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Teaching Social Justice Through TPSR:

Where Do I Start?



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To study social justice is to learn about the problems that dramatically impact quality of life for certain populations, and how people have worked to solve those problems. (Gonzalez, 2016)

There is “a pressing need to address issues of equity and diversity in health, physical activity, and education” (Flory & Landi, 2020, p. 219). Teachers and teacher educators, however, are uncertain about *how* to teach social justice content in physical activity–based physical education settings (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015; Gerdin et al., 2021; Scorrington et al., 2021). Though several approaches might support educators in teaching social justice content, we are advocating for possibilities to learn about social justice through a redesigned socially just teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) approach.

Social justice is not explicitly identified as a core value, implementation strategy or goal of a TPSR approach (Hellison, 2011). Nevertheless, Kirk (2019) suggested that an inherent characteristic of a TPSR approach is the promotion of social justice. Given this, teacher and teacher educator practice should be examined to identify explicit ways in which a TPSR approach might further support the promotion of social justice (Riolo, 2019). Accordingly, we suggest that TPSR must be reconsidered and reframed through a social justice lens — a socially just TPSR approach (Scanlon et al., 2022).

With this article we turn the focus to developing and sharing practical suggestions for integrating social justice content into physical activity–based physical education, namely, through a socially just TPSR approach. The aims of this article are to emphasize the need for pedagogies for social justice in school physical education and to provide suggestions for practical implementation. The discussion begins by examining the need for pedagogies for social justice in physical education. This is followed by a brief overview of TPSR (the “what”) and a re-imagined TPSR approach from a social justice lens. Next, practical examples (the “how”) of teaching social justice issues through a TPSR approach are offered. A five-part TPSR lesson plan on teaching about a particular social justice issue, ableism (discrimination in favor of able-bodied people), is then offered as another entry point on the journey to integrating social justice issues into physical activity–based physical education settings. Though social justice content should be emphasized throughout all grades, including physical education teacher education (Scanlon et al., 2022), the practical suggestions in this article are perhaps best suited for students in upper primary through high school (9–19 years old). They are, however, offered with the confidence that teachers (and teacher educators) possess the intricate knowledge of both their students (and preservice teachers) and their subject area necessary to modify these ideas for their context.

Challenges of Using Pedagogies for Social Justice in Physical Education. Teachers’ implementation of a TPSR approach can assist in building democratic, critical, equitable movement spaces

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in which students develop a sense of self and belonging and feel safe to participate and empowered to share their voice (Fitzpatrick & Russell, 2015; Lynch et al., 2022). However, recent research has highlighted the challenges with implementing pedagogies for social justice within both K–12 physical education and teacher education. Challenges for physical education teachers, for example, were predominantly within the physical activity contexts of physical education such as gym halls and sports fields (Gerdin et al., 2021). Flory and Walton-Fisette’s (2015) research with preservice teachers also raised questions about their ability to transfer sociocultural content to practical physical education settings. In another study, all stories shared by preservice teachers about their implementation of socially critical approaches were based in contexts outside of the practical spaces of physical education (Scorrington et al., 2021). These examples highlight that the challenges of teaching through pedagogies for social justice are largely within the practical spaces of physical education (Walton-Fisette et al., 2019). In addressing this challenge and meeting the call to search for “new relationships between models based practices and sociocultural theories” (Flory & Landi, 2020, p. 221), teachers might consider ways in which a socially just TPSR approach offers possibilities in supporting the teaching and learning of social justice content in physical activity–based physical education contexts.

A TPSR Approach to Social Justice Content

Although physical education is a context in which positive sociocultural learning may well be fostered, positive development through physical activity will depend on how programs are delivered and experienced (Holt & Jones, 2007). Though not the only way to teach about social justice, a TPSR approach has been recognized as a model fit the purpose of promoting social justice (Casey & Kirk, 2020; Kirk, 2019; Riolo, 2019). For example, a TPSR model provides pedagogy, content and context for developing physical activity–based physical education programs that explicitly address affective development. The TPSR approach has been developed over years of implementation (see Richards & Shiver, 2020) to support educators in intentionally creating environments that foster the development of personal and social responsibility through physical activity. Understanding complexities of the “how” is of utmost importance in the design and implementation of effective personal and social responsibility programs that also integrate social justice content.



TPSR: A Brief Overview. To facilitate an understanding of how to use a TPSR approach to support the integration of social justice content into physical activity–based physical education contexts, a brief overview of the “what” of TPSR is provided. TPSR stands for a set of ideas that have grown out of an attempt to help youth take more responsibility for their social development rather than succumbing to external forces that are not in their best interest (Hellison, 2011). Deep and meaningful learning is attained through a variety of methods and strategies aimed at increasing personal development in the form of self-control, responsibility and caring through participation in physical activity. Simply stated, the primary purpose of TPSR is to help youth assume more personal and social responsibility within and beyond programs (i.e., school, home, community, society in general) by embedding TPSR core values and implementation strategies into physical activity (Hellison, 2011).

TPSR’s core values of developing personal and social responsibility, “putting kids first, human decency, holistic self-development, and a way of being” (Hellison, 2011, p. 18), are promoted through the cultivation of decision-making processes by providing young people with opportunities to share their beliefs and knowledge, thereby acknowledging that they know things that

program leaders do not. Therefore, it is critical that participants apply their intimate and personal knowledge of their world to decision making. This process is more authentic and more likely to transfer outside of the program, which is the ultimate goal of TPSR (Hellison, 2011). Figure 1 provides a synthesis of the major components of the TPSR model (see Hellison, 2011; Martinek & Hellison, 2016; TPSR Alliance, n.d.a).

A TPSR approach, as a process of developing decision-making skills through the critical examination of attitudes and behaviors with the ultimate goal of transferring skills outside the physical activity context, might well support the “how” for pedagogies for social justice (e.g., care, understanding, inclusion; see Gerdin et al., 2021). As currently presented, however, TPSR levels invoke the idea that students must pass one level before they can move to the next. A hierarchical representation such as this does not capture the complexity involved in acquiring and using responsible decision-making skills, nor does it align with a socially just conceptualization of the model (Scanlon et al., 2022). In suggesting that TPSR might serve as an approach through which to examine social justice issues, then, responsibility levels, as the primary goals of the model (TPSR Alliance, n.d.a), must first be re-imagined.

Re-imagining TPSR: Responsibility Levels. The current TPSR Alliance group more commonly uses the word *goal* to refer to TPSR stages rather than *level*, in part to recognize that on any given day participants may move between levels and that levels are not meant to be purely developmental (i.e., you can only go to level 2 once you’ve passed level 1; S. Beaudoin, personal communication, January 8, 2018). In addition to the levels being one of the most highly observable components of a TPSR approach in practice (Gordon & Beaudoin, 2020), this signals a recognition that though the five-level framework was designed as a means by which to increase the potential for sharing (Hellison, 2011), it is being used more as a rigid structure or blueprint for a TPSR approach. This does not align with a socially just approach to teaching and learning because a rigid framework has the potential to “reduce the humanity by overlooking the idiosyncratic zigzag nature of the educational process” (Hellison, 2011, p. 17).

<p>Core Values Putting kids first Human decency Holistic self-development A way of being</p> <p>Implementation Strategies Gradual empowerment Self-reflection Integration of levels into physical activities Transfer Being relational</p> <p>Levels (Goals) Level I: Respect for the rights and feelings of others Level II: Self-Motivation Level III: Self-Direction Level 1V: Caring Level V: Transfer ‘outside the gym’</p>

Figure 1.
Teaching personal and social responsibility core values, strategies and goals



Figure 2.

Reconceptualization of TPSR levels of responsibility

TPSR, although currently represented by a five-level framework, should be thought of in terms of basic or core values, ideas and implementation strategies (see Figure 1). In this way, the five levels are social constructions and, as such, can be modified in a variety of diverse ways depending on the contexts in which the model is applied, as long as the underlying principles of TPSR are honored (Hellison, 2011). The metaphor of a colorful rose provided in Figure 2 offers a plethora of interpretations and connections. With respect to the re-imagining of TPSR in this article, the metaphor signals a shift from hierarchical levels/goals to a more fluid representation of the complexity of humans and human interaction. The petals, for example, represent the interconnected nature and overlapping qualities of all of the levels/goals both to each other and to the core values of TPSR: putting participants first, human decency, self-development and a way of being (see Hellison, 2011). In this way the levels/goals may be thought of more as *spaces* that students can move in and out of and between in one class and over time. This metaphor might also be used to convey the idea that students can start in different (and multiple) spaces and can remain in such spaces for shorter or longer periods of time.

Developing a Socially Just TPSR Approach: Practical Examples. Social justice content and topics (e.g., privilege and oppression; racial and cultural discrimination, prejudice, injustice and inequality; gender and sexuality; economic injustice) are beginning to appear in physical education curricula around the world. For example, in Ireland, one of two theoretical strands in their examination physical education curriculum is “contemporary issues in physical education,” which includes topics on inclusion and gender (National Council for Curriculum & Assessment, 2017). In the Australian curriculum, one of the five interrelated propositions (which underpin physical education provision) is “include a critical inquiry approach” (Australian Curriculum, n.d.). Given that teachers have reported challenges with implementing social justice content into physical activity-based physical education contexts (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015; Gerdin et al., 2021; Scorrington et al., 2021), what is needed is the sharing of practical suggestions.

Examining and Practicing Socially Just Behaviors. Just as a TPSR approach uses physical activity as the medium through which to learn personal and social responsibility, educators might use participation in physical activity as the medium through which to examine justice and injustice through a critical lens. Part of a physical activity-based unit or course founded in a reconceptualized socially just TPSR approach may include both firsthand and secondhand experiences as a way to develop awareness about social justice. Teachers may support student awareness of social justice issues through secondhand experiences that offer a safer space (i.e., it is not someone they know or themselves). The following scenario and associated quotes, for example, are extracted from an online video of an African American man’s experience when he arrived at a pickleball court (see Sharpton, 2020). Students could examine why an African American person who shows up to a court “pickleball ready” with paddles and pickleballs in hand is asked by a Euro-centric person (i.e., White) why he is there as if he is “invading their special place, not realizing that’s a special place for [him] too” (Sharpton, 2020). This can spur deeper considerations based on an authentic experience of what racism

- Sounds like: “What are you doing here? Can I help you?”
- Looks like: “The ball is in but he calls it out and you just gotta keep eatin’ that because ... you don’t want to fall into that racist narrative of ‘the angry black guy ... oh, he’s a thug.’”
- Feels like: “If I tell you that this is happening to me, I’m having this experience, don’t you care. Aren’t you a friend?”

This look outward could then be followed with a turn to self in which self-awareness about ways in which we all participate in discriminatory and oppressive practices through what we say, how we act and what decisions we make about action and/or inaction as bystanders. A heightened awareness of what racism looks like, sounds like and feels like in physical activity contexts could be used to establish ways in which racism will be addressed in physical education class. Co-establishing ways to address racism (e.g., telling their classmates when what they are doing sounds like, looks like or feels like racism) may provide students a sense of empowerment and voice. Part of the co-established plan to address racism (or other forms of oppression and privilege) might also be for teachers to address in-class discriminatory and oppressive practices through one-on-one conversations, individual reflection or group meetings (all part of a TPSR lesson plan format). It is also important for teachers to pinpoint positive students interactions (O’Neil & Olson, 2021). Including social justice content into physical activity-based physical education through discussion provides the opportunity to develop plans of action for both students and teachers to address social justice issues that arise in all physical education contexts.

Another all too common social justice issue is the exclusion of classmates. Instances of inclusion and exclusion need to be addressed. Teachers should develop and consistently implement socially inclusive practices such as increasing the “nature and number of positive personal interactions between peers with and without disabilities” (O’Neil & Olson, 2021, p. 9). In addition, teachers should model appropriate language and inclusive behaviors (O’Neil & Olson, 2021). Teachable moments when classmates are actively excluding each other during physical activity based on cultural background, socioeconomic status, sexual

identity, body type, social constructs such as race and gender, or skill and/or ability level also provide the opportunity to bring awareness to privilege as well as our implicit and explicit bias including those of the teacher (see Lynch et al., 2022). Awareness talks, discussions and reflections, all hallmarks of a TPSR approach, about the ways in which actions are biased and based on privilege could include students suggesting ways to minimize such bias or dissect privilege. Students might, for example, suggest ways to reduce and eliminate bias so that student relatedness, skill development and participation increase (Yun et al., 2021). Students might also suggest using physical activity time to support the skill development of peers or seeking out new partners or small groups to learn from and with during physical activity. These reflections should then be followed with the opportunity to change behaviors by resuming physical activity with the explicit expectation of increasing actions and behaviors that promote physical activity with and by all. Initially, the expectation of actioning unbiased behaviors may need to be supported. Teachers might guide students toward increased social interaction and relatedness with a variety of peers through respectful peer assessment (McDavid et al., 2014).

These are just a few examples of ways in which conversations about social justice issues can be initiated and then actioned within physical activity contexts and using features of a TPSR approach. Social justice is ever present and therefore supporting the awareness of and actions for social justice is an ongoing endeavor. Further discussions and reflections based in TPSR core values and goals and social justice pedagogies such as human decency, self-direction, reciprocal respect and social cohesion (see Figures 1 and 3; Gerdin et al., 2021) will be warranted. Discussion and reflection, however, must be accompanied by opportunities to practice being more socially just within physical activity contexts.

Transfer and Advocacy. In addition to developing awareness of social justice through self-reflection and gradual empowerment through self-directed integration of changing attitudes and behaviors, there must be action *outside* the physical activity context. In a TPSR sense, this would be transfer outside the gym; for social justice pedagogies this might be advocacy. Teachers could support the process of gradual student empowerment and development of advocacy skills by eliciting student voice and offering choice that meets their needs and interests. Part of this practice should include being explicit about (and modeling) balancing whose voice is privileged by offering both anonymous ways to contribute ideas (e.g., exit slips, online polls) as well as more public ways to self-advocate and develop feelings of empowerment (e.g., verbally share thoughts and ideas). Students could be offered choice of equipment (e.g., size, material, color, length, width, weight), roles to assume (e.g., player, referee, time-keeper), level of challenge (e.g., weight used for dumbbell, distance from target), adapted games to teach peers (quad rugby, sled hockey) and rules of the game/sport (Childs & Lieberman, 2021; Yun et al., 2021). Decision making and communication, skills important both in a TPSR approach and for the development of advocacy skills through the integration of social justice content, could be practiced through negotiating names of teams, rules of games and inventing a game with a group of peers; announcing personal accomplishments (i.e., care to share); or researching adapted versions of their favorite games (i.e., empathy challenge; Childs & Lieberman, 2021) and participating in them. Examining

factors that contribute to what types of physical activities can be accessed and by whom (e.g., cost, facilities, transportation) and planning ways in which this might be changed (e.g., advocating for changes in the built environment of the community) might be another part of the process of supporting students in developing an awareness of social justice issues. These understandings can then be actioned outside of the learning context. Disc golf versus golf or handball/American handball versus squash, for example, might be used as explicit examples of privilege and accessibility. Questions such as who has more or less accessibility to equipment (e.g., disc versus golf clubs; a ball versus a racquet, ball, goggles and attire) and space (greens, clubhouses, courts) and why this is the case might be followed with opportunities for students to possibly effect change. The class might, for example, engage in a community mapping activity to identify what physical activity opportunities are available in the community and what makes them accessible and to whom. What is learned through such examination and investigations could then be applied to physical education programming or leadership projects in which students advocate for themselves and others to participate in these types of physical activity. Ultimately the intent is to provide opportunities for both reflection and action, both within physical activity-based physical education spaces and beyond.

Before reading further, we recommend making a plan for action. What are two or three ways you might use features of a TPSR approach to (a) build awareness of social justice issues? (b) provide opportunities for students to learn about social justice through physical activity settings? and (c) support the transfer of learning outside of the controlled environment of physical education (e.g., the classroom, playground, sport teams, community)?



Figure 3.
Teaching personal and social responsibility five-part lesson plan format

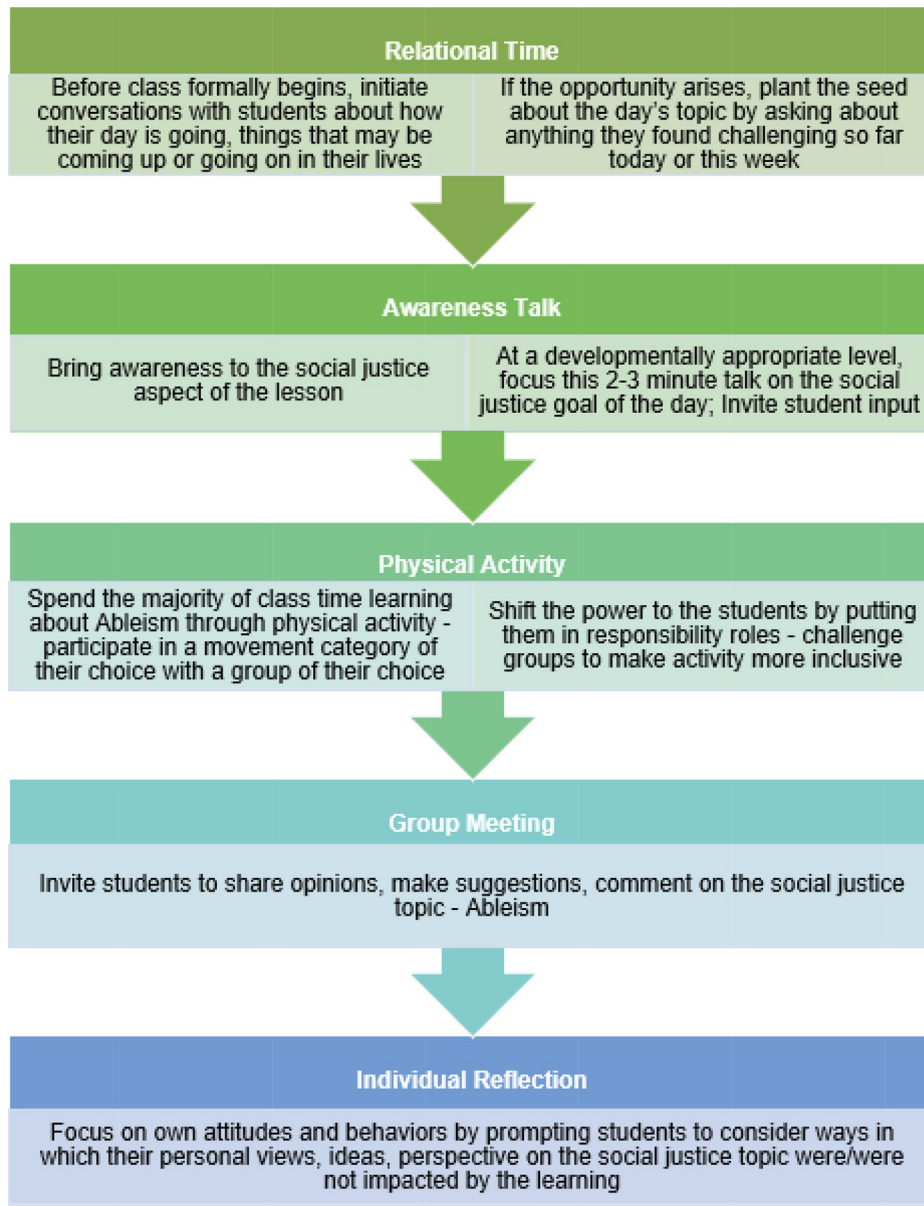


Figure 4.
Ableism through a five-part TPSR lesson plan format

The Five-Part Lesson Plan: Another Entry Point for Educators. As one of the most identifiable and observable components of a TPSR approach (Gordon & Beaudoin, 2020), the lesson plan format may provide another entry point for educators. The five parts of a lesson, with relational time at the beginning and reflection time at the end (TPSR Alliance, n.d.b), are outlined in Figure 3. The lesson begins with relational time, where the teacher checks in with participants to develop relationships and to build a welcoming atmosphere. This is followed by an awareness talk that focuses the learning on developing personal and social responsibility. Physical activity time, the third part of the five-part lesson plan, is an opportunity to put the awareness talk into practice. Fourth and fifth, respectively, are times devoted to reinforcing the development of personal and social responsibility through reflection, first in a group meeting and then through an

individual reflection. These reflections are also used to support the transfer of personal and social responsibility within the current lesson, future lessons and other contexts (e.g., the classroom, lunchroom, playground, home and community).

Learning About Ableism Through a TPSR Lesson Plan. Developing a plan to dissect discrimination, explore privilege and devise solutions to address the problem of ableism might be supported through a TPSR lesson plan in the following ways. In Figure 4, a flowchart of a five-part TPSR lesson plan that integrates ableism as the social justice topic is offered. We will break the lesson down and clarify specifics of developing the various pedagogies.

Teachers first engage in relational time with students. Though this is always an opportunity to check in, develop relationships and build a welcoming atmosphere, teachers should also be

looking for opportunities to plant the seed about the social justice topic. Asking students about anything they found challenging so far that day or that week might be easily woven into conversations. Once class is ready to begin, teachers set the stage by engaging in a brief awareness talk. At a developmentally appropriate level, teachers bring awareness to ableism through a brief conversation in which student input is invited. Questions such as, “What challenges have you experienced lately?,” “What challenges do you think people have with respect to participating in physical activity?,” “What do you think of when you hear the word *ableism*?,” and “What is ableism and how does it impact participation in physical activity?” might serve as conversation starters. Follow-up questions can be guided by student responses but might include ideas such as, “In what ways can/have we as individuals/communities/societies work(ed) to solve these problems?”

The majority of the class time within a TPSR lesson plan format is learning through physical activity. Shift the power to the students by encouraging participation in a movement category of their choice with a group of their choice. Engage in small-group or large-group discussions about ableism. For example, upon observing one group, the teacher might challenge that group to examine the activity with respect to its potential for involving people with differing abilities. Prompt the group to put themselves in the shoes of a person who would not be able to participate in the current form of the activity and to reflect on how that would make that person feel. Challenge the group to solve the problem by creating a fun and challenging form of the game that is more inclusive. After observing another group of students, the teacher might challenge those students to consider the equipment they are using and ways in which it might be adapted to make the game more enjoyable for more participants. A third group might be offered the opportunity to play an adapted game such as goalball and to consider why it was or was not enjoyable for them. They might then use this experience to adapt a popular game or sport in ways that it can be enjoyed by all. Rather than discussions and challenges being based on observation, a lesson like this could also take the form of using task cards in three areas of the gym. If there is a short time frame for the class, each group could stay in their area for the whole class but have an opportunity to participate in the other two areas over the next two classes. Alternatively, if class is a longer duration, groups could rotate from one area to another, perhaps even having six groups with three groups rotating clockwise and three groups moving counterclockwise in order to engage with more ideas and perspectives. Though discussions during physical activity can be based on teacher observation, it is recommended that guiding discussion questions about the social justice topic be created prior to class and modified based on the students’ responses, participation and actions.

The next two parts of the TPSR lesson plan, which occur after the physical activity, invite student reflection on their experiences. During the group reflection, invite students to share opinions, make suggestions and comment on what was learned about the social justice topic by using *we* and *our* statements, not classmates’ names. The individual reflection might then return students to their personal attitudes and behaviors by prompting them to consider ways in which their views, ideas and perspectives on ableism were or were not impacted by their participation in class and why.

After reading these suggestions, some might question the amount of time spent talking during a TPSR lesson plan. Remember, however, that a TPSR lesson plan format is designed so that most of the time is spent learning through physical activity, so create discussion and reflection times accordingly. Also, consider that physical education is more than physical activity. The nonactivity time is an opportunity to prioritize cognitive and affective learning. Empowerment that the learner gains through a process of teacher questioning aimed at having students make connections by reflecting upon experience, interpreting it and building upon it drawing from their existing knowledge and experience enables the learner to find meaning in movement (Light, 2008). But it is not only the learner who is impacted — it is also the teacher who constructs understanding of the program and its implementation based on prior experiences, personal and professional beliefs, instructional context, educational (recreational) philosophy, instructional skills and motivation to implement the curriculum (Zhu et al., 2011).

At this point, we once again suggest that you stop, think and write down some ways in which you can begin integrating social justice content into physical activity–based physical education contexts. What physical activity experience can you develop and implement that helps students learn about social justice through physical activity? In what ways might this be further developed into advocacy that transfers beyond the physical education classroom? In what ways might a redesigned socially just TPSR approach (Scanlon et al., 2022) support the integration of social justice content into physical activity–based physical education contexts?

Final Thoughts

Some aspects of what we have written about in this article may be more or less familiar than others. A TPSR approach may be familiar and social justice content less familiar or vice versa. Reconceptualizing a TPSR approach through a social justice lens may be something you have considered from time to time or it may be totally new. Regardless, it takes time to reconsider and ultimately change pedagogical practice. Be kind to yourself and your students by taking time to make the unfamiliar familiar.

Another important consideration is that contexts (and people within) matter. Social justice issues are different from country to country, city to city, school to school, classroom to classroom, people to people. Learning opportunities must be designed with these contextual factors in mind (Walton-Fisette et al., 2018). As such, student needs must be the starting point for decisions about what social justice content to examine. We need to ask students what social justice issues are prominent in their lives in order to integrate personally meaningful social justice issues into physical education teaching and learning.

We are extending Hellison’s (2011) work by reconceptualizing TPSR through a social justice lens — a socially just TPSR approach (Scanlon et al., 2022). Our intent is to provide pedagogical direction for the enactment of social justice content (Gore, 1998; Walton-Fisette et al., 2019) in physical activity contexts (Flory & Walton-Fisette, 2015; Gerdin et al., 2021). We offer both the theory (why) (Scanlon et al., 2022) and the practice (how) of a socially just TPSR approach as just one example of how to support the inclusion of social justice content in physical activity–based physical education. We encourage teachers,

teacher educators, recreation leaders and others to also include social justice content in ways that support young people in examining social identities, social inequalities and social justice (Walton-Fisette et al., 2019) either by implementing suggestions from this socially just TPSR approach or by developing and sharing other research- and practice-informed pedagogies for social justice fit for physical activity-based physical education contexts.

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