).

In the EDUHEALTH project, data were collected through exploratory observations and stimulated-recall interviews (Lyle 2003) looking for the enactment of social justice pedagogies in the name of HPE. We narrowed the scope of our observations to focus only on ‘critical incidents’

that aimed to address inequity and help students identify challenge and transform existing power relations.

The study participants were 13 teachers purposively selected (Bryman 2016) from four schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, four in Sweden and three in Norway. The teachers were known by the research team to be examples of teachers who embrace a social justice agenda in their pedagogy. The seven male and six female teachers ranged in age from 25-55 with between 3- and 25-years teaching experience (see table 1). The classroom observations, which focused on incidents that appeared to be addressing issues of social justice, were restricted to compulsory HPE classes with 13-15-year-old students in co-educational schools.

*Insert Table 1*

The use of a multi-national observer teams was a key principle of the study and is based on the proposition that local researchers familiar with context come with taken-for-granted assumptions about teachers' practices. The observations and insights provided by the 'outsiders' (Patton, 2002) were thus crucial in attempting to (re)interpret the observed HPE teaching practices for social justice (Gerdin et al. 2019).

The observers worked independently and recorded 'captured incidents' that could have included: a brief interaction, a structure or theme that could have extended through the whole lesson; or classroom artefacts' such as photographs. Captured incidents were incidents that an individual observer believed were focused on social justice that were worthy of further exploration as examples of social justice pedagogy. Decisions to turn a captured incident into a critical incident required a description of the deeper structures that produced the incident (Tripp 1993), which was accessed through the follow-up stimulated-recall interviews.

The list of captured incidents to be explored in the subsequent interviews was generated directly after observations when the observers met and discussed what had observed and recorded. Interviews lasting between 40-70 minutes took place immediately after, or almost immediately after, the observed lessons. These stimulated-recall interviews probed captured incidents and created a nuanced and shared understanding of the teachers' practices, through the combined perspectives of the teacher, and native and non-native researchers, which ultimately resulted in a co-constructed critical incident relating to social justice pedagogies in HPE.



Data were analysed through a six-phase thematic analysis approach that consisted of familiarisation with data, initial and advanced coding, identifying and naming themes and reporting findings (Braun and Clarke 2013). Data was at first analysed separately in each of the three individual cultural contexts (New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden). Researcher pairs from each country then met to compare, cross-check and reduce initial codes and themes into common/shared codes and themes. The third level of analysis was a group analysis by all members of the research team. The strength of the three levels of individual, shared and group-analysis lay in the preservation of individual and culturally located lenses, which provided important insights and perspectives from both the inside and outside. This process helped to shine a different light on familiar contexts/cultures (see Philpot et al. 2020 for a detailed description of the research methodology).

In this paper, the lead author used critical pedagogy as a heuristic to take the analysis from a ‘semantic’ to a ‘latent’ level (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and search for teaching practices that moved beyond advocacy for social justice to practices that recognise and act on social inequities. The next section therefore provides examples of HPE teachers’ ‘explicitly teaching about and acting on social inequities’.

### **Explicitly teaching about and acting on social inequities**

A deeper analysis of the theme ‘Explicit teaching about and taking action on social inequities’ using a critical pedagogy lens revealed the three subthemes that we represent in this paper; (1) Teaching as ‘equity not equality’, (2) promoting marginalised groups’ and (3) teacher critical reflection. To protect the confidentiality of the teachers, but retain the context, we have used pseudonyms for the teachers and referred to the context by country only. In our data presentation, we use the abbreviation ‘CAP’ to show a captured incident, along with the participant-teacher pseudonym to designate the teacher and country-code NOR (Norway), SWE (Sweden) and NZ (New Zealand) to designate the context.

#### ***Teaching as ‘equity not equality’***

The difference between equity and equality lies in the tension between evenly allocating the same amount of resources to all students or recognising that there are some students who may require more resources to give them the same opportunity to be as successful as other students. In *Equality*,

*Education and Physical Education*, Evans and Davies (2017) differentiate between equality and equity with the former being the provision of equal opportunity for all students, while equity is akin with greater equality of outcome for all students. Importantly to this study, the authors call for an examination of how equity is achieved through HPE educational experiences. In this subtheme, we report on accounts of the participant-teachers who recognised that teaching for social justice (to achieve equity) required an uneven distribution of resources.

In Norway, Kari modified the rules of a game for a student who was not in PE clothes and was not participating due to injury. When reporting this captured incident one researcher noted, ‘I overheard [the] teacher asking one boy who had surgery on his foot if he could attend if he were allowed to walk (not run) instead of sitting on the side. He answered yes. Then she made up a rule that he could walk, and instead of one hit, the students had to hit him twice (he had “two lives” in the game) before he was out.’ (CAP, Kari, NOR)

When asked about this captured incident, Kari stated,

He has had an operation on the foot, so he will not be allowed to run and should be very careful with his foot. ...the thought struck me that it might just happen he'll be able to play TULLIBALL...and then I thought that then we'll add a twist so it will be all right for him too, so we took the variation that he had to be stung [tagged] twice to exit' (Kari, NOR).

Although we recognise that this example is a simple adaptation of a game rule to include a student who had not been a part of the lesson up until this point, Kari has taken action to try to include a student who, in many classes around the world, would simply be consigned to sitting out the lesson.

In Sweden, another teacher chose to adapt her expectations for a student who had recently emigrated to Sweden. The student lacked both the swimming background to perform at the standard expected of students and may have experienced some cultural conflict in regard to swimming with a coeducational class. In the captured incident, the researcher recorded,

A [newly arrived refugee-student] girl participates at a level that is allowed, encouraged, and supported by both the teacher and another student. When they changed, she too changed but into a full body suit. When the children got into the pool to swim the lengths, she swam two lengths but was not too confident so got out of the pool and sat on the side. The teacher went to her and

spoke to her in an understanding manner. This girl sat out while the other children continued to swim lengths and then do the rescue tube or ring exercises, but when they got out of the laned pool to have free time she got in and swam some lengths...It does show that the teacher was not only aware of and caring for this one student but was at the same time teaching the rest of the class in a complex multitasking situation. (CAP, Emma, SWE)

Following the observation, the teacher was asked about her response to this student. Her answer reflects a belief both that this student needed more encouragement than others to give her the confidence to participate and that, as a teacher, it is OK to have different responses to different needs. She stated,

...she is new for this semester so I have never seen her swim. This is the first time.... I just want to make her feel comfortable because she was really struggling and she had a bit of struggle before because she wanted to buy a swimming cap for her hair but they didn't have it...So she came and she did it and I'm really proud of her. (Emma, SWE)

A third example of inequality to achieve equity of opportunity occurred in a lesson observed in New Zealand. The subtleness of the incident was such that it was not initially recorded as a captured incident. The incident occurred in an invasion game in which teams scored by passing the ball to a teammate in a circle. Recognising that the game was one sided the teacher, Dillon, adjusted the field dimensions for the weaker team. In the interview, Dillon pointed out how he tried to make the game more even. Dillon stated:

This morning I made one circle bigger and one smaller. They didn't know that but I did that because I knew one team initially had a weaker team but giving them a bigger circle just meant that they had a better opportunity to score. (Dillon, NZ)

In all three countries, teachers purposefully made exceptions to rules around appropriate PE uniform, exceptions that at times, were likely to contradict broader school rules. For example, Charlie (SWE) indicated that these exceptions resulted in greater inclusion stating:

...if they have forgotten their training clothes they are allowed to participate. We have also bought some clothes that the students can borrow because there are some students who don't have any clothes. It is very seldom some of the students do not participate.' (Charlie, SWE)

In New Zealand, Candice also recognised the importance of both knowing\caring for students (Moen et al, 2019) and being willing to make exceptions to normal expectations. In her interview, she stated:

One of the boys came and he didn't have PE gear today and he was a bit flustered and I could have told him off but I was like... I could see that something had happened he was a bit..., I don't have my PE gear and so I just went and found him gear. (Candice, NZ)

Kari (NOR) was asked why she included a student with no PE clothes. She stated:

I think he wanted to participate so it was perfectly fine. Perhaps he was a little warm...I tend to ask if they think they may be a little anyway, whether they think they get too sweaty or if it becomes uncomfortable, and yet it is often the same, but if there is someone who always forgets, I need to take a hold of it then. (Kari, NOR)

Kari's answer reflects the complex decision making that HPE teachers make on a daily basis. In this incident we can see that she prioritises the inclusion of the students in lessons over the school rules about needing PE clothes, until her students fail to bring their PE clothes to class on a regular basis.

In the lower socio-economic schools where we collected data, the willingness of teachers to make exceptions is based on the belief that children should not be punished for socio-economic or health reasons. For example, Dillon (NZ) recognised the financial challenges faced by families stating:

Being in PE for the last four years and listening and talking to parents... I know for some of them financially it is not possible and so I am not going to punish them because they can't afford to buy a uniform. The [school] uniform is \$100 to begin with and if I asked them to pay another \$40 [for PE uniform] and then [students may go] one week without

lunch or tea... The boy without a t shirt, he sweats a lot and always says sir can I not have a t shirt and I say class how do you feel about it. And they are like yip sir that is fine if he wants to do that that is absolutely okay so if the class is okay with it, I am okay with it. I know we are not allowed to, but I said that is fine as long as you are involved and you feel comfortable. (Dillon, NZ)

### ***Promoting marginalised groups***

One of the key principles of critical pedagogy is to recognise inequities that are impacting on marginalised groups in society and take action. In the context of HPE, researchers have begun to identify teaching strategies aimed at addressing issues of ableism (Giese and Ruin. 2018), gender inequity (Oliver and Kirk 2015), cultural inclusiveness (Robinson and Jadis 2019) and heteronormative cultures (Harrison and Shipley 2019).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the explicit inclusion of te reo Māori (Māori language) was captured by the researchers. The following captured incident demonstrated how Kendall purposefully translated a teaching resource into te reo,

The second critical incident of the lesson was the adoption of te reo Māori in the chart and on the whiteboard. 'He mahi tahi tatou mo te oranga o te katoa – we should all work together for the wellbeing of everyone'.... Hellison's five levels were given Māori names with the top one being manaakitanga –(respect and caring) which was also one of the School's values. (CAP, Kendall, NZ)

In the post-lesson interview, Kendall, a New Zealand European teacher acknowledged that her actions were political,

It is about doing it [incorporating tikanga or Māori culture] in a way that is authentic rather than, I could have written the date up in Māori but actually, that is a tokenism kind of way of doing it. So, what I am trying to do is introduce that sort of culture into the class in a way that is more authentic...I think as educators, we have a responsibility to try and bring that [Māori culture] back in. (Kendall, NZ)

In Sweden, where swimming ability is assessed to a specific standard in the HPE curriculum, many of the teachers in the study described how they have actively tried to support the large groups

of newly arrived refugee-students who typically have not come from swimming backgrounds. Emma (SWE) explained how she had taken action at her school to support this group of students,

Every Friday there comes a bus here and takes some of the students who can't swim to the swimming pool and they have a swimming teacher there not a PE teacher, someone who is trained to learn to teach swimming and they go there for like 50 minutes or something and then...But now it is every Friday and like we have a lot of girls who don't want to swim with boys. So maybe every other week it is just girls only and then it is boys only. (Emma, SWE)

Similarly, Kane explained how the students who were new to Sweden needed extra support if they were to achieve equitable outcomes.

At this school we have 40 or 50 girls who only swim with other girls...So the way around it, we found, was one time a week, one morning before school or around when school starts, one of the staff here at school takes them there [to the community pool] and helps them with the technique and she is there for just like a morale booster... The results are very, very good. They work so hard and so now we have one time every week and we have divided the girls into three groups. So they go four weeks in a row and then these other girls with the group four weeks... They actually started a project this summer for the girls to be able to swim during the summer as well. (Kane, SWE)

In the interview, it also became clear that it took a considerable amount of advocacy from Kane and the HPE department to make this happen. Kane had to approach the school principal and the local council to apply for funding to enable this to happen.

The final example of taking action for marginalised groups involved a teacher who recognised that a lack of resources was limiting his ability to provide what he considered a valuable outdoor education learning experience for his students. In the captured incident the researcher noted, 'the context for the lesson is a lake about 500M from the school. The context is Canadian canoeing. There are approximately 15 canoes and a lock up with paddles and lifejacket. It must have taken a lot of effort to gather these resources?' (CAP, Per, NOR)

In the interview, the host researcher from Norway noted that these resources did not come to fruition by chance. He stated, 'you put outdoors very high here at school, you have received funds from the Gjensidige Foundation, and you put a lot of effort into it as teachers.' (Interviewer, NOR).

Per, who had previously worked at another school with better resources, acknowledged that he recognised a need that he was willing to take action on. Per stated,

The school provides some experiences that they can hardly get at home. I have done this in my spare time...I think is very valuable to contribute to it, and I am dedicated to making physical education very fair...parents are spending less time on peaks, in the sea, and in small boats... (Per, NOR)

### ***Critical reflection***

Critical reflection has always been an underpinning principle of critical pedagogy. Recently, Tinning (2019b) reiterated that ‘critical pedagogies that seek to transform physical education involve both social change and personal change’ (93). Critical reflection involves reflections that move beyond the routine actions of the teaching process, focusing instead on the political and ethical principles that underpin teaching (Smyth, Down, and McInerney 2014). A critically reflective teacher makes decisions based on conscious awareness and careful consideration of the assumptions upon which teaching decisions are based (Yost et al. 2000). Brookfield (1995) advocated for critical reflection as it provides a deeper appreciation of how ‘our actions, decisions and choices reflect ideological perspectives’ (40). Similarly, in HPE there has been a strong call for reflection on the significance of how life history, personal biographies, and identity act as a filter for learning. This has been acknowledged by many in teacher education (e.g. Ovens and Tinning 2009; Wrench and Garrett 2012). Those who advocate for critical reflection aim to move beyond what Freire (1970) called ‘banking’ education where students store knowledge unproblematically to focus on exploring issues of context, positionality, or power.

The following examples of critical reflection from the participant-teachers are examples of these teachers’ reflections that move beyond the technical aspects of teaching. Kane (SWE), who self-identified as a former semi-professional handball player, critically reflected on how he has changed as a teacher,

I think as time went on, I think it is much more about developing persons instead of sports results...I want to be able to work together, I want to be able to respect each other. In the beginning it was much more like okay, we just need a little bit of the elbow to the right or a little bit more back. (Kane, SWE)

Ola (NOR) an early career PE teacher, critically reflected on how he tries to reduce the power relationships in his class when showing his awareness of his own positionality and how this affects social justice pedagogies in his classroom,

A teacher is in a position of power...in terms of communication and relationship building, I cannot stand there and work from the top down the whole time. I have to meet the students and... just by bending me down I can change the balance of power a little. Before I would put them down and I stood...I did not do it at the start or the first time we united today because I wanted to give them a task, while at the end we wanted to communicate more on an equal footing and hear what kind of experience they have...Then it is natural that I sit down. (Ola, NOR)

Candice (NZ) also critical reflected on what a socially just classroom should look like. In her statement below, she suggests a view of the world and school that recognises the social, cultural and political contexts in which her students live. This understanding leads to classroom practices that recognise difference,

I think, if anything, in terms of social justice, then we need to be a bit more flexible and allow for difference and I guess that is where I am trying to go with it. If they can manage themselves then it frees me up a little bit more to perhaps try and attempt to do that a little bit. But that would be the biggest thing for me, not treating necessarily everyone the same but you still have that same expectation but... does that make sense. (Candice, NZ)

In the following statement, Dillon (NZ) critically reflects on how the actions he takes in class are based on his own life history, which included his own unpleasant memories of schooling that he does not want to reproduce. He stated:

I went to a boarding school when I was in Africa so I got caned quite a few times and the teachers would always yell and I hated school, I mean I really hated school. .And then when I moved to NZ, I had a couple of teachers that were just calm, they still have the behavioural issues but they wouldn't ever be in your face yelling. I want to be a teacher that doesn't do that. I just want to be calm I just want them to understand where I am coming from. I don't think I have ever yelled in eight years and kids understand that. They respect it. They get



enough of it at home, they get it at church, they get it at sports training. If they want to learn they want their environment to be really good or amazing for them. (Dillon, NZ)

These are examples of teacher reflection that involves more than reflection on technical concerns. These reflections relate to issues of social justice. Kane is able to reflect on his own experiences in sport and is able to differentiate the purposes of PE from those of sport. Ola is conscious of power relations in class and is able to articulate how he addresses these through small actions such as sitting with students rather than talking down to them. Candice reflects on privilege while Dillon is conscious that his own life history has influenced how he relates to students.

## **Discussion**

The broad aim of the EDUHEALTH project was to contribute to our understanding of how HPE teachers address social justice in their classrooms and ultimately to share good examples of practices that privilege social justice with our respective HPE and PETE communities. The specific aim of this paper was to use critical pedagogy as a heuristic to describe HPE teaching practices that recognise and act on social inequities. Although our findings provide examples of teaching practices that move beyond advocacy and take action on social inequity, we recognise that the presentation of practices as themes can serve to disguise both the importance of knowing and understanding context and the tensions inherent in enacting critical pedagogy within social contexts and school structures influenced by neoliberal globalisation. In the following discussion, we touch on some of the context in which these findings are located and some of the unresolved tensions in the study.

The examples provided in the findings of this paper demonstrate a move beyond teaching *about* social justice issues for the purpose of increasing student consciousness of social justice issues (Bell, Adams and Griffin 2007). As intended, the findings of this project are examples of the actions of teachers who aim to teach *for* social justice. In taking action, these teachers are acknowledging the challenges faced by the students in their classroom contexts and in response, they aim to create classroom climates that embrace multiple perspectives and provide equitable opportunities for learning. It is instructive that although all of these lessons occurred in the typical PE contexts of gymnasiums, fields, courts, swimming pools and lakes, the forms of activity we observed were predominantly minor games, creative movement, and outdoor education; activities

that move beyond the context of sport and biophysical scientific knowledge of the body (Tinning 2010).

What little we know about critical pedagogies in HPE classrooms tells us that these teachers employ student-centred learning environments that focus on building relationships, and deconstructing power through dialogue and inquiry (Fitzpatrick 2018; Oliver and Kirk 2015). In addition, several researchers have stressed that critical pedagogy is an embodiment of a social justice agenda (Kirk 2020; Tinning, 2002). In practice, this embodiment would involve teachers who seek to listen and talk and act in ways that enable students to become conscious of social justice issues in their own communities and who have the confidence to address their own social justice agendas.

In contrast to the suggestion that ‘PE is an exclusionary and marginalized space for many students’ (Fitzpatrick 2019, 1129) and ‘sexist, racist, homophobic and ablest’ (Fitzpatrick 2019, 1130), that ‘PE is too competitive’ (Couturier, Chepko and Coughlin 2005, 171) and focused primarily on health and wellness (Hawkins 2008), most lessons we observed involved playful activities with a limited focus on performance, positive interaction between students, and significant student input through modified activities and rules, and challenge by choice approaches in activities such as canoe rescues. These lesson environments do not happen by chance. These HPE classrooms are organised in ways that create more inclusive, fair and equitable embodied experience for young people (Kirk, 2020). Many of the examples we provide are of teachers who do recognise inequities and choose to challenge them. Notwithstanding claims that HPE can still make friends and enemies (Evans 1986), our findings reaffirm our belief that HPE can be a learning space that is inclusive and can educate for social justice outcomes.

We also need to remind readers that the explicit examples of taking action, which are described in this paper, are performed in a contextual/relevant way that focus on addressing social justice issues most relevant to the particular context. In Aotearoa New Zealand, a strong focus on indigenous Māori culture was observed. In Sweden, the teacher actions focused on providing equitable opportunities and outcomes for new migrant students and in Norway, strong social democratic principles appeared to predicate the teachers’ inclusive practices. The examples of teaching practices we have observed and explored in interviews were focused on social justice issues that are found in that particular school context, as shaped by the surrounding society and curriculum. As suggested by proponents of critical pedagogy, these teachers have enacted critical

pedagogies in ways that are relevant to, and shaped by, context (Allen and Rossatto 2009). These teachers have identified and acted on social inequities in their particular class/school by promoting/enhancing the experiences and outcomes of marginalised groups, but this goes beyond the mantra of equality of opportunity to a focus on achieving greater equity.

Inevitably, the representation of how teachers teach for and about social justice requires a degree of reflexivity that considers the claims that are made and the tensions that might exist between taking action for social justice and the consequences (intentional or unintentional) of the actions. Although this study provides details about the actions the teachers have taken, the study has not focused on *why* these teachers care about the specific social justice issues they do. Although some of the explanations are shared in the life histories of school experiences, we have not investigated the influence of family influences, PETE or the occupational socialisation that occurs in HPE departments in schools. Tinning (2019b) suggests that it is unlikely that PETE can take much credit for this, rather he claims that it is more likely that these teachers have a disposition that is receptive to a socio-critical perspective.

The first two findings highlight how teachers have recognised that some individuals and groups of students have greater needs and how the teachers purposefully have not treated them the same. A point of tension in striving for greater equity is that by not treating everyone the same, we might end up reinforcing social inequities/unequal power relations. There is an ongoing tension between identifying and promoting marginalised groups and the risk of reproducing these groups as marginalised (Ennis 1999).

Secondly, teacher actions that act on inequity in school without talking about social inequity run the risk of leaving students ill prepared to be their own agents for change and unprepared to act on social inequities beyond PE. Rather than simply taking action, teaching for social justice requires teaching that raises student's consciousness so that the students can reflect on and develop their agency/disposition to perform socially just selves in society. Returning to Wright's (2004) definition of critical pedagogy, we should remain conscious that teaching for social justice by taking action on inequity without educating about deeper societal issue that create inequity may not cultivate the consciousness required to empower advocacy and community action.

In reflecting on Kirk's (2020) claim that critical pedagogy requires the alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, we are aware that this study did not capture the voices of students involved in learning in these classes. While we can articulate how the teaching practices

align with the principles of critical pedagogy, we are unable to make claims as to if, or in what way, the students in these classes understand these practices. Future studies could therefore involve the students in shedding more light on how they perceive and experience pedagogies for social justice in HPE.

Finally, in reflecting on the study aims, that is, how teachers teach for social justice, we are drawn to Tinning's (2002) conception of a modest critical pedagogy. Our understanding of 'modest pedagogy' or 'modest critical pedagogy' is that it recognises both the importance and difficulty in enacting critical praxis in a post-millennial world. That is, critical pedagogies must be strategic and purposeful yet accept that they will not always transform structures nor make a uniform difference to all students (Gerdin et al. 2019). We recognise that the examples of 'taking action' included in the findings could be interpreted as being humanistic education where individual needs are addressed, while the structures that reproduce inequality are unchallenged. However, in taking heed of Foucault's (1980) focus on the importance of small local resistances to unequal power relations as a way of bringing about social change, and Kirk's (2020) suggestion that teaching for social justice in a way that makes a genuine difference for young people might be best achieved through a strategy of small wins, we are both encouraged and affirmed in our view that HPE teachers can make a difference when it comes to contributing to more equitable outcomes in the classroom and beyond.

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