



Shared Island
Initiative



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University

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY ACROSS A SHARED ISLAND (SRASI):

TEACHING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN
INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION



Ann MacPhail, Antonio Calderón,
Brigitte Moody, Clare McAuley,
Dylan Scanlon, Elaine Murtagh,
Mairead Davidson, Paul McFlynn
Carla Luguetti, Jennifer Walton-
Fisette and Allison Campbell



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Research Team

Ann MacPhail, University of Limerick, Ireland

Antonio Calderón, University of Limerick, Ireland

Brigitte Moody, University of Limerick, Ireland

Clare McAuley, Ulster University, United Kingdom

Dylan Scanlon, Deakin University, Australia

Elaine Murtagh, University of Limerick, Ireland

Mairead Davidson, Ulster University, United Kingdom

Paul McFlynn, Ulster University, United Kingdom

Advisory Group

Carla Nascimento Luguetti, Victoria University, Australia

Jennifer Walton-Fisette, Kent State University, United States of America

Research Assistant

Allison Campbell, Ulster University, United Kingdom

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Executive Summary

The Shared Responsibility Across a Shared Island (SRASI) project aimed to (i) develop and share a teaching approach to social justice across two Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programmes from North and South, and (ii) encourage teacher educators and preservice teachers (PSTs) to learn with and from each other, within and across their respective jurisdictions. The participants were teacher educators and PSTs attached to two teacher education programmes in the North (Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) Physical Education) and in the South (Professional Master's in Education (PME) Physical Education). Three teacher educators and 12 PSTs were attached to the programme from the North and five teacher educators and 24 PSTs were attached to the programme from the South. Multiple data sources (including online recorded meetings, one face-to-face meeting, focus groups and debriefs) were collected and analysed throughout the thematic analysis.

The findings are presented as multiple ways of considering the experiences, positions and directions of those involved in the project and are captured with reference to 'space'. PSTs and teacher educators occupy multiple spaces (sometimes at the same time) that are considered to be connected to exposure to, and experiences of, social justice matters. The concept of space allows the findings to be presented in a way that directly relates back to addressing the research questions of (i) the way in which facilitating shared discussions around social justice (in PETE programmes North and South) enhance PSTs' and teacher educators' perspectives and experiences of addressing social justice in schools, and (ii) considerations that need to be addressed in formalising a shared North and South PETE space to discuss and enact social justice in schools.

The key findings focus on (i) the integration of social justice matters across two jurisdictions and within PETE programmes, (ii) teacher educators' exploration and experience in teaching about and for social justice, (iii) setting realistic expectations to encourage engagement with social justice matters, (iv) School Placement as an opportunity to experience the realities of social justice matters, (v) the similarity of experiences between jurisdictions, and (vi) PSTs' acknowledgement of personal growth with respect to social justice matters.

Six recommendations are aligned with the six key findings:

Recommendation 1: To create a safe space, teacher educators and PSTs should continually engage within and across their respective jurisdictions to determine how best to maximise the engagement in discussing social justice matters, appreciating that this takes time.

Recommendation 2: Teacher educators' understanding of their positionality and vulnerabilities in exploring social justice matters is central to appreciating their role in encouraging PSTs' engagement with social justice matters.

Recommendation 3: Sufficient time needs to be allowed to determine the 'readiness' of teacher educators and PSTs to develop appropriate dispositions and aligned skill-sets that will enhance engagement with social justice matters.

Recommendation 4: Appreciating that the realities of teaching in a school heightens PSTs' exposure to social justice matters, PSTs need help to consider how best to encourage teachers and schools to adapt approaches and practices that address social justice matters.

Recommendation 5: Consider the extent to which teacher educators and PSTs can learn from each other about social justice matters which arise in different school and teaching contexts as well as geographical jurisdictions.

Recommendation 6: Provide PSTs with opportunities for modelling practices and regular reflection on experiences and exposure to social justice matters with a view to acknowledging personal growth and determining how best to develop an ongoing commitment to social justice matters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

There has been a general acceptance for some time that education is likely to be the most powerful instrument in increasing mutual understanding, and perhaps increased co-operation, within and between the two parts of Ireland (Murray et al., 1997). It is this acceptance that has driven this project to believe that, while the structure and practice of education in the North and South are different, learning about these differences and aligned social justice issues can be a powerful medium for teacher educators and preservice teachers (PSTs) to understand self-respect, respect for others, and strive towards the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions.

Given that social, economic, environment and cultural inequality are evident in North and South, it is anticipated that social justice issues aligned to healthism, genderism, heterosexism, racism, classism, linguicism and religionism are likely to direct, perhaps to different extents, contemporary debates in social justice and equity practices in North and South post-primary schooling. Sharing and considering the extent to which these social justice issues are prevalent and how they are addressed, provides teacher educators and PSTs with direction on how to evaluate their current programmes and practices by providing ideas for content, curriculum development, implementation and pedagogical practices and impact.

The social justice space captures the distribution of opportunities and privileges within a society. This provides a clear warrant for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to work towards the development of PSTs who are socially just in their beliefs and practices and better equipped to work in diverse and inclusive school learning environments. Additionally, it emphasises the need for teacher educators to create democratic spaces to model social justice pedagogies. The Shared Responsibility Across a Shared Island (SRASI) project provides empirical data on teacher educators' and PSTs' experiences of sharing a social justice space across North and South and subsequent teaching practice in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). This leads to capturing the teaching practice realities of striving to teach for social justice while developing a pedagogy for social justice.

Social justice and Physical Education Teacher Education

There has been increased attention provided to social justice within teacher education over the past couple of decades (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). In an education

system with levels of systemic social inequality, teachers can play a significant role in challenging such inequalities and promoting more socially just environments for learners. Critical research in this space has advocated for approaches to support social change, but translation into practice in schools and teacher education is complex (Hickey et al., 2022). In this context, ITE programmes need to be educating teacher educators and PSTs on social justice and their role in challenging social inequalities and contributing to a more socially just educational experience for learners. Despite this need, Mills and Ballantyne (2016, p. 263) suggest that much of the research in social justice and ITE focuses on the beliefs or values of PSTs and teacher educators with regards to social justice, rather than “what programs that prepare preservice teachers to engage with student diversity in socially just ways might look like in practice”. Many researchers have noted that changing attitudes and beliefs of PSTs is challenging, and studies have reported both limited success (Lee, 2011) and positive change (Mills, 2013). Mills and Ballantyne’s (2016) research, which reviewed empirical research in the field of social justice and teacher education (from 2004 - 2014), concluded by suggesting:

“There would be value in research focusing on the pedagogy employed in teacher education, as well as the attitudes/beliefs of teacher educators. Thus far, the predominant focus has been on changing students, rather than teacher educators, and “blame” is, therefore, placed on the students for any deficiencies noted, rather than critically exploring the pedagogies and philosophies espoused by teacher educators” (p. 275).

When we turn to the PETE context, there have been calls to address issues of equity and diversity, and more broadly, social justice in the field (see, e.g. Flory & Landi, 2020; Lynch et al., 2022). Social justice attempts to promote deep changes in the *status quo* of Physical Education, sharing a commitment to equity, democracy and social justice (Enright et al., 2018; Lynch & Ovens, 2022). This body of research points to the potential of social justice pedagogies to enable teachers and students to take action for democracy and empowerment in PETE (Lynch et al., 2022). Pedagogies for social justice are committed to equity, democracy and have challenged and/or negotiated forms of discrimination in Physical Education (e.g. neoliberalism, sexism, racism and ableism) by interrogating and denaturalising the conditions of oppression. Kirk (1986), Wright (1995), Fernandez-Balboa & Stiehl (1995), and Tinning (1991) pioneered the advocating piece for embedding social justice into PETE programmes. More recently, there has been a small growing research base on how Physical Education teacher educators are conceptualising and addressing (to a lesser extent) social justice. Hill et al. (2022) explicitly argue that having a social justice focus in a PETE programme is ‘not

enough'. The authors continue to advocate for explicit teacher educator positionality work in developing an understanding and conceptualisation of social justice coupled with scaffolded reflection and formal learning of social justice knowledge and critical content knowledge.

There are some promising developments addressing social justice issues in PETE, for example, using an activist approach (see e.g. Luguetti et al., 2019), trauma-informed approaches (see e.g. Quarmby et al., 2021) and adopting culturally relevant pedagogies (see e.g. Shiver et al., 2020). Despite this, challenges continue to exist in how to enact social justice particularly in school settings (Gerdin et al., 2021). For example, in Flory and Walton-Fisette's (2015) self-study on teaching sociocultural issues to PSTs teachers, the authors questioned if their PSTs had the ability to transfer the sociocultural content knowledge to practical settings.

Moving from an individual level to a programmatic level, there have been some considerations in how best PETE programmes can teach about, through, and for social justice (pedagogies). Hill et al., (2022) suggest how PSTs and teacher educators can work together in communities of practice to understand, develop, and learn about beliefs, curriculum, and pedagogies related to social justice. Mitchell et al., (2021) provide 'future directions' for PETE educators: (i) the need for educators to engage in positionality work and self-reflection on their social identity (which can potentially, if intentional, lead to an understanding of certain programmatic-level decisions [or not]); (ii) to conduct a programmatic equity audit (the authors provide guidance and questions for this process); (iii) the use of self-study as an approach for exploring, engaging, and challenging teacher educator practice related to social justice – this can take shape as a programmatic self-study (see e.g., Tannehill et al., 2015); and (iv) engaging in policy work – the authors argue for teacher educators to engage in policy work as policy actors; to have policy conversations with PSTs and colleagues and to act as 'entrepreneurs and provocateurs' (Lambert & Penney, 2020) in enacting policy.

Although we have an increasing number of scholars arguing for social justice to be included in PETE (Lynch et al., 2022), there is a gap in studies that explore ITE programmes North and South. The SRASI project aims to gather empirical data on the experiences of teacher educators and PSTs in the North and South as they engage in a shared social justice space, ultimately shedding light on the practical challenges of teaching for social justice while concurrently developing a pedagogy rooted in social justice principles. With the SRASI project, we hope to bridge the gap in understanding how PETE programmes, North and South,

understand social justice, shedding light on the practical challenges and fostering the development of pedagogies grounded in social justice.

Aims and research questions

The aims of the SRASI project are to (i) develop and share a teaching approach to social justice across two PETE programmes, North and South, and (ii) encourage teacher educators and PSTs to learn with and from each other, within and across their respective jurisdictions.

The aligned research questions are:

1. In what way does facilitating shared discussions around social justice (in PETE programmes North and South) enhance PSTs' and teacher educators' perspectives and experiences of addressing social justice in schools?
2. What considerations need to be addressed in formalising a shared North and South PETE space to discuss and enact social justice in schools?

Chapter 2: Methodology

North and South contexts

The SRASI project supported collaboration and dialogue among teacher educators and PSTs in two PETE programmes in the North (Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) Physical Education) and in the South (Professional Masters in Education (PME) Physical Education).

A key objective of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) aims to develop young people as contributors to society and, as such, *Local and Global Citizenship* is a statutory component of the post-primary curriculum at Key Stage 3 (11-14 year olds) and Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds). At Key Stage 3, the *Local and Global Citizenship* Curriculum is framed around four key concepts: *Diversity and Inclusion, Equality and Social Justice, Democracy and Active Participation* and underpinned by the concept of *Human Rights and Social Responsibilities*. Enquiry-based and participatory learning approaches are promoted in the Local and Global Citizenship classroom. At Key Stage 4, young people continue to engage with contemporary citizenship-related issues with a strong focus on human rights, social justice and equality. Optional qualifications are also available at both GCSE (14-16 year olds) and GCE (16-18 year olds) level. For example, students can choose to study *GCSE Learning for Life and Work*, which includes a compulsory Local and Global Citizenship strand, or choose to study *Government and Politics* at both GCSE and GCE level.

The PETE programme at Ulster University (UU) is the only post-primary Physical Education PGCE programme offered in Northern Ireland. The PSTs on this one-year full-time course study the statutory requirements for Physical Education at Key Stage 3 including the key elements such as citizenship, cultural understanding, media awareness and ethical awareness in order to fulfil the curriculum objective of developing young people as contributors to society. The PSTs have the opportunity to engage with sporting activities from other cultures as well as explore issues connected to the lack of opportunities available for females to participate in particular sporting activities. Through practical subject application in athletics, dance, games, gymnastics, outdoor education and swimming, PSTs focus on social justice issues such as ability/disability. Whilst social justice is not studied as a stand alone module, it is explored across all practical modules and through two Level 7 assignments where PSTs respond to questions which focus on the role of Physical Education in the NIC and the link between teaching, learning and assessment.

In the South, Junior Cycle caters for students in the first three years of their post-primary education. The optional short course *Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)* is built around three strands - rights and responsibilities, global citizenship and exploring democracy. There is a strong focus on student action aimed at giving students an experience of active citizenship. Senior cycle education in the South constitutes students following a two-year Leaving Certificate programme or engaging in an additional optional year at the start of their senior cycle. This year is called Transition Year. Transition Year may include a variety of units as part of their transition year programme and units aligned with social justice matters include '*Pamoja-Together for Rights*' (helps students to explore development and human rights issues in a global context) and '*Global Development Issues*' (introduces development issues and action for local and global citizenship). Leaving Certificate offers '*Politics and Society*' that aims to develop the learner's capacity to engage in reflective and active citizenship.

The PETE programme at the University of Limerick (UL) is offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Physical Education pathway of the Professional Master's of Education (PME) is a full-time two-year ITE programme which prepares graduates to be skilled in designing instructionally aligned, evidence-based Physical Education programmes. Students complete a total of 20 weeks of School Placement in two full-time blocks of 10 weeks, where they are immersed in a school community teaching all aspects of the Physical Education curriculum. As at UU, while social justice is not studied as a stand alone module, social justice matters such as inclusion, disability and gender, are discrete topics throughout all modules. As part of the development of two modules focussed on applying research into practice in Physical Education, PSTs were asked to design an action plan to capture their experiences on applying research into practice through the reading of relevant literature related to a chosen topic and its enactment while they were on School Placement. A social justice lens was included both for the design and enactment of the action plans, and also for the analysis and presentation of the whole process.

Research design

The SRASI project had a research design that enabled teacher educators and PSTs to reflect and develop their pedagogical approach and curriculum delivery for matters relating to social justice. Teaching for social justice broadly refers to progressive efforts to engage diverse students and communities inclusively in inquiring into real-world local and international

problems of injustice and inequity, and secure equitable outcomes for diverse and typically under-represented students (DISCs, 2022). Working collaboratively, teacher educators involved in the project were challenged to consider how best to address potentially controversial issues relating to social justice within, and across, their respective modules.

Drawing inspiration from Freire's concept of dialogue and guided by the principles of agonistic respect (Monforte & Smith, 2021), this social justice initiative fosters a community of learners where PSTs and teacher educators collaborated to refine their pedagogical approaches and curriculum delivery, particularly in the context of social justice, through practitioner research. This project was built upon a well-established three-tiered teaching model within a University, emphasising the role of PSTs as practitioner researchers, as outlined by Tannehill et al., (2020):

Tier 1: In Tier 1, PSTs partnered with peers from different jurisdictions to jointly identify specific areas of interest within the realm of social justice. These topics emerged from their previous experiences working with pupils or from social issues or matters they anticipate, such as racism and sexism.

Tier 2: Moving to Tier 2, PSTs immersed themselves in relevant research related to their chosen social justice areas, selecting six research articles with the potential to inform their practice. Emphasis was placed on identifying literature specific to their respective jurisdictions to uncover potential nuances in working with their chosen social justice topics. For each research article, PSTs collectively scrutinised the research's purpose, three key findings, and discussed the implications for their own practice, including planning for its implementation.

Tier 3: In Tier 3, PSTs collaborated on crafting action plans based on their selected research findings, with the goal of influencing their practice within their school placement. This process involved five key steps: (i) implementing the action plan, (ii) documenting their actions, pupil reactions, and outcomes, (iii) reflecting on their notes and the overall action plan experience with their peer, (iv) sharing these experiences with PST peers in both ITE programmes to encourage collaborative discussions and approach expansion, and (v) contemplating how to apply these insights in their subsequent teaching experiences.

Ethical approval was received from the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at UL.

Participants

The participants were teacher educators and PSTs attached to two teacher education programmes - one in the North (Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) Physical Education) and one in the South (Professional Master's in Education (PME) Physical Education). Three teacher educators and 12 PSTs were attached to the programme from the North and five teacher educators and 24 PSTs were attached to the programme from the South. The PSTs attached to the programme from the North were enrolled on a one-year programme with those from the South enrolled on a two-year programme. At the time the project was conducted, the PSTs from the South were in their second year of the programme. Two renowned international experts in the field of social justice and PETE acted as 'critical friends' throughout the duration of the project.

Data collection

Multiple data collection was considered in the SRASI project. Ten online recorded teacher educator team meetings took place throughout the project and tended to last on average for one hour. These team meetings determined the ongoing logistics of the project (and specifically the meetings planned with the PSTs), items to action, consideration of timelines, research design and data collection.

Additionally, data collection included three recorded online meetings (October 2022, February and March 2023) and one face-to-face meeting (May 2023) with PSTs. The presentations and resources used in the four meetings are included in Appendix 1. The first online meeting was scheduled for two hours, the second and third online meetings for one hour and the face-to-face meeting for four hours. Teacher educators wrote reflections after each of the meetings with PSTs they had attended. Reflections were captured in a Google Doc with no specific prompts. Rather, this was an opportunity for teacher educators to present their reactions and thoughts on the four meetings with the PSTs.

Two focus groups with PSTs were collected. The first focus group sought responses to their initial expectations of being involved in the project, anything from the meetings and

subsequent discussions that they recall making an impact on them, any discussions that resonated with School Placement experiences and any changes to their thinking related to social justice issues. The second focus group was held face-to-face between teacher educators and PSTs and focussed on what they had learned from the North and the South in this project and what considerations need to be addressed in enacting social justice. PSTs were also asked to describe their own content knowledge specific to the teaching for social justice in their School Placement, and to consider how they believed this knowledge/experience had changed over the semester. The opinion of PSTs was also sought in relation to whether they had anything they would like to add to what was discussed and or if there was anything they thought should be changed about the project.

Two one hour debriefs (December 2022 and April 2023) between teacher educators involved in the delivery of the PST meetings and the project's international critical friends provided the space to explore various matters. The second debrief included the teacher educators' vision and hope in beginning the project, their (evolving) positionality as teacher educators and anything they had learned about themselves, their developing content knowledge and pedagogical experience relating to social justice, learnings specific to the North and South jurisdictions, description of PSTs' knowledge and awareness of social justice matters through undertaking School Placement, specific challenges that they experienced, proposed changes to their pedagogy in the future and, finally, aspects of the project that have worked well and any changes they would suggest.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved inductive and iterative analysis using thematic analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2019). First, two authors of this project individually read all the data and grouped statements and ideas into inductive codes. Independently, they refined their codes by reading and re-reading data before using the refined codes to construct themes that they each illustrated with quotes. Second, the two authors compared their individual analyses and constructed common concerns. They met numerous times to discuss their interpretations and collectively develop insights into the themes. Finally, the other authors collectively reviewed the combined analysis and engaged in a process of double-checking the interpretations. In

this phase, multiple revisions were made to the analysis until all authors felt that the analysis was reflective of their experience in this project.

It is anticipated that the findings will inform future professional development for teacher educators on the shared island by identifying how social justice matters can respectfully be addressed within ITE programmes, and simultaneously supporting teacher educators to develop their capacity to facilitate this learning for PSTs. Learning from the project will thus inform both professional and policy development considerations relating to pedagogy and curriculum delivery for social justice.

Chapter 3: Findings

The findings are presented as multiple ways of considering the experiences, positions and directions of those involved in the project and are captured with reference to 'space'. PSTs and teacher educators occupy multiple spaces (sometimes at the same time) that are considered to be connected to exposure to, and experiences of, social justice matters. The concept of space allows the findings to be presented in a way that directly relates back to addressing the research questions of (i) the way in which facilitating shared discussions around social justice (in PETE programmes North and South) enhance PSTs' and teacher educators' perspectives and experiences of addressing social justice in schools, and (ii) considerations that need to be addressed in formalising a shared North and South PETE space to discuss and enact social justice in schools.

Theme 1: Creating a safe space: Integration of social justice matters across two jurisdictions and within PETE programmes

Given the nature of the project, initiation of social justice matters with PSTs involved consideration at a local level and cross-border level. While there was an initial tendency to focus on building relationships between the North and South PSTs, we were conscious that this was not to be pursued at the detriment of PSTs exploring their, and others', understandings of social justice. The challenge was identified as how best PSTs could share their experiences across two jurisdictions and, in turn, interrogate their developing and interlinked social and teacher identity.

Considerations on how to initiate social justice conversation with PSTs, locally and across the two jurisdictions, tended to favour the notion of the creation of a safe space for both PSTs and teacher educators. Teacher educators determined that an element to creating a safe space would be, before meeting with PSTs, to share proposed items for discussion (starting with social justice matters they were more likely to be familiar/comfortable with) to allow them to consider responses they would be willing to share:

“Before you have a collective conversation, because every time you bring it [social justice matter] to the whole group, that’s when they [PSTs] usually shut down, but if they have time to think about it and have the answer and they can write or have an activity to go through, you might get more about who they are

and they will be more willing to share and feel safe versus just having that open conversation” (Project Meeting, August 2022).

The most prominent matter that arose in initial meetings concerned the extent to which engaging with social justice matters could be integrated with what was being taught on an already established module, not wishing for the social justice focus to be considered as an ‘add on’ by either teacher educators or PSTs (and in addition an increase in workload for both): *“whatever we do, we... need to embed it [social justice matters] within the actual module, their assignments, assessments, it needs to be embedded there as opposed to an add on”* (Project Meeting, June 2022). The challenge of embedding social justice matters addressed, to some extent, the reality of how best to embed social justice matters within PETE programmes that are continually being squeezed for time to cover multiple concepts and content:

“It is so hard teaching about and for social justice and keeping it...teaching it as isolated from other things you are teaching - it really needs to be connected and integrated so that they can start seeing what that looks like...you need to help them bridge the pieces together, they need to view the concept of social justice through physical activity and movement” (Project Meeting, August 2022).

Ongoing challenges in creating space across the two jurisdictions included the different timetable/scheduling requirements, differing abilities to access and use online platforms and the reality that one group of PSTs had more school-based experience (and perhaps by association more exposure to social justice matters) than the other group.

Recommendation 1: To create a safe space, teacher educators and PSTs should continually engage within and across their respective jurisdictions to determine how best to maximise the engagement in discussing social justice matters, appreciating that this takes time.

Theme 2: A learning space: Teacher educators' exploration and experience in teaching about and for social justice

Consideration was given to the concept of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1996), where the teacher educators and PSTs were sharing the same space. This entailed teacher educators being pushed (along with PSTs) to feel 'comfortable with being uncomfortable' and for teacher educators to undertake the same tasks that PSTs were being asked to complete. This latter point resulted, at times, in teacher educators either undertaking the tasks proposed for the PSTs before class or undertaking the tasks at the same time as PSTs during the class.

Teacher educators reflected on the importance of building relationships between themselves and PSTs and accepted the reality that sharing a space was an opportunity for both groups to learn from each other and upskill together on social justice matters. For example, in response to one task where teacher educators and PSTs were prompted to capture the 'demographics' on those they interact/socialise most with, a teacher educator admitted: *"I was prompted to consider the extent to which some of the demographics, e.g., gender, age and sexual orientation were clearly more diverse in my response to the task than ethnicity, disability and SES"* (Reflections, Meeting 2).

A level of vulnerability was evident from teacher educators looking to share the space with PSTs, particularly when they were asked to comment on social justice matters that PSTs may have experience of and the teacher educators do not: *"I also felt somewhat limited in the advice that I could offer. This work is difficult; we certainly don't have all the answers! I feel that we are all working things out together – the PSTs and I"* (Reflections, Meeting 3). In the long term, teacher educators recognised that participating in this project had led to them feeling less fearful of addressing social justice matters and to be more *"chilled out"* as a researcher (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2).

The teacher educators had initially envisaged introducing some of the high-level discourse surrounding social justice (including definitions of social justice, the importance of social justice language, assumptions and biases with respect to social justice matters) as well as sharing their positions towards, and experiences with, social justice matters with the PSTs in the first online session. On reflection, teacher educators agreed that they did not wish to direct the subsequent PST discussion so they chose not to share their respective positionalities and rather capture PSTs' current exposure to, and readiness to discuss, social justice matters: *"It*

was important to acknowledge where PSTs are starting from and build on that, i.e., what their understandings of social justice are and what they think about gender, etc., and the role of social justice in this. Interest in capturing their ‘readiness’” (Reflections, Meeting 1).

Teacher educators described entering this project with the vision of furthering their own personal development and learning, expressing feelings of ignorance on social justice issues, wanting to learn *“from the north”* and about how to teach social justice in teacher education generally. An air of excitement was also evident as to the impact/benefit such a project could potentially have on equipping PSTs for their teaching careers and in relation to providing an approach for dealing with social justice issues on the island of Ireland (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2). Teacher educators acknowledged their difficulties experienced in trying to define their own positionality and, generally in regard to social justice issues, they acknowledged the possibility they were approaching social justice from a place of privilege and having their thinking shaped by their profession: *“... still trying to get my head around social justice in its entirety and how it is interpreted”* (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2).

Recommendation 2: Teacher educators’ understanding of their positionality and vulnerabilities in exploring social justice matters is central to appreciating their role in encouraging PST engagement with social justice matters.

Theme 3: Realistic space: Setting realistic expectations to encourage engagement with social justice matters

There was an overestimation from teacher educators of how ready PSTs were to discuss social justice ‘isms’. Teacher educators reflected on the somewhat stilted PST response to the introduction of ‘isms’ (e.g. racism, ableism, classism), surmising that PSTs had not had experience in aligning specific ‘isms’ with the social justice matters they discussed. For example, not appreciating comments made by some students that gymnastics is ‘for girls’ implies sexism. When pushed to consider ‘isms’, PSTs focussed on the more visible ‘isms’ one would perhaps expect to arise in a Physical Education context, e.g. ableism.

Teacher educators acknowledged that it was important that PSTs were at least able to identify and discuss an 'ism', anticipating that this would increase their confidence to expand their 'isms' repertoire in the future:

"While we were perhaps initially disappointed with the 'isms' that the pre-service students had chosen in relation to the range, we had said that it was more important that they come up with something that they are initially comfortable with to get them into the space. To get them to think about interrogation and then to grow from there. So our initial ... disappointment we talked ourselves round and said at least they were identifying an ism and were able to talk about it" (Project Meeting, March 2023).

Despite what might be considered a limited ability to engage with social justice matters, PSTs valued the importance of such matters and conveyed an interest and empathy towards social justice matters by wanting to learn more.

Recommendation 3: Sufficient time needs to be allowed to determine the 'readiness' of teacher educators and PSTs to develop appropriate dispositions and aligned skill-sets that will enhance engagement with social justice matters.

Theme 4: School space: School Placement as an opportunity to experience the realities of social justice matters

A shift in PSTs' awareness of social justice matters was evident when both groups had experienced/were experiencing an extended period in schools completing the School Placement component of their respective teacher education programmes. The School Placement experience appeared to heighten PSTs' identification of, and exposure to, multiple social justice matters (isms) and, consequently, heighten their ability to reflect on social justice matters. While there was a concern from teacher educators about the types of challenges PSTs might experience in relation to dealing with social justice matters in schools, the realities of teaching in a school had appeared to heighten PSTs' exposure to social justice matters:

“I didn’t really value their maturity, their social justice knowledge, their social justice experiences while on placement, their ability to articulate ideas, opinions, etc” (Reflections, Meeting 4).

“I am more than delighted to say that I was completely wrong. The PSTs were outstanding. I believe the event was a total success, (if for success we understand, respectful dialogue, collegiality, support, provoking thoughts, etc.)” (Reflections, Meeting 4).

The extent to which School Placement did not always encourage the use of more social justice practice as well as the extent to which PSTs were not sufficiently confident to challenge this was evident. It was clear from the PSTs’ experiences on School Placement that they had not always been supported by teachers to explore social justice matters with the students they taught: *“Some PSTs were a bit doubtful about bringing social justice matters in their school context due to the highly unstructured and challenging context they were in” (Reflections, Meeting 3).*

There was the general feeling with the PSTs that new teachers were more aware of social justice issues, however they faced difficulties when school departments have certain ways of doing things: *“I feel like the world is changing, but school settings are staying the same in a lot of cases - they need to be open to change” (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4).*

A recurrent theme was PSTs expressing they felt limited as to how far they can address social justice issues while they are on placement:

“As a PST, there’s only so far you can go with it without needing someone else to impact it, and when you are going to a teacher who has been in the job X amount of years, god knows, they are maybe just letting things slide or ignoring it and you are depending on them to be the person you are passing information to so it is tricky that way” (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4).

PSTs felt that although context and structure of the school they were working in would have a role to play, it would be easier to impact on social justice issues/implement more ways of addressing it when they were a qualified, full time teacher:

“I think it would be easier to implement things if you were a fully qualified, full-time teacher in the school, that you had your own classes every single week and you could continue to implement stuff yourself. Whereas PSTs, like you were saying before, it is so difficult to go in and then another teacher take over and it could be scrapped altogether” (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4).

While PSTs recognised that a lot of changes have been experienced by teachers in the last 10 to 15 years, some experienced teachers took longer to adapt. PSTs outlined how they were striving to approach issues but felt it should be the generation of teachers above them who should be leading them to implement such things:

“We are the ones going into schools and correcting them on their language and the words they are saying when we are relatively new to the whole gig like. Rather it should be the older generation leading us, it speaks volumes even. We are doing our best and trying to correct it...and we are the ones being more critical of ourselves” (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4).

From the onset of the project, PSTs regarded Physical Education classes as being an inclusive space, adaptable to the needs of individuals and where inclusivity and social justice matters can be addressed and promoted (Meeting with PSTs, Number 1). Despite this, there was a general feeling amongst PSTs that Physical Education was regarded within schools as “*at the bottom of the pecking order*”. PSTs articulated that, in their experiences, the culture in schools was that Physical Education was the one subject that could be cancelled or missed resulting in them missing out on teaching time (Focus Groups with PSTs, December 22 - January 23). One PST reported that they had missed four weeks of teaching due to the Physical Education hall being used for mock exams - they felt it was just accepted in their school that Physical Education could be cancelled.

Recommendation 4: Appreciating that the realities of teaching in a school heightens PSTs’ exposure to social justice matters, PSTs need help to consider how best to encourage teachers and schools to adapt approaches and practices that address social justice matters.

Theme 5: Similar spaces: The similarity of experiences between jurisdictions

When asked what PSTs had learned from their peers in the North and South, while there was a difference in education systems (which some PSTs were previously unaware of) the issues faced tended to be the same - jurisdiction was not the issue - it was down to individual schools and their policies. For example, all agreed that there was male/female inequality in relation to sports and that Physical Education was sometimes regarded as not having as high a priority as other subjects and as dispensable should other events/circumstances arise. Both teacher educators and PSTs observed that discussions were not “... *about North and South. It was just about sharing different kinds of experiences*” (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2). One PST commented in relation to the attitudes of their peers in this project:

“... we all kind of care about [the] same things, about like inclusion, make sure everybody is participating rather than just to say to sporty people, we want to adapt to make sure that everybody is included. So it's nice to see that” (Focus Groups with PSTs, December 22 - January 23).

While discussions did not focus on the North and South, both teacher educators and PSTs made the observation, from the outset, (Meeting with PSTs, Number 1) that social justice in the North “*was very much focussed around religion*” (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2). Far from being viewed as negative, this interpretation of social justice was considered progressive, given that PSTs felt comfortable discussing religion in what remains a divided society (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2). Whereas in the South, it was felt that religion “*wasn't as big of an issue and... perhaps had a broader sense of social justice issues*” (Critical Friend Meeting, Number 2).

Recommendation 5: Consider the extent to which teacher educators and PSTs can learn from each other about social justice matters that arise in different school and teaching contexts as well as geographical jurisdictions.

Theme 6: Reflective space: PSTs' acknowledgement of personal growth with respect to social justice matters

The project was described by PSTs as having been “*an eye opener*” and providing them with “*the cornerstone about ‘isms*” (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4). After the first meeting, PSTs said they felt more aware of social justice and how large a spectrum this encompassed and were actively identifying and addressing social justice issues on School Placement. For example, they discussed working with students with very limited English, incorporating those from a learning support unit into Physical Education classes and addressing sensitivities and problems highlighted by obesity (Focus Groups with PSTs, December 22 - January 23). PSTs had the desire to learn more on the subject and wanted more information/training on how to handle more complex social justice situations, for example, a student transitioning gender. There was a genuine anxiousness about not getting things right when handling social justice issues (Focus Groups with PSTs, December 22 - January 23).

At their final meeting, PSTs acknowledged that there was so much more to social justice than they ever expected and still so much that they had to learn on an ongoing basis. PSTs also believed their knowledge and experience of social justice had changed over the course of the semester and reported that they felt more equipped and confident to stand up and address social justice issues and stressed the importance of being open to change and learning from their mistakes (Meeting with PSTs, Number 4).

Recommendation 6: Provide PSTs with opportunities for modelling practices and regular reflection on experiences and exposure to social justice matters with a view to acknowledging personal growth and determining how best to develop an ongoing commitment to social justice matters.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the SRASI project, which explores the experiences of teacher educators and PSTs in the North and South as they engage in social justice education, align with the broader body of research on social justice in PETE (Flory & Landi, 2020; Lynch et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2021). Over the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing social justice issues in teacher education to combat systemic inequalities in education. However, this research often focuses on the beliefs and values of PSTs and teacher educators regarding social justice, rather than the practical implementation of social justice education (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). The SRASI project extends the body of research in PETE.

In the context of PETE, there has been a notable push to address issues of equity, diversity, and social justice (Flory & Landi, 2020; Lynch et al., 2022). Social justice in PETE aims to challenge and eliminate discrimination, including forms of oppression like neoliberalism, sexism, racism, and ableism (Enright et al., 2018; Lynch & Ovens, 2022). This research emphasises the potential of social justice pedagogies to empower teachers and PSTs to take action for democracy and equity in Physical Education (Lynch et al., 2022). The SRASI project reflects the ongoing challenges in translating social justice education into practical settings, particularly in school settings (Gerdin et al., 2021). This mirrors the broader challenge faced by teacher educators in PETE programmes, who strive to nurture social justice values and knowledge in PSTs (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015).

In conclusion, there are four main threads that have arisen throughout the project and which we suggest are pertinent when considering teaching social justice in ITE.

Firstly, social justice work takes time for teacher educators and PSTs. Teacher educators need to take time to consider carefully their positioning with respect to social justice matters before contemplating how best to introduce and encourage PSTs to engage with such issues. PSTs need to be afforded appropriate time to begin the ongoing process of being exposed to social justice matters and developing a disposition and skill-set that will allow them to engage with such matters.

Secondly, to maximise exposure to, and understanding of the enormity of social justice matters, social justice matters need to be embedded across all elements of an ITE programme rather than reside in one module with a specific social justice focus. It is therefore imperative

that all those contributing to the programme are invested in promoting social justice matters within modules and across the programme. This entails introducing, reinforcing and developing social justice matters across the different elements of the programme.

Thirdly, while PSTs are aware of some social justice matters, they may not have received encouragement to interrogate and/or challenge such matters or indeed consider the breadth of matters that social justice encompasses. Teacher educators need to consider how best to create a safe space through which PSTs are encouraged to explore more broadly, and in more depth, social justice matters. This will help to prepare PSTs, and increase their confidence, to navigate and negotiate the realities of social justice matters that arise outside the confines of the university setting during the School Placement element of the ITE programme.

Fourthly, the North-South connection of the project provided a unique element. Teacher educators and PSTs were exposed, and challenged, to consider social justice matters that arose in a different jurisdiction. This resulted in getting to know each other, trusting each other, challenging each other and challenging oneself. This, we contend, is the foundation of social justice work.

We leave the reader with six recommendations:

Recommendation 1: To create a safe space, teacher educators and PSTs should continually engage within and across their respective jurisdictions to determine how best to maximise the engagement in discussing social justice matters, appreciating that this takes time.

Recommendation 2: Teacher educators' understanding of their positionality and vulnerability in exploring social justice matters is central to appreciating their role in encouraging PST engagement with social justice matters.

Recommendation 3: Sufficient time needs to be allowed to determine the 'readiness' of teacher educators and PSTs to develop appropriate dispositions and aligned skill-sets that will enhance engagement with social justice matters.

Recommendation 4: Appreciating that the realities of teaching in a school heightens PSTs' exposure to social justice matters, PSTs need support to consider how best to encourage teachers and schools to adapt approaches and practices that address social justice matters.

Recommendation 5: Consider the extent to which teacher educators and PSTs can learn from each other about social justice matters that arise in different school and teaching contexts as well as geographical jurisdictions.

Recommendation 6: Provide PSTs with opportunities for modelling practices and regular reflection on experiences and exposure to social justice matters with a view to acknowledging personal growth and determining how best to develop an ongoing commitment to social justice matters.

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Dissemination

Conference presentations

MacPhail, A. and Calderón, A. (2023) Shared Responsibility across a Shared Island: Teaching Social Justice in Initial Teacher Education. *European Conference on Educational Research*, University of Glasgow, Scotland, 22-25 August 2023.

MacPhail, A., Calderón, A., Moody, B., McAuley, C., Scanlon, D., Murtagh, E., Davidson, M. and McFlynn, P. (2023) Teaching social justice in physical education teacher education across the island of Ireland. *Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport Ireland Research Forum*, Marino Institute of Education, 10 June 2023.

Blog

[Advocating for social justice across teacher education programmes: Ten realities experienced by teacher educators – Allison Campbell and Ann MacPhail. – PESS News & Information](#) (May 2023)

Upcoming

Conference presentations

MacPhail, A. (2023) Sharing a social justice space across two initial teacher education programmes from the North and South of Ireland. *The Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS)*, Ross Inner, UK, 19-20 October 2023.

MacPhail, A., Calderón, A., Moody, B., McAuley, C., Scanlon, D., Murtagh, E., Davidson, M. and McFlynn, P. (2023) Dialogue and solidarity in teacher education: Positionality in advocating for social justice. *European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning (EAPRIL)*, Belfast 22-24 November, 2023.

Moody, B., MacPhail, A., Calderon, A., McAuley, C., Scanlon, D., Murtagh, E., Davidson, M. and McFlynn, P. (2023) Teaching social justice in physical education teacher education across the island of Ireland. *European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning (EAPRIL)*, Belfast 22-24 November, 2023.

Webinar

MacPhail, A., Scanlon, D., McFlynn, P., O'Neil, G. and Luguetti, C. AIESEP Connect webinar
- Dialogue and solidarity in teacher education: Positionality in advocating for social justice.
26th October, 2023 – 11am (BST)

Appendix 1

Project presentations

Meeting 1: Creating a safe space and getting to know each other.

001 SRASI Meeting

Meeting 2: Working on positionality and presenting the social justice matters (isms)

002 SRASI Meeting

Meeting 3: Action plan discussion

003 SRASI Meeting

Project resources

In preparation for the meetings, the PST from UU and UL were asked to complete some learning tasks to promote a higher engagement in the meetings and enhance their social justice related knowledge.

Resource 1:

Case studies

Resource 2:

Podcasts and readings



Shared Island
Initiative

