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## **Narratives from the road to social justice in PETE: teacher educator perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

Developing teacher education programmes founded upon principles of critical pedagogy and social justice has become increasingly difficult in the current neo-liberal climate of higher education. In this article we adopt a narrative approach to illuminate some of the dilemmas which advocates of education for social justice face, and to reflect upon how pedagogy for inclusion in the field of Physical Education teacher education is defined and practiced. As a professional group, teacher educators seem largely hesitant to expose themselves to the researcher's gaze, which is problematic if we expect pre-service teachers to engage in messy, biographical reflexivity with regard to their own teaching practice. By engaging in self- and collective biographical story sharing about 'our' teacher educator struggles in England and Norway, we hope that the reader can identify 'her/his' struggles in the narratives about power and domination, and the spaces of opportunity in between.

**Key words:** Physical Education, teacher education, social justice, inclusion, teacher educators, narrative, collective biography

### **Memories from PE Department Meetings (Norway, beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century)**

‘It’s all too time-consuming! We can’t keep it up. I know I initially agreed to all this student-friendly stuff, the regular conversations with them, finding out where they’re at, and all of that! And I’ve done it, haven’t I? It’s not like I haven’t tried!’

By now, Wendy’s neck was half-covered in blotchy red patches. I mused whether this somatic reaction symbolised a sense of self-defeat and frustration, or whether she harboured an intent to halt our attempts to re-new and develop our teacher ed. programme. William caught my eye and raised his eyebrows, confirming my suspicion that this was probably a pre-arranged critique, delivered for once in public. I simultaneously registered the sympathetic exchange of glances being passed between Wendy, David, and Beth. Just as I was contemplating whether to remind everyone that we’d actually been given extra resources and been able to timetable these conversations in our work load, Peter interjected,

‘I couldn’t agree more, Wendy! In principle we’re all for doing our best for the student. That much we can agree upon! But as far as I’m concerned, my time’s best spent on helping them with their lesson plans, planning my gymnastics sessions, you know, and not this mumbo-jumbo ‘get-to-know the individual’ stuff! And I just can’t see the need for a reflexive log, or all that lark about writing their life histories! And letting the students select some of the course literature, for goodness sake! They’ll be marking their own exam papers next! Sorry, I just don’t get it!’

Now Peter was looking directly at me.

“At the end of the day they’ve a national curriculum to keep to, so why we should spend time and resources finding about their personal whims, is simply beyond me! I’m with you all the way, Wendy, what students need is ‘hands on’ know-how, tips about *how* to teach. That’s the bottom line. All the theory stuff, would be better targeted at masters students. Sorry, luv, but the gender stuff, and the problematizing of health and the body, they’re just not interested. And they’ve got a point. Sport’s sport, and PE’s PE! It’s doesn’t have to be so complicated, you know.’

## **Introduction**

We have just presented you with a narrative constructed from memories about the challenges teacher educators can face when they engage in innovative work as part of teacher education. Like Clough (2002:8), we believe that narrative has a potential to open up a

... deeper view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. As a means of educational report, stories can provide a means by which those truths, which otherwise cannot be told, are uncovered.

Throughout this article we share fragments of truths about trying to create more socially just learning environments in higher education in England and Norway with the purpose of stimulating critical reflection about education for social justice in Physical Education teacher education (PETE). In a sense, these tales could be called ‘educational fictions’ (Clough 2002) in as much as they are stories which could be ‘true’, they are derived from amalgams of raw data, of real events and feelings, but they have been crafted by us. They are examples of a ‘collective narrative’ about marginalised voices in teacher education that aim to resist the dominant ‘cultural narrative’ of PETE and offer transformative possibilities (Richardson 1997). The stories we share portray the experiences of the social category of a teacher

educator concerned for social justice, rather than the individual teacher educator's particular story. From a point of departure which acknowledges the postmodern position that all research is a site of moral responsibility, we aim to use our skills and privileges " ... to reveal personal problems as public issues, to make possible collective identity and collective solutions" (Richardson 1997:34) with the view to advance the case of the non-privileged in PE. Should you be seeking a linear form in our article or a sense of closure to these tales, we cannot but disappoint you as a reader. Our text is messy, at times contradictory and fragmentary, and it offers no clear cut conclusions. We reject the form of a Scientific tale because it imposes a narrative sense of coherence that is illusionary (Sparkes, 2002), masking the uncertainties and ambivalence which so often characterise innovation (Fullan 2001). It is crafted as a "writerly rather than a readerly text" (Sparkes 2002:96) and as such, is less predictable and calls upon readers to engage with it and to bring their own experiences to its reading. There are 'blanks' in the writing which "invite the reader to fill them with personal meaning gathered from outside the text" (Sparkes 2002:96).

We do intersperse the narratives with some explicit theoretical reflections, although we recognise that these sociologically grounded narratives are inextricably linked to our biographies, and as such, they are offered as *possible* interpretations of the social worlds we inhabit. Ultimately we hope that the paper can provide readers with a thinking tool for engaging in further development of a socially inclusive PETE, which seems to be increasingly difficult to achieve in the current neo-liberal climate of higher education with its emphasis on standards, measurement and competitive individualism (Apple 2006; Cochran-Smith 2004; Gale and Densmore 2003). We explore the ways in which advocates of education for social justice constitute themselves as teacher educators and their pedagogies, and examine the discourses that shape their stories. For example, do their narratives embrace a critical analysis

of the 'big picture' informing education (political, socio-economic structures), of empowering students to participate in democratic settings and/or fighting specific instances of oppression? Are they framed by a politics of recognition and/or redistribution (Apple 2008)? Following Rivzi and Lingard (2010), we acknowledge that social justice is a highly contested notion, so we also ask whether, and when, work in PETE is being framed from a liberal-humanist, market-individualist and/or social democratic philosophical position?

Given the relative scarcity of research on teacher educators (Bates, Swennen and Jones 2011), and in particular, PE teacher educators (Fernández-Balboa 2009), we believe that such a focus is overdue. We observe that teacher educators, including ourselves, often expect students to reflect upon and articulate their educational visions and values, and they pursue research about student teachers' and teachers' teaching practice with regard to transformative education, yet as a professional group we seem more hesitant to expose ourselves to the researcher's gaze (Aveling 2001). Indeed, we were recently challenged about this paradox concerning some of our own work when we published a book encouraging students to engage in messy, biographical and emotional work in relation to creating inclusive learning environments in school PE and sports contexts, whilst simultaneously almost silencing our teacher educator voices (Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff 2012). This critique led us to embark upon a systematic self- and collective biographical project with the view to analysing the discourses that are constructed about a PETE for social justice, of which we are an integral part, and how this commitment is developed and has been realised throughout the different time spans of our careers in PETE. It seemed unethical to continue to expect our students to engage in this type of reflexivity with regard their teaching practice if we were unwilling to try to better understand the roles we play in both the cultural construction, and the cultural distribution and acquisition of knowledge in teacher education (Bruner 1990). Furthermore,

like many academics, we were recognising a sense of despair creeping into, and detrimentally affecting, our work in teacher education as inequities persist despite many rhetorical claims to the contrary. Accordingly, we saw this collaboration as a means for ‘keeping hope alive in troubled times’ (Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson 2012), and by sharing ‘our’ teacher educator struggles, we hope that the reader can identify her/his struggles in the narratives about power and domination, and the spaces of opportunity in between (Ball and Olmedo 2013; Davies and Gannon 2006).

Anne retrieved some of her memories from the 1980s when attempting to introduce gender and equal opportunities to the PETE curriculum, which she shared as part of our collective project:

**‘The’ Women and Sport Lecture (England, glimpses from the 1980s)**

I was a new member of staff in higher education, with little experience under my belt when I was asked to deliver a ‘women and sport’ lecture to 60 students on their ‘PE and Sport Contemporary Issues’ module. In those days, back in the early 1980s, there was little feminist sociology of PE to draw on, and this was the one session where gender would be addressed. I was half-way through my Master’s Degree, and finally gaining access to some literature which could help me understand some of my experiences. Like Ken Dyer’s book, *‘Catching Up the Men: Women in Sport’*. Rather liberal feminist, looking back on it, but for me it was new and exciting. I can remember being nervous, and spent a long time preparing the lecture, finding examples that I thought would be interesting, making my slides punchy (no powerpoint back then!), and thinking hard about the overall message of the lecture.



Approaching the lecture room, I passed the students' notice board, and was amazed to find that details of my lecture had been crossed out with a large 'LECTURE CANCELLED', written in red. I was furious, and flushed, and angry! I pushed into the lecture theatre, before noticing that there were 10 students sitting quietly waiting for me. They shared my concern over the defacing of the notice, and we discussed this as an example of gender power in action, before I delivered the lecture – somewhat shaken but relieved that they seemed to engage and enjoy the session. I never did find out who had defaced the notice, and my complaint to the (male) module leader was met with a shoulder shrug and a 'oh well, how unfortunate'.

### **PETE and inclusive education**

The political and professional dilemmas facing PETE are, of course, similar to those facing teacher education in general (Apple 2008; Cochran-Smith 2004), although certain concerns are specific to the subject culture and colour the way they are rehearsed and practised (e.g. whether 'legitimate' content knowledge in this multidisciplinary subject is best generated in the physical, biological, behavioural or social sciences). PETE is therefore continually being defined and practised within the on-going tensions about the purposes of schooling in a democratic society and the role of teachers in relation to them, struggles over who has legitimate authority and culture, and over who should benefit the most from government policies and practice. Throughout our different career trajectories spanning from the late 1970s until today, policy in England and Norway has advocated for both teaching as a learning activity and teaching as a technical issue, and given the inevitable slippage between the 'imagined desired futures' of policy (Rivzi and Lingard 2010) and its enactment in teacher education, we have embodied both these conceptions of teacher education and the many grey

zones in between. On account of the practical nature of the subject of PE, the context of PETE has been particularly affected by the on-going dispute about the preferences for an academic or practice-vocational orientation in teacher education (Maguire 2000), and as mentioned above, its content knowledge continues to be fraught with disagreement (Tinning 2006). There are currently multiple pathways to becoming a PE teacher in our national contexts – that of England and Norway – including a 3 or 4-year specialist PE Bachelor Degree, and a combination of a variety of Sports Science Bachelor Degrees followed by post-graduate teaching qualifications. In England, routes into teaching have become diverse. Although traditional paths mirror those in Norway and continue to be located in institutions of higher education, interspersed with periods of teaching practice in schools, newer ones are largely school-based and practice-oriented. These changes reflect, of course, the increasing hegemony of market individualism in education policy around the globe, which conceive the purposes of education in human capital terms and define investment in education within economic, as opposed to broader cultural and political, terms (Rivzi and Lingard 2010).

Against this ever-evolving backcloth, the plight of a focus on social justice and equity in PETE has waxed and waned, but according to Tinning (2002) it has never enjoyed the status of underpinning entire institutional programmes. Indeed it has tended to be taught by individuals, or small groups of like-minded teacher educators, who espouse a personal philosophy of education for social justice and embrace a critical pedagogical approach to teaching. Research indicates that it has been fraught by ‘difficulties’, ‘resistance’ and in part, a naïve belief in the transformative possibilities of the (student) teacher (Gore 1990; Macdonald and Brooker 2000). As early as in 1990, Gore warned about the possible dogmatism of some critical pedagogy, and again in 2003, she reiterated the need for a critical pedagogy in PE to acknowledge the contextual and historical contingencies, as well as the

individual's subjectivity, with regard to agency. In line with this developing critique in PE and indeed beyond (e.g. Lather 1998), Tinning (2002) called for a 'modest pedagogy' in PETE, which should take account of the difficulties of 'doing' critical work with postmodern students. Acknowledging the way in which early critical pedagogical work had relied too heavily upon the 'rational dialogue' of the Enlightenment, he argued for the need to be circumspect in our claims to know about how best to achieve emancipatory outcomes, and to also draw upon *thymos* (a voice of rage at injustice from the perspective of the disempowered, the disenfranchised and the marginalised) and *mythos* (a personal voice of story-telling, cultural mythology, autobiography and literature) for enriching ways of knowing in PETE. These rhetorical forms encompass emotional, embodied ways of knowing and can therefore offer an emotional commitment to changing unjust practice.

Our analyses in this paper build upon these critiques, and we are additionally very aware of the findings of recent studies which indicate the persistence of education systems to reproduce social inequalities (Bakken and Elstad 2012; Fitz, Davies and Evans 2006), and the following subject-specific issues which concern us in this historical moment. Firstly, despite PE's enduring low status amongst core subjects, it has become an increasingly 'interesting' space in the national curriculum for both conservative and liberal political projects. From a neo-conservative perspective it is a subject in which fundamental values such as a competitive spirit, national pride, and leadership qualities can be embodied and nurtured, and from a neo-liberal perspective, it represents an important arena for the self-regulating technologies of good citizenship via 'healthy body projects' (Evans *et al* 2004; Wright and Harwood 2009). Secondly, related to these political projects and due to the subject's close alliance to the field of sport, PE has played and continues to play a significant role in the reproduction of embodied inequalities (e.g. in relation to gender, sexuality, social class, 'race' and ethnicity,

disability and religion (Kirk *et al* 2006)). As a result all too many young people learn that they lack physical ‘ability’ or talent, and learn to embody feelings of alienation and insecurity (Evans *et al* 2004). Thirdly, in our national contexts (Flintoff 2008; SSB 2011), as elsewhere around the globe, the existing PE teaching profession and its recruits, is characterised by being a homogenous, predominately white, middle class, heterosexual group, which is in stark contrast to the increasing diversity to be found in the student population (Cochran-Smith 2004; Mills 2009). There are accordingly pressing concerns about how young people can be provided with physical educational experiences which are congruent with their life experiences (Stidder and Hayes 2013), and how the tendency for white, middle class teachers to understand diversity as a deficit to be overcome, can be challenged, as part of an on-going project to understand pedagogy as a moral and political practice (Smith 1993).

### **Individual stories, collective biographies and our enmeshment in PETE**

Of course these current equity issues in PE are not new *per se* because the subject has historically always played a role in the disciplining the body (Tinning 2010), and similar to the way in which the fundamental tensions about teacher education emerge and re-emerge, so too have these tensions concerning the values and legitimacy of PE as a school subject. In order to tease out the way in which ‘new’ tensions emerge and take form within ever-evolving policy, and at different social and economic times, we therefore adopted a methodological approach which could capture the tortuous, often contradictory processes of engaging with an agenda for social justice, namely that of ‘collective biography’. Collective biography is a research strategy which entails sharing memories relevant to the topic under study through telling, listening and writing, with the view to getting beyond the clichés and usual explanations of what has been experienced (Richardson 2000). In particular, by paying close

attention to the embodied memories of earlier experiences, the method aims “... to provide knowledge about the ways in which individuals are made social, are discursively constituted in particular fleshy moments ... what kinds of truths are produced through what technologies ... to interrogate the materiality of lived experience” (Davies and Gannon 2006: 4). As McLeod and Thomson (2009:30) observe, “memories are not simply records of the past, but in their evocation represent the past within the present”.

In other words, the sharing of biographical tales does not seek to generate knowledge about the individual teacher educator or his/her experiences, but rather it seeks to examine the thoughts and practices of teacher educators who constitute themselves and are constituted as experiencing subjects. Memories are inevitably social constructions weaving the personal, the social and the historical together, and they can be analysed as cultural texts. Collective memory work can therefore illuminate social, cultural and historical formations in PETE (McLeod and Thomson 2009). As Davies and Gannon (2006: 4-59) write,

By making the ordinary objects and subjects of everyday life worthy of inspection, we can ask what the social conditions are that hold their apparent certainty in place.

... we create our own documentary materials through which we can search out the ways in which things are made evident, fixed and apparently unchangeable. Our stories, in showing the detail of our collective enmeshment in that fixed world, set out to make it more fluid, more open to other possibilities.

There is no single method for collective biography but following the experiences of scholars like Davies and Gannon (2006), we developed a set of memory triggers from which we

individually wrote down memories, for example, of an episode of being involved in an innovation in PETE, of an event associated with an in/exclusive learning environment, of embodying power at play, of becoming and being a teacher educator. We imposed no sense of chronology, preferring instead to juxtapose tales from the past and present and thus avoiding a temptation to imagine the motives and position of all involved. These fragmentary cultural texts were, in turn, used as a starting point from which to share, reflect upon and generate collective memories about constituting teacher education for social justice during 22 hours of memory-work spread over 5 days (spanning a 12<sup>th</sup> month period). We are positioned in a range of social locations - our ages range from 55, 51 and 45 years old; we have respectively 30, 22 and 8 years' experience of PETE; one of us has worked in PETE in both England and Norway, whereas two have had careers just in England. In order to ensure that we focused upon the conditions of possibility associated with these memories, as opposed to reducing them to transparent windows of experience, we took it in turns to read embodied accounts from the past and present, to share emerging memories triggered by each other's stories, and to intersperse these with reflections from shared theoretical readings and our emerging analyses. This collective memory sharing was recorded and transcribed verbatim, and integrated in the ongoing analyses. We looked for similarities and differences between the memories, identifying clichés, generalisations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphors and the like. We looked, too, for what was omitted from the memories in relation to what we had expected to be there. In this way we sought to systematically, sociologically analyse the discourses of 'our' biographical narratives, making visible the threads with which we are entangled and open them up for a broader interrogation of discourses about teacher educators and social justice in the wider professional field of PETE. We have avoided the challenges of writing on behalf of the Other and simultaneously been reminded of the power of the researcher's pen to inscribe lives; it is a humbling experience to select representations of lives

as lived. The degree to which we have succeeded in constructing narratives and analyses which cohere with the reader's and the profession's existing knowledge, that are persuasive and life like, and not least that invite the reader to re-examine his/her own experiences and move him/her emotionally and intellectually beyond current understandings (Richardson 1997), is necessarily a judgement call to be made beyond this text.

Below we will illustrate an aspect of this collective memory project by sharing some fragments from our conversations ensuing the reading of memories about struggling to create inclusive learning in PETE:

### **Catching the students' attention in the marketplace of higher ed**

Anne – The intensification of higher education the last 20 years has meant that groups have got bigger but also the physical spaces of pedagogy have changed ... Like a tiered lecture theatre with fixed furniture. ... So what's an inclusive learning environment?

Hayley - Well, I'd come back to the first point, which is knowing your students. For me that's something which is really important. Talking to them, finding out about where they're at ... But I think that's the first thing we fail at, the first hurdle actually, because of the size of the groups of students we're working with. ... I was reflecting upon the thing you said, Anne. You know, about the tiered classes, and what it does in terms of interaction. We did go through a phase, didn't we, when we were encouraged to be really interactive and... so I used to do things like I'd have little balls and things I could throw into the class. Which actually is quite an exclusionary thing to do!

Fiona – Yeah, really inclusive for those who can't catch!

Hayley – Talk about putting on the pressure! What was I thinking of? But I did get a bigger, lighter ball which I thought would be lighter for the students to catch and throw. It was like a hot potato. So I'd ask a question, but I didn't want to put pressure on the individual who caught the ball, so they'd throw it around until someone who had an answer and wanted to give one, could do so. But the problem with doing all of that stuff is that they're not necessarily interested in the content of what we're going to talk about, they're only interested in the excitement and thrill of the game! So I stopped doing it. It worked for a wee while but I'm not sure ...

Fiona– Well, isn't that just a marketing gimmick? A way in, at least initially, but as you say, it's easy to lose sight of the substance?

Anne – Just like 'death by power point', but we're still expected to post our lectures on the web. ...

Fiona – Just going back 10 years, I'd say it was a lot easier to try to really get to 'know' the students. Like I shared that tale earlier, about trying to introduce more problem-based inquiry learning on our teacher ed course. We found the time to have regular one-to-one tutorials about their individual development. We wanted to genuinely respect the idea of starting from where they're at, and encouraging them to articulate their personal educational values. We experimented with a negotiated curriculum. As I told you, I even ended up teaching a module about student assessment in minus 11 C, on an ice rink for several weeks! And I used to spend hours negotiating field work for our masters students in local schools, so that they'd learn to engage with equity issues in practice, and not just simply read about them, but all that's disappeared nowadays. There's no room for that sort of approach in short



modules ... By the way, I refuse to post my power points on the web! I still cling to the idea of the potential power of the 'physical' and 'emotional' exchange of ideas as being central to education, although clearly some students see this as simply bad teaching.

Hayley – Yeah, we're governed a lot by student feedback. Ours have to complete lots of different surveys ... I still try, though, to use lots of different resources like inequality statistics, or relevant films or TV programmes, as a starting point for encouraging students to grapple themselves with what the problems of equity entail, rather than giving them the 'facts' in a lecture.

Anne – But you're right, Fiona, it's not in our interests to create more challenging and engaging educational sessions ... before I use to work a lot collaboratively ... but I was thinking last night, when do I really sit down and think about creative ways of teaching? Of course as a Prof I do less teaching, so then what does it mean to be inclusive with masters- and PhD students?

## **Emerging themes in our interpretations of the narratives**

### **Isolated tales of working against the grain**

Echoing the experiences of teacher educators engaged in social justice agendas (Ladson-Billings 2004), our biographical tales have revealed discourses saturated in a sense of swimming against the tide. Common for the narratives has been the way in which personal troubles have become public issues (Wright Mills 1959), with Fiona and Anne initially seeking to understand inequities which were the result of patriarchal practices, whereas Hayley searched for tools to help her unpack oppression on account of disability. The three of

us have described landscapes characterised by a sense of dissatisfaction concerning our professional education (from the late 1970s/early 1980s and from the early 1990s in England) for failing to equip us with the theoretical concepts necessary for making sense of a series of injustices, encountered in university learning arenas, in schools and/or the local community beyond. We have struggled, and continue to struggle, with trying to come to grips with a range of discomforts, either directly or indirectly. Pain, shame, embarrassment, anger, and powerlessness are emotions which have saturated our memories and our re-telling of them. Common, too, for our recollections has been the way in which we have had, on the whole, to tackle this insecure space in isolation (Gale and Densmore 2003), or if we have been fortunate enough to find colleagues with whom we could share our insecurities or seek collective solutions, they have tended to be from other disciplines than PETE. An aspect of work on inclusion appears, therefore, to have been driven by a desire to prevent others from having to battle on their own, as well as an agenda to illuminate injustices and engage in a politics to challenge them.

### **Nourishing pedagogical encounters**

Recognising the danger of seeming to create a binary, when the landscape is in fact far more prismatic, it is important to recognise the positively charged emotions which have also been woven into the fabric of our narratives. As our commitment to working for a broad social democratic notion of justice has evolved, we have experienced moments of epiphany such as discovering insightful texts or moving pedagogical encounters with students, characterised by overwhelming feelings of joy and exhilaration. We have been reminded that the task of confronting cherished beliefs, or coming to grips with the pain and inequalities to which millions of innocent people are subjected on a daily basis, is wrought with discomfort (Apple

2008; hooks 1994), but amidst the resistance often demonstrated by students or colleagues lies the ‘teachable moment’ (Feigenbaum 2007). That is a moment when the ordinary can momentarily become disrupted, enabling the vulnerability of acknowledging that thought cannot be complete and knowledge is always becoming, to bring about a meaningful encounter. This insecure pedagogical space, densely filled as it is by the entire spectre of human emotions, has often provided the spur to carry on with resisting settled codes for ways of thinking and behaving, when battle fatigue appears to be taking its toll. We have described to each other how it can provide moments of passionate engagement, a sense of joy and an embodied strength (Davies *et al* 2006).

### **The different guises of teaching for social justice in PETE – no clear definitions**

An examination of the ways in which we have endeavoured to practice our commitment to education for social justice has illuminated a range of strategies, from influencing the content knowledge of specific modules and teacher education courses, experimenting with ‘inclusive’ didactics, to trying to underpin an entire post-graduate teacher education programme. The local policy for the latter drew heavily upon a philosophy of inquiry-learning, emphasising student participation in a negotiated curriculum and sought to problematise the social construction of PE and schooling within a broader critical analysis of socio-economic structures. As the opening vignette witnesses, the gaps between policy and its enactment are many, complex and troubled. Moreover, the shifting policy landscape makes opportunities for pursuing innovation of this kind seem more or less conceivable, and as we have noted above, market-individualism in current policy limits narratives like this one from currently being told. As Kårhus (2012) observes, the academic freedoms of institutions of higher education in Norway today are influenced by a quasi-market ideology and adherence to the European

Credit Transfer System/Bologna Declaration, resulting in the proliferation of short-term modules as opposed to nurturing over-arching study programmes. In England, the growth of school-based teacher education programmes has had severe consequences for the organisation and content of education for social justice.

Our collective memories have revealed that our work all too often has been dominated by a politics of recognition with less time being spent on a politics of redistribution, and consequently we are fearful that pre-service teachers have been less than adequately prepared “... to deal with the utter complexities associated with concerns surrounding the structures of inequalities in schools and the larger society ... Thus, in our attempts to create critical dispositions in general, we may also risk deskilling current and future teachers.” (Apple 2008, p.106). It seems we too often have been caught up in the naivety described over two decades ago so lucidly by Gore (1990), rather than enabling students to grasp the historical and contextual contingencies of an individual’s agency. Not least due to the dominance of one-off or elective courses in equity work, which reflects the broader picture in teacher education and PETE, there is little discourse in our narratives to suggest that we or colleagues have taught, or structured programmes, in ways as to result in students repositioning themselves politically or being able to see the world from the eyes of those who have the least (Apple 2008).

Historically, these courses in multiculturalism or social equity have been taught around single issues and they only recently have traces of an intersectional approach. We have, in fact, been surprised by the persistence of our early private concerns, such as gender or disability, and the ways they continue to colour our engagement with education for social justice, as well as the taken-for-grantedness and often ‘silent’ theoretical viewpoints. On occasion Fiona and Anne have found themselves teasing Hayley about her apparent lack of desire to label herself as a feminist. From their perspective they cannot imagine understanding the social world other

than through a feminist lens, yet clearly this is not the case for Hayley. Conversely for Hayley, it would be unthinkable to ignore disability in her worlds, whereas this has not been on our agenda. We have thus been reminded of the contradictions running through the constitution of our practice, not only with regard to our theoretical lenses but equally in relation to the challenges of celebrating difference and being non-judgemental. We have clearly drawn upon different ‘technologies of the self’ with regard to discourses about, for example, gender and power (Foucault 1997 cited in Wright 2004).

Fiona chose to reflect upon some of her experiences of teaching gender theory in Norway via writing a poetic representation (Sparkes 2002), aiming to recreate some of the feelings associated with teaching/learning gender theory in PETE in the twenty first century:

### **Gender on the PE agenda**

The module plan indicates gender

theory

on today’s social justice agenda.

Literature,

and an array of ‘relevant’ websites for stats,

filmclips, TV programmes,

selected with

due consideration.

Trying to meet the students where they are, but

aiming

to move them onto

pastures new.

Thomas

demonstratively reading a tabloid newspaper,

and a group of men at the back

loudly continue their conversation.

A young woman at the front

hopes

they'll quieten down

so that she can discuss the knowledge gleaned from yesterday evening's reading.

Peter shares her desire,

but they dare not to turn,

nor to ask them to

respect their and

Others' needs

in the room.

And tomorrow they'll be

Teaching

Others in schools.

### **Negotiating the contradictions and the structural constraints of education for social justice in PETE**

Our on-going analyses of the narratives have revealed the ways in which we shamefully and paradoxically, given our espoused social democratic project, can fall into the trap of Othering students who resist our attempts to celebrate difference. Similar to other research findings, we have talked despairingly about pre-service PE teachers' seeming lack of a disposition towards issues of social justice (Tinning 2002), their tendency to have a liberal democratic notion of equality (a so-called deficit model), and we have drawn upon the discourse of perceiving a need to change the recruitment process as a possible solution to these 'problems' (Mills 2009; O'Bryant, O'Sullivan and Raudensky 2000). Inadvertently we have *positioned* 'them' firmly in one place, despite the existence of contrary, albeit seldom, tales which challenge this standpoint. Whilst the subject of PE and PE pre-service teachers have historically been characterised as conservative (Macdonald and Brooker 2000), it would seem that we have compounded this image in recent neo-liberal times in higher education, rather than focusing upon the discursive spaces for agentic possibilities. Although recognising the effects of neo-liberalism on our own professional identities and lives, we somehow seem loathe to readily acknowledge the students' inevitable entanglement in the discourse. Like Porfilio and Yu (2006) in the USA and the educators in Henkel's UK (2000) study, we have become exasperated when pre-service teachers appear to shun problem-solving, self-study and the discomfort of uncertain outcomes which we believe are central features of teaching for democratic humanism, whilst simultaneously reflecting upon our own challenges in the

corporatized classroom. We embrace the idea of education for all as a human right, and yet can become frustrated by students who in today's massification of education seem to lack the cultural capital we had at their age within a highly selective, inequitable system. We have shown great scepticism concerning the role social platforms, like Twitter and Face Book, have begun to play in our universities' work and learning environments, and shocked by some students' apparent inability to locate a journal article; yet, all the while we are advocating a celebration of difference. Consequently, engaging in the collective memory work has revealed many fault lines in our daily lives and reminded us of the challenges of creating 'productive pedagogies' and the danger of inadvertently constructing 'pedagogies of indifference' (Lingard and Mills 2007). The process has had a humbling effect when we inadvertently have heard our own voices resonate with the responses we often hear, and become frustrated over, from in-service teachers or coaches about the seemingly endless hurdles which stand in the way of trying to make a difference in their learning environment; because how do you really get to know who the individual student is, and where s/he is at, in the neo-liberal crowd? How can we enact a pedagogy which acknowledges and problematizes social inequities in all their complexity, whilst also transforming them?

Reflecting the ever-changing political landscape of teacher education within higher education, our narratives have demonstrated discourses of the 'heady days of academic freedom', autonomy in the workplace (Henkel 2000; Robson 2006), as well as the more recent discourse of the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball and Olmedo 2013). Our professional identities have been fluid in relation to these sets of values about education, although Hayley as the youngest amongst us, has described how she entered the academy as a contract researcher within an institution already saturated with corporate management thinking and cannot identify so readily with Fiona and Anne's rosy-hued reminiscences of 'better days'. These so-called



'better' days were characterised by having time for collaborative work with colleagues, good student-lecturer ratios and teaching spaces which allowed for creative pedagogical encounters, not least with regard to working for social justice in PETE. Given the many contradictions in our narratives, the discourse of 'academic freedom' is perhaps a pertinent illustration of the ways in which our memories are inevitably *selected* expressions of our imagined pasts, presents and futures. Rather than representing a 'true' historical moment or indeed a 'freedom', the memory of the idea of 'academic freedom' has provided us with a tool for reflecting about the truths, and the many contradictions, which have affected and continue to e/affect our material lives. We observe that despite a sustained, strong value commitment to education for social justice, our pedagogical practice reflects this value position to a lesser or greater degree at any given moment, depending upon varying personal and/or contextual facilitators or barriers. The collective memories cohere with Fullan's (2001) observation that even when individuals initiate or voluntarily participate in change the meaning of the change is rarely clear at the outset, ambivalence and uncertainty pervade the transition and the impulse of rejection is constantly present.

The powerful role of the subject discipline has been well documented (Henkel 2000; Robson 2006), and the narratives are witness to the continuing dominance of bio-behavioural ways of knowing in PETE, at the expense of social theories about the body and teaching.

Consequently, themes like education for social justice are constructed as marginal within PETE's 'legitimate knowledge' (Apple 2006), as, too, are the advocates of this type of knowledge. As women, our memories about striving to establish social justice in PETE are also saturated with instances of marginalisation due to our gender position in the academy.

Given the dominance of traditional 'male', taken-for-granted values circulating in higher education (Acker and Dillabough 2007), it is not atypical for women to have larger teaching

loads, to be given more pastoral responsibility and to have been socialised into emphasising the need to develop caring forms of teaching. Even though we have ‘known’ that it is not in our ‘best’ interests to spend long hours preparing to teach students in a creative and inclusive fashion we have chosen to do so. We have sought to bring colleagues together in innovative work, which we have known not to ‘count’, and yet, we have still allowed ourselves to be puzzled over some people’s seeming lack of interest or enthusiasm for our social justice frameworks. We have been bemused over the way we have chosen to ‘mismanage’ our time, and in addition, spent even more time and energy on confronting the ‘foolishness’ of our choices. Our musings have none the less reminded us that education is ultimately about a better moral order (Rivzi and Lingard 2010), and therefore we have no choice but to confront and seek to change these discomfiting paradoxes.

### **On-going reflections**

These reflections, and the other points we have addressed, seem to be pertinent in our continuing daily work with social justice and meaningful pedagogies in PETE. Our collective memory work has reminded us that being an educator is always about becoming in a world, which we envisage to have a better future based on democratic humanism. Knowing where we have come from, and recognising the tortuous paths we travel, would appear to be a valuable part of this embodied and cognitive work. It provides imagined spaces for future praxis, and reminds us that democracy is never a finished project (Giroux 2011). Sharing tales from the field can constitute a means for pursuing this collective dialogue about how best to organise teacher education so that it respects the commonality of being human yet also has the capacities to work with difference (Lingard and Mills 2007). An important aspect of this work rests upon acknowledging the vulnerability of teacher educators’ investment in teaching for

social inclusion and the ever-present need for collegial support and encouragement. To this end, we share a recent episode from Hayley's teaching on a PE and Sports Science course, and ask, 'when, and how, did your daily work in PETE last address matters of social justice?'

### **Losing control**

As their snippets of conversation assault my ears, my feelings, the very core of who I am, and what I believe in, I try to maintain my composure.

"That's disgusting, them being with us. They should go somewhere else."

"I had to stop looking. It just put me off my lunch."

"Yeah, yucky! Horrible and not normal! If they can only eat like that they shouldn't be allowed at college."

Their very words grate on my senses and my blood slowly starts to boil. I feel the heat rising through my body and my head tingling with the shock, the shame, and the anger about what they are saying. They are talking about people I know, people with learning disabilities who I meet every Thursday evening. But they don't seem to be notice the effect they are having on me, and as it dawns on them that I am standing there, arms folded, blatantly listening, they actually draw me into their web of collusion and spite, and try to include me.

"Did you see them, Hayley? God, they're disgusting, aren't they?"

This group of leisure studies students, whom I have worked with all year look at me, waiting for a nod of agreement, but all I can do is to stare back at them, almost as if seeing them for the first time. In that moment, that millisecond, my relationship and

feelings towards them changes. How did I miss this? How long have they thought like this? This, now group of strangers, sat in front of me talking about ‘them’, the college’s disabled students, as if they are sub-human, a sort of freak show, a pack of animals. But this is not how I know them, these people are actually my Thursday evening friends!

Before I can prevent it, I’m the one with the volume turned up high. I do not recognize myself, and I rant and shout, words spewing from my mouth before I have even thought about what I want to say. I feel myself getting redder and angrier as one sentence merges into another, and they just stop and stare, jaws one-by-one dropping, as they slowly realize who I am not, what I don’t do, and am certainly not one of them, with their petty, small-minded ways.

Once I run out of energy I turned to the session at hand but the next hour passes quietly, despondently, begrudgingly. I remember driving home and feeling saddened, so disappointed, but not just with them, but with myself. How did I educate those students? What could I have done better? How would this influence our relationship for the rest of their year? This experience has stayed with me; it reminds me that teaching inclusion is with us all the time. It reminds me that we can feel vulnerable and exposed. It reminds me that by shouting, I may have felt momentarily better, but that this reaction may not help our students. I try to use the depth of emotion to move me and ‘them’ into another space ...

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