

# Exploring teacher educator pedagogical decision-making about a combined pedagogy of social justice and meaningful physical education

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## Abstract

Teacher educators shape curriculum in the pedagogical decisions they make (Lunenberg et al., 2007). Yet, evidence is lacking about how physical education (PE) teacher educators make decisions about what to include in their teacher education pedagogies. Four teacher educators in four different PE teacher education (PETE) programmes collaborated to examine their decision-making as they explored ideas related to Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies. Insight into how teacher educators make decisions can add nuance to understanding pedagogical decision-making in PETE. A self-study of teacher education practices frame supported collective and individual interrogation of our decision-making processes. Data included planning documentation for each teaching episode ( $n = 42$ ), individual reflections ( $n = 33$ ), recordings of conversations with critical friends ( $n = 15$ ), and recordings of collective meetings ( $n = 8$ ). Pedagogical confrontations (Moran et al., 2019) provided a lens for each teacher educator to gain perspective and insight into their decision-making related to Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies. The findings are presented in the form of four individual cases that illustrate the distinct story of each teacher educator's engagement with Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies. Teacher educators' decisions were guided by their purposes and influenced by their contexts. Additionally, peers were an

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important source of pedagogical confrontations to influence decision-making practices. This research contributes to the understanding of innovation in PETE by illustrating how clarity about priorities promotes deliberate decision-making by teacher educators resulting in adoption or rejection of innovation.

### **Keywords**

Self-study, pre-service teacher, values, pedagogical confrontation, case study

## **Introduction**

Growth in the scholarship of physical education teacher education (PETE) internationally has led to an increased understanding of the work of physical education (PE) teacher educators (Ovens and Fletcher, 2014). Insight into how teacher educators make decisions in relation to what content and approaches are prioritised in their teacher education programmes reveals their influence on curriculum in the pedagogical decisions they make (Lunenberg et al., 2007; McDonough et al., 2023). For example: ideas that are prioritised may be presented more explicitly in teacher education pedagogies (Kosnik, 2007; Loughran, 2007). It is therefore important for teacher educators to ‘seriously question what is taught, how and why’ (Loughran, 2007: 12). Empirical investigation of PE teacher educators’ pedagogical decision-making can help make sense of their priorities, the underlying reasons for these decisions and promote more deliberate and intentional decision-making (McDonough et al., 2023). Insight into how PE teacher educators shape PETE experiences can help deepen understanding of how teacher education operates.

Teacher educator decision-making processes can be difficult to qualify because decisions of practice are driven by personal and professional values and judgements (Lunenberg et al., 2007). Self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) research has attempted to capture this relationship between decision-making and values by connecting practice decisions with principles of teacher education (Fletcher, 2016). PE teacher educators have also examined the experience of pedagogical change (Philpot, 2016) towards understanding decision-making processes. Brandenburg et al. (2016) propose pedagogical confrontations as a means to capture and make sense of moments of change in pedagogical decision-making. Pedagogical confrontations represent ‘incidents, interactions or events in learning and teaching which cause us to pause and critically examine our practice’ (Brandenburg et al., 2016: 270). Pedagogical confrontations are unanticipated and grounded in ordinary everyday pedagogical practices. A pedagogical confrontation ‘provokes, as it challenges teachers’ beliefs, ethics, emotions, or philosophies about the approaches they employ’ (Moran et al., 2019: 150). Understanding of pedagogical confrontations draws from the literature on critical incidents (Brookfield, 1995); what makes pedagogical confrontations distinctive is the pedagogical focus. McDonough et al. (2023: 4) explain that these incidents ‘are closely tied to the teaching and learning process and the responses to them have pedagogical orientations resulting in pedagogical decision-making’. Drawing on pedagogical confrontations as a lens for reflection is therefore an opportunity to shed light on the pedagogical decision-making processes of teacher educators in the context of their values (McDonough et al., 2023).

This research explored teacher educator decision-making in relation to a combined pedagogy of social justice and Meaningful PE and how they impacted on our teacher education practice. The rationale for this combination is grounded in recent writings on Meaningful PE where Fletcher

and Ní Chróinín (2022: 463) stated ‘we do see much promise in the potential of prioritising meaningful experiences to promote socially just work’. Following this direction, we focused specifically on teacher educator decision-making related to (a) social justice, using the five principles of transformative pedagogy (Philpot and Ovens, 2019) and (b) Meaningful PE (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2022). These frameworks provided a shared understanding and common frame of reference for our collaborative exploration and deliberations.

### *PETE pedagogies of social justice*

Pedagogies for social justice in PETE include a commitment to equity, democracy and social justice, positionality and intentionality in listening and pedagogically responding to the needs and interests of diverse populations in localised contexts (Hill et al., 2018; Walton-Fisette and Sutherland, 2018). Scholars of social justice in PE highlight the importance of understanding the enactment of these social justice pedagogies (Ovens et al., 2018; Philpot, 2016; Tinning, 2017). We adopted Philpot and Ovens’s (2019) five principles of transformative pedagogies in PETE as a framework to conceptualise social justice pedagogies. These are:

1. Provoke understanding through an embodied awareness.
2. Recognise and work with diversity.
3. Involve students as co-contributors to course design.
4. Question your own practice.
5. Address the mechanisms and consequences of oppression.

In adopting these principles, we acknowledged the importance of a combination of teaching ‘about’ and ‘for’ social justice as *praxis*: the intersection of reflection and action necessary to achieve social change (Freire, 1987). Understanding social justice – having a consciousness or awareness of the ways in which social inequities exist and are reinforced in society – is one step. But without action and reflection, there are limited opportunities for micro (or macro) transformations. We recognised that for social change to occur, future teachers need to learn about teaching *about* and teaching *for* social justice as interconnected processes.

### *PETE pedagogies of learning about Meaningful PE*

Meaningful PE is an approach to PE where the facilitation of meaningful experiences is the prioritised filter for pedagogical decision-making (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2022). The goal of Meaningful PE is to help students value PE through experiencing meaningfulness and recognising ways participation enhances the quality of their lives. Meaningfulness is therefore both the vehicle and outcome of learning. Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2022) propose democratic and reflective pedagogies as foundational to approaches that promote meaningful experiences; these principles framed our understandings and engagements. Alongside these two pedagogical principles of Meaningful PE, the pedagogical principles of learning about Meaningful PE (LAMPE) (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018) provided a shared language and direction on how to support future teacher learning. These principles are:

1. Meaningfulness should be a consistent explicit anchor across all aspects of the PETE experience.

2. Support future teachers to engage with the features of meaningful participation as a learner and as a teacher.
3. Gaining insight into both learner and teacher perspectives can help future teachers to better understand learner positioning.
4. Frame learning activities using features of meaningful participation.
5. Support reflection on the meaningfulness of PE experiences.

Teacher educators have used these principles to guide their decision-making in relation to prioritising learning about meaningfulness (Coulter et al., 2021; Fletcher et al., 2021). The value of these principles in influencing and supporting future teacher learning (Fletcher et al., 2020) suggests they provide a cohesive frame for action in relation to promoting meaningful experiences in PE.

LAMPE is the vehicle for PETE students to engage with Meaningful PE. Transformative pedagogies can be described as an educational philosophy that combines the principles of social constructivism and critical pedagogy (Tinning, 2017). The two frameworks described above have quite distinct theoretical framing and motivations, yet democratic and reflective approaches are common to both Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogical frames. Elsewhere (Iannucci et al., 2023), we have shared in detail how we arrived at an agreement that there is merit and potential in combining these ideas in supporting pre-service teacher learning within PETE programmes. In particular, a combination of Meaningful PE and social justice can facilitate attention to both ‘the individual’ and ‘the social’, with democratic and reflective practices as the ‘bridge’ supporting smooth and logical transitions between the two. Exploring how this initial direction and encouragement to combine Meaningful PE and social justice ideas in teacher education pedagogies plays out in the realities of teacher educators’ everyday decision-making requires further interrogation. Our inquiry was therefore guided by the research question: How do PE teacher educators make decisions about combining Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies in their teacher education practices? Identification and analysis of pedagogical confrontations provided a frame to understand these teacher educator decisions and the reasons for making those decisions. The experiences of McDonough et al. (2023: 12) attest to this as they concluded that ‘it is the identification and critical reflection on pedagogical confrontations that provides another lens to examine the sophisticated, complex work and decision-making that teacher educators engage in as they gain deeper insights into their pedagogical practice.’

From the outset, we acknowledged that each of the four teacher educators in this study might make quite different decisions. Yet, at the same time, we were encouraged that exploring and making explicit the pedagogical decision-making of teacher educators can help to guide groups of teacher educators towards developing common goals and practices (Beck and Kosnik, 2012). We expected that the separate context of each teacher educator might influence decision-making too and considered that our findings could potentially provide insight into how context shaped decision-making in different PETE programmes. Furthermore, this combination of pedagogies was an innovation in PETE practices. Insight into how teacher educators engaged with new ideas and integrated them into their pedagogy of teacher education could also add an understanding of how renewal and growth can be promoted in PETE contexts. The contribution of this paper lies in insight into what shaped PETE teacher educators’ pedagogical decision-making in combining Meaningful PE and social justice, and to what purpose; this new understanding can make a valuable contribution to the literature on pedagogies of PETE and guide other teacher educators’ approaches.

## Methodology

### Research design

Four teacher educators in four different PETE or H/PETE programmes collaborated to examine their teacher education pedagogical decision-making about combining Meaningful PE and social justice within PETE modules. All four teacher educators selected one module to be researched based on the potential to combine teaching about and through social justice and/or Meaningful PE to various degrees based on the module context and content. Ethical approval for this study was received from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee and all four teacher educators gave informed consent. This S-STEP was situated within a larger international community of practice of 12 PE teacher educators focused on the LAMPE pedagogical framework (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018) across two years, 2021–2023. The design emphasised collaboration to support interrogation of decision-making processes (e.g. Ovens and Fletcher, 2014). LaBoskey's (2004) characteristics of quality in S-STEP informed the project design as follows:

1. We collectively initiated our collaboration and identified the focus on our self-in-practice through discussion and consensus and articulated this in the form of a research question.
2. We were motivated to explore our decision-making processes as we developed our pedagogical practices, to learn about and test ideas towards improving our practice.
3. Dialogue with colleagues, critical friendships and interactions with the literature were all fundamental to our collective inquiry. Sharing and analysing decisions together was essential to making sense of our experiences.
4. Evidence from multiple sources including teacher planning and reflection documents, paired critical friend conversations, and collective meetings all provided important data that contributed to answering our research question.
5. We share the story of our journeys in detail and present our analysis using evidence gathered to allow others to authenticate our account.

### Data collection

Our data collection combined sharing activities – paired critical friend and collective meetings – with implementation of ideas in our PETE programmes. Data collection took place over a 13-month period from September 2021 to October 2022. First, we engaged in four months of collective meetings to explore ideas and develop shared understandings. Next, teaching-related data collection took place from January to May 2022. Finally, we participated in more collective meetings from June to October 2022. Data sources included:

1. *Planning and teaching documents*: Overall module and assessment documents ( $n=4$ ) were collected, and teacher planning documents as well as teaching artefacts, such as PowerPoint presentations and student work samples, were gathered for 42 episodes of teaching (Carla ( $n=11$ ), Cassandra ( $n=18$ ), Déirdre ( $n=4$ ) and Declan ( $n=9$ )). Some teacher educators had more teaching time than others. For example, Déirdre had only eight hours of teaching on the module in four teaching episodes and Cassandra had 18 hours of teaching in nine weeks. While initially setting out to take the same approach, we quickly realised this was not possible due to differences in individual teaching loads and module organisation.

Instead of trying to all do the same thing, we saw value in capturing the realities of implementation in a diversity of contexts.

2. *Teacher educator reflections*: Following teaching episodes the teacher educator completed an individual reflection guided by prompts including ‘What worked?’, ‘What caught my attention?’, ‘What I wonder...’ and ‘If I was doing this again...’. Again, the number of reflections varied for each of us. The total number of reflections was 33. This included Carla ( $n=11$ ), Cassandra ( $n=9$ ), Déirdre ( $n=4$ ) and Declan ( $n=9$ ). Déirdre, Carla and Declan completed a reflection after every teaching episode. Cassandra completed weekly reflections following every teaching week which included two teaching episodes (excluding week seven because she did not teach due to medical leave). These data were used to inform the paired critical friend meetings and collective meetings.
3. *Paired critical friend meetings*: In paired meetings, we discussed in detail teaching experiences, possible learning and implications for practice. Carla and Cassandra in Australia ( $n=13$  meetings in person) and Déirdre and Declan in Europe ( $n=2$  meetings online) met to discuss the challenges and facilitators in decision-making about a combined pedagogy of Meaningful PE and social justice. The difference between the number of meetings reflects context (Cassandra and Carla were in the same city) as well as the organisation of teaching (Declan and Déirdre both taught in short teaching blocks). Critical friends reviewed teacher educator reflections and contributed to an analysis of practice experiences and decision-making by asking questions, helping to connect ideas and listening carefully. Critical friends took an encouraging and collegial stance to support our fledgling inquiry. All meetings were audio-recorded. These recordings were not transcribed. Instead, these were a personal reference point for individual teacher educators in making sense of and tracking their own decision-making processes in compiling their personal cases.
4. *Collective meetings* (1–2 hours,  $n=8$  in total) focused on making sense of the relationship between Meaningful PE and social justice ideas and implications for teacher education practice. In these conversations, we often cited learning and reactions to interactions with other peers, future teacher reactions to our teaching and personal reflections. Together we progressed our inquiry by sharing ideas, discussing literature, updating on critical friend meetings, raising questions, discussing future plans and brainstorming solutions to overcome challenges encountered. All meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed.

### *Data analysis and trustworthiness*

Richards and Hemphill’s (2018) practical guide to collaborative data analysis guided our approach. Data analysis was driven by the research question: How do PE teacher educators make decisions about combining Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies in their teacher education practices? First, each teacher educator reviewed all their own teaching data as well as their critical friend engagements and all the collective meeting transcripts. From these, each teacher educator drafted their own story of engagement with Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies within PETE. We homed in on incidents, interactions or events in learning and teaching which stood out as moments when we paused, reflected on and critically examined our understanding, our decision-making and teaching practices, and what we termed pedagogical confrontations (Brandenburg et al., 2016). A case-based approach was chosen to present the findings because we aimed to capture the differences in context, the varying number of teaching episodes and the differences in critical friend engagement where Cassandra and Carla met 13 times in person and Declan and

Déirdre only met twice, and online. We hoped that a case-based approach might allow us to accurately represent these differences. Each case is represented in story format. Stories are fundamental to human experience and understanding, and thus, are powerful tools for representing the complexities and nuances of social phenomena (Clandinin et al., 2000). A story format allowed for the development of an engaging account that communicated knowledge and interpretation of events to help the reader to make sense of what was going on and facilitate a deeper understanding (Riessman, 2008). Stories also forefront participants' voices and the contextual integrity of their experiences, enhancing the authenticity and relatability of each account (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Each case described the overall context and provided an overview of teacher educator decision-making about how Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies featured and intersected. An analysis of how teacher educator pedagogical decision-making was influenced by pedagogical confrontation is then outlined. Each teacher educator presented their draft case at a further collective meeting where we collectively made sense of our decision-making processes through cross-case analysis, noting similarities and differences between how we made decisions, the factors involved in the individual pedagogical confrontation and our individual analysis of its impact. Next, as a part of the cross-case analysis, we each wrote a further summary reflection about how our decision-making approaches related to Meaningful PE using the principles of LAMPE (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018) and social justice, drawing on Philpot and Ovens's (2019) five principles of transformative pedagogies. These reflections helped to clarify each individual teacher educator's decision-making in relation to the theoretical frameworks and provided clarity for collective cross-case analysis. Then, Déirdre reviewed the main findings of the cross-case analysis against each case again to confirm the alignment and accuracy of the accounts. Each teacher educator then reviewed their own case again and made small edits for clarity.

## Findings

Here we present the story of each teacher educator in turn. Our intent is to share evidence of how teacher educators made decisions about a combination of Meaningful PE and social justice in different contexts and courses through the lens of pedagogical confrontations. Reflection on pedagogical confrontations in our practice, and how decision-making was influenced, may help other teacher educators to reflect on how they engage with contemporary pedagogical ideas and approaches and incorporate them within their teacher education practices, either implicitly or explicitly.

### Case 1: Declan

Declan leads a one-year secondary (12–16 years) PETE programme at a university in London, UK. Previously, Declan taught in primary and secondary schools for 20 years and has since been involved in teacher education for 10 years. For this research, Declan focused on nine face-to-face sessions with 18 future teachers. Teaching was spread across two semesters where teaching was once a week (three hours) and then a more intense three-week period of 13 contact hours in the week. *Understanding your learner* was a key theme in these sessions, with a focus on examining the role of gender, race and looked after children in PE.

Both social justice and Meaningful PE already feature in the PETE programme. Social justice and equity are key programme features. Pedagogies of social justice include adoption of a collaborative approach to teaching involving student input and feedback in shaping course experiences.

Declan has been exploring LAMPE pedagogies (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018) within the programme over the last three years. Meaningful PE is presented as a tool for professional judgement and decision-making. Reflective and democratic practices are key programme pedagogies. Students learn how to use Meaningful PE through modelling by Declan and analysis of learning and teaching experiences.

On their learning journey, Declan grappled with the extent to which social justice concepts and Meaningful PE should be prioritised and at the forefront of their teaching. Declan was aware that even with this diverse group (50% from ethnic minority backgrounds), these future teachers, by their own admission, experienced privilege fatigue – discontentment from excessive discussion regarding protected characteristics (age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion). This awareness made Declan hesitate as to whether it was always appropriate to highlight social injustice when the opportunity arose:

Do I make it an obvious thing to address? Or do I just let it play out? ... I don't want to highlight it so much that it kind of overtakes and becomes the most important learning objective in that session (collective meeting 3).

Declan identified a pivotal moment of pedagogical confrontation with respect to this thinking when Déirdre observed:

...it really strikes me in Carla's stuff that she wears her heart on her sleeve.... I imagine her students know exactly what she stands for her... she's comfortable, but she represents the positions that she takes, she takes them strongly (pair critical friend meeting 1).

This made Declan question how their future teachers saw them: acting out social justice, in particular, gender sensitivity, or the Meaningful PE guy? They explained, 'I don't want to overly influence them, but then maybe that's just being passive and then you're not having an influence' (pair critical friend meeting 1). They realised that by not wanting to be too forceful in presenting, there was a risk that future teachers would not take up ideas in the ways intended. Declan also considered how much to prioritise Meaningful PE and how much to forefront these ideas in the programme. They reflected:

I think that that comes back to forcing the point. I think we have to be acutely aware of what others' vision is of physical education and what their beliefs are, and so therefore we don't want to force it upon people (collective meeting 8).

Declan was convinced of the value of Meaningful PE as a tool for making better judgements regarding social justice. For them, Meaningful PE was, 'a shared language which I think helps massively, and that can engage the student teachers ... [to] communicate with others, not just their own peers, but also pupils as well' (collective meeting 8). Declan's moment of pedagogical confrontation in recognising Carla's consistent positioning prompted reflection on their comfort with the relative emphasis they placed on Meaningful PE and social justice concepts through explicitly referencing these ideas. Hearing Carla's position helped them to be more confident in their decisions and reflecting on this helped to crystallise the reasons for those decisions. They have clarity of purpose to deliver a coherent programme message that prioritises Meaningful PE and social justice but does not preclude other possibilities for teaching PE and alternative approaches



to achieving social justice and equity. As a result of reflecting on this confrontation, Declan continued their teaching more assured in consistently advocating for Meaningful PE and promoting social justice ideas.

## Case 2: Déirdre

Déirdre has been a primary PE teacher educator in Ireland for over 20 years. She had previous experience with developing Meaningful PE and the LAMPE principles. Déirdre had also taught a module focused on social justice and primary PE for a number of years. The students were 32 final-year future primary teachers taking a specialism in PE. The overall 36-hour module examined social issues relating to participation in sport, physical activity and PE through the following lenses: social class, race and ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality and ability. From previous years' teaching on this module, Déirdre was aware that these students appreciated explicit direction on how to teach for social justice (post-lesson reflection 1).

Déirdre taught a set of four lectures (eight hours) within the module. Taking a novel approach, in each interactive workshop-type lecture, she planned explicit connections between Meaningful PE and teaching about social justice. Déirdre framed the relationship between social justice pedagogies and Meaningful PE pedagogies by using two categories: reactive and proactive pedagogies (lecture 1 slides). For example, a reactive pedagogy (voice) might involve asking the participant what is working or not working. Proactive pedagogies could include scaffolding the participants learning how to make activities work for them (self-direction), and participants being supported to anticipate what might work/not work for themselves and others in planning an activity (reflection).

Déirdre aimed to help her students become reflective, feel empowered and have a basis for action (Friere, 1987). Therefore, in each lecture, students engaged in critical reflection on their own and others' experiences, identified actions (proactive and reactive) to address issues of social justice, and advocated and/or implemented ideas in a variety of ways (lecture 1–4 slides). For example, students engaged with the Hall of Shame (<https://www.pecentral.org/professional/hos/index.html>). They then worked in a small group to share personal accounts and identify a practice or activity that merited being added to the Hall of Shame, which they presented as if they were in a school meeting (lecture 3 slides). She shared: 'Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies complemented each other in these activities: It felt like meaningfulness and social justice lined up perfectly when talking about the quality of individual experience' (post-lesson reflection 2). Reflecting on her experiences, Déirdre concluded that an explicit Meaningful PE focus added value to her teaching and future primary teacher learning about social justice (collective meeting 8).

Déirdre identified her pedagogical confrontation in a collective meeting conversation. Déirdre's approach had been to put Meaningful PE to work as a social justice tool. For example, identifying the social justice issue to be addressed, and then using the features and pedagogies of Meaningful PE to action the issue. Through listening to Carla argue for emphasising the differences, rather than similarities between the approaches, she came to appreciate the value of a combined pedagogy, as opposed to one approach unidirectionally serving the other. Clarity about the potential contribution of Meaningful PE to a combined pedagogy with social justice based on the differences between the approaches released Déirdre from justifying her decision-making in terms of similarities between the approaches. This freedom allowed her to appreciate the value of Meaningful PE in helping future primary teachers to see the relevance of social justice issues by looking from the perspective of individual experience, while deepening their understanding of Meaningful PE also.

Appreciation of differences was evident in how Déirdre grappled with the language demands of working with a combined pedagogy. Déirdre recognised that a foundational knowledge of social justice was needed for students to draw on Meaningful PE to add value: 'Putting words on actions and feelings to name the issues at play is essential to the students advocating and being confident as agents of change' (post-lesson reflection 4). In particular, the language of Meaningful PE was accessible to students and provided a concrete practical action through both democratic and reflective pedagogies that was achievable within their PE practices as beginning teachers. Déirdre reflected:

...maybe it's just one way that they can head in that direction of noticing and caring about what's happening to individuals within the group, that maybe down the road when their capacities change, and they're less worried about the 'what', that this is something they can lean on to develop more a sophisticated repertoire as a social justice educator. So maybe it's like a 'starter kit' in that sense that's accessible to PETE students (collective meeting 8).

Déirdre started with the intention of using Meaningful PE as an accessible and coherent frame for her future teachers to learn about social justice. Now, she is more comfortable combining the complementary but different ideas of Meaningful PE and social justice to make decisions towards supporting future teacher learning.

### Case 3: Cassandra

Cassandra is a white, middle-class, cisgender Canadian woman living and working in Australia. Beginning her career as a teacher in a K-12 school, she now identifies as a passionate teacher educator. She identifies as neither a 'Meaningful PE person' nor a 'social justice person' per se. Interest in student voice and democratic practices brought her into this research project.

For this research, Cassandra focused on her teaching of one cohort of 25 first-year students in the first semester of their four-year initial teacher education programme that would qualify them to teach health, PE and a third (elective) subject. The course included a weekly 1.5-hour interactive seminar as well as a 1.5-hour practical. During this research, the course had some online experiences in a blended approach to returning to 'normal' following the emergency remote teaching of 2020–2021.

Cassandra's course activities intentionally aimed to disrupt dominant sport and performative discourses in PE. She began by modelling a five-week PE unit focused on individual, non-traditional movement forms exploring 'crazy golf'. Pairs and small groups of students worked together to create one crazy golf station that, when combined, made a full course framed within a 'crazy golf course' unit of learning. Each hole focused on a sport-specific or fundamental movement skill in a creative and non-traditional way. The pedagogical focus was on establishing and maintaining safe learning environments, planning for learning in PE, and foundational teaching strategies. Cassandra's overall pedagogical approach was committed to democratic approaches including practices such as centring the voices of students, embedded opportunities for meaningful dialogue, and student choice. There was no explicit focus on Meaningful PE or social justice content but rather a broad commitment to teach for a more socially just experience for all students. Cassandra explained, 'it's nothing to do with Meaningful PE per se and nothing to do with social justice per se. So, these are two additional layers to the learning' (collective meeting 4). Cassandra

hoped that Meaningful PE and attention to social justice might provide an avenue to better understand democratic practices.

Cassandra maintained a focus on democratic practices, with openness to both social justice and Meaningful PE. Without an intentional focus on either, neither was to the fore and instead, Cassandra's experience was most significantly impacted by her interactions with her critical friend, Carla. Cassandra had regular interactions with Carla that caused her to pause and critically examine her practice. For example:

What was really important for me in that process...was Carla's validation, like in our critical friends meeting, sometimes I'd be there being like, 'I don't think I'm doing anything', and Carla would be like, 'No, I see so much evidence of this, and this and this' (collective meeting 7).

Carla's expertise in the area of social justice provided a sounding board for Cassandra to share her practice and discuss some of her pedagogical decisions. At times, Cassandra felt overwhelmed trying to layer social justice and Meaningful PE on top of her usual approach: 'I was trying to do everything that I wanted to do. And I was overcomplicating things' (collective meeting 7). She reverted to 'just trusting my gut and just doing my practice.' She explained:

I was getting lost in the language. And I think that led me to almost just leave it alone, although it was still there in my reflections, but I ended up just doing what I felt good about doing in my practice (collective meeting 7).

Although teaching about social justice was not a learning priority in this particular unit, Carla emphasised that while 'Cassandra was teaching more implicitly in her class, students got there' (collective meeting 8), they felt a sense of community, a space of empowerment, of respect and reciprocity. Also, though Meaningful PE was not presented as a coherent pedagogical framework, ideas related to Meaningful PE that align with democratic principles were evident in her teaching.

So, while neither Meaningful PE nor social justice teaching were explicit priorities, Cassandra and her students travelled much of the same ground in learning to teach PE. Carla commented on Cassandra's students:

The feeling of belonging that they share, the importance of reflection – they might not have the language to talk about what they were living but they could say that they could not feel the same way they were feeling in your class in other classes... it was a magical moment for me to see some of the results of Meaningful PE and social justice combined (collective meeting 7).

Cassandra's decision-making was driven by a desire to improve her implementation of democratic approaches. Peer interactions with Carla provided moments of pedagogical confrontation that helped her position herself and her practices relative to her priority, democratic approaches. On reflection, Cassandra recognised that both Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies served her ends in different ways. Through interrogating these moments of pedagogical confrontation her decisions were validated and she grew in confidence in making decisions that aligned with her priority on democratic approaches.

### Case 4: Carla

Carla is a middle-class Brazilian woman living in Australia with English as an additional language. Carla's experience includes nine years of enacting social justice in youth sport and five years of implementing social justice in PETE programmes. In this research, Carla focused on *Sociology of Health and Physical Activity* delivered to third-year Health and PE pre-service teachers. This course was delivered online with no physical activity-based learning. Based on Freire's (1987) and hooks's (1994) pedagogies, Carla worked towards the critical consciousness of some of the 'isms' in the area of Health and Physical Activity (racism, sexism, healthism and fatism) and strategies to address social injustices (Freire, 1987).

Students developed an inquiry project where they read about an 'ism' and used surveys and/or interviews to analyse people's perceptions of social injustices in health and physical activity. Additionally, students completed a reflective workbook where they shared their lived experiences with the 'isms' and reactions to watching provoking videos. Carla intended to nurture a learning community where dialogue was central. Carla held a radical view for her enactment of social justice pedagogies based on her theoretical bases (Freire, 1987; hooks, 1994). Carla had no previous experience with Meaningful PE. She explained, 'I'm based much more in social justice' (collective meeting 3).

Carla's pedagogical confrontation is located within her critical friend interactions with Cassandra. Carla's positionally and her lack of understanding of Meaningful PE led her to resist Meaningful PE in the first instance. How would Meaningful PE help in her sociology of health and physical activity unit? Carla started her journey trying to find the similarities in relation to her 'radical' social justice approach and Meaningful PE. She struggled to see value in how Meaningful PE might help her to enact social justice: '...I don't need Meaningful PE to be democratic and reflective' (collective meeting 2). Over time, she recognised 'that was a wrong way to go' (collective meeting 7). Carla set about looking for the differences between Meaningful PE and social justice, rather than the similarities, in search of Meaningful PE's added value.

Cassandra and Carla were critical friends. Carla taught four weeks of enacting just social justice with no consideration of Meaningful PE even though Cassandra pushed Carla to explore the possibilities of Meaningful PE. In her critical friend role, Carla observed Cassandra teaching a face-to-face, practical unit. Carla was forced to consider Meaningful PE ideas and engage with Meaningful PE literature in order to fulfil her critical friend role. Over time, through exposure to Meaningful PE driven by her critical friendship with Cassandra, Carla began to see some potential for Meaningful PE in her practice: 'I think the richness of Meaningful PE is this possibility and flexibility to be a way of working for other things...' (collective meeting 6) and 'you've pretty much convinced me now that the individual experience and upstanding the individual experience would for sure impact how [future teachers] understand social justice' (collective meeting 5). Still, Carla maintained a healthy cynicism about Meaningful PE ideas:

I still cannot see a few things that you can see Déirdre, and I really like the concept of Meaningful PE, as a lens, as a tool. And 'as a lens', perhaps this is easy for me to see... But I think when you say, 'as a tool', I have to be honest, at the beginning of this project, I was in doubt that that would be possible, you know, and I'm stubborn as well (collective meeting 6).

In summary, Carla did not combine social justice and Meaningful PE in her unit. Carla's approach prioritised social justice teaching based on her belief that Meaningful PE would not add value. Her pedagogical confrontation arose in the context of acting as a critical friend to

Cassandra. Observing Cassandra's enactment of democratic pedagogies (which resonated with both Meaningful PE and social justice teaching) led Carla to appreciate some possibilities for how Meaningful PE might provide an accessible language for teachers to pay attention to individual experience. Carla's perspective on the value of Meaningful PE changed through her critical friendship. At the conclusion of the project, Carla still had many questions about Meaningful PE and was unsure about how and whether it might feature in her future pedagogical practice.

### *Cross-case analysis and discussion*

Taken together, the stories of these four teacher educators highlight the importance of teacher educator judgements about the value of ideas to their decision-making about Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies. These findings contribute in two ways. First, by illustrating the relationship between decision-making, values and context in our teacher education practices. Second, by demonstrating the value of peer interactions to professional learning in ways that changed teacher educator beliefs and practice.

At the outset, Carla and Cassandra both resisted Meaningful PE ideas as they questioned its distinctiveness and how it added value to their practices. In contrast, Declan and Déirdre embraced the possibility of a joint pedagogy of social justice and Meaningful PE because they saw potential in using Meaningful PE to learn about social justice within their PETE programmes. Consequently, Meaningful PE and social justice featured in different ways in our teaching approaches. The pedagogical confrontations (Brandenburg et al., 2016) described in the cases above shifted all four teacher educators from these original positions. As a result of provocation, Declan and Déirdre were pushed to pay attention to how social justice ideas might expand their vision for Meaningful PE and to consider how social justice can be prioritised within a Meaningful PE framework. Carla became more open to Meaningful PE ideas. Cassandra, who started out trying to implement both, ended up not being explicit about either social justice or Meaningful PE. Instead, her comfort with a democratic approach was confirmed.

Pedagogical confrontations provided a useful lens for us to examine our learning journeys and to better understand how our judgements had shifted or not, and why. S-STEP helped us to recognise these moments of pedagogical confrontations as we were pushed to position these experiences relative to our principles of practice (Fletcher, 2016). Attention to the 'self' in these practices within an S-STEP frame was revealing as we recognised the values that were driving our decision-making. For example, Carla's commitment to social justice was clarified and reinforced. At the conclusion, similar to Kosnik (2007: 16), we were 'still the same yet different'. Engagements with pedagogies of LAMPE and social justice in moments of pedagogical confrontation served to reinforce and confirm what we valued rather than result in any dramatic transformation in relation to our personal values and pedagogy of teacher education (Fletcher, 2016; Kosnik, 2007). Thus, this S-STEP captured a clarification and reinforcement of the current 'self' in practice. Understanding this process of how values were reinforced rather than interrupted is particularly useful in the context of understanding why teacher educators might take up or reject innovation of practice. It seems that both alignment of the innovation with current values as well as a clear distinctive added value to serve the teacher educator's purposes are important to investment in new approaches. Pedagogical confrontations provided a mechanism to recognise what might be distinctive and additive; each confrontation was a lens for reflection that revealed connections between decisions and values in our pedagogical practices. Similar to Moran et al. (2019), it is evident that recognition of these connections and the insight into what mattered to us as teacher educators has enriched our understanding of our work as teacher educators.

Peer interactions within our collaborative S-STEP were the most valuable mechanisms for us to critically examine our practices and interrogate the reasons for our decisions (Brandenburg et al., 2016). All four teacher educators identified a peer interaction as their standout pedagogical confrontation. Aligned with an understanding of pedagogical confrontations, the effect of these interactions took us by surprise. Provocation was not a planned element of our interactions, yet it became crucial to our learning journeys; provoking peer interactions challenged our decision-making in ways that resulted in changes to teacher educator judgements and decision-making (Moran et al., 2019). Opportunities to share and interrogate pedagogical decision-making alongside colleagues mattered to disrupting and challenging assumptions and judgements in ways that resulted in new or renewed understandings. It is noteworthy that the length of these confrontations varied – for some, such as Déirdre, a single sentence or idea was significant. For others, such as Carla, the confrontation was more drawn out across time. From our experiences, these eureka moments cannot be planned for. Instead, we suggest that the conditions for such moments to occur can be created. Both collective sharing opportunities and more intimate paired critical friendships coloured our learning. Most of our interactions were scheduled well in advance and occurred online. We suggest that careful consideration should be given to planning dedicated time and space to prioritise peer interactions. In addition, careful scaffolding of early conversations is important to developing trust and shared understanding as a prerequisite to participants engaging in a spirit of open inquiry and nurturing a supportive and safe sharing space.

Through systematic interrogation of our experiences, we made sense of how judgements we made influenced our professional decision-making. We also recognised how these decisions were mediated by the contexts in which we operated (Brandenburg et al., 2016). Course organisation, context and focus all mattered to decisions about a combined pedagogy of Meaningful PE and social justice. Meaningful PE and social justice ideas sat more easily with other course elements for some more than others. For Cassandra, who was teaching a first-year undergraduate introduction to teaching health and PE course, neither Meaningful PE nor teaching about social justice concepts were the intended learning priorities. Both Declan and Déirdre's experience resembled more of a balanced focus between Meaningful PE and social justice pedagogies. Carla's course focused on social justice teaching, and being online, did not include an applied, physical activity element. The potential place of Meaningful PE in teaching about and for social justice was less obvious and often seemed irrelevant to her purposes. Carla's resistance to and questioning of the value and purpose of Meaningful PE was helpful to the group in considering why a teacher educator might take up or resist a particular pedagogical approach in their practice, despite seeing value in that approach. The differences in extent of buy-in to a combined pedagogy across the four teacher educators can partly be explained by context and course aims, but ultimately it was the values of individual teacher educators that determined the extent of influence of social justice and Meaningful PE ideas on pedagogical decision-making.

The extent to which each teacher educator used the pedagogical principles of LAMPE (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, 2022) and Philpot and Ovens's (2019) five principles of transformative pedagogies in PETE to promote learning about social justice and/or Meaningful PE reflects the value they placed on each. Aligned with their commitment to both sets of pedagogies, Declan and Déirdre used Philpot and Ovens's (2019) pedagogies and LAMPE explicitly and intentionally in their planning and teaching. Carla related strongly to the principles of transformative pedagogies but did not use the LAMPE pedagogies at all. In retrospect, Cassandra recognised that she used some elements of both sets of pedagogies but had not selected these in advance for these purposes. Instead, they happened to align with her focus on democratic approaches. These pedagogical choices played out in how ideas were presented to students with lesser or no emphasis on social justice or Meaningful PE. The diversity of approaches is illustrative of the influence teacher

educator decision-making has on the content of PETE. These decisions matter because what teacher educators are explicit about impacts future teacher learning (Loughran, 2007).

Taken together, our findings highlight the role of teacher educator values and context in pedagogical decision-making. Moments of pedagogical confrontation were instrumental in clarifications in understanding. These did not always result in a different decision or immediate change in pedagogical practice. Instead, these moments prompted reflection and challenged us to consider new ways of being a teacher educator. Ultimately, we each defended or adapted our current practices in ways that helped to enrich our understanding of our work as teacher educators.

### *Future directions*

Empirical studies that provide insight into PE teacher educator decision-making processes are lacking. We see value in others systematically documenting and sharing their experiences and suggest pedagogical confrontations as a useful tool to reflect on decisions of practice in PE settings. Insight into why and how teacher educators adopt or reject innovations would also be revealing of the values held by PE teacher educators and how decision-making by teacher educators influences the nature and purpose of PE. It may be useful to explore how teacher educators with values different to an innovation engage with and represent those ideas in their PETE practices. Perhaps a key indicator of whether an innovation will sustain is the extent to which teacher educators of similar and different values to an innovation can be persuaded of its merits. Carla's story of resistance may provide useful direction to others designing PETE research related to innovation adoption. Examining teacher educator decision-making in the context of their PETE programmes is critical to better understanding the processes of innovation that drive change.

While we found evidence of Meaningful PE and social justice co-existing useful in supporting future teacher learning, our inquiry did not explore the reciprocal value of social justice pedagogies and Meaningful PE in school contexts. Questions need to be asked about if and how more focus on individual meaningfulness can lead to greater equity and inclusion in PE. If Meaningful PE is to translate across contexts and be widely adopted as a contemporary PE pedagogical approach then, we suggest, it is essential that its positioning relative to a wider social justice agenda be considered. Empirical inquiries grounded in the experiences of teachers and future teachers to inform this project would be valuable in ensuring social justice is integrated and prioritised in ways that will have sustained impact.

### **Conclusion**

Collaborative S-STEP promoted peer interactions in which pedagogical confrontations arose. Reflection on these pedagogical confrontations resulted in reinforcement of core values that informed pedagogical decision-making by teacher educators. With a clear sense of their priorities and the underlying reasons for their decisions, each teacher educator made deliberate and intentional decisions (McDonough et al., 2023). Findings illustrate how individual judgements about the alignment of ideas with their core values are the determining factors in decision-making about a combined pedagogy of Meaningful PE and social justice. This research contributes to the understanding of innovation in PETE by illustrating how clarity about priorities promotes deliberate decision-making by teacher educators, resulting in adoption or rejection of innovation.


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