“The Education System is Broken:” The Influence of a Sociocultural Foundations Class on the Perspectives and Practices of Physical Education Preservice Teachers
Abstract
The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of one sociocultural foundations class taught by Florence, a teacher educator, on the perspectives and practices of two physical education (PE) pre-service teachers (PTs), Michael and Bob. Within a narrative inquiry approach, data sources were non-participant observation, intraviews, conversations, exit slips, digital interactions, responses to three fictional PE teaching scenarios, a fictional curriculum outline, three stimulated recall interviews, documents, and various forms of visual data. Theoretical thematic analysis was employed to work with and make sense of the data. Findings indicated both PTs faced frustration and discomfort during class. Nevertheless, the class resonated and raised the PTs’ critical awareness of sociocultural issues related to PE. Key reasons for the apparent success of the class were the deinstitutionalizing pedagogical methods employed by Florence and Florence's "problem-posing" education which prompted the PTs to question their perspectives and assumptions about society and culture.

Keywords: transformative pedagogy, critical consciousness, physical education, physical education teacher education
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A number of sport pedagogists have argued that neoliberalism can have a detrimental influence on schooling in general and physical education (PE) in particular (Azzarito, Macdonald, Dagkas, & Fisette, 2017; Dowling, Garrett, Lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015; Hill et al., 2018). Specifically, these and other authors argued that this ideology’s extreme focus on economic productivity has led to standardized PE curricula that are decontextualized, elitist, overly competitive, and hierarchical. As a result, PE has helped to perpetuate inequalities in society at a time when school enrollments are becoming more diverse (Harrison & Clark, 2016; Fernández-Balboa, 1993; Simon & Azzarito, 2019; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). To counter this state of affairs, scholars have argued for a social justice agenda in which teachers of all subjects, including PE, take a critical approach with the objectives of improving society by championing human rights, celebrating diversity, and protecting the environment (Azzarito et al., 2017; Azzarito, Simon, & Marttinen, 2016; Harrison & Clark, 2016; Ovens et al., 2018).

To prepare pre-service teachers (PTs) to take a critical approach, scholars have also argued that teacher educators employ transformative pedagogy (Tinning, 2017; Ukpokodu, 2009; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). Central to this form of teacher education, is the requirement of PTs to examine their own beliefs about power, equity, oppression, democracy, and sociocultural issues (Hickey, 2001; Hill et al., 2018), and to emphasize the role that teachers can play in creating social change (Fernández-Balboa, 1993). Methods employed by transformative teacher educators to realize these goals include modeling, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflective journaling, and project-based learning (Ukpokodu, 2007). In addition, sport pedagogists have suggested that the transformative pedagogies employed by physical education teacher education
(PETE) faculty should include storytelling; peer teaching; critically-focused field experiences; and the examination of PTs’ biographies, critically oriented case studies, film, and readings (Ovens, 2017; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018).

The limited amount of research conducted to date indicated that PETE faculty’s efforts to employ transformative pedagogy have largely been ineffective in terms of convincing PTs to take a critical approach beyond their PETE (e.g., Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Gerdin, Philpot, & Smith, 2018; Hickey, 2001; Philpot, 2015; Philpot & Smith, 2018). In the United States, this may be because PETE faculty lack the training and content knowledge to implement such programs (Ruiz & Fernández-Balboa, 2005; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018) or have adopted neoliberal ideologies (Hill et al., 2018). In addition, some critically oriented American PETE faculty may have been ineffective because they worked in isolation rather than as part of a team with the same focus (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015), or because their perspectives were countered and contradicted by more conservative colleagues (Cliff, 2012; Ukpokodu; 2007) and national teacher education policies (Ovens et al., 2018). Moreover, the messages provided by some critically oriented PETE faculty may have been filtered out by PTs who have been socialized into conservative and competing perspectives prior to beginning PETE that are extremely hard to change (Curtner-Smith, 2017).

Another arena in which American PE PTs may be exposed to transformative pedagogy, and through which they may gain a critical perspective, are classes taught within colleges of education focused on power, equity, oppression, democracy, and sociocultural issues (Ukpokodu; 2007; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). These sociocultural classes are taken by PTs learning to teach all subjects and are usually focused on intellectual development with the goal that they influence practice Cochran-Smith (2004). The small amount of scholarship conducted
on the impact of such classes on PE PTs also suggests that they have been largely ineffective (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015). Nevertheless, how these classes are tailored to PE and how they are read by PE PTs is, as yet, unknown. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to determine the influence of one sociocultural foundation's class on PE PTs’ perspectives and practices. The specific research questions we sought to answer were: (a) What were the PTs’ perspectives and practices at entry into and exit from the class; (b) What pedagogies did the teacher educator employ in an attempt to transform the PTs’ perspectives and practices; and (c) What factors, if any, influenced the PTs’ perspectives and practices during the sociocultural foundations class?

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural foundations classes are encompassed within social justice education; therefore, data collection and analysis within this study was informed by theories of oppression and a commitment to social change for transformation (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Socially critical pedagogues Freire (1970, 2007, 2013) and hooks (1994) were drawn upon to illustrate how a teacher educator of a sociocultural foundations course attempted to transform PTs’ perspectives and practices. Specifically, theoretical constructs including “critical consciousness,” “banking education,” and "problem-posing education" were drawn upon.

The term critical consciousness or conscientização has been used to recognize individuals becoming aware of the reality of social contexts (Freire, 1970, 2013). Social settings include PTs being informed of social structures in society that perpetuate forms of domination (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) and structures of oppression (e.g., discriminatory laws, unequal education, societal views). Critically conscious PTs are those who begin to question long-held perspectives, values, and beliefs related to society and are empowered to change their practices based on that awareness (Freire, 1970, 2013). The aim of critical consciousness is freedom. Freedom is seen as
an ethical concept whereby individuals have respect and responsibility for one another (hooks, 1994). This caring attitude opposes a standardized education, which reinforces individualism and competition against peers.

Teacher educators engaged in raising critical consciousness reject neoliberal teaching methods such as traditional direct teaching styles (hooks, 1994) that perpetuate standardization, competition, indoctrination, and normalized practices, e.g., high stakes testing and teacher as authoritarian. Direct teaching includes the “banking method” (Freire, 1970, 2007), a pedagogical style that assumes the teacher has the knowledge, which should be deposited into passive consumers (i.e., PTs) and repeated back.

The ongoing process of raising critical consciousness can be frightening or painful for individuals (hooks, 1994). Griffin and Ouellett (2007) have explained four common themes associated with the consciousness journey. First, they noted that PTs may experience dissonance when they are disturbed by the perspectives presented by critically oriented faculty. As a result, particularly unsettled PTs may attempt to dominate discussions and perceive both the class and teacher educator to be invalid. Second, they suggested that some PTs from privileged groups may be angered because they believe that their rights are available to all individuals. Third, these authors suggested that some PTs are immobilized by critical content, feel powerless to make changes or guilty for belonging to a privileged group, and so withdraw from class participation. Finally, Griffin and Ouellett explain that some PTs are converted by transformative faculty and the critical perspective they espouse. But, this may lead to them challenging others without reflecting on the influence of their own identities.

Teacher educators are encouraged to adopt a "problem-posing" education with an emphasis on theoretical dialogue to help PTs raise their critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).
Theoretical dialogue includes conversation-based lessons surrounding scholarship (e.g., journal articles, books, legal documents, etc.) Teacher educators present materials (e.g., articles) to conscious, active PTs for their consideration and interpretation. Educators then facilitate knowledge sharing sessions, where both teacher and PT reflect on the knowledge exchanged (Freire, 2007). Organizationally, this means that classrooms disrupt the norm of standardized education and allow for deinstitutionalizing strategies such as spontaneity, negotiation, change, intervention, and question what it means to be ongoing critical citizens (hooks, 1994).

**Method**

**Design**

Considering stories have transformative potential, during this study we took a narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin, 2007, 2016; Dowling et al. 2015; Pinnegar, & Daynes, 2007). Thus, the methods by which we collected data focused on the study of experiences, evolved with the research participants, and were temporal. As narrative inquiry is a democratic and inclusive form of knowledge production (Dowling et al. 2015) it speaks to the social justice agenda (Azzarito et al., 2017) and, as authors, we recognized the inherent relational process that was involved and our position as critically oriented scholars. Consequently, we realized that the stories retold by the participants in our study were not objective static representations of reality, but should be viewed as stories retold from a mutual and reciprocated relationship of knowledge sharing. While we recognized the power involved in the research process and our position as academics, we attempted to create an egalitarian relationship. Consequently, data were collected through multiple methods that were convenient for the participants and gave them voice.

**Participants**
Two PE PTs registered for the sociocultural foundations course during the spring of 2018 when the study took place. Subsequently, they were the main participants of the study. Michael, the first PT, a 28-year-old black American, came from a military family and served in the United States Army as a medic for four years. Before enrolling in the PETE program to become a certified teacher, he completed a non-teaching degree in kinesiology at another institution. At the time the study was conducted, Michael was at the beginning of his PETE and was taking his first methods course. Bob, the second PT, a 35-year-old white American and former Navy engineer, was enrolled in the same program. In contrast to Michael, Bob was near to finishing his degree and had completed all three of his methods courses.

Another participant in the study was the teacher educator of the sociocultural foundations class. At the time the study took place, Florence, a 40-year old female white American, was in her final semester as a doctoral candidate in Instructional Leadership with an emphasis on sociocultural studies. Florence was an elementary school teacher before enrolling in graduate school. Before teaching the class that was the focus of this study, Florence had taught sociocultural foundations to other groups of PTs on ten previous occasions. The first author observed Florence the semester preceding the study and identified as her as a transformative educator. Prior to data collection, Florence and the two PTs signed forms indicating that they consented to take part in the study and selected fictitious names to protect their anonymity.

The PETE Program

The study was carried out at a large public research university situated in the southeastern United States. The university had a two-year undergraduate PETE program in which Michael and Bob were enrolled and that was layered on top of the university’s two-year core curriculum. The core of the PETE program was a sequence of three methods courses and early field
experiences and the culminating student teaching internship. In addition, the program included a series of content courses (i.e., track and field and net/wall games; swimming; gymnastics and dance; invasion, striking and fielding, and target games; health-related fitness; and adapted PE) all coupled with early field experiences. PTs also took courses in the kinesiological subdisciplines (i.e., introduction to kinesiology, biomechanics, motor development, exercise physiology, measurement and evaluation, sport administration, and ecological aspects of health) and educational foundations (sociocultural foundations, special education, education psychology, and computer applications). The primary focus of the PETE coursework was behavioral and technical in nature with an emphasis on learning how to employ effective instructional (Silverman, 1991) and managerial (Doyle, 1986) behaviors, use Mosston and Ashworth’s (2008) spectrum of teaching styles, and deliver PE through a variety of curriculum models (i.e., the skill themes approach, the traditional multi-activity model, sport education, teaching games for understanding, health-related fitness, and teaching personal and social responsibility) (Metzler, 2017). The PETE faculty’s main goal was to break the cycle of non-teaching PE teachers that existed in their state.

The Sociocultural Foundations Class

The sociocultural foundations class met two days a week for 15 weeks on the university campus. Each class meeting was 75 minutes in duration. The course consisted of 23 female PTs as well as Michael and Bob. These 23 PTs were studying for degrees that enabled them to teach a variety of subjects at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Two of these PTs identified as black American and 21 as white American. As advertised in the syllabus, the primary purpose of the class was to “explore sociocultural contexts of schooling, examine effects of factors such as race, class, gender, ability, and ethnicity on instruction and learning,
develop/exercise personal voice and analyze historical and contemporary social, historical, political, philosophical issues in education.” Content covered in the class included how racism, classism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and linguicism are perpetuated through schooling; the competing aims of education such as sociocultural justice, equal educational opportunity, deculturalization, and consumerism; and analyzing the historical and current struggles in the United States concerning educational policy and teaching practices.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected by employing ten qualitative techniques that were mutually agreed on with the participants. *Non-participant observation* involved the first author observing all 30 sessions of the sociocultural foundations class and taking copious field notes on a laptop computer describing their content, the pedagogies used by Florence, and the reactions of Michael and Bob to these pedagogies. Both PTs completed two open-ended *intraviews* (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012). Intraviews were walking style interviews that allowed participants to relax in alternate habitual ways comfortable to them. One of these intraviews took place prior to the class commencing, and one after the class was completed. During these intraviews, both PTs were asked the same overarching questions, but multiple follow-up questions and stories were exchanged. The first PT intraview focused on gathering relevant background biographical data about Michael and Bob and data which described their espoused perspectives and practices regarding PE teaching and the purposes of schooling in society. During the second intraview with the PTs, the focus was on establishing the extent to which the sociocultural foundations class had influenced Michael and Bob’s perspectives and practices and the factors within the class that led to this influence.
Florence was also intrviewed prior to the beginning and after the completion of the course. Again, an open-ended format was employed. The focus of the first intrview with Florence was on the pedagogies, strategies, and methods she intended to use during the class. Additionally, Florence was asked about her prior experiences of teaching sociocultural foundations to PTs in general, PE PTs in particular, and her views regarding the purposes of education. The second intrview with Florence focused on her perceptions regarding the influence her class had on Michael and Bob, and the pedagogies she believed were most and least effective. All six intrviews lasted between 37 and 73 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. They took place in locations convenient to the participants, for example, walking along a river, their houses, and the library.

Whenever the opportunity arose before, during, and after class meetings informal conversations occurred with Michael, Bob, and Florence. The focus of the conversations was on the pedagogies that Florence employed and the influence it had on the two PTs’ perspectives and practices. The content of the conversations was recorded in note form as soon as they had been completed. In congruence with Bob’s suggestion following the fourth class meeting, after subsequent class sessions both PTs supplied the first author with written exit slips. Other PTs in the class did not complete exit slips. Within the exit slips Michael and Bob described (a) the content covered in the preceding class session, (b) the pedagogies by which this content was delivered, (c) the influence of the content and pedagogies on their perspectives and practices, if any, and (d) any additional reactions to the class session. In total, due to class absences, 43 exit slips were added to the data set.

Toward the end of the class during the final intrview, Michael and Bob were asked how they would respond to three short fictional PE teaching scenarios if they were the teacher, each
of which was read to them. Scenario 1 focused on racism, Scenario 2 focused on sexuality, and Scenario 3 focused on ableism. Michael and Bob were also asked to write a fictional one-page curriculum outline in which they described their ideal school PE program for the ages they would like to teach concerning goals, content, curriculum models, pedagogies employed, and evaluation. They were asked to explain and expand on their curriculum outline during their final intraview.

Additionally, Michael’s methods course included an early field experience in a local middle school. Michael taught 8 to 10 students each lesson. The school was racially and culturally diverse, and approximately 32% of the students qualified for free school lunch. Non-participant observations in this context involved the first author observing and filming Michael in lessons 10 to 14 of a 15-lesson sport education unit. After filming, the first author took copious field notes on a laptop computer describing Michael’s content and pedagogies. Michael then took part in three stimulated recall interviews. These interviews involved Michael watching filmed episodes of his teaching from the early field experience which the first author deemed to be examples of inequitable teaching. Michael was asked to reflect on these episodes and explain his thoughts when teaching. Stimulated recall interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview 1 lasted 40 minutes, interview 2 lasted 57 minutes, and interview 3 lasted 71 minutes.

Throughout the study, relevant digital interactions between the first author and the participants were also recorded and added to the data set. These consisted of text messages and emails. Two final sources of data were 66 documents and visual data created for and within the class by Florence and the two PTs. The former included the PTs’ written class assignments (e.g., teaching philosophy statement, index cards required from weekly readings as PTs answered
questions on readings), the course syllabus, and Florence’s evaluation rubrics, class handouts, class website, curriculum vitae, and any articles she required the PTs to read. The latter consisted of artwork, picture drawing, visual metaphors, and digital media.

**Data Analysis**

Theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to work with and make sense of the data. This five-stage process involved the first author (a) familiarizing herself with the data and identifying data which pertained to the three research questions we were attempting to answer, (b) assigning initial codes to data chunks, (c) searching for themes related to the constructs from the theoretical framework, (d) reviewing and revising themes, and (e) defining and naming themes. Data were coded and sorted into themes using the QSR NVivo 11 software. Throughout the data reduction process, the second author acted as a “critical friend” (Costa & Kallick, 1993) which involved discussing and critiquing developing categories and themes with the first author. During the final phase of the analysis, data snippets which illustrated key themes were identified and selected for use in the manuscript.

Trustworthiness of the analysis was ensured by employing several strategies as recommended by Tracey (2010). First, an audit trail was created during data collection. This involved noting which data were collected using each method at specific points in time. Second, by collecting data from multiple avenues we were able to provide a thorough understanding of our findings. Lastly, member reflections were used throughout the data collection process during which Florence and the PTs were asked to affirm, modify, or disregard data collected on earlier occasions.

**Findings and Discussion**
Unlike previous PETE research (Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Gerdin et al., 2018; Hickey, 2001; Philpot, 2015; Philpot & Smith, 2018), data gathered during this study indicated that PTs’ perspectives and practices were influenced by Florence's teaching within the sociocultural foundations class. These findings were described in Florence’s themes: *deinstitutionalization* and *dialogue*. Bob’s themes were *social justice illiteracy, dissonance, anger*, and *immobilization*, and Michael’s themes were *consciously aware, shock, immobilization, practice to action struggle, and critical transformation*.

**Pedagogies Employed by Florence: Deinstitutionalization**

To increase the PTs’ critical consciousness, Florence wanted to make the PTs aware of the reality of their future social context (Freire, 1970, 2013). In this case, it was the oppressive structure of education as an institution:

> It [schooling] is an institution, it exists by virtue of habits, the habits live on through that institution. You can shape it [school] and alter it, and that's what I tell my students. You can shape it and alter it to what you are doing. You do not have to turn it into this mechanized dehumanizing space. You can infect your immediate surrounding, and with the help of others, you can start to enforce institutional change. (Intraview 1, Florence)

Before the course, Florence stated, “I want them [PTs] to see two things. Life is way more complex than any of us know and have been taught and that human beings just really just wanna be accepted” (Intraview 1, Florence). Florence’s deinstitutionalizing strategy was “to create more humane interactions with people. Then they can open up to a communal experience and social change, but you gotta start there. Everything starts with a relationship" (Intraview 1, Florence).
Florence aimed to build relationships with the PTs by embodying a transformative approach. She was fun, flexible, outgoing, approachable, and a negotiable course instructor. As Bob illustrated,

There were a lot of instances where deadlines or what project would be due first and what or how projects could be done or really left up to us to come up as a collective to what we would prefer, which empowers us a lot to say that we have a more democratic classroom like we are all involved and our voice all gets heard. (Bob, Intraview 2)

Considering Florence felt that respect and close human interactions were essential to relationship building, for each class, she rearranged the room from traditional rows: “I begin by arranging the seats in a U shape to facilitate group dialogue and eye contact” (Before Class Email, Florence). Additionally, during each class, Florence sat with the PTs rather than behind a lectern. Considering students are institutionalized to repeat information back to an educator (i.e., the “banking method”), Florence rejected this traditional mode of teaching. Thus, she provided a space for knowledge exchange between PTs and educator (Freire, 2007).

**Dialogue.** Florence’s “problem-posing” pedagogy was based around the notion that the key to unlocking PT’s critical consciousness was to “incite problems that students would take an interest in at a later date . . . You have to feel like something is wrong. Inquiry comes from an emotional impetus” (Intraview 1, Florence). The problems, or course content, were covered in critically focused theoretical homework readings and digital media pedagogies (e.g., blogs, Vimeo, video documentaries, Ted Talks, YouTube clips, online learning modules). The homework “expose[d] them [PTs] to a multitude of narratives from the perspective of individuals who have experienced the forms of oppression that we are talking about” (Intraview 2, Florence).

For example, an assigned reading on ableism was from an individual that identified as autistic.
As a result, class time was dedicated to student facilitation. Individually or as a pair, PTs facilitated discussions based on the assigned homework and came up with questions for the group to consider. Michael explained, “You do readings, and you come in . . . it’s open discussed [sic] and everybody pretty much talks” (Intraview 2, Michael). This was an attempt by Florence to share control and power of the classroom (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). As she illustrated, “For the most part, we are sharing the space, dialogue.” Michael agreed: “As students, we had a voice; it wasn't like we couldn't talk. We were free and open to talk in very open discussions.” Ensuring respect for each PT, Florence would begin the facilitation by saying, “Shut down your computers and just listen” (Field Notes, Lesson 18). While sitting with the group, Florence asked questions throughout these discussions to probe into students’ thinking such as “What is a democracy? What does democracy mean in terms of power? Who benefits from a democracy?” (Field Notes, Lesson 28).

At times, Florence drew on an array of breakout strategies that allowed PTs the opportunity to reflect critically and increase their knowledge base. These included artwork (e.g., picture drawing, artistic work, see Figure 1), silent gallery walks, found poetry (e.g., searching for meaningful/targeted words), freewriting, journal entries, teacher read-aloud (poems/book extracts), visual metaphors (e.g., light/the moon being reflected as an image to demonstrate how light is interpreted in many different ways, similar to our societal perspectives, see Figure 2), digital media (e.g., image overlay with quotes, see Figure 3), news articles, and pedagogical action orientated handouts (e.g., a checklist when implementing critical thinking techniques in the classroom). These strategies often came up spontaneously and changed the direction of the conversation to allow PTs to think more deeply about the material or emphasize a theoretical position/point. When sharing visual images specifically, Florence would question students saying
“What do you see?” and “What does your partner see?” and allowed students time to reflect through freewriting or discussion before provoking thought or addressing misconceptions of the image. Florence also asked one of her past students to come to the class and share ideas about pedagogical strategies for non-heterosexually conforming students in schools. As a gay-identifying male, he was able to speak from experience.

**Assessment as dialogue.** Aside from active participation and weekly homework tasks such as readings, PTs were required to complete several reflective essays, a biography, a philosophy statement, and a final assignment as part of their grade. Each week after the homework task, PTs were required to answer self-reflective questions on an index card and submit them to Florence. The purpose of the cards was to “try to keep the conversation going between the students and myself” (Intraview 1, Florence). Once collected, Florence would reply to the PTs’ index cards with further questions/considerations to provoke their thinking or clear up any misunderstandings. Consistently, Florence asked the PTs to peer-comment on index cards and essays:

> They have to share it with a peer. Their peers provide feedback for them . . . they are getting a multitude of people offering their input, not just a teacher to question their assumptions, to question their clarity about their beliefs. (Intraview 1, Florence)

Then PTs would respond to comments before submission.

The culminating final project consisted of five options: a thoughtful reflective essay and portfolio, an arts-based research project, a Deweyan inquiry (problem-based), creation of a sociocultural children’s library (narratives from diverse scholars), or a choice personal assessment, where PTs could choose the way they wanted to demonstrate what they had learned. The choice assessment, which rejected traditional forms of assessment, demonstrated to Florence
that some PTs preferred traditional assessments: “There is this period of deinstitutionalization that I think they have to go through, and not everybody embraces it” (Intraview 1, Florence).

**Bob: “Dude you Live the Same Life, you Just put a Different Skin On”**

*Perspectives prior to the class: Social justice illiteracy.* Bob had strongly felt assumptions and beliefs related to oppression, drawing from his own socioeconomic experiences prior to the class beginning: “I was poor . . . poor of mind, poor of money, poor of everything” (Intraview 1, Bob). He found it particularly difficult to answer questions on teaching for a diverse audience: “I don't know. I guess I haven't really thought about it,” stating that “people from the same background have the same perspective and can be educated the same way” (Intraview 1, Bob). When questioning Bob about social justice before the class, he admitted: “I don’t know anything about social justice” (Intraview 1, Bob). When discussing oppressors such as sexism, genderism, ableism, Bob was not able to provide a definition or provide an example of each. On the subject of race, he believed

> It's like dude you live the same life; you just put a different skin on . . . there is really nothing different in you from them [black Americans]. I mean you look at your life, and it is the same; it is a carbon copy; you drive the same car; you live in the same neighborhood. (Intraview 1, Bob)

Based on his personal experiences, Bob did not see a difference between his race privilege and black American minorities. By not recognizing a person’s race, we ignore people’s unique elements. This understanding has been termed “colorblindness.” Colorblindness holds racism in place because we do see the race of others and race often has unconscious meanings for us (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Bob’s prior knowledge suggested he had multiple gaps in his expertise related to sociocultural issues and social justice. Where there are gaps in a person's
understanding of what social justice is, it affects what is required to achieve an equitable society and is considered social justice illiteracy (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Factors influencing Bob: Dissonance and anger. Griffin and Ouellett (2007) outlined when PTs begin to learn about the reality of the social context, they can feel dissonance (e.g., unsettled, class/teacher educator as invalid, dominate class discussion) and anger, as they think their rights are available to others, especially if they are from an advantaged group. Anger was demonstrated through Bob's class experiences. He consistently remarked that he felt:

“frustrated/irritated” (Exit Slip, Lesson 24) and that the class “was making him an angrier person” (Exit Slip, Lesson 26). After questioning Bob why he felt so angry, he confessed, “The class causes me to think in ways I hadn’t before, thus instigates a change in my thoughts on some aspects of whatever topic” (Text Message Following Lesson 24, Bob). Florence justified Bob’s reactions to the class:

For people who have had various forms of privilege, this class can feel really nihilistic because we keep talking about the various forms of power that somebody in Bob’s position has. So, for a person that has almost all of those forms of privilege with the exception of perhaps social class, it can be very hard for the students to not self-blame and start hating on themselves and feel they can’t do anything right. (Intraview 2, Florence)

Bob enjoyed the dialogue aspect of the class: “I really enjoyed the first class. Mostly the informal way it was conducted and the topics of conversation. It definitely kept me interested” (Email Following Lesson 1, Bob). However, Bob tended to voice his opinion in class discussions. Florence recognized this: “Bob definitely did dominate the conversation many days, and there were certain points in time where I would have to nudge him back a bit to make sure
that we heard somebody else” (Intraview 2, Florence). In his own words, Bob suggested he benefitted by this exposure and dialogue. . . . sitting in a room with 30 [25] other different individuals from different backgrounds, there were some things I learned. . . . there were some things I thought or assumed I had a firm grasp on. . . . I had to really sit down and have these really open discussions on my own thoughts. (Intraview 2, Bob)

However, Bob’s lack of diligence in keeping up with readings affected his ability to use theoretical dialogue in class. In his final assignment, he indicated I do not believe I explored or extended the concepts in our readings very well. I come to this conclusion based on the fact I neglected to do my due diligence in keeping up with the readings and accompanying assignments. (Final Assignment, Bob)

Furthermore, Bob had not completed a large number of index cards and submitted his philosophy assignment 10 days late (beyond the class agreed deadline). Florence was aware and supportive of Bob’s needs in the class, allowing him to submit assignments late, and addressed his conflicts as a learning opportunity (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Despite this, on several occasions Bob retracted from the class.

Bob is sitting at the back of the room [not in the U shape], and Florence asks him if he wants to join the circle. He said, “Respectfully, I decline.” He sits at the back, eats a Chick-fil-A sandwich and responds to emails on his laptop. (Field Notes, Lesson 16)

Furthermore, due to illness or family commitments, he arrived late, left the class early, and was absent on five occasions. Bob’s response to the class was not uncommon. Social justice education courses can often counter long-standing assumptions and perspectives toward society and conflict over what individuals have been taught to achieve equality (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Therefore, withdrawing from the class can take various forms.
Perspectives after the class: Immobilization and thirsty for more. Social justice courses overwhelm PTs, and they feel powerlessness, pain, and discomfort (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; hooks, 1994). Even though Bob felt anger and frustration toward the class, his exit slips also suggested that the content set for the class resonated with him, and the reality of the unequal schooling situation in the United States took hold. Specifically, the topic on racism made Bob realize that “the problem still exists and is far more reaching than I previously believed” (Exit Slip, Lesson 17). Later in the course, Bob expressed the content “made me question if I’ll ever be able to be part of a genuine change” (Exit Slip, Lesson 25).

Bob placed a small amount of emphasis on the amount he learned in the class: “There were certainly things I learned. . . . this course has positively changed me as a person, to some extent” (Intraview 2, Bob). Specifically, Bob enjoyed the guest lecture on sexuality; he said, “There is no better way to learn than from those that have truly done or experienced” (Intraview 2, Bob). This lecture encouraged Bob to realize the need to separate “church and state, my personal religious views. . . . to help all children and people regardless of gender, race, sexual identity or affiliation, disability, socioeconomic background, or religious or personal beliefs” (Philosophy Assignment, Bob). Despite this positive influence toward a more inclusive perspective and being able to identify a substantial amount of knowledge related to teaching for a diverse audience, definitions related to multiple oppressors, and practical scenario strategies, Bob lacked democratic PE curricula ideas. When discussing his fictional PE curriculum outline, he emphasized the biomedical concepts of health and sport, focusing on models-based practice and teacher-directed instruction (Metzler, 2017; Silverman, 1991). Bob also commented that his PE courses lacked a social justice focus: “I wish I had more classes that aligned with these sorts of concepts . . . [in PE] they were never really touched upon in a well-rounded or thorough way. It’s
just not really bought up” (Intraview 2, Bob). Importantly, Bob mentioned that he lacked concrete examples of how to deal with sociocultural issues in the PE classroom: “Like can you identify it [racism], and then what should you do about it or how should you address it?” (Intraview 2, Bob). Bob explained, “By not making any real attempt to analyze [sociocultural issues in class] . . . you are perpetuating it and underserving a lot of your students” (Intraview 2, Bob). This recognition alone highlights the influence of the course on Bob; he no longer saw his role as a physical educator as abstract to the proliferation of social inequality (Fernández-Balboa, 1993) and as he became more critically conscious, his awareness toward his education became critical, evidencing the beginning of critically conscious citizen (hooks, 1994).

Michael: “I Can Really Make a Difference”

*Perspectives prior to the class: Consciously aware.* It was evident from Michael's first intraview that he was astutely cognizant of multiple types of oppression and structures within society, even down to his minority status and identifying habits:

I don't see myself as black because if I say that I am black, then that is like a color, I am not a color. I am also not African, I have never been to Africa. I am American, but I suppose I have to say African American. (Intraview 1, Michael)

Michael was adamant that race was a social construct, hence his reasoning for reluctantly identifying as African American. He also recognized that there is a lack of social justice. Social justice is basically about seeing a problem in the system and basically fixing that problem for a different social background. I think people don't know how to touch social justice topics correctly. So, it’s a tough topic ‘cause it is so prevalent today. You see people want social justice, but when it comes to that point to reflect, as far as voting, people fall short, especially in the South. (Intraview 1, Michael)
Concerning PE, Michael noted,

Physical education should be about the physical and mental of being healthy. . . . Kids should be doing physical activity that tests important skills like their range of motion, stamina, and testing different levels of physical fitness, then mentally how to work past certain things. (Intraview 1, Michael)

Although not socioculturally focused, Michael was new to his PETE program and came from a coaching background: “I really think I could be a good coach” (Intraview 1, Michael). Michael could have been described as a “coaching orientated” (Curtner-Smith, 2017; Lawson, 1983). As Lawson (1983) explained, three factors influence a person entering PETE with a coaching orientation: an individual's athletic achievements, PE as a career contingency, and having a traditional (custodial) teaching style. Michael acknowledged two of these:

I played basketball and track. At first, I wanted to do physical therapy but for all sports, but I didn’t focus enough for my grades or aim high enough to get to that ladder . . . So physical education could be a career option for me because kids need it. (Intraview 1, Michael)

Factors influencing Michael: Shock and immobilization. Within the class, Michael was shocked that Florence, a white American educator, "would be the one who is touching on these [social] issues” (Intraview 2, Michael). During class meetings when Florence would talk to the class, Michael would intently lean forward and write notes. After class, he commented, “[Class] got me fired up and mad” (Field Notes, Lesson 13). Michael claimed, “The more I learn, the worse it gets” (Conversation, Lesson 16). In Michael’s final intraview, he mentioned how much he enjoyed hearing from others in the class:
There were some things that shocked me like a lot of them [other PTs] . . . never knew some of the racial stuff was going on, and they had never seen that and that was kind of surprising being from here [the city] and they don’t know what’s going on and that they didn’t know it was that bad. I could tell for some of them it was like an open light they had never seen that side especially about when we were talking about segregation.

(Intraview 2, Michael)

At the same time, on the topic of race and the re-segregation of the school system in the local area, Michael recognized, “I didn’t know about it either” (Intraview 2, Michael).

As the weeks progressed, Michael proffered, “The education system is broken, and I want to fix it, but I don’t know how” (Exit Slip, Lesson 19). Michael felt a sense of powerlessness, a common feeling of social justice education (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). To learn more, Michael would often stay after class and speak with Florence; this occurred after Lesson 6. After Lesson 15, Florence said, “Michael and I walked from the class to the parking lot together. He asked a lot of questions about education. We spent a further 15 minutes talking, and I have shared some additional resources with Michael” (Conversation, Florence).

Factors influencing Michael: Practice to action struggle. Michael wanted to teach equitably and “be able to mold the curriculum . . . to blend all cultures together” (Philosophy Assignment, Michael). However, in practice, he found this particularly challenging. Curtner-Smith (1996) noted that PTs early in their PETE are focused on the managerial aspect of teaching (i.e., behavior management and organization). Michael's fictional PE curriculum, scenarios, and methods course observations evidenced his focus on the managerial aspects of teaching and the PE curriculum model he was using (i.e., sport education) was driving his purpose as opposed to a sociocultural purpose toward PE. As stimulated recall interview 1
evidenced, Michael was unable to recognize that he had segregated his sport education students by ability and gender, instead of allowing students to decide their team roles.

First author: What is going on here?

Michael: They are officiating.

First author: Do you see any issues?

Michael: No.

First author: You have given all the boys an officiating role in the class, and all the girls are stood behind you doing nothing, without a role.

Michael: nooooooo, no, no, no, no. (Stimulated Recall Interview 1)

Michael began to realize that his sport education unit was representative of sporting culture and that sport in society could be racist, sexist, classist, homophobic (Azzarito et al., 2016). There were other instances in Michael’s practice that displayed him promoting competition and individualism. For example, he only cheered on those winning within the track and field events, rather than all students, despite performance. When discussing this with Michael in his final intraview, he suggested his PE courses thus far were more focused on the act of sport performance/physical competency, and as a PT it was not about intervening in social inequality:

You can see in the schools there are [social injustices], but our job is not to do with social injustice, it is about teaching the curriculum and leaving. It is not about background and what are you going to do to break this up and it is not about that. It is about doing it, coming in and leaving. (Intraview 2, Michael)

Similarly to Bob, Michael began to see his role as an educator more holistically. He exclaimed, “I can really make a difference in students’ lives” (Intraview 2, Michael).
Perspectives after the class: Critical transformation. Michael never asked about grades; for him, the process was always about learning and the learning within the class led to a deeper social justice understanding:

I learned that I need to be more aware than anything on [sic] social issues and gender issues, and I need to worry about making sure my kids are not consumers and making sure they are actually free thinkers and how they can make difference in the world.

(Intraview 2, Michael)

Michael saw his role as an educator in creating social change (Fernández-Balboa, 1993).

Florence speculated that “Michael is seeing a broader social structure. . . . he looks at it now from a community perspective rather than individual interactions” (Intraview 2, Florence). In Michael’s final exit slip, he concurred: “This class has changed me as a student.”

Michael evidenced choice, creativity, and action when he opted for an alternative final assignment. Considering critical understanding leads to critical action (Freire, 2013). When PTs raise their critical consciousness, they can take their learning into their content area and intervene in unfair practices. For Michael’s final project, he chose to highlight gender and race segregation in a youth track and field event held for the state. He created a video that included photographs with voice-over. The footage showed athletes racially or gender segregated. One photograph showed a group of white American athletes praying together in a circle. Michael explained that while taking the photograph, a coach asked him why he was taking it. Michael clarified, “There are no African Americans in the circle. I am showing how teams are segregated by race.” The coach noticed this issue himself and invited his African American athletes to join the circle.

Michael then commented, “They are still not integrated, because the African American athletes are at one end of the circle and joining in after being asked is not integration. We need
integration throughout the circle and the community.” Despite Michael’s intervention with a coach at the event and acting on social injustice, he emphasized that he still had more to learn: “I think that [the class] is a step and we need more steps to get prepared especially for physical education. I want more classes that are geared toward physical education that are like this” (Interview 2, Michael). As Curtner-Smith (1996) and Hill et al. (2018) encouraged, PETE courses should focus on the political, social, moral, and ethical concepts of sport and physical education and PTs should be armed with tools to enact social justice. Subsequently, specific courses related to sociocultural issues and practical strategies are suggested or “you could go through your whole physical education program and not talk about social issues at all” (Interview 2, Michael).

**Summary and Conclusions**

This paper has demonstrated how a sociocultural class taught by a transformative teacher educator challenged two PTs’ perspectives and practices in PETE. The findings indicated that before the class, neither of the two PTs had thought much about critical issues in PE. During the class, they came to realize how important these issues were. The teacher educator, Florence, enabled critical awareness through “problem-posing education” and theoretical dialogue (Freire, 1970, 2007).

The first PT, Bob, had little knowledge related to sociocultural foundations before the class and withdrew from the course at times, feeling frustration, anger, and a sense of powerlessness to the content taught. Despite this, Bob found the conversational aspect of the class helpful in understanding the theoretical readings and his personal experiences. After completing the class, Bob was an advocate for sociocultural foundations, suggesting that their
implementation is crucial so that teachers do not perpetuate inequalities in their contexts. This finding evidenced Bob’s heightened critical awareness of sociocultural issues.

Michael, the second PT, had a mature stance on sociocultural foundations before the class commenced. However, Michael was affected by hearing his classmates’ perspectives throughout class dialogue. He learned content that shocked him and made him question whether he could make any social change. Furthermore, in his early field experience, Michael focused on the managerial aspects of teaching and evidenced a lack of skills when practicing teaching for equity. Despite this, Michael’s critical consciousness was raised, and he intervened in an inequitable social context for social good. His actions and perspectives related to sociocultural foundations evidenced a critical transformation. As a consequence, Michael noted a need for more critically oriented classes throughout his PETE.

The findings in this study counter previous studies that have taken place in PETE, stating a critical approach has been mostly ineffective in raising consciousness toward critical action (e.g., Curtner-Smith & Sofo, 2004; Gerdin et al., 2018; Hickey, 2001; Philpot, 2015; Philpot & Smith, 2018). A reason for this, we believe, was Florence’s pedagogical style. First, as the educator, she used transformative educational strategies including discussion, debate, journaling, storytelling, case studies, biographies, peer teaching (e.g., student facilitation), and project-based learning (Ovens, 2017; Ukpokodu, 2007; Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). Additionally, Florence drew upon digital media and arts-based pedagogies (e.g., gallery walks). As a result of Florence sharing the classroom space, she encouraged PTs to make assessment choices and negotiate deadlines. Furthermore, Florence created a culture where PTs could learn about democratic practices (Freire, 2013). By providing a space for critical interrogation and constructive confrontation, Florence supported PTs in their journey toward critical consciousness (hooks,
Although both PTs mentioned they benefited from the dialogical aspect of the class, we cannot attribute the students’ consciousness raising to one pedagogical method. We believe that an accumulation of all of them helped challenge their perspectives and practices. We also acknowledge that current beliefs serve to filter what we learn from new material, and similarly to Philpot and Smith (2018), that transformation could have been attributed to their life-histories and past experiences.

A noteworthy finding was the critical consciousness journey, which was met with reluctance, discomfort, and frustration by the PTs. The primary focus of their PETE program was behavioral and technical, and the sociocultural class competed with this view and asked the PTs to avoid standardization, competition, and normalized practices in education. It was unsurprising then to find both PTs focused on the managerial aspects of teaching and unable to provide moral, ethical, political, and social practical examples (Curtner-Smith, 1996). Despite Florence not being able to provide contextualization to sociocultural issues in PE, both PTs advocated for more critically oriented classes so that they would be adequately prepared for social issues in schools. Therefore, if these findings transfer to other PTs and other foundations courses, then we tentatively suggest that PETE programs seek to adopt a sociocultural vision (Azzarito et al., 2016; Cliff, 2012) and teacher educators of sociocultural courses to be educated on providing subject-specific examples for PTs in all subject areas. This would involve creating a social justice culture which includes professional development for faculty (see Walton-Fisette et al., 2018) and specific pedagogical methods and skills which faculty could share with their PTs. For PETE faculty specifically, it might also include incorporating instructional models that focus on democracy, equity, and inclusion, and the problematizing of societal norms such sport for peace (Ennis, 1999) and the body curriculum (Azzarito et al., 2016). Moreover, PETE faculty could
stress the importance of PE teachers actively exposing their students to and explaining, debating, and discussing sociocultural issues so that the social ills that plague western society are not perpetuated (Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). More generally, higher education faculty members would benefit from interdisciplinary work and sharing of practices so that social issues were contextualized in each area of education.

Finally, although the PTs in the current study raised their critical awareness, conducting similar studies with other identifying PTs, including minority groups using intersectionality approaches (Simon & Azzarito, 2019) would be beneficial. Moreover, researching PTs throughout their PETE program into the culminating internship to see whether PTs do, indeed, integrate a critical thread into their teaching would be helpful. Furthermore, research is needed to see whether or not PTs’ critical perspectives are actioned over the course of their careers (Philpot & Smith, 2018). Our experience in this study suggests that narrative inquiry would be helpful in research tasks ahead for socially just and transformative endeavors to occur.
References


