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A socially-critical curriculum for PETE: students' perspectives on the approaches to social-justice education of one Brazilian programme

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ABSTRACT

Brazil is the largest and most influential country in South America with a population of about 211 million. The reality is a country with a wide gap between rich and poor. Many of its issues of (in)equity are related to a complex mix of factors, such as its large population, ethnic and cultural diversity, class and income disparity, late slavery abolishment, unstable democracy and political governance. At a national level, the former Brazilian government attempted to address the challenges outlined above by passing new legislation in 2007 that expanded the services and scope of the federal universities, particularly in respect to increasing access to tertiary education and providing increased support and infrastructure for people of middle- and low-income families. In this paper we analyse a PETE programme offered at one university in the Brazilian Northeast in response to changes introduced as a result of the 2007 legislation. Drawing on the perspectives of graduates from this programme, we examine how they see the complexity of social justice and equity issues from their experience in the course. Data were generated through focus group and individual interviews with former students. We supplemented this with document analysis of key policy and curriculum artifacts produced by the programme, and consultation with professors from the course to better understand the former students' experiential dynamics. Each participant expressed a strong affinity for and orientation towards social justice as an integral aspect of school physical education. The curricular restructuring enables students to engage with a broad range of content underpinned by ethical, political, aesthetic, epistemological, pedagogical and theoretical-methodological principles. We consider that this curricular orientation seeks to meet the regional and local needs so that future physical education teachers, in turn, intervene with a more critical socio-cultural perspective in their teaching.

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Introduction

With a population of about 211 million, Brazil is one of the largest and most influential countries in South America. However, the reality for many is that it is a country with many issues of (in)equity, oppression and poverty. Such issues are related to a complex mix of factors, such as Brazil's large

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population, its ethnic and cultural diversity, its historical economic reliance on slavery, its class and income disparity, and its history of alternating between democratic and military rule (Andrews, 1996; Lovell, 2000; Sanches Neto & Oyama, 1999). At a national level, the former Brazilian leftist government has attempted to address these challenges in a range of ways. One of the most significant was the passing of legislation in 2007 that expanded the services and scope of the federal universities, particularly in respect to increasing access to tertiary education and providing increased support and infrastructure for people of middle- and low-income families. Under what was called the government's restructuring and expansion support programme (Reuni), each university was required to provide a restructuring plan of how it would address these challenges and provide a more equitable university education for a broad diversity of students (Pereira & Silva, 2010). The plans were expected to consider initiatives that could potentially facilitate the process of reducing social inequalities, such as: the provision of evening courses; the expansion of inclusion policies and student assistance; improvement in the student-to-professor ratio; investments in the purchase of new equipment and books; and construction of new facilities (Borges & Aquino, 2012; Léda & Mancebo, 2009). In addition, federal universities were required to reserve 50% of the vacancies for students who attended public high school, considering criteria of ethnicity, colour or race (Brasil, 2012). Reuni also focused on both the restructuring of existing universities and the creation of new ones (Costa et al., 2013).

In this paper, we focus on the local level and, specifically, how the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) in the Northeast of Brazil responded to the opportunities provided by Reuni by situating social justice as a key orientation to its physical education teacher education (PETE) programme. Reuni not only opened up the opportunity to re-think the nature of PETE in this programme, it also diversified the mix of students in the programme by creating opportunities for students who previously would never have considered studying at a federal university. Some of these students became the participants in this research. Drawing on the perspectives of new graduates from this programme, we examine how they see the complexity of social justice and equity issues from their experience in the course. Specifically, we sought to understand:

- What influence has PETE had on the students' understanding of social justice and equity?
- How did the students' own lived experiences of inequity frame their perspectives of the complexity of social justice?

Linking social justice to PETE

The Federal University of Ceará is an institution maintained by the Brazilian federal government that, among its stated missions, contributes to overcoming social and economic inequalities by supporting the development of the state of Ceará and the Northeast. According to the last national census (Brasil, 2010), Fortaleza is the Brazilian state capital with the highest number of homicides per firearm. In 2004 the city occupied the 19th position, so this represents a significant increase in this type of violence. As we write this article in February 2020, the state of Ceará has reached a record of 147 people murdered in five days as police strike for better wages (BBC, 2020). In addition, the neighbourhood surrounding the Pici campus of the university (situated in central Fortaleza) has a low human development index¹ (HDI) of 0.22. More than 36.9% of the inhabitants earn less than half minimum wage.² There is a high population of young people and high rates of violence.

In an attempt to address these issues, and due to its membership in Reuni, the university has created more than 30 undergraduate courses and more than 800 academic staff have been hired since 2007. The broad and bold vision of the university is to expand educational opportunities and be transformative for the citizens of the state. The broader politics context around the Reuni was connected to advancing social justice and promoting decent work measures for a future worth living (Berg, 2015). As Barontini and Silva (2010) recognised, this proposal courageously

stood in contrast to the traditional conception of a university and embraced ideas promoting a democratic society that were extremely challenging at that moment in Brazilian history.

The PETE programme is offered by the Institute of Physical Education and Sports (IEFES), which is situated at one end (south side) of the Pici campus. This location is significant because in the mid-1970s it was often a space trespassed by different groups and the development of a campus sports area was seen as a way of making the area safe and addressing the needs of the local community. Since 2009, the number of students enrolled has increased. This has been supported by initiatives such as courses offered to a cohort attending in the evenings (known as the night programme). Many PETE students have also participated in the institutional programme of initiation to teaching (PIBID). PIBID is a governmental proposal created in 2007 that provides scholarship bursaries for university students and faculty and school teachers to collaborate in teacher education projects. Currently, during the daytime cohort there are 186 students enrolled and there are 95 students in the night cohort. The programme is studied over eight semesters, and includes 400 h of practicums in kindergarten, elementary school, high school, and youth and adulthood education contexts.

The aim of the PETE programme is to, 'educate teachers committed to social transformation, with a solid and complex teacher education, which will enable the analysis, understanding and critical reflection of social reality and the main themes related to physical education' (UFC, 2013, p. 27). Changing the orientation of the programme to enable this aim involved a substantive reworking of the curriculum based on Freirean reflexive, dialogical and critical student-centered methods (Nepomuceno et al., 2019). In addition, practicums and other supervised teaching practices and community projects were situated in neighbourhood schools, providing PETE students with additional contextualised experiences of the issues discussed in their course work. Although all the courses could adopt these principles within the current curriculum organisation, principles related to social justice appear more directly as compulsory subjects of the following courses: Socio-Anthropological Foundations of Physical Education, Socio-Historical and Cultural Studies in Education, and Pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Physical Education.

A socially-critical curriculum for PETE and its complexities

Internationally, there has been consistent and enthusiastic advocacy for more critically oriented PETE programmes that enable graduates to better deal with the issues caused by growing levels of poverty, racism, sexism, war, and migration (see, for example, Ovens et al., 2018). Kirk (2020) suggests that such advocacy is a response to the way modern society is characterised by precarity as a result of living in uncertain, unstable, risky and hazardous situations in many countries of the Global North, as well as in Brazil and the South hemisphere. Bracht et al. (2015) suggest that Brazil can also be characterised as living in a liquid modernity embedded in fluid relationships, and advocate for increased criticality in Brazilian school physical education and PETE pedagogies. In his advocacy for Brazilian PETE to better address the needs of Brazilian society, Manoel (2017) is critical of the contradictions when PETE is anchored in the presuppositions of technocratic rationality and the discourses of science. Manoel's (2017, p. 236) concern is that 'students' professional learning needs to be guided by questions such as: Why study? Who I am studying for? What am I learning? What knowledge will make a difference?' In his view, for PETE students to answer such questions requires considerable self and community awareness, and stronger contacts with the epistemological basis of the PETE curriculum. Based on this, there is a need in PETE to educate students who are able to (self)-critique their own ways of learning and teaching (Manoel, 2017). In other words, there is a need in Brazilian PETE to foster a form of socially-critical scholarship whose broad aim is to,

... understand the socially constructed nature of society and schooling, challenge how and what is being learnt, and become empowered to transform educational practices in the interest of justice, equity, democracy, and human freedom. Critical pedagogy stems from critical scholarship and is a pedagogical practice that has a transformative agenda at its heart. (Philpot et al., 2019, p. 2)

Transforming PETE to enact more socially-critical pedagogies is neither easy nor formulaic. We understand that complexity is embedded in the sense of what is 'critical' in critical pedagogy because it 'evokes a complex array of dispositions, values, suspicions, and questions relating to power inequities and how they lead to privilege and marginalization' (Philpot et al., 2019, p. 2). In their review of the literature on critical pedagogies used in PETE, Philpot et al. (2019) conclude with four observations. Firstly, it is necessary to avoid a conception of critical pedagogy as a single decontextualised method. Socially-critical pedagogies that are transformative for students are contextually embodied experiences that cannot be transported unproblematically from one programme to another, or from the context of PETE to schools. Secondly, building trusting relationships with students is a pre-cursor for pedagogical engagement. This includes being able to create learning cultures and environments that respect confidentiality, autonomy, and student empowerment. Thirdly, students' preexisting beliefs and dispositions are very difficult to shift and often mediate how students engage with the content of PETE programmes. As they note, it has long been observed that critical PETE programmes have struggled to change or significantly influence the beliefs and practices of their students (For example, see Mordal-Moen & Green, 2014; Philpot et al., 2020). Finally, there is a need for PETE educators to enact democratic principles in their own classes so as to better model and practice socially just forms of pedagogy. The important aspect of enacting democratic principles is the presupposition of equality among all participants as a starting point rather than a goal to be achieved, which has been reinforced by Ovens and Lynch (2019).

There is a general acknowledgement that changing students' prior knowledge and beliefs is difficult because much of the work in PETE has suggested that teacher candidates are oriented by their prior involvement with and in sport and schools. However, less attention has been paid to the complex interconnections, the intricate interrelations, the layering of experiences, events, histories, intentions and biographies that work together to produce emergent effects across a range of embedded and mutually implicated settings, networks and fields (Ovens et al., 2016). In one of the few examples, Ovens (2017) studied the dispositions of two PETE students to show how, as principled persons, they negotiate the emancipatory politics and plurality of positions within which their critically oriented teacher education was enacted. In a similar way, Philpot et al. (2020) used the relational concept of habitus to show how critically oriented PETE programmes have the capacity to impact differently on different students. It is necessary to unpack the complexity of emerging from PETE with a professional identity and framing an identity oriented to social justice education is a complex task within a programme. In this sense, Ovens (2017) argues about the complexity of teacher identity as a process underpinned by critical PETE aspects, while it seems that enactment is highly dependent on a supportive policy environment and conducive institutional constraints. While acknowledging the highly variable and situationally dependent nature of critical pedagogies is important, less attention has been paid to the subjectivity and learning of students in such programmes. We address these two complex issues – related to PETE students' subjectivity and learning – in this article.

Methodological design

In order to explore how the graduates from the PETE programme understood the complexities of social justice and equity issues from their experience in the course we used an interpretive research approach (Thomas et al., 2015). The methodological design comprehended or called on primary sources with supplementation from secondary sources. Data were generated through focus group interviews (Barbour, 2009). In order to avoid bias caused through a possible conflict of interest for students currently enrolled in the programme, we invited twelve students (three women and nine men) who were recent graduates. Five (one woman and four men), all of whom were not yet employed as teachers, accepted our invitation. To preserve participant anonymity, we have changed the names and used those suggested by the participants themselves: *Era*, *Raf*, *Rod*, *Ser* and *Tan*. Figure 1 provides a brief description of each participant.

| <i>Era</i> | <i>Raf</i> | <i>Rod</i> | <i>Ser</i> | <i>Tan</i> |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <i>He is an activist in an organisation called popular unity, that fights for social justice; attended the night cohort</i> | <i>He is a former football player and had a scholarship from athletics while attending the night cohort</i> | <i>He had a part-time job in public service and a scholarship from a community project; attended the night cohort</i> | <i>He had a scholarship for research and a supervised academic apprenticeship while attending the daytime cohort</i> | <i>She works as a dance instructor, lives far from the campus at the HDI top-ranked location; attended the daytime cohort</i> |

Figure 1. Graduates from the PETE programme.

Data generation and analysis

Data were generated through three focus group meetings as primary sources, lasting from 37 (minimum) to 65 min (maximum). Two researchers attended each meeting, one to moderate and lead the discussion and the other responsible for observing and recording the discussion in audio and video. Discussion was facilitated by questions and by the use of an image of the cartoon character Mafalda.³ The image is well known for its association with political and social criticism, so it was an image that participants could recognise. Its use served to provoke discussion on the terms ‘social justice’ and ‘equity.’ Regarding the secondary sources, data from the focus groups were supplemented in three ways. Firstly, the transcriptions of all focus groups meetings were then shared and discussed with the five participants individually, with the aim of seeking more insights on the topics raised. This dialogue took the form of a shared narrative (Venâncio et al., 2016) and provided a safe context for the participants to explain emotions, perceptions and questions related to physical education (Venâncio & Betti, 2015). Secondly, key policy documents and curriculum artifacts produced by the programme (UFC, 2013) were analysed. Thirdly, faculty from the programme were also asked to clarify how their teaching and courses addressed social justice and equity. These additional data from the documents and faculty helped to contextualise and extend the comments shared by the participants in the focus group interviews.

The process of data generation allowed us to make initial interpretive inferences about the structuring and participatory dynamics in the PETE programme. We identified emergent themes in participants’ statements, and used the supplementary data to help contextualise, extend and deepen our data set and mitigate researcher bias. We then analysed this data set using a three phase thematic analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). The first phase involved familiarising ourselves with the total data set by reading through it several times and assigning some preliminary codes. We interspersed our reading with discussions about our individual interpretations and coding. The aim was to challenge our own assumptions in respect to understanding the participants’ voices and ways of expressing their perspectives. The second phase involved looking for similarities across individual participants comments. In this process, we identified overarching themes and searched to contextualise this with the supplementary data. The aim in this phase was to provide more robust insights by considering only the themes that could be contextualised by either curriculum artifacts, policy documents or consultation with faculty. Finally, the third phase consisted in a shared critical interpretation and refining of the themes according to their core meanings. We produced several drafts and discussed with peers in order to shape the overarching themes properly. Figure 2 shows the overarching themes, the analytical codes used to generate these themes and the supplementary data used to contextualise those themes.

Insights on becoming a PE teacher oriented to social justice

In presenting the following results we are cautious about suggesting any stable or generalisable findings from the participants’ comments. We agree with Ovens (2016, 2017) that pedagogies in

| <i>Overarching themes</i> | <i>Codes emerged from interviews</i> | <i>Correspondence to the logs</i> |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Social justice as an aspect of PE pedagogy</i> | <i>difference, prejudice, reflection, complexity, social problems</i> | <i>curriculum artifacts, faculty, policy documents</i> |
| <i>Epistemological confrontations</i> | <i>solidarity, agency, sexist culture, social inequalities</i> | <i>curriculum artifacts, faculty</i> |
| <i>The importance of pedagogy</i> | <i>inclusion, disabled students, public school, equity</i> | <i>curriculum artifacts, faculty, policy documents</i> |
| <i>Living the ethics and politics of the PETE programme</i> | <i>discipline of ethics, social justice, experience, legitimisation, voting, democratic resource</i> | <i>curriculum artifacts, faculty, policy documents</i> |

Figure 2. Insights on becoming a PE teacher oriented to social justice.

PETE are complex phenomena. Rather, we suggest that the participants' comments emerge as a performance of a professional self or teaching identity that is entangled within the networks of social relations and material settings that constitute their personal and university worlds. What is foregrounded in their comments is the idea that becoming a teacher is not a linear or gradual process, but one filled with critical moments where individuals are provoked to reorganise, adapt, and enhance their systems of thinking. We begin by showing how the students discussed notions of social justice as an aspect of teaching physical education. We then consider how the PETE programme has allowed the students to engage with a wide range of content that is consistent with epistemological, ethical, political, aesthetic, pedagogical and theoretical-methodological principles.

The findings correspond to the following overarching themes: Social justice as an aspect of physical education pedagogy, Epistemological confrontations, The importance of pedagogy, Living the ethics and politics of the PETE programme. There is an alignment between the findings and the two research questions (What influence has PETE had on the students' understanding of social justice and equity? How did the students' own lived experiences of inequity frame their perspectives of the complexity of social justice?) that allows us to also explore students' perspectives on the pedagogical work that matters in terms of social justice education. Regarding the first question, under the first theme, we describe how students understand social justice and the influences on this understanding, including PETE. In the second theme, we discuss how PETE clashes with students' life histories. Regarding the second question, in the last three themes, we describe students' perspectives on key elements of the programme (second theme), pedagogies employed in the PETE programme (third theme), and ethical dimension of pedagogical decision-making (fourth theme).

Social justice as an aspect of physical education pedagogy

Each participant expressed a strong affinity for and orientation towards social justice as an integral aspect of school physical education. This was evident in both the language used and focus of their comments. The participants acknowledged that they brought with them a range of experiences, beliefs and principled positions that were then shaped, enhanced and challenged through their PETE programme. As *Raf* commented, 'I came from sports, I came to university and today I have a totally different view'. Similarly, *Tan* commented, 'I will not leave as the same *Tan*, I can already target other experiences, and these will add to my life, learning from each other [...] with each experience, to every experience'. Another example from *Era* clarifies his beliefs on the nature of physical education.

I understand physical education as an educational space, which can work on the aspect of equality and the aspect of equity. From the recognition of difference, creating conditions for people to have access, [...] creating space for everyone to participate in the best possible way, without prejudice on the grounds of race, income or

any issue of disability. [...] Physical education, in this sense, has a role to play through education, so that we can have a society with more egalitarian conditions. (Era)

Era's comment captures the sense of how the others also viewed physical education; that it has a core role to play in the broader mission of education to create a socially just and egalitarian society. In his comment he acknowledges the pedagogical importance of recognising and responding to difference so that all students have the opportunity to learn in an equitable way. He acknowledged ethnicity as a point of difference, which is important because it is one of the great taboos of Brazilian society and issues of racism are rarely discussed. Each of the participants acknowledged the importance of living with difference, in the sense of knowing that we are all equal, as human beings, but different from each other, because we are unique beings. In the case of physical education, there is an emphasis on culture, body and movement, but it is necessary to broaden the discussion to issues of social justice in financial, ethnic and gender conditions.

Era also acknowledged how his experience both prior to and outside of the course mediated his learning inside the course. As he said, 'I am speaking of it because, in a way, I already have certain knowledge. My experiences outside of the course, from other experiences that I had. I then bring that reflection into the physical education course'. This notion that events, experiences and beliefs were interdependent with, and impact on, their professional learning was evident in many of the comments shared by the participants. For them, their world views and their practices as teachers required navigating a complex mix of philosophical, aesthetic, administrative, economic, sociological, political, historical, geographical, physical, natural and virtual issues. *Ser* demonstrates this in his insight into how his world view is influenced by a complex social network of connections. As he states,

I believe, using another example from the human sciences, that this phrase – 'did you ever think that if it were not for everyone, you would not know anything?' – that is, if it were not for everyone, it would be like living in a cave. [...] My vision of the world, the general world, the complex organism in which we live, is not to be based only on what I know. So, I do not think there would be 'I discovered, I guided my life' assumptions. There are several factors that have influence on this. (Ser)

The capacity of the programme to be transformative for the students is expressed both overtly and also implied in some comments. For example, as *Raf* shared the following experience,

It was an event there in São Paulo, at [public university from that State], I saw a presentation that provoked me. [...] The professor was talking about the scientific discipline, which was directed to the Lattes [Brazilian official academic platform] curriculum: 'I can do a gigantic study, with a large sample on nourishing or learning deficits related to the nourishment of the children from northeastern Brazil'. But his obligation should be to research ways to solve the problem. (Raf)

Raf's comment demonstrates that he is able to critique and oppose an idea based on a different educational vision. It implies a positioning that enables him to examine what educational, moral, and political commitments should guide teachers' work, as well as encourage them and engender their critical citizenship, reflective thinking, social consciousness, and disposition for social-justice education (Ovens, 2017).

Overall, such comments provide support for the notion that the PETE programme provoked these students to reorganise, adapt, and enhance their thinking about physical education. We now focus on how these comments reflect the programme's ability to provide spaces and practices and enabled students to engage with the epistemological, ethical, political, aesthetic, pedagogical and theoretical-methodological principles involved in social justice education.

Epistemological confrontations

The participants talked about key elements in the programme that challenged their thinking, such as exposure to different knowledge and concepts that enabled a language for surfacing and discussing the mechanisms of oppression and discrimination, as well as having opportunities in courses to dialogue and discuss such issues. In the group interviews, the participants shared their experiences of

living each day, of being positioned in difference spaces, of engaging with difference knowledges, of navigating the different expectations, of being moved by different events and actions. There was a clear emphasis on the epistemological dimension of such experience, as well as on the complexity and interaction with knowledge that emerges from everyday life, which is understood as an ontological instance continually reconstructed through multiple relations with socio-cultural phenomena. An example of this can be seen in the following comments. Here, *Ser* uses an idea learnt in his Sociology of Education class to discuss the nature of the individual in society. As he states,

The concept of organic solidarity in society, where each one plays a different role [...] in interdependency. So, I see that each one has her/his share of different knowledge to add within society [...] that constitutes the environment in which people also live. It is no use for me to think that because I have experience in a particular subject, this experience must be taken as truth. Perhaps my reality is different from Tan's reality, your reality, and the reality of the teacher. I think that everyone should be open to receiving stimuli from different experiences, so that there is agency within society. (*Ser*)

The importance of being able to draw on the ideas and concepts learnt in his programme to help challenge and reflect on his lived experiences is covered in a second comment where he says,

I grew up in a very sexist culture. So, every day, today's *Ser* fights against his historical charge. He fights against the principles he learned that were right, to devalue, to find, to judge. [...] So, I'll see someone else's opinion, seek knowledge from another source. From there we begin (re)constructing. (*Ser*)

In a similar way, *Era* is able to synthesise a variety of concepts to discuss the main obstacles to social-justice education, connecting his perspective to the rise of neoliberalism (Kirk, 2020) in many countries. As he states,

I think society itself [...] is not educated to understand what social justice is. Anyway, I think that the legal aspect and the educational aspect, as well as the economic aspect, in the sense of economic groups that limit the access of people to services, I think it is a certain concentration of income, which will generate inequality, will generate this lack of equity. So, I think these would be the main ones: the economic aspect, in the sense of a large concentration of income and social inequalities, the aspect of education and the legal aspect. (*Era*)

A key point here, and reinforced by the other participants, is that knowledge and the opportunity for dialogue are essential for transformation. In this sense, the participants point to the need for theoretical deepening through reading and research, confronting various authors and theories to overcome their own assumptions of common sense built on lived (and living) experience. For these students, learning is a process of being able to engage with knowledge in a way that it enables the individual to question their own beliefs, biases, and new knowledge in order to broaden their perspective.

The importance of pedagogy

The comments suggest that some of the pedagogies employed in the PETE programme enabled a (self)critical openness to new ideas and challenging their own visions of common sense. From the discussions with the participants, it was evident that there were different dimensions to this. For example, one important aspect was having an orientation to social justice embedded across multiple courses in the programme. In this way, the students were constantly challenged to reflect on their professional decision-making as teachers in relation to key social justice issues. *Ser* demonstrates this in her comment about her course on athletics,

The professor [...] asked us to do a high jump activity and how this activity could reach all the class members without the student with disability being harmed. She showed the example of adapting the bar diagonally, where the most capable student to perform the activity jumped where the bar was higher and the student with disability jumped where he felt comfortable and safe to perform the activity. (*Ser*)

Another aspect was the way some courses used embodied experiences to stimulate engagement with key issues. For example, in one course students were blindfolded and guided through an

environment of artwork installations designed to provoke different reactions for the students (see Zylberberg et al., 2014). *Tan* highlighted this as a meaningful experience for her. As she explained,

To experience [...] blindfolded, entering the room to feel the sensation or listen to something along the whole class and then tell the experience. [...] It is to use the hands, to touch, to perceive and talk a little of the experience that happened, what it felt like, and to know the difference. (Tan)

Embodied experience also extended to the experience of practicum. In school settings, the participants were directly situated in contexts where social justice issues were entwined with the process of teaching and needed to be confronted. For example, *Ser* shared his experience,

In the practicum, a third-grade student had cerebral palsy, then became paraplegic. Every week it was a challenge [...] to practice inclusion in class in order to practice the principle of equity. So, he was always out there looking, and every time [...] we could do an activity in which he participated. (Ser)

Similarly, *Tan* shared her story of being on practicum,

I had students who were autistic. One mother tells that her daughter is autistic; but there is another mother who doesn't accept her daughter's autism. I have already lived and studied a little about autism, in the discipline. And it is different knowing how to deal with the mother who doesn't want to accept that her daughter is autistic, and the whole process to be evolving the child. [...] It is difficult, but it is pleasant to be together there, learning as well. (Tan)

The participants also reported other experiences they had during their programme that highlighted issues of equity. While the lack of equipment and facilities, both within the university and schools, may inadvertently teach adaptive skills and creativity, there was a feeling that this should not be justification for the precariousness of public education infrastructure. However, what these experiences collectively demonstrate is that these complex and multi-faceted pedagogical assemblages all function in the making of curriculum, of shaping learning and of producing subjectivities for thinking about social justice for these participants. And, as these assemblages are always changing in the life and experience of the teachers, their teaching is continuously changing and shifting as a result of each teacher's relationship and experiences.

Living the ethics and politics of the PETE programme

Public education policies to serve Brazilian 'poorly assisted' regions (in the North and Northeast) advocate for the expansion of public higher education in the last decade. This perspective is in line with the literacy plans devised for Brazil suggested by northeastern intellectuals such as Paulo Freire (1987, 1997, 2000). However, enacting such policies have been the subject of much political discussion and opposition, with many of the proponents of such policies being persecuted during the military dictatorship (early 1960s until mid-1980s), and by the current right-wing government voted in at the last election (Knijnik & Luguetti, 2020). Such political polarisation and turmoil highlighted for the participants the impact education has on the life chances of people. For *Ser*, there is an ethical dimension in the pedagogical decision-making process that is linked to social justice.

We discussed in the discipline of Ethics: there are things I want, but I cannot do; things that I can do, but I should not; things that I should do, but I do not want to do. When we talk about social justice, [...] there are things that we do in our lives that [...] are a necessary experience to shape my personality, my work behaviour. (Ser)

As we contemplate *Ser's* comment we begin to understand how experiences shape an individual's ethics, which in turn influences how reflective activity emerges, varies and is experienced by the PETE students. As highlighted by Ovens and Tinning (2009), transformative learning experiences are greatly influenced by the different discourse communities PETE students become situated in as part of the teacher education programme. This can be seen to a degree *Rod's* comment as he recalls an elective course that was designed with a strong focus on social justice and equity. On one occasion, there was problematisation of capoeira as fighting and its ethics development against slavery. However, few students, even African-descendants, touched directly on the ethnic-racial question.

There are several fights besides capoeira and then the teacher wanted to do an activity that would take the instrument from the fight in an adapted way, since in school you will hardly have fencing equipment, which is also a fight. [...] You must be active so that this social justice, this equity is effectively embraced, learned by society, by the students, by those who are graduating from university. [...] If I want social justice to be implemented, if I want equity to be understood by all, I have to position myself, [...] make a difference in one's life and mine as well. (Rod)

Negative experiences in the course also provided learning opportunities around issues of politics, power, fairness, and equity. These were not planned but served to highlight for students how such issues arose in everyday situations. An example of this is provided by *Era* who described a situation that occurred in one course when a workers' strike in the public transportation system prevented several students from attending an assessment activity. In deciding how best to deal with the issue, the professor of the course decided to take a class vote in the belief that such a democratic process could decide on whether the absent students should be penalised or not. For *Era*, such actions can appear democratic, but also can disguise inequalities and curtail representative voices. The participant *Era* explains how it generated conflict in the classroom environment as he comments,

It was a legitimisation using a seemingly democratic resource. [...] She will use a methodological device that will be a classroom vote. So, she is going to be kind of justifying herself, she is using a way to legitimise what she thinks should happen, understand? I can even make an analogy with the [former president] Dilma's impeachment: there was no crime, but [...] there is a way in the law to impeach her, so I will use that excuse to get my political end. [...] Because the professor could be questioned, she said, 'The best way to solve this is voting, let's vote.' From the moment the majority won, it is settled, it is legitimate, it was not an authoritative decision by the professor. Our class should have about 26 enrolled, that day we had about 10 in the room. [...] From what I had already heard from her [the professor's] positions, I expected a different behaviour, I was a little disappointed by her attitude. Those who did not come to class were also outraged, it generated friction later in the classroom. (Era)

The theme of living the ethics and politics of the PETE programme suggests that educating students for social justice extends beyond the content of what is taught and captures something of how student's daily experiences of issues relevant to social justice are experienced, addressed and learnt.

Discussion

Ovens et al. (2016) argue that becoming a teacher is a process of students having to navigate the multiple locations and spaces that constitute the landscape of teacher education. They suggest this landscape is never neutral, but a product of the socio-material networks of power relations that serve to structure the practices taking place. Applied to this study, we suggest that PETE contexts can be viewed as not just the institutional and programmatic arrangements that enable and constrain PETE students learning activity, but more as a form of learning architecture that discursively preconfigures the forms of relationships, identities, knowledge, dispositions and practices that individuals must navigate as they become teachers. In accepting the opportunity offered by Reuni, the revised PETE programme sought to orient the programme with a strong commitment to social justice and equity, revising not just content, but also the contexts for learning and the profile of students enrolled. In this way, they significantly reshaped the landscape PETE students would navigate in the process of becoming teachers.

This revised programme, while radical in one sense, was in line with the broader goals and aspirations for education in Brazil. For example, the current guidelines for teacher education (Brasil, 2019) mention agency and encouragement, personally and collectively, with autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, resilience, openness to different opinions and pedagogical concepts, making decisions based on ethical, democratic, inclusive, sustainable and solidary principles, so that the learning environment can reflect those values. Such principles are related to positioning teachers as intellectual agents who elaborate knowledge and culture and, as such, the need for their permanent access to scientific knowledge, qualified information and cultural experiences (Sanchez Neto et al., 2015).

Navigating the learning architecture of teacher education is an evolutionary, iterative process emerging from the way individuals become entangled within the networks of social relations and material

settings that constitute their existential worlds (Ovens et al., 2016). Thinking of learning in this way opens up the idea that becoming a teacher is not a linear or gradual process of knowledge acquisition, but one filled with critical moments where individuals are provoked to reorganise, adapt, and enhance their systems of thinking (Chauí, 2000; Madden, 2015; Ovens et al., 2016). It also reinforces Ribeiro's (2003) contention that the university should be a place where students will be challenged to develop a critical base of professional knowledge while also learning the value of being bold and take risks.

In respect to this study, the participants identify multiple spaces and interactions linked to their learning. Overall, they valued how their experiences within the programme addressed issues related to difference, recognising prejudice, encouraging reflection on the complexity of social problems, as well as solidarity-based agency to resist the sexist culture, and to overcome social inequalities. Their comments reveal there is an interdependence between their studies of social justice mechanisms and issues with the experience gained from participating in community projects and practica, and the encouragement to reflect and (self)critique from the discipline of ethics. At the same time, their comments reveal they also learn from the unplanned and serendipitous moments occur. They shared how they felt when professors prevented dissonant voices to be heard or misused democratic processes to serve their own end. Each participant expressed a strong affinity for and orientation towards social justice as an integral aspect of school physical education. Such an affinity is important in respect to being able to being teachers who can develop school curricula based on equity and equality as described in the Brazilian teacher education guidelines (Brasil, 2019).

Certainly, the findings of this study would support the idea that the revised programme created moments where different students produced different knowledge in respect of the nature and role of physical education. In other words, expanding the opportunity for different students to study enabled different prior knowledge and experiences to be shared, and different course knowledge and different learning experiences enabled different insights and appreciation of education to surface. From the perspective of the former students who participated in this research, such moments enable one to reflect one's own conditions of origin and identify the extent to which being in university, in a PETE programme, consolidates a critical and conscientious professional-academic career. The notion of social justice and equity orientation give us clues to ponder on the transformation of the living conditions of all people, not just a portion of the population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that this study indicates that the decision to orient the PETE programme to issues of social justice and equity provided a valuable means for students to connect with how these issues relate to impacting on the lives and education of the students they will teach in schools. The curricular restructuring enabled students to engage with a broad range of content underpinned by ethical, political, aesthetic, epistemological, pedagogical and theoretical-methodological principles. We consider that such an emphasis in PETE meets the regional and local needs of communities and enables future physical education teachers to engage with students in more meaningful, helpful and informed ways. At the same time, we acknowledge that our study has been limited to the views of new graduates from the PETE programme. In this sense, while our results are encouraging, further longitudinal studies could deepen our understanding of the shifts in students' learning and their capacity to enact a critical practice once teaching in a school. We suggest that future research explore the critical PETE possibilities in other regions that – similarly to the Brazilian northeastern context – challenge huge gaps and constraints to promote equity and foster social justice.

Notes

1. The human development index was created by the United Nations Organisation to emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country. Its use can stimulate debate about government policy priorities as it is a summary measure of average achievement in key

dimensions of human development. However, the index likely fails to take into account factors such as inequality, poverty, and gender disparity.

2. According to the International Labour Organisation (a specialised agency of the United Nations), identifying a minimum wage helps protect workers against unduly low pay. Minimum wages can also be one element of a policy to overcome poverty and reduce inequality. In Brazil, it is adjusted annually by the federal government and its value is currently equivalent to \$186.83 (dollars) or €168.15 (euros) per month. But many Brazilians earn even less than half of such amount.
3. Character created by the Argentinean cartoonist Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado, 1932–2020), well known in South America for political and social criticism.

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