



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

*'I became a teacher that respects the kids' voices':
challenges and facilitators pre-service teachers faced
in learning an activist approach*

This is the Accepted version of the following publication

Luguetti, Carla and Oliver, KL (2019) 'I became a teacher that respects the kids' voices': challenges and facilitators pre-service teachers faced in learning an activist approach. *Sport, Education and Society*. ISSN 1357-3322

The publisher's official version can be found at
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13573322.2019.1601620>
Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/38373/>

1 **‘I became a teacher that respects the kids’ voices’: Challenges and**
2 **facilitators pre-service teachers faced in learning an activist approach**

3 Carla Luguetti^{a*} and Kimberly L. Oliver^b

4 *^a Institute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia; ^bDepartment*
5 *of Kinesiology and Dance, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, United States*

6
7 Carla Luguetti

8 Institute for Health and Sport ,Victoria University, Australia

9 Room 135, Building L, Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Ballarat Rd,

10 Footscray VIC 3011, Melbourne, Australia. *Phone:* +61 3 9919 5981

11 *Email:* Carla.NascimentoLuguetti@vu.edu.au

12

13 Kimberly L. Oliver

14 Department of Kinesiology and Dance, New Mexico State University, United States

15 P.O. Box 30001 MSC 3M, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM 88003, US

16 *Email:* koliver@nmsu.edu

17

18 **Corresponding author. Room 135, Building L, Victoria University Footscray Park*

19 *Campus, Ballarat Rd, Footscray VIC 3011, Melbourne, Australia. Email:*

20 *Carla.NascimentoLuguetti@vu.edu.au*

21

22 **‘I became a teacher that respects the kids’ voices’: Challenges and**
23 **facilitators pre-service teachers faced in learning an activist approach**

24 Several studies demonstrate the benefits of educating for social justice in physical
25 education teacher education programs (O’Sullivan, 2018; Philpot, 2015; Walton-
26 Fissette & Sutherland, 2018), which supports that pre-service teachers (PSTs)
27 have the capacity to be active agents of change. In working with social justice,
28 PSTs engage in what can be a very personal struggle with their own stereotypes
29 and assumptions about the people they are working with (Oliver et al., 2015).
30 Although the challenges that PSTs faced to learn an activist approach to teaching
31 are described in the literature, there is little research that aims to understand how
32 these challenges progress across time. The aim of this study is to explore the
33 challenges pre-service teachers faced when learning to use an activist approach
34 across time. Participatory action research framed this 3-semester study (18
35 months). Participants included 10 pre-service-teachers, 90 youth, and two
36 researchers. Data collected included: (a) collaborative PSTs group meetings; (b)
37 PSTs reflective diaries after each teaching episode; (c) lead researcher
38 observations collected as field notes; (d) PSTs generated artifacts; and (e) PSTs
39 interviews and focus groups. Data analysis involved inductive and constant
40 comparison. Results conveyed: (a) the PSTs’ assumptions about what student-
41 centered pedagogy meant and the challenges of overcoming their misconceptions
42 about teaching and learning; and (b) the PST’s struggles in coming to understand
43 themselves as activist teachers, with dispositions as advocates of social justice.
44 Future studies should continue to explore the challenges and facilitators PSTs
45 face when learning an activist approach aimed at empowering both students and
46 teachers to develop a critically conscious understanding of their relationships
47 with the world through their effort to name and change the world together.

48 Keywords: sport; empowerment; activist approaches; social justice; participatory
49 action research; PETE; critical pedagogy; student-centered pedagogy

50

51 Over the past four decades, a history of research conducted on social justice, critical
52 pedagogies and physical education teacher education has develop (Fitzpatrick, 2018;

53 O’Sullivan, 2018; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). This research posits that pre-
54 service teachers (PSTs) have the capacity to be active agents of change and engage in
55 transformative pedagogical practices. In this perspective, PSTs recognize the power
56 structures in society that led to inequity and sought to empower students to challenge
57 and change those inequities (O’Sullivan, 2018). Critical education cannot be reduced to
58 a teaching method or transmission of knowledge as in a ‘banking education’ perspective
59 (Freire, 1987); but rather should be viewed as an educational philosophy where a
60 teacher concerned with questions of justice, democracy and ethics creates spaces for
61 social change (Giroux, 2011; Hill et al., 2018; O’Sullivan, 2018).

62 Over the years, researchers have investigated practices of critical pedagogies in
63 Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs (Hill et al., 2018; Philpot,
64 2015; Shelley & McCuaig, 2018). Philpot (2015) explored how six PSTs, teaching in a
65 PETE program in Australia, understood and enacted critical pedagogy. This study
66 demonstrated a commitment to social justice from all of the PSTs, despite differences in
67 their understandings of critical pedagogy. Further, these differences revealed each
68 teacher educator’s own valued theoretical perspectives, and manifested themselves in
69 teaching practices within the PETE program.

70 Hill et al. (2018) sought to map variations in definition and conceptualization of
71 social justice in PETE programs in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden,
72 the United Kingdom, and the US. Most frequently, the participants articulated a
73 humanist approach to social justice by encouraging their PSTs to have awareness of
74 equality of opportunity in relation to gender, sexuality, and/or racism. Less prevalent,
75 was the importance of taking action for democracy, empowerment, or critical reflection.
76 The authors concluded that the range of non-critical concepts found raised concern that
77 PSTs were not getting the tools required to tackle sociocultural issues.

78 Shelley and McCuaig (2018) presented one PETE educator's use of critical
79 pedagogy as a strategy for confronting social injustice and socio-cultural issues within
80 an Australian Health PETE program. Their paper argued that the approaches for social
81 justice pedagogy offer a more nuanced rationale for, and appropriate alignment with, the
82 pedagogical strategies employed. The authors suggested that disrupting PSTs' values
83 and knowledge through critical pedagogies continues to be an unpredictable and
84 dangerous project.

85 Although we have a body of research on social justice and critical pedagogy in
86 PETE, there is much to learn about how best to support PSTs in foregrounding issues of
87 equity and justice in their own teaching (O'Sullivan, 2018; Philpot, 2015; Shelley &
88 McCuaig, 2018). For example, while PSTs may be told that they need to empower
89 students to actively engage in their education, they usually have little experience of
90 living this student voice rhetoric during their PETE experience (Enright et al., 2017;
91 Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013).

92 ***Rethinking high education as a practice of freedom: challenges to conceptualizing***
93 ***and practicing critical pedagogy***

94 There is little interest in understanding the pedagogical foundation of higher education
95 as a deeply civic and political project that provides conditions for individual autonomy
96 and takes liberation and the practice of freedom as a collective goal (Giroux, 2011,
97 p.154)

98 According to Giroux (2011), higher education has been hostage to market-driven
99 modes of accountability where faculty are increasingly deprived of power. This mode of
100 ideology and teaching, called neoliberal pedagogy, stifles critical thought, reducing
101 citizenship to the act of consuming, defining certain marginal populations as
102 contaminated and disposable, and removing the discourse of democracy (Giroux, 2011).
103 In this paradigm, undergraduate students are educated primarily to acquire rote learning,

104 memorization, and high-stake testing, producing an atmosphere of student passivity and
105 teacher routinization. Faculties are reduced to a class of technicians and students as
106 mere recipients of the forms of banking education (Freire, 1987, 1996).

107 Unlike dominant modes of authoritarian pedagogy in high education, critical
108 pedagogy presupposes a notion of a more socially just world by offering the students
109 ways to think critically and act in the world, encouraging human agency (Freire, 1987,
110 1996). According to Paulo Freire, education is a practice of freedom that must expand
111 students' capacities for agency by naming, critical reflection, and acting on the worlds
112 in which we live (Freire, 1987). Critical pedagogy attempts to understand how power
113 works within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as social
114 agents (Freire, 1996, 2005). It means to educate students to become critical agents who
115 actively question and negotiate relationships between theory and practice, critical
116 analysis and common sense, and learning and social change (Giroux, 2011).

117 Critical pedagogy in high education opens up a space to engage students in an
118 open dialogue that 'frame their own relationship to the ongoing project of an unfinished
119 democracy' (Giroux, 2011, p.157). It provides students with skills and knowledge to
120 question the assumptions that legitimize the disempowering social practices and then
121 take responsibility for intervening in the world: a language of critique and hope (Freire,
122 1987, 1996, 2005). Hope for Freire is a practice of moral imagination that enables
123 teachers and students to think otherwise in order to act otherwise in the interest of
124 justice, equality and freedom (Giroux, 2011).

125 There are a number of challenges that teachers and students might face when
126 engaging in critical pedagogy in high education. First, they may be uncomfortable with
127 the necessary change in power relations that results from the necessity of a more
128 democratic pedagogical process (Bovill et al., 2011; Enright et al., 2017; Fitzpatrick,

129 2018; Luguetti & Oliver, 2018; Oliver et al., 2015). It challenges conventional
130 conceptions of learners as subordinate to the expert lecturer in engaging with what is
131 taught and how (Bovill et al., 2011). Educators and pre-service teachers need to break
132 down the power differential between them, experiencing the freedom to become critical
133 thinkers and critical beings in the world (Freire, 2005). In addition to this, educators and
134 pre-service teachers need to learn that listening to and trusting young people are
135 valuable and important skills (Oliver et al., 2015). In that sense, educators and pre-
136 service teachers need to be aware about reproducing power relationships (Mcintyre,
137 2006; Nygreen, 2006). According to Nygreen (2006), divisions of race, gender, class,
138 and age are often reproduced within collaborative groups, no matter how sincere the
139 attempt to equalize power between teacher and students.

140 Second, educators and pre-service teachers must be prepared to engage in what
141 can be a very personal struggle with their own stereotypes and assumptions about the
142 people they are working with (Mcintyre, 2006; Oliver et al., 2015). For example,
143 according to McIntyre (2006), pre-service teachers working in socially vulnerable areas
144 believe that hard work and merit lead to success regardless of the social and cultural
145 contexts and that the researcher is the authority figure and the participants are the
146 recipients of his/her knowledge. This ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy: a binary position
147 where white student (us) believe that they need to ‘help’ people from socially
148 vulnerable background (them) reifies the myth that the students are white knights whose
149 mission is to ‘save’ the poor and the downtrodden (Ladson-Billings, 2000; McIntyre,
150 2006).

151 While advocacy for critical pedagogy and education for social justice has grown
152 exponentially over the years, there is little research that aims to understand how
153 educators conceptualize and practise critical pedagogy over time. This paper addresses

154 this research gap and advances these issues through exploring the challenges pre-service
155 teachers face when learning to use an activist sport approach across time.

156

157 **Methods**

158 This study was a participatory action research (PAR) project. PAR supports the belief that
159 knowledge is rooted in social relations, and it is more powerful when produced
160 collaboratively through action (Fine, 2007; Freire, 1987, 1996).

161 *Context and participants*

162 The project took place in a University in Guarujá, Brazil. Guarujá is an urban,
163 coastal and tourist city and has high rates of income inequality. The University is
164 located in a socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhood in the city. The lead
165 author, lecturer in the University, contacted the coordinator of a Physical Education
166 teaching degree in the University and explained the objectives and methodology of the
167 research. In 2017, the University coordinator agreed to start a sport project called ‘Sport
168 and Empowerment’. The project’s mission was to ‘promote and democratize access to
169 educational sport aimed at empowering young people’. We invited young people from
170 two schools in the University’s neighborhood to participate in this project. The young
171 people came after school in the University to work with the pre-service teachers. This
172 project was connected with the University in Guarujá and its PETE program.

173 The project was a partnership between the University and two schools aimed at
174 creating spaces of empowerment for young people and pre-service teachers. All youth
175 and pre-service teachers were invited to participate in the research. The youth and their
176 parents gave assent, and parents signed an informed consent form. Ethical approval for
177 this study was received from the Ethics Committee (protocol number 2.258.880). All
178 pre-service teachers signed informed consent.

179 The study involved approximately 90 young people in total, divided in 16 youth
180 ages 9-13 (9 boys and 7 girls – semester 1), 35 youth ages 7-13 (20 boys and 15 girls –
181 semester 2), and 64 youth ages 7-13 (36 boys and 28 girls – semester 3). In addition, 10
182 pre-service teachers in total (6, 5 and 10 in the first, second and third semester,
183 respectively) were part of the study. The PSTs (five women and five men) were in the
184 third or fourth semesters at the beginning of the project of a Physical Education
185 teaching degree. The PSTs ages ranged from 18-35 years and had no previous
186 experience with activist teaching approaches.

187 The lead author (Carla) was also part of the study. She was a 34-year-old middle
188 class Brazilian lecturer with 6 years of experience using activist teaching approaches in a
189 variety of physical activity settings in and out of schools in both Brazil and the US. Her
190 PhD research was an activist study using an activist approach with boys from socially
191 vulnerable backgrounds in a sport context (see Luguetti et al., 2017a, 2017b). The second
192 author (Kim), an expert in activist approaches for more than 24 years (see Oliver et al.,
193 2015), served as a peer debriefer and assisting with progressive data analysis.

194 *Activist sport approaches*

195 Over the last four years, we have developed an activist sport approach with and
196 for youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds (Luguetti et al., 2017a, 2017b; Luguetti
197 & Oliver, 2018). The approach was designed as a means of listening and responding to
198 youth in order to use sport as a vehicle for assisting them in becoming critical analysts
199 of their communities and developing strategies to manage the risks they face. This
200 activist approach combines student centered pedagogy, inquiry-based learning centered
201 in action, an ethic of care, attentiveness to the community, and a community of sport as
202 key (or non-negotiable) critical elements (Luguetti et al., 2017a, 2017b). The key theme

203 of this activist approach is to *co-construct empowering learning possibilities through*
204 *sport with youth from socially vulnerable backgrounds*¹.

205 The implementation of the activist approach to teaching lasted 18 months across
206 3 academic semesters (2017/2018). Youth participated in sports twice a week for one
207 hour each day (total of 84 classes). The lead author was responsible for the learning
208 activities with the youth in the first semester (23 classes) while the PSTs were observing
209 and participating with the young people. In the second and third semesters (33 and 28
210 classes, respectively), the lead author was observing and offering feedback while the
211 PSTs were responsible for the learning activities with the youth.

212 A Student-Centered Inquiry *as Curriculum* (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013) approach
213 was used both as a process of working with the PSTs and youth as well as serving as a
214 framework for data collection. This process includes *Building the Foundation Phase*
215 followed by a four-phase cyclical process of *Planning, Responding to Students, Listening*
216 *to Respond*, and *Analyzing Responses (Activist Phase)* as the basis of all content and
217 pedagogical decisions.

218 *Building the Foundation Phase* took place over 6 weeks and was designed with
219 the intent of identifying what facilitated and hindered the youth' engagement in sport
220 (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013). Carla and the PSTs started by inquiring into what the
221 youth liked/disliked, their perceptions of school and family, their opinions about the
222 training sessions, and barriers to sport participation they encountered in both the
223 program and their community as a whole. In that phase we also worked in order to
224 broaden their perspective in terms of sport. For example, the youth experienced
225 different types of sports and games.

¹For more information regarding the schedule of tasks with youth see Luguetti et al. (2017a).

226 Given what we learned during *Building the Foundation Phase*, Carla and the
227 PSTs co-created and implemented with the youth an *Activist Phase*. In this 8-week
228 *Activist Phase* started from things that the youth saw as important if they were going to
229 develop strategies for negotiating the barriers they identified. In each semester we
230 developed a different action based on the barriers the youth identified. *Planning*
231 involved the weekly meetings between the pre-service teachers and Carla. *Listening to*
232 *Respond* involved the strategies Carla and the PSTs were using to inquiry the youth's
233 perceptions about the training sessions and barriers they face in sport context.
234 *Responding to Students* involved the creation of training sessions that bridged what
235 Carla and the PSTs were learning from the youth. *Analyzing the Responses* involved the
236 debriefing and analysis of data between the Carla and the PSTs as well as Carla and
237 Kim following the PSTs weekly meetings.

238 ***Data gathering***

239 Data collection spanned an 18 month period and included:

240 (a) *Collaborative PSTs group meetings* (63 meetings). The structure of the
241 meetings created an environment for PSTs to engage in conversations about their
242 experiences using an activist approach in their teaching. All PSTs group meetings were
243 audio recorded and transcribed (total of 568 pages).

244 (b) *PSTs reflective diaries*. The students completed diary entries after every
245 class for the 84 classes across the 3 semesters. A total of 257 PSTs reflective diary
246 entries were completed during the period of the study. Diary entries were based around
247 writing cues about student's engagement and teachers' behavior.

248 (c) *Lead researcher observations through field notes*. Carla wrote field
249 notes/observations after each class (total of 78 pages) about challenges and enablers

250 arising during teaching sessions. This data was used to inform the weekly collaborative
251 group meeting discussions.

252 (d) *PSTs generated artifacts*. All PSTs generated artifacts were collected, such
253 as lesson plans, summaries of data collected from the youth, and shared materials on
254 social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp (total of 189 pages).

255 (e) *PSTs interviews and focus groups*. Two 20-minute interviews (second
256 semester) and two 30-minute interviews focus groups (third semester). The focus
257 groups were based on the challenges and facilitators they faced in learning to use an
258 activist approach. The interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded for verbatim
259 transcription (total of 81 pages).

260 ***Data analysis***

261 Data analysis involved four steps and was approached through an inductive lens
262 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, Carla read all data sets and engaged in the process of
263 coding aimed at capturing the challenges and facilitators PSTs faced in learning an
264 activist approach to teaching. Through this inductive analysis, statements and ideas
265 were developed as data was read and re-read. The second process of analysis involved
266 constant comparison. Data were grouped and placed into categories and moved
267 backwards and forwards until an agreement was reached. The third and final process of
268 analysis involved Kim. Kim engaged in a process of checking the interpretations. Carla
269 and Kim discussed the codes she had identified in relation to the research questions.
270 Kim added credibility to the analysis by challenging the interpretations of the coded
271 data and the construction of themes. In this phase, data was moved between different
272 themes until a level of agreement was reached. Two challenges emerged from the data:
273 a) the PSTs' assumptions about what student-centered pedagogy meant and the
274 challenges of overcoming their misconceptions about teaching and learning; b) the

275 PST's struggles in coming to understand themselves as activist teachers. Pseudonyms
276 are used throughout to refer to the PSTs. For the presentation of results, direct quotes
277 have been translated into English.

278

279 **Findings**

280 Two main challenges were encountered in PSTs' learning to use an activist approach
281 across time. The first involved the PSTs' assumptions about what student-centered (SC)
282 pedagogy meant and the challenges of overcoming their misconceptions about teaching
283 and learning. The second challenge involved the PST's struggles in coming to
284 understand themselves as activist teachers, with dispositions as advocates of social
285 justice. In this section we describe how these two challenges emerged and how we
286 worked with our PST's to negotiate their experiences.

287 *'For me to begin to understand this approach took almost the whole year':*

288 *Challenging PSTs' assumptions about SC pedagogy and their misconceptions about*
289 *teaching and learning*

290 The first challenge that emerged in PSTs' learning to use an activist approach
291 were their assumptions about SC pedagogy. In the first and second semesters the PSTs
292 described that they believed SC pedagogy was based on what young people 'like' and
293 the idea of 'camouflaging' their pedagogy (tricking the kids to do what the PSTs wanted
294 them to do):

295 Carla: What happened last class?

296 Roberta: I think they kept talking a lot... They are not seeing us as a teacher... we
297 cannot control them.

298 Carla: I was able to observe that, too. And I don't think that everyone likes their
299 behaviour... they are annoying themselves. I'm also not saying that we want them all to
300 be silent and in control... And based on that, I've prepared a lesson for us to create a

301 safe class environment with them. Instead of deciding rules, we will invite them to
302 create ways of working.

303 Rodrigo: So it's actually a way to camouflage the rules? For them not to think that this
304 thing would be serious, right?

305 Carla: It's not quite camouflage. Inviting them to create an emotionally and physically
306 safe class environment is related to co-responsibility, empowerment... It is a way of
307 making them co-participants in ways of acting with us (Semester 1, Collaborative group
308 meeting 11).

309 During the first semester, the PSTs did not understand the value of co-
310 constructing a class environment with the kids. Carla explained to them that by creating
311 ways of working instead of rules we could invite the kids to participate in creating their
312 class environment. However, most of the PSTs believed that SC pedagogy would allow
313 the teachers to camouflage the rules in order to manipulate the kids into doing what they
314 wanted them to do. The PSTs believed that by 'camouflaging' the rules they would
315 'control kids' behavior', tricking them to behave in ways the PSTs wanted.

316 Camouflaging the rules was one way the PST's sought to be student centered. A
317 second was in doing what the kids 'liked' by creating an 'easy and fun' class.

318 Rodrigo: A SC class is like our aim in the project. We always ask them: 'what can we
319 do to improve the class? Or what do you like?' So, we planned a class based on what
320 they want, and we modified the class in a way that everyone played, that everyone
321 participated.

322 Roberta: In SC pedagogy the goal is always to think of a lesson that is very easy for the
323 kids. In our group we have a lot of age difference and there are some students with
324 disabilities. So, it has to be an easy lesson and a very fun class. (Semester 2, PSTs
325 interview 1).

326 The PSTs described a lot of misperceptions about SC pedagogy. It was clear that
327 the PSTs struggled to understand that SC pedagogy it is about understanding what

328 facilitates youth's interest, motivation and learning and then using this information to
329 guide their pedagogy (Oliver & Oesterreich, 2013). It is not about what kids want or
330 like. Only one of the PSTs was able to articulate and put in practice what SC pedagogy
331 meant after two semesters in the project:

332 Janaina: SC pedagogy it's more or less what we've been doing during the project. We
333 [Carina and I] try to emphasize in our class not what they want, but what they need. I
334 did not go to class as a teacher and said, 'It's going to be like this, like this.' Together
335 with the students we decide what is best. For example, the ways of working we create in
336 our class. We do not have rules in our classes: we decide ways of working with the kids.
337 We agreed that you cannot disrespect the teacher and that they cannot fight (Semester 2,
338 PSTs interview 1).

339 Janaina could articulate what SC pedagogy meant in the middle of the second
340 semester. She described the importance of using kids' data to guide her pedagogical
341 decisions. In Janaina's view, SC pedagogy was not doing what kids want, but it was
342 about to identify what facilitate their interest, motivation and learning. Janaina
343 exemplified it by describing the co-creation of ways of working when she invited the
344 youth to be co-participants of deciding how create an emotionally and physically safe
345 environment in her class. We also observed incidents where Janaina created spaces for
346 students to be co-participants in her class. Co-creating with youth ways of working in
347 class instead of deciding top-down rules allowed them to be co-responsible for their
348 own learning. It is essential in this project that has a learning focus to co-construct
349 empowering possibilities through sport with youth from socially vulnerable
350 backgrounds (Luguetti et al., 2017a, 2017b). It highlights the importance to work with
351 the youth in order to better understand how to assist them in ways that foster collective
352 empowerment (Freire, 1987).

353 However, the majority of the PSTs were still struggling to understand what SC
354 pedagogy meant after two semesters. It wasn't until the third semester that the PSTs
355 began to better understand SC pedagogy. They pointed out that time, the contact with
356 students, and the community of learners they created together was essential to their
357 understanding:

358 Rodrigo: For me to begin to understand this approach took almost the whole year. In the
359 beginning, I didn't understand a lot of things Carla was doing with the kids... I
360 discovered that the students feel more comfortable in that way and they also take more
361 responsibility.

362 Nivaldo: The contact with kids made me learn a lot. The students taught me more than I
363 thought I knew... The weekly meetings have helped us a lot. Carla gave us many
364 guidelines, and I ended up having a lot of insights. The meetings made our learning a lot
365 easier because it is what guides us to understand what facilitates student learning
366 (Semester 3, Focus group 1).

367 The PSTs started to realize that a SC pedagogy challenged their assumptions
368 about teaching and learning (Oliver et al., 2015). Living a SC pedagogy helped them to
369 learn that kids didn't have to be 'organized and in control all the time'. In that sense, SC
370 pedagogy would allow students to feel more comfortable in that way and they also
371 would take more responsibility for their own learning. The PSTs also attributed their
372 learning to the contact with young people. They recognized that contact with the young
373 people provided the reflection of who they were as teachers. The PSTs also described
374 the importance of being in a community of learners in order to understand what SC
375 pedagogy meant. They pointed out that the weekly meetings and having new PSTs in
376 the group allowed them to create this socially friendly space to learn; recognizing and
377 valuing everybody's knowledge.

378 Although the PSTs could better articulate what SC pedagogy meant in the third
379 semester, they still faced barriers in how to put this pedagogy into practice. For
380 example, Carina and Nivaldo decided to vote on the content in one of their classes.

381 Carla: In the last class we have identified some aspects that facilitate the students'
382 learning... such as work in groups, playing small-sided games, and having teachers who
383 engage in dialogue with them. But I'd like to understand why you decided vote on the
384 content for the next class?

385 Nivaldo: When we did that, we asked one by one and the three most voted content were
386 the ones we chose for the next class. It was very democratic!

387 Carla: But what is democratic is not necessarily what facilitates their learning. What do
388 you think facilitates their learning?

389 Nicolas: I think it is invasion and net games because they are more familiar with.

390 Carina: Gymnastics and martial arts are more difficult.

391 Carla: But the question here is not just about content. (Semester 3, Collaborative group
392 meeting 9).

393 Carina and Nivaldo were in the beginning of *Activist Phase* when they decided
394 to vote on the content. The *Activist Phase* is designed to co-create a curriculum with the
395 youth based on what facilitates their interesting, motivation and learning. In the
396 *Building the Foundation Phase* they inquired into what the youth liked/disliked, their
397 perceptions of school and family, their opinions about the training sessions, and barriers
398 to sport participation they encountered in both the program and their community as a
399 whole. In that phase we also worked in order to broaden their perspective in terms of
400 sport. For example, the youth experienced different types of sports and games such as:
401 territory games, net/wall games, striking/fielding games, target games, gymnastics,
402 martial arts and athletics. Given what we learned during *Building the Foundation*
403 *Phase*, they co-created and implemented with the youth an *Activist Phase*. It started

404 from things that the youth saw as important if they were going to develop strategies for
405 negotiating the barriers they identified and what facilitated their learning. In the activist
406 approach, student learning focus on co-construct empowering possibilities through
407 sport: social learning expectations. In that sense, youth become agents in the process of
408 transformative learning, seeking opportunities to reframe and re-imagine their sports
409 experiences (Lugueti et al., 2017a).

410 In the *Building the Foundation Phase*, we identified some aspects that facilitate
411 the students' learning such as work in groups, playing small-sided games, and having
412 teachers who engage in dialogue with them. Instead of considering those aspects in their
413 classes, Carina and Nivaldo kept the misconception that SC pedagogy it is about doing
414 what youth like and voting on activities. It exemplified how the PSTs were still
415 struggling to use SC pedagogy in the end of the third semester. Although they could
416 better articulate what this pedagogy meant, they struggled to identify what facilitated
417 the youth leaning and how to use this knowledge in their planning.

418

419 ***'I am going to fight for my students': Coming to understand themselves as activist***
420 ***teachers***

421 The second challenge the PSTs faced was in coming to understand themselves
422 as activist teachers. The PSTs had to move from focusing solely on their classroom
423 management in order to understand their role as social agents whose dispositions
424 advocate for social justice. In the first two semesters, the PSTs struggled to understand
425 their role as teacher:

426 Carla: In the last class we organized a game and I realized that both Jorge and Rodrigo
427 [two PSTs] started to overtake the game... This was very interesting. What is our role as
428 a teacher? Because if we want everyone to participate, as a teacher, I think we should
429 make sure that everyone is participating.

430 Jorge: I remembered that.

431 Rodrigo: In fact I was overtaking the game. I am quite competitive.

432 Carla: It was a very interesting lesson that it seemed that you have forgotten the role of
433 a teacher. And it is not only the girls who were not participating, the non-skilled also
434 did not participate. Rodrigo said few times when the kids missed the pass: 'are you with
435 butter in your hand?' (Semester 1, Collaborative meeting 15).

436 Rodrigo and Jorge had overtaken the game in the first semester showing us an
437 example of how PSTs struggled to understand their role as teacher. In the first semester
438 they were observing Carla and playing with the youth. In the second semester, the PSTs
439 were responsible for the learning activities and Carla was observing them and giving
440 support.

441 Dani: What was the biggest challenge you faced in learning this approach?

442 Carina: The biggest challenge was to get more attention from children and young
443 people. They get very off task in class. It is still a challenge for me. ...At first I was
444 afraid of what it would be like to be responsible for the lesson. I was afraid it would not
445 work...I was afraid of becoming a teacher and I expected they would not obey me.

446 Janaina: I faced many challenges in practice. The first challenge was for the kids to see
447 me as a teacher. All of us until then, we were as Carla's assistants. We participated in
448 all activities with the students, playing and helping Carla. So the students started to see
449 us as their colleagues. In the second semester, Carla said, 'Now it's with you'. The kids
450 kept asking: 'Where's the teacher?'

451 Dani: What do you think facilitated your learning?

452 Carina: I think we all had patience and we worked in groups... So it was not all for one
453 person to do, all three of us worked together... For example, we had Janaina and the
454 kids listened to Janaina better, so it was easier for her to talk to the kids.

455 Janaina: I think it was Carla's feedback. Her feedback from the lessons was always
456 sacred.... This was what makes it much easier... Another help comes from the teachers,
457 we helped ourselves, and we wanted the project to work (Semester 2, Interview 1).

458 Janaina and Carina described the struggle they faced in the transition between
459 observing the class and becoming the teacher. This challenge can be highlighted in the
460 Janaina's interview when she said 'the kids kept asking: where's the teacher?' In that
461 sense, the youth also realized the issues with management skills. PST's described
462 wanting to 'control the classes' and they wanted the kids to 'obey them'. They had to
463 learn how to manage the class environment while simultaneously continuing a SC
464 pedagogy. In this phase, Carla's structural support and the weekly meetings were
465 essential in order to help the PSTs improve their management skills required for
466 becoming an activist teacher.

467 In the third semester, the PSTs started to talk about the importance of the
468 youth's lives. They stopped blaming the young people because they could not 'control
469 them' or keep them from being 'off task' and started to see the importance of a sport
470 project in a kid's life.

471 'Value' is the only word that comes to my mind in today's class... And thinking of
472 value, I also thought about the value that a sports class has for a child or young people
473 in situations of social vulnerability. I thought about what a huge difference a simple
474 lesson can make in a kid's day... I meet Marcelo, a 9-year-old boy in old clothes, a
475 slipper and a shy look. By the time Marcelo arrived in class, I saw that something was
476 wrong. Marcelo was not interacting or playing with the other kids... I went to him and
477 asked, 'Why do not you come and join us?' And he told me it was because he did not
478 have tennis shoes to play... So, that's why I started writing about 'value'... I'm talking
479 here about the value of Marcelo's smile when he discovers he does not need tennis

480 shoes to attend class... discovered the value of a kid's smile like Marcelo, the greatest
481 learning of my day (Semester 3, Nivaldo' diary, Day 1).

482

483 Carla: Reading Nivaldo's diary, I thought a lot about who these kids are.

484 Rodrigo: They are underserved kids and most of them are not heard. They tell us: 'our
485 teachers at school do not listen to us.'

486 Nivaldo: I realize that some of the kids, like Marcelo and Caio are kids who live on
487 streets, they're very low-class. The other kids do not leave their houses because it is
488 dangerous, a lot of violence in their community. They can only leave school and play on
489 the streets if they have someone watching them.

490 Rodrigo: Here in the project they have opportunities that they do not have in other
491 spaces. They have access to materials and equipment that they do not have at school.

492 Nivaldo: They are super happy when they play with different sports equipment!

493 Carla: And it's important to remember that we do not work with underserved children
494 and young people. We work with children and young people who live in areas of social
495 vulnerability. These children and young people are not underserved, they have
496 knowledge that many of us do not have. They have experienced many things in life that
497 we do not experience. How can we work with empowerment if we believe that they are
498 underserved? So they live in areas with a complexity of problems, but they can and
499 should dream about different futures (Semester 3, Collaborative meeting 4).

500 The PSTs started to realize that the youth's behaviors might happen because of
501 the social environment with which they live. The PSTs understood that sport could be a
502 vehicle for assisting these kids in seeing other opportunities in their lives. Although they
503 still called them 'underserved' kids, they realized the importance of the sport project in
504 order to give youth's voice; a way to overcome barriers they face in their communities.
505 According to Freire (1987, 2005), teachers committed to critical pedagogy are
506 motivated by their passion for learning and teaching and their love for others. In that

507 sense, education occurs ‘when [the teacher] stops making pious, sentimental, and
508 individualistic gestures and risks an act of love’ (1987, p. 35). For it, the teachers need
509 to know ‘the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend
510 themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the
511 school, and how they know it’ (Freire 1998, p. 73). The PSTs described that they
512 learned the importance of prioritizing youth’s voice and valuing their knowledge.

513 Julia: I take the project as life learning. I learned to listen to the students here... I
514 learned a lot about their lives.

515 Rodrigo: I became a teacher that respects the kid's voice... I think I’ve learned to care
516 more about my students. I am going to fight for my students... I became a teacher who
517 talks less and lets the students to talk more.

518 Nivaldo: All this contact with the kids allowed me to learn this pedagogy that is totally
519 different from what I have been learning in the University. It is quite opposite what I
520 have learned in the last four years I am an undergrad student. I have changed a lot since
521 my first contact with the children.

522 Pedro: I came with that background of being more authoritarian. This project took out a
523 curtain that I had in front of my eyes and showed me a way of teaching where the
524 teacher doesn’t need to be militarist: a way of teaching where the kids have autonomy
525 and voice (Semester 3, Focus Group 2).

526 The PSTs pointed out how this experience changed them as teachers. They
527 described that they learned the importance of listening to and believing the youth.

528 Rodrigo learned the teacher's resilience in believing the student: ‘I am going to fight
529 even though he/she does not do anything at all’. Critical Pedagogy is linked to our deep
530 personal commitments to care for, enter into relationships of solidarity with students
531 that supports our humanity (Darder, 2017). In that sense, a liberating education could
532 only with difficulty be conceived without a profound commitment to our humanity and

533 dialogue (Freire, 2005). The PSTs stopped blaming the young people and learned to
534 believe in them. They also recognized they learned it is possible to create spaces to
535 empower youth. Finally, the affirmed that they intended to continue teaching children
536 and young people respecting their voice and believing that it is possible to create spaces
537 for social transformation.

538

539 **Discussion and conclusion**

540 The aim of this study was to explore the challenges and facilitators pre-service teachers
541 (PSTs) faced to learn an activist approach across time. Two main challenges were
542 encountered in PSTs' learning to use an activist approach across time. The first
543 involved the PSTs' assumptions about what student-centered pedagogy meant and the
544 challenges of overcoming their misconceptions about teaching and learning. The second
545 challenge involved the PST's struggles in coming to understand themselves as activist
546 teachers, with dispositions as advocates of social justice. In this section, we discuss: (a)
547 how the PSTs challenged their own stereotypes and assumptions about teaching and
548 learning; (b) an activist approach as a way to rethink higher education as a practice of
549 freedom; and (c) pedagogical implications and future directions.

550 In order to learn an activist approach, the PSTs had to challenge their
551 assumptions about what student-centered pedagogy meant and stereotypes of the youth
552 they were working with. The PSTs engaged in what it is considered a personal struggle
553 and described in previous studies (Mcintyre, 2006; Oliver et al., 2015). According to
554 Shelley and McCuaig (2018), challenging and disrupting PSTs' values and knowledge
555 through critical pedagogies continues to be an unpredictable and dangerous project. The
556 challenges still lies in the confoundedness of changing PSTs beliefs and values that, if
557 left unchallenged, allows them to teach in the way that worked for them but ignores the

558 young people (Oesterreich & Oliver, 2015). PSTs use their pretexts as a filter to
559 interpret their teacher education courses and reinforce rather than challenge prior beliefs
560 and values about teaching, learning and young people (Oesterreich & Oliver, 2015). In
561 order to effectively challenge pretexts, the nature of PSTs experiences must create the
562 spaces for the concrete and conceptual to collide; providing ways of looking at the
563 ‘particulars, individuals, and specific situations’ in localized contexts (Minnich, 1990;
564 Oesterreich & Oliver, 2015).

565 In this study, the PST’s negotiated these stereotypes and assumptions when they
566 faced a collision between what they thought they knew and what they were
567 experiencing in their work with youth. These collisions created a space for their
568 assumptions about teaching, learning and youth to be challenged and renegotiated. Most
569 of them believed that SC pedagogy was about camouflaging their pedagogy in order to
570 trick the kids into doing what they wanted them to do in the first two semesters. The
571 PSTs also challenged their pretexts about the kids they were working with. They
572 stopped blaming the young people because they could not ‘control them’ or keep them
573 from being ‘off task’ and started to see the importance of a sport project in a youth’s
574 life. They started to understand their role as social agents whose dispositions advocate
575 for social justice. The contact with the kids and the social environment they created, a
576 kind of community, helped them to better understand SC pedagogy and their role as
577 social agents. By taking the time to know this group of young people, the PSTs were
578 provided with multiple opportunities to explore their fears, anxieties, and prejudices and
579 develop strategies to address them in positive and critical ways (Mcintyre, 2006).

580 In this study we use an activist approach to working with youth that challenges
581 the conventional conception of youth as subordinate to the expert teacher in engaging
582 with what is taught and how it is taught (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Cook-

583 Sather, 2002). According to Freire (1987), education is a ‘conscientization’ practice,
584 and is defined as the process of becoming aware of the structural, political and cultural
585 constraints that prevent a group or an individual from exercising autonomy or
586 participating in a democratic society. In this study we offered a way to rethink higher
587 education as a practice of freedom by modeling democratic spaces of reflection. We
588 understood the importance of living this student voice rhetoric during their PETE
589 experience in order to empower students (Enright et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2015). We
590 experienced an activist approach by way of critically engaging PSTs as active agents of
591 change. It was aimed at empowering both students and teachers to develop a critically
592 conscious understanding of their relationships with the world (Freire, 1987, 2005).
593 Teacher and students together can develop greater consciousness of the historical
594 process through their effort to name and change the world together (Darder, 2017). In
595 that sense, pedagogy should connect learning to social change, a project that challenges
596 both teacher and students to critically engage with the world so they could act on it
597 (Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2011).

598 The PSTs described how their experience of living an activist approach changed
599 them as teachers. They had learned a great deal about themselves and the young people
600 they worked with. They discovered that young people are resources for knowledge,
601 growth, and change (Mcintyre, 2006). Rodrigo described: ‘I am going to fight even
602 though he/she does not do anything at all’. They also learned the importance of valuing
603 young peoples’ voice, and caring about their students. According to Freire (1987, 2005),
604 a critical educator or activist teacher has the ‘passion to know’ their students and the
605 environment where they live and in order to do that he/she should have indispensable
606 qualities and virtues such as humility and the courage of love (Darder, 2017; Freire,
607 2005). Humility requires courage, trust and respect. It helps teachers to recognize that

608 we all know something and we all ignore something. Humility helps the teacher to
609 never let himself/herself to be trapped in the circuit of his/her truth. By the end of three
610 semesters, the PSTs recognized how much they learned from the kids and they intended
611 to continue teaching children and young people respecting their voices and believing
612 that it is possible to create spaces for social transformation. They described: 'I am a
613 teacher who talks less and lets the students talk more. I listen to them more.' In addition
614 to humility, an activist teacher needs to have the courage of love as a quality (Darder,
615 2017; Freire, 2005). It means to love the students and the process of teaching,
616 discovering how beautiful it is to be involved in the process of educating people. In our
617 study, the PSTs learned to care more about their students, showing love of being with
618 their students.

619 By taking actions that contributed to community, the PSTs gained a new
620 confidence in themselves as thinkers and doers. We believe that PETE programs could
621 develop similar relationships with the dynamic communities that support and surround
622 them. Those of us who work in PETE programs can contribute to developing those
623 relationships. Many of us have the opportunity to make room in our courses, and our
624 programs, to initiate ongoing and collaborative relationships with schools and
625 communities and developing action research (Mcintyre, 2006). It is through those types
626 of experiences that university students and youth can view one another as genuine
627 resources and essential stakeholders in teaching and learning experiences (Mcintyre,
628 2006).

629 Engaging PSTs in critical perspectives means deeply engaging them in complex
630 and challenging transformative pedagogies in an attempt to deconstruct their values and
631 beliefs (Enright et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2015; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). It
632 is challenging because of the various beliefs, prejudices, and feelings of resistance that

633 individuals may experience related to these issues (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018).
634 For example, it is necessary to create learning opportunities for PSTs to become aware
635 of their own privileges and the realities of others within dominant structures and
636 ideologies (Hill et al., 2018).

637 This activist approach was small in scale, involving one university-based
638 researcher and a small team of pre-service-teachers. However, it is worth remembering,
639 as Fitzpatrick (2018) mentioned, that critical work is intended to disrupt the status quo,
640 engage in questioning and uncertainty and challenge power relations and in that sense, it
641 will always be somewhat on the margins and micro (Fitzpatrick, 2018). Although this
642 project happened in a socially vulnerable area, this activist approach is not limited to
643 disadvantaged youth; it has a broader application addressing issues of gender, race,
644 ethnicity and social class in different contexts (Luguetti et al., 2017a; Luguetti & Oliver,
645 2018; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012; Oliver & Kirk, 2015; Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughtry,
646 2009).

647

648 **References**

- 649 Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching
650 approaches, course design and curricula: Implications for academic developers.
651 *International Journal for Academic Development*, 16(2), 133–145.
- 652 Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing Students' Perspectives : Toward Trust, Dialogue,
653 and Change in Education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3–14.
- 654 Darder, A. (2017). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: a pedagogy of love*. (Routledge, Ed.).
655 New York.
- 656 Denison, J., Mills, J. P., & Konoval, T. (2017). Sports' disciplinary legacy and the
657 challenge of 'coaching differently.' *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(6), 772–783.
- 658 Enright, E., Coll, L., Ní Chróinín, D., & Fitzpatrick, M. (2017). Student voice as risky
659 praxis: democratising physical education teacher education. *Physical Education
660 and Sport Pedagogy*, 22(5), 459–472.
- 661 Fine, M. (2007). Feminist designs for difference. In *HESSE-BIBER, S.N. Handbook of
662 Feminist Research: theory and practice* (pp. 613–619). London: Sage Publication.
- 663 Fitzpatrick, K. (2018). What happened to critical pedagogy in physical education? An
664 analysis of key critical work in the field. *European Physical Education Review*, 1–
665 18.
- 666 Freire, P. (1987). *Pedagogia do Oprimido [Pedagogy of the oppressed]* (17th ed.). Rio
667 de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- 668 Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogia da autonomia: saberes necessários a prática educativa
669 [Pedagogy of autonomy: necessary knowledge for educational practice]*. Paulo
670 Freire: vida e obra. São Paulo: Expressão São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- 671 Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: letters to those who dare teach*.
672 Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

673 Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

674 Hellison, D. (1978). *Beyond balls and bats: Alienated (and other) youth in the Gym*.
675 Washington, DC: AAHPER.

676 Hill, J., Philpot, R., Walton-Fisette, J. L., Sutherland, S., Flemons, M., Ovens, A., ...
677 Flory, S. B. (2018). Conceptualising social justice and sociocultural issues within
678 physical education teacher education: international perspectives. *Physical*
679 *Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(5), 469–483.
680 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2018.1470613>

681 Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Preparing teachers to teach African American students.
682 *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 206–214.

683 Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
684 Publications.

685 Luguetti, C., Oliver, K.L. (2018). ‘Getting more comfortable in an uncomfortable
686 space’: learning to become an activist researcher in a socially vulnerable sport
687 context, *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(9), 879-891.

688 Luguetti, C., Oliver, K.L., Dantas, L.E.P.B.T., & Kirk, D. (2017a). ‘The life of crime
689 does not pay; stop and think!’: the process of co-constructing a prototype
690 pedagogical model of sport for working with youth from socially vulnerable
691 backgrounds. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 22(4), 329-348.

692 Luguetti, C., Oliver, K.L., Dantas, L.E.P.B.T., & Kirk, D. (2017b). An Activist
693 Approach to Sport Meets Youth From Socially Vulnerable Backgrounds: Possible
694 Learning Aspirations. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88(1), 60-71.

695 McIntyre, A. (2006). Activist Research and Student Agency in Universities and Urban
696 Communities. *Urban Education*, 41(6), 628–647.

697 Nygreen, K. (2006). Reproducing or challenging power in the questions we ask and the

698 methods we use: A framework for activist research in urban education. *Urban*
699 *Review*, 38(1), 1–26.

700 O’Sullivan, M. (2018). PETE Academics as public intellectuals and activists in a global
701 teacher education context. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 23(5), 536–
702 543.

703 Oliver, K. L., & Oesterreich, H. A. (2013). Student-Centered Inquiry as Curriculum as a
704 Model for Field Based Teacher Education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45(3),
705 394–417.

706 Oliver, K. L., Oesterreich, H. A., Aranda, R., Archeleta, J., Blazera, C., Crux, K., ...
707 Robinson, R. (2015). ‘The sweetness of struggle’: innovation in physical education
708 teacher education through student-centered inquiry as curriculum in a physical
709 education methods course. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 20(1), 97–
710 115.

711 Philpot, R. (2015). Physical education initial teacher educators’ expressions of critical
712 pedagogy(ies): Coherency, complexity or confusion? *European Physical*
713 *Education Review*, 22(2), 260–275.

714 Shelley, K., & McCuaig, L. (2018). Close encounters with critical pedagogy in socio-
715 critically informed health education teacher education. *Physical Education and*
716 *Sport Pedagogy*, 23(5), 510–523.

717 Spaaij, R., & Jeanes, R. (2012). Education for social change? A Freirean critique of
718 sport for development and peace. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 1–16.

719 Walton-Fisette, J. L., & Sutherland, S. (2018). Moving forward with social justice
720 education in physical education teacher education. *Physical Education and Sport*
721 *Pedagogy*, 23(5), 461–468.