





# Contributions of Service-Learning to more inclusive and less gender-biased Physical Education: the views of Spanish Physical Education Teacher Education students

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## ABSTRACT

There continue to be gender biases and masculinization within Physical Education (PE). Therefore, PE teacher training should challenge current curricular practices and promote transformative pedagogical approaches. We advocate service-learning (SL) which shares its essential principles and research outcomes with feminist pedagogy. This study aims to discover whether generic SL projects, aimed at meeting the needs of at-risk populations, might promote a non-gender-biased conception of PE in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students/trainees. A qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological method was used to explore the trainees' personal experiences. Participants included 292 PETE trainees from Universities belonging to the Spanish Service-Learning Research Network in Physical Activity and Sport for Social Inclusion. PETE trainees experienced SL programmes aimed at promoting social inclusion of vulnerable populations through physical activity. A total of 292 reflection journals, 12 semi-structured interviews and 13 focus-groups were conducted. The findings were organized into four categories: 'Equal footing', 'Overcoming masculinized views of PE', 'Beyond the class walls', and 'It seems that PE has evolved'. In conclusion, these findings show that SL might lead PETE trainees to see PE in a less gender-biased way and that a well-designed curriculum will be inclusive, empowering students who do not fit into the hegemonic expectations of masculinity.

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## Introduction

Educational curricula and environments, around the world, are not neutral; the presence of inequality and patriarchal power relations prevail (Fardon & Schoeman, 2010). In Physical Education (PE) there is a trend of continuity rather than change in gender relations with regard to teaching and teacher education (Larsson, Fagrell, & Redelius, 2009; Mennesson, Bertrand, & Court, 2019; Metcalfe, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández, Martos-García & Soler, 2019). For example, present PE approaches have been found to negatively affect the experiences of boys who do not fit into the hegemonic expectations of masculinity based on performance (Hickey, 2008). PE teacher training needs to address gender issues by challenging current curricular practices and promoting more inclusive

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ones (Felis-Anaya, Martos-Garcia, & Devís-Devís, 2017; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006) with the aim of maximizing educational opportunities for all students (Wilkinson, 2019).

Many approaches have focused on theoretical developments but few on providing active solutions and pragmatic progress (Fine, 2007; Oliver & Kirk, 2016; Scraton, 2018), so this article will focus on practical and activist experience rather than on theory. Gender is part of a complex structure of power relations (Fitzpatrick & Enright, 2019), so any discussion within standard educational practices is complicated through a variety of schools of feminist thought which contain a multifaceted mosaic of feminist vision (Wilkinson, 2019). There is a need to provide practical steps forward, despite the complexity of these issues (Martín & Beese, 2016).

Therefore, the moment has come to explore the usefulness of activist and transformative educative approaches to overcome established gender-biased constructions (Oliver & Kirk, 2016). Transformative pedagogies draw on several discourses, including critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, poststructuralism and queer theory (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011). Bearing these approaches in mind, practitioners and academics must collaborate to find transformative pedagogical approaches towards a less biased PE curriculum that include feminist viewpoints. We do not assume that there is a singular transformative approach, but we do argue that some practical approaches might directly challenge narrow norms of gender in PE (Fitzpatrick & Enright, 2019). One methodological approach to improving gender equity could be Service-Learning (SL) (Shane, Brewer & Thomas, 2010; Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez, & Scott, 2008; Mumford & Kane, 2006), defined by Bringle and Hatcher (1996) as:

a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 222)

SL can be understood as a teaching-learning approach that seeks to facilitate academic learning and skills development while providing a community service to meet social need. In SL programmes, trainees<sup>1</sup> combine in-class content and volunteer-like services in the community, thus allowing them to learn course content while applying it to real-life situations. Students involved in SL obtain personal and social growth, including a reduction of stereotypes, stronger cultural sensitivity and increased understanding of socio-political phenomena (Chiva-Bartoll, Capella-Peris, & Salvador-García, 2020; Gil-Gómez, Chiva-Bartoll, & Martí-Puig, 2015; Winans-Solis, 2014; Zimmerman, Krafchick, & Aberle, 2009). SL also promotes the development of students' identities (Nelson & Sneller, 2011), reinforcing and intensifying feminist identities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014; Kelly, 2015). This social engagement can encourage girls to talk back to oppressive forces (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009; DeMuth, 2011); questioning unjust social or school practices and promoting improvements in agency, belonging and competence (Leblanc, 2001; Winans-Solis, 2014).

SL lies at the intersection between curricular education and identity, which could encourage the promotion of implicit gender equity. In this sense, there are similarities between feminist pedagogy and SL, since both are essentially active and participatory, focusing on the interaction between academic and social experiences and concerned with promoting social transformations. For instance, Webb, Allen, and Walker (2002) and Weiler (1991) identified six basic principles of feminist pedagogy that are clearly in line with the essentials of SL (Table 1). Based on these overlapping principles, it could be assumed that any implementation of SL, even without any specific intentionality, might promote promising results in terms of a less gender-biased conception of PE.

Since teachers tend to teach as they themselves were taught and they are in a unique position to act as role models (Yager, Gray, Curry, & McLean, 2020), the interest of this study focuses on Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). Teachers' educators have the responsibility for training future culturally conscious teachers (Harrison et al., 2010), breaking the cycle of male-dominated hierarchical traditions (Weiner, 2004). During recent decades PETE researchers have argued for the importance of elucidating the hidden curriculum (Kirk, 2012), equality (Ennis, 1999; Evans, 1990),

**Table 1.** Essential links between Feminist Pedagogy and Service-learning.

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<b>Restructuring the teacher-learner relationship</b>
While in the traditional education paradigm the educator is perceived to be an authoritative figure and the student a passive recipient of knowledge, in both feminist pedagogy and service-learning, authority and power are shared among learners, teachers and even service recipients. Thus, the teaching space becomes an active and collaborative setting, where decision-making is encouraged.
<b>Empowerment</b>
This principle implies equality and shared power, and contests the conception that education is a neutral process. Feminist pedagogy and service-learning see education as a way to facilitate students' inclusion. In this context, empowerment refers to the teaching-learning process of both female and male learners to critically and creatively deal with authenticity and reality, participating to transform their contexts.
<b>Social engagement</b>
This principle focuses on building collaborative and cooperative relationships between the classroom and its broader environment. The development of a free and more inclusive society is a crucial pillar of both feminist education and service-learning. Both approaches pursue respect and equal opportunities for all community members.
<b>Favouring voice</b>
This principle relies on the concept that knowledge is constructed and culture-bound. In both feminist pedagogy and service-learning, the learner-teacher relationship is more equitable. In fact, multiple authority combinations of educators, learners and service receivers allow different teaching-learning dynamics and voices to emerge (culture-bound).
<b>Respect for the diversity of personal experience</b>
This principle refers to an educational community that works closely together (teachers, learners and service receivers), respects each other's points of view, challenges hierarchical structures and involves more egalitarian relationships. Both feminist pedagogy and service-learning advocate personal experiences as the basis for analysis and assessment, aiming to develop critical thinking skills and a wider understanding of social truths.
<b>Challenging traditional pedagogical approaches</b>
This principle underlies a socially critical perspective of education and challenges such ideas that teaching can be neutral and value free. For both feminist pedagogy and service-learning, teachers and students are stimulated to challenge the roots of ideas and concepts, the positions of different collectives and elements that promote the way social relationships and power distribution come to exist in their current state.

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sociocultural perspectives (Cliff, Wright, & Clarke, 2009; Flory, Tischler, & Sanders, 2014), body image (Kirk, 2006; Tinning & Glasby, 2002) and gender (Brown, 2005; Dowling, 2008). However, despite these concerns, many PE teachers' educators have shown only a timid response to gender biases in PE and challenging unequal relations (Evans & Penney, 2002).

SL not only shares essential principles but also research outcomes in line with several feminist pedagogical objectives. In this vein, the present study aims to answer the following research question: how could non-intentional gender-oriented SL affect PETE trainees' conception of PE? Specifically, its objective is to discover whether generic SL projects aimed at meeting the needs of different at-risk social groups (such as, children with special educational needs, the elderly and at-risk women) might promote a non-gender-biased conception of PE in the PETE trainees involved. This approach certainly does not aspire to offer a definitive solution to gender issues in PE but to explore the possibility of positive outcomes that could lead transformative actions.

## Materials and methods

A qualitative method using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to explore the SL experiences and learning of PETE trainees. While phenomenology focuses on the meaning of human experience by examining concrete experiences, hermeneutics seeks to understand actions within specific contexts (Barnacle, 2004; Smith, 2016).

### Participants and settings

The participants included 292 PETE trainees from five different Universities belonging to the Spanish *Service-Learning Research Network in Physical Activity and Sport for Social Inclusion* ([www.riadis.es](http://www.riadis.es)). The Autonomous University of Madrid was the lead institution for this project and responsible for the standardization of ethical procedures (such as informed consent, anonymized centralization of data). To ensure ethical and responsible investigation, before participating in the study each trainee was

informed of its purpose. Furthermore, written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Each participant university ensured compliance with these procedures. Specifically, the study was carried out following the deontological standards established in the Declaration of Helsinki in 2013 (World Medical Association, 2013), and those determined by the Code of Good Research Practices, prepared by the Research Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Madrid (2013). Table 2 displays the participants' characteristics.

### Service-learning intervention

Since all the participating PETE professors were coordinated under the 'Service-Learning Research Network in Physical Activity and Sport for Social Inclusion', the SL programmes implemented at each university followed a common structure in terms of typology, timing, reflective tasks and instruments. The service purpose was to promote social inclusion of vulnerable populations through physical activity, while the PETE trainees were expected to learn curricular content by designing, teaching and assessing physical activity tasks provided to vulnerable groups. Considering Hastie's scheme for describing pedagogical models in research work (context, curricular elements and implementation actions), we highlight the following essential features (Hastie & Casey, 2014):

### Context

the SL implementations were carried out in PETE programmes at the Autonomous University of Madrid, University of Granada, Jaume I University of Castellon, University of Barcelona and University of Valladolid. The intervention contexts brought together vulnerable groups or groups at risk of social exclusion, such as migrants and refugees, children with special educational needs, older adults, women in situations of social exclusion, ex-drug addicts, and people with mental health disorders. Each PETE SL programme included several of the above-mentioned groups (see Table 2).

### Curricular elements

the interventions shared a series of social learning aims underlying awareness of social inequalities. The curricular subjects involved in the SL shared the following curricular objectives from the PETE programmes:

**Table 2.** Description of the participants.

University – students involved (N = 292)	Gender* (%)			Age (%)			Service recipients
	Female	Male	Other	<22	22–24	>24	
Autonomous University of Madrid (N = 34)	41.7	58.3	-	71.8	23.3	4.9	Children with special educational needs, women in situations of social exclusion.
University of Granada (Melilla Campus) (N = 50)	20.2	79.8	-	52.2	40.6	8.2	Refugees, older adults and women in situations of social exclusion.
University Jaume I of Castellón (N = 93)	62.4	35.4	2.2	41.1	54.7	4.2	Children with special educational needs.
University of Barcelona (N = 64)	53.6	46.4	-	36.3	27	36.7	Children with special educational needs, adults and children, and mental health patients.
University of Valladolid (N = 51)	83.7	16.3	-	38.1	61.9	-	Children with special educational needs, older adults and women in situations of social exclusion, and ex-drug addicts.

\*Participants classified themselves as male, female or other.

- Plan, execute and assess teaching-learning processes related to physical activity and sport, considering the participants' individual and contextual features;
- Design and develop body language practices and recreational physical and outdoor activities;
- Select and use appropriate equipment for physical activities;
- Assess physical condition and recommend health-oriented physical exercises;
- Encourage and promote the practice of long-lasting, autonomous physical activities and sport habits among different populations.

### Implementation actions

although each SL programme was adjusted slightly to suit the characteristics of each context, they all followed certain implementation patterns that allowed us to analyse them together. These common patterns, which are shared with feminist pedagogy (Table 1), are the inherent elements of SL programmes that might facilitate the PETE trainees' perception of a less masculinized PE. In turn, these programmes followed Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning. First, concrete experience actions were carried out, establishing initial contact with the vulnerable groups and their needs. While in some cases the trainees went out to learn about the people with whom they were going to work, in other cases professionals from social entities were brought into class to describe some potential needs of the vulnerable groups. After that, the programmes followed reflective and critical reasoning processes in which the trainees discussed opinions and proposed activities based on the subject curriculum. This reflection stage continued throughout the whole intervention through group and individual reflections guided by the educators, and by writing personal reflective journals. The next step consisted of a theoretical analysis of the curriculum through an abstract conceptualization phase that allowed the trainees to plan specific physical activity proposals. Lastly, the SL programmes involved active experimentation phases where the services planned for the community recipients (Table 1) were put into practice and assessed.

### Data collection

A total of 292 reflective journals, 12 semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews and 12 focus groups were the source of data for this study:

- *Reflective journals* are a widely used research practice in teacher training (Kugelmass, 2000), specifically in SL settings (Nolan, 2008; Schön, 2016). The assignment asked trainees to describe their personal experiences and explain what they gained from these and whether their views about PE had changed due to their participation in SL. Mindful of the recommendations of Carrington and Selva (2010), journals were submitted at the end of the SL programme for assessment which was based on having completed the reflection according to formal requirements, rather than being evaluated for its content. These completed journals were used in this study.

- The *semi-structured interviews* lasted for an average of 35 minutes. The research team prepared various topic areas and questions related to the study's objective (Patton, 2002). Participants were first asked open questions, such as: 'What has this experience meant to you? What were the main barriers and benefits you experienced in SL? What were your initial thoughts?'. The questions then became increasingly closed and specific, such as: 'How has the programme affected your conception of PE? How did participating in the programme affect your training as a teacher? Do you think gender issues have affected this experience in any way? How and why? The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An intentional sample was used, including 12 PETE trainees that were representative of the different participating universities.

- The *focus groups* were designed to explore the PETE trainees' viewpoint in more depth, thus helping triangulate the information collected through the other instruments. Therefore, the questions and issues covered followed the same patterns as the semi-structured interviews. A total of 72 trainees participated in 12 focus groups, consisting of six members each. The criteria for forming the

groups were: gender parity and working with different service recipients. The groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interviews and focus groups were done and transcribed in the first language of the PETE trainees (Spanish). Later, a qualified native-level professional translator translated them into English.

### Data analysis

Considering the amount of information available and the potential of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) (Odena, 2013; Silver & Lewins, 2014), the NVivo\_10 software was used to organize, explore and analyse the data. Data analysis consisted of a multiphase approach based on an initial open-coding phase and an axial coding phase (Flick, 2014). The procedure was as follows: after transcribing the information, the research team became familiar with the participants' discourses and assigned initial codes to meaningful words, sentences or paragraphs, going backwards and forwards between the different datasets in order to identify meaningful units. In the next phase, based on an axial coding process, researchers moved between inductive and deductive reasoning (Flick, 2014), using the previously coded information to refine, saturate and select categories and quotations that appropriately represented the participants' experiences regarding the research question (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The reliability of this research was ensured by utilizing multiple data sources, conversations among the researchers that questioned one another's perspectives and interpretations, and a member-checking process (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Codes are used to protect the interviewees' identities. Reflective journals are identified by the acronym RJ, semi-structured interviews by SI and focus-group by FG, followed by the quotation number from all those extracted in an initial screening process.

### Findings and discussion

Although several themes emerged from the data, the focus of this study was to understand how non-intentional gender-oriented SL could affect the PETE trainees' conception of PE. Four interrelated content categories were extracted from the phenomenological analysis: (1) 'Equal footing'; (2) 'Overcoming masculinized views of PE'; (3) 'Beyond the class walls'; and (4) 'It seems that PE has evolved'. Below, we argue and present some representative quotes from each category using this scheme to respond to the research question.

#### Equal footing (gaining inclusion)

The perceptions grouped in this content category stress that since SL is a student-centred pedagogical model, it puts each student on an equal footing. Trainees revealed that SL clearly increased their involvement in curriculum decision-making, helping all students to feel more included and empowered in PE, regardless of gender.

Somehow, SL considers our opinions on what we want to do and gives us a chance to participate in some decision-making processes. It encourages us to experience PE in a much more participative and inclusive way. I think it made us see PE as a subject that places all students on an equal footing regardless of gender, background, ability . . . . (F.G.32)

Similarly, another trainee expressed that everyone participated regardless of gender, and when asked why she thought they had all participated, she explained it was because the activities matched their motivations and expectations: '*Since we had a say in the planning, we designed it to fit our interests and all of us felt much more comfortable and confident*' (F.G.25). Likewise, another trainee expressed it very clearly: '*(. . .) it was our project; how could we not like it?*' (F.G.25). A persistent theme in making inclusive learning a reality is the necessity of taking into account student choice (and voice), in such a way that students are not consumers but co-creators of their educational

experiences (Makopoulou & Thomas, 2019). In fact, giving voice to the students is a recommended action at all educational levels, including both students who experience PE at school, as well as for Teacher Trainees.

Thus, we observe that letting participants have a say in what they do really affects their conception of PE, empowering girls and boys who do not fit into the hegemonic expectations of masculinity (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012; Fiset, 2011). In this sense, SL is clearly consistent with the essentials of feminist pedagogy, not only in restructuring the teacher-learner relationship, but in promoting student empowerment and giving them a voice (Webb et al., 2002; Weiler, 1991). Moreover, these findings are consistent with general education research on student voice (Cook-Sather, 2009; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007; Schultz, 2003), strengthening the assumption that curricular reforms and modifications that take into account student voice increase students' involvement and ownership. In our study, being able to make decisions helped the trainees reflect on their interests and motivations, and thus explore their own identity as future PE teachers (Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2020; Gil-Gómez et al., 2015):

The SL experience has helped me connect with other areas of my personality that I hadn't considered I could work on in PE. In a way, it didn't matter so much about our physical abilities, but more who we were as people and what kind of society we wanted to achieve by becoming PE teachers. (R.J.23)

Moreover, the trainees' views repeatedly stressed that introducing decision-making processes during the SL programme made them change their mind about the subject in terms of conceptions of gender treatment and equal footing, in line with Mitchell, Gray, and Inchley (2015).

I'm convinced that SL implementations in PE can change the assumptions that make many students hate this subject. The new (SL) PE approach makes it a much more encouraging subject for all of us. (S.I.81)

These findings show how SL introduces new components to PE that transform the subject into a more plural and inclusive one, instead of taking a 'one size fits all' approach (Makopoulou & Thomas, 2019). When different learning domains such as the social and affective ones come into play beyond traditional PE content and students have the chance to decide specific aspects of the curriculum, the subject becomes not just inclusive but encouraging (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010), placing all the students on an equal footing, regardless of gender (or any other protected characteristic).

### ***Overcoming masculinized views on PE***

The perception of overcoming masculinized visions of PE establishes a new content category, which is closely related to the previous one, since it specifically relates to overcoming masculinized prejudice in PE. Rather than emphasizing how SL fosters a broader and more inclusive conception of PE, the PETE trainees suggest that SL creates spaces in the curriculum to critically understand, assume and overcome some traditionally masculinized views on PE (Novak, 1999), reinforcing the diversity of experiences it produces and challenging traditional pedagogical practices (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002).

Through the constant reflective processes required by the SL model (Butin, 2003; Carrington & Selva, 2010), trainees seem to have overcome certain gender prejudices about PE.

Before starting the course, my conception of PE was very traditional and masculinized, clearly dominated by elements such as competitiveness, skill, strength, etc. But through the experience of SL I have seen that there are other components of PE that give it a completely different meaning. (S.I.41)

This SL experience led PETE trainees to conceive PE as less masculinized, since certain intervention actions implemented (such as reflective activities, respect for the diversity of personal experience, decision-making processes and social engagement) allowed them to take part in the subject regardless of gender, overcoming the traditional importance of components such as physical

condition and/or ability and thus eliminating barriers that generate inequality. Based on this approach, we suggest that, as long as SL implementations include these elements, they facilitate the reduction of gender bias, since it is not physical performance or any other traditionally masculine feature that necessarily matters most in PE (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019). Trainees discovered first-hand that PE can be a much more inclusive subject (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Penney, 2002).

This version (of PE) considered new features such as the student's ability to socialize and promote social interactions, recreation, fun ... To achieve these features, you don't have to be a sports person or the typical strong guy ... Through SL projects like this, anyone can enjoy physical education, regardless of their physical condition, race and gender. (R.J.12)

Moreover, participants understood that PE teachers have the potential to ensure that they do not reproduce dominant gender discourses and practices; they might also be productive in challenging them (Yager et al., 2020). PETE trainees were conscious that one of their educational functions was to promote social inclusion *in* and *through* PE (Philpot, 2016). They learned that they could develop PE students' awareness of diversity and existing gender power relations (Dowling, 2006).

The new dimension that SL brings to PE has led me to think that, as a future teacher, I can modify the gendered idea that many female students have of PE. It may not be easy, but SL is a very interesting methodological option. (S.I.27)

As seen in the previous section, many PETE trainees attribute this inclusive conception of PE to the introduction of the different domains of knowledge provided by the SL experience beyond the motor domain, which is consistent with the recommendation of using trans-domain pedagogical models (Metzler, 2017). Our results suggest that introducing other learning domains seems to help overcome PE gender biases.

These affective and social approaches to PE could be brought into primary and secondary schools, so that the subject is less focused on the body and is oriented towards elements that make it more inclusive and less masculinized (F.G.19)

The findings related to this category certainly suggest that enriching the subject with new domains and components through the implementation of SL might reduce the influence of some of the most controversial and masculinized components of PE such as motor performance, competitiveness, strength and ability, among others, as clarified in Flintoff and Scraton (2006), Penney (2002) and Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2019).

### *Going beyond the class walls*

The perceptions that constitute this category show that the scope of SL goes beyond the class walls, promoting social transformations and participant empowerment (Kasinath, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). These findings suggest that once PETE trainees found that they could make a difference in their own conception of PE, in turn they were also ready to transform the world around them by promoting this conception beyond educational settings (Butin, 2003).

From my point of view, this SL experience is open to many interpretations. For instance, as a student I have discovered a new dimension of PE, but as a future teacher I have also discovered that I can help to extend this new approach to PE while being much more engaged with the community. (R.J.30)

This evidence shows once again how SL coincides with general elements of feminist pedagogy such as empowerment and social engagement (Webb et al., 2002; Weiler, 1991). More specifically, several PETE trainees highlighted the ways in which they felt empowered to change the gendered nature of PE after being involved in the SL experience.

One of the things that I take away from this experience is that SL is a pedagogical approach that lets us go beyond the class walls, challenging not only inequalities in PE, but social injustices affecting the people we work with. In my opinion, this is the best reason why the experience has been worth it. (R.J.43)



This implies that trainees may be able to develop future PE teaching that ensures equal experiences regardless of gender. Likewise, fully in tune with the critical SL model proposed by Deeley (2015) and Mitchell (2008), many PETE trainees supported an idea that was clearly exemplified through the following quotation:

Somehow it (SL) made the education process accessible not just for students but for the vulnerable groups we worked with. This way, not only could they enjoy physical activities, but they acquired some related lessons and values. (F.G.16)

The findings indicate that the PETE trainees reached the idea promulgated by Mitchell (2008) that SL community members should also benefit from at least some learning afforded to students.

(...) In one of the after-class reflections I realized that what I was learning had a lot to do not only with the subject content, but with a philosophy of life. A way of seeing the teaching profession as a pretext to improve society. (R.J.2)

Consequently, we have seen that the socially critical interest that emerged from this SL experience not only aspires to explore what happens within school contexts, but also calls on social action to improve society (Felis-Anaya et al., 2018). Although we admit that it is not possible to know how our educational actions might affect our students through critical pedagogy (Kirk, 2019), advocating for SL in PE seems to be a viable option to overcome unfair conditions like the hegemonic masculinity in PE, among others.

### *It seems that PE has evolved*

The PETE trainees' perceptions grouped in this category show a series of connections between the trainees' schooling experiences as pupils in the PE system and their renewed aspirations in constructing their own pedagogical positions as PE teachers. Most PETE trainees were surprised by the implementation of SL and the changes it caused in academic subjects. Their expectations were generally based on previous experiences focusing on much more traditional and masculinized approaches to PE. However, most trainees quickly adapted and ended up appreciating this less gendered refocusing. The following quotation exemplifies this:

The truth is that I had never considered PE in these terms. At first, I was certainly disappointed with this approach (SL) because I expected PE to focus almost exclusively on doing physical activities and learning how to teach them. However, the SL gave me a broader and more comprehensive view of PE than the one I had when I was a primary and secondary student. (R.J.35)

This SL experience made the trainees see that the choice of a concrete pedagogical model can influence their understanding of the subject (Metzler, 2017). In this case, SL overcame traditional gender approaches by restructuring roles and personal experiences. These new roles and personal experiences, which were influenced by contact with vulnerable groups, seem to have changed their conception of PE. The PETE trainees declared how their vision of PE had expanded and evolved thanks to this experience:

The (SL) programme has broadened the vision I had of PE. When I took PE in Primary and Secondary school, it was much more rigid and focused on physical performance. I'm not saying that was wrong, but the SL approach enriches its potential (...). It seems that, somehow, PE has evolved. (F.G.52)

The SL model seems to give trainees new understandings about PE that are in line with a more inclusive approach, away from the masculinized perspective of traditional PE. The evolution experienced by PETE trainees is reflected in their gendered conceptions of PE, helping them to unravel hegemonic masculinity by challenging current curricular PE practices (Hickey, 2008).

I didn't have bad experiences with PE at previous educational levels, but I do know former classmates who hated the subject because they didn't fit in with the required physical abilities. For example, the PE I experienced in secondary school was much more focused on content that favoured boys since they were stronger and more competitive. (F.G.57)

These perceptions certainly support the idea that PE is evolving thanks to the introduction of new pedagogical models (Hastie & Casey, 2014; Metzler, 2017), and that SL is one such approach that produces positive results in overcoming gender bias. It also reminds us that trainee teachers in this field are potentially motivated by their own positive experiences of PE which contrast with those of others and that this has the potential to reinforce less progressive approaches.

## Conclusion and final considerations

The results of this study are consistent with other research on students' perception in the broader field of education (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). However, the main contribution that differentiates this work from previous studies is that rather than focusing on directly combating the masculinized approach to PE, it proposes an alternative that promotes a plural and inclusive approach to PE. In SL implementations, the traditional gender biases of PE seem to be blurred. This study suggests ways in which teachers may begin, through SL, to move beyond the masculinization of PE by drawing on an understanding of physical culture and developing reflective practices in PETE.

Specifically, the results point to a number of intrinsic implications of the SL programmes analysed that may be responsible for the positive perceptions expressed by the participants. Firstly, an essential aspect of the SL programmes that might have helped the trainees to overcome traditional gender approaches is the restructuring of roles and personal experiences in PE. The horizontal relationship established between the different participants, where decision-making was encouraged and authority and power were shared, seems to have lessened the importance of traditionally masculinized elements such as physical performance and physical condition and/or ability, thus eliminating barriers that lead to inequality. In turn, the introduction of new learning domains such as the social and affective ones, by promoting social awareness through reflection activities and contact with vulnerable groups, seems to have fostered a more inclusive PE, placing the students on an equal footing regardless of gender.

These findings show a series of inherent teaching-learning implications of SL that are clearly aligned with feminist pedagogy, which may have led the PETE trainees to see PE in a new way, helping to diminish gender bias as well as the traditional masculinized perception of PE. These new meanings, far from being categorical, show the participants' understanding, so by no means are they meant to be completely representative since it is not possible to ensure that gender bias was overcome in all instances or by all participants.

This work is based on Stenhouse's (1975) and Oliver and Kirk (2016) beliefs that one proposal cannot aspire to be the solution to gender issues in PE, but nevertheless it is worth testing in practice. Thus, we are not suggesting there is no place for criticism and dissent; indeed, quite the opposite. It seems appropriate to clarify that the SL interventions examined were not without difficulties. The most significant tensions were mainly associated with criticisms from trainees who expected a much more technical and traditional approach to the subject. Moreover, some typical difficulties of SL related to the logistics involved in working in real contexts also had to be overcome. Despite these difficulties we propose that, as long as the teaching-learning implications described are appropriately included in the programmes implemented, there are sufficient grounds to consider SL to be a feasible approach to counter gender biases in PE, particularly through PETE programmes. Therefore, this manuscript is useful for current and future educators, teachers, practitioners and entities responsible for developing the PE curriculum.

This study is not without limitations though many of these give rise to future possibilities for research. It would be especially interesting to explore whether trainees show different views depending on their own gender identity and experiences of PE at school and whether there are different interpretations depending on the vulnerable groups with whom they work.

## Note

1. Since there is a potential for confusion in the text students on PETE courses are referred to as 'trainees' while the students that they will go on to teach, or who are taking PE as part of their own education, are referred to as 'students'.

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