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ABSTRACT

This article describes context-based professional development (PD) for cultural diversity in a Portuguese school cluster, and discusses how it supports change for justice and equity. Teachers felt the importance of PD and showed willingness and interest to learn. Several teacher learning opportunities were mapped out such as formal workshops, starting small collaborations and teachers' self-directed informal learning activities. Yet, a rather fragmented character of PD seemed to emerge in terms of content on cultural diversity and forms of learning. Conflicting agendas, scattered teacher collaboration and commitment, and little student and community involvement in planned PD were found. Furthermore, there seemed to be tensions between current PD and teachers' needs and circumstances; teachers wished for more specific information and pedagogical solutions, more collaboration and more organisational support in PD. Applying a critical multicultural perspective, it is discussed that although the current constellation of PD is a potential start, it might still contribute to teachers' conceptual confusion and pedagogical insecurities on the field of cultural diversity. It is suggested that criticality towards PD frames is needed to re-centre cultural diversity on the premises of justice, as well as teacher support, and conscious learning with and from students, families and communities.

Introduction

Teachers from across Europe seem to experience personal and professional dilemmas with cultural diversity (Zembylas 2010, Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Flores and Ferreira 2016, Ben-Peretz and Flores 2018), and studies consistently suggest that teachers´ professional development (PD) is needed on the issue (Burns and Shadoian-Gersing 2010, Acquah *et al.* 2016). Despite this general call for PD, research studies have been rather engaging with preservice teacher learning for cultural diversity, and it is still less investigated how schools support in-service teacher PD in everyday school contexts (Leeman and van Koeven 2018, Forghani-Arani *et al.* 2019). Consequently, this article is a contribution to understanding practicing teachers' PD for cultural diversity by portraying a case study (Stake 1995, Simons 2009) of a school cluster in Portugal. Since the lack of such contextualised understandings of PD for cultural diversity have been noted generally, and that it is an even more scarce field of study in Portugal; this exploration might be important both for a national and international comprehension of the issue. Previous studies often point to teachers' conceptual confusion in understanding cultural diversity (e.g. Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2004, Hajisoteriou 2013) and pedagogical difficulties in being able to modify practice in responsible ways (Zembylas 2010, Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Szelei *et al.* 2019), which school practitioners usually attribute to inadequate teacher education and organisational/structural constraints such as lack of time and

resources (Miller 2011, Hajisoteriou 2013, Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Louie *et al.* 2018, Karousiou *et al.* 2019). The issue of relevant PD is recurring in these studies, since even teachers who received PD on cultural diversity seem to report training inadequacy and thus, feeling of unpreparedness (Arnesen *et al.* 2008, Fine-Davis and Faas 2014). Crossing these results with the fact that transnational European policies have put cultural diversity on the teacher learning agenda as a popular tendency (e.g. European Commission 2013, 2015, 2017), yet at times frameworks on cultural diversity in teacher education might conflict justice and equity (e.g. Fylkesnes 2018, Souto-Manning 2019); it remains important to untangle how schools actually support teacher learning in context, and how these PD arrangements contribute to justice-oriented understandings and pedagogical actions. In other words, we were interested in the role context-based PD hold in supporting teachers to re-centre the question of cultural diversity to justice and equity and to implement equitable, culturally relevant practices that avoid reproducing inequalities in pedagogical enactments.

Theoretical perspectives and literature review

A critical perspective on cultural diversity and professional development

There is a variety of theoretical frameworks on cultural diversity (see overviews in e.g. Hall 2000, Kincheloe and Steinberg 2001). This study approaches cultural diversity from a critical multicultural perspective (e.g. Goldberg 1994, Kincheloe and Steinberg 2001, May and Sleeter 2010, Quijada Cerecer *et al.* 2010, Acuff 2018). Although this paradigm is not a united front, the underlying main perspective is taking into account the interrelated relationships between culture and power, and explicitly address social justice. In brief, the core perspectives can be defined as fluid conceptualisations of culture and identity, considering power relations, critical reflexivity between thinking and practice, pedagogies of empowerment and student voice, and an explicit focus on relating cultural diversity to social justice (e.g. May and Sleeter 2010). This critical perspective towards cultural diversity is necessary since misconceptions of culture and language as essentialised entities can be concerning when forming the base for pedagogical actions, and may result in opposite effects to what they set out to achieve (Sleeter 2012, Walton *et al.* 2018, Szelei *et al.* 2019). An example for this is how the notion of ´cultural diversity´ might be interpreted through whiteness (Fylkesnes 2018). Critical multiculturalism aims at moving away from normative, hegemonic definitions and narrations of culture and language, and rather support fluidity and hybridity (e.g. Acuff 2018) as it is voiced by participants of an educational community – students, families, communities and school practitioners. Consequently, teachers indeed need support in transforming pedagogical practice as well as knowledges about self, students and society in better conceptualising cultural diversity (Santoro 2009, 2017) and support student learning. Thus, teacher learning within this paradigm is understood as an interruption of taken-for-granted notions that usually result in reproducing injustices in education (Souto-Manning 2019). PD in the critical multicultural paradigm is intertwined with culturally relevant and critical pedagogies (e.g. Freire 1970/2005, Ladson-Billings 1995, 2009, Sleeter and Delgado 2004, Souto-Manning 2017) and emphasises pedagogical facilitations of empowerment and voice, as well as teachers´ critical reflexivity between practice, self and societal discourses (May 2009, May and Sleeter 2010, Santoro 2017). In this article we seek to understand teachers' context-based PD needs, opportunities and challenges in a Portuguese school cluster from this critical perspective, and discuss if PD supports justice-driven change.

Professional development for cultural diversity

Hereby PD is understood as a broad system of learning experiences aiming at teacher change (Fraser *et al.* 2007), and as an 'uptake of formal and informal learning opportunities that deepen and extend teachers' professional competence, including knowledge, beliefs, motivation and self-regulatory skills' (Richter *et al.* 2011, p. 116) related to cultural diversity. We are particularly

interested in context-based PD that is rooted in everyday school life (Worsham 2017) and the needs, challenges and potentials that lie within the school context as cores of teacher learning. We also acknowledge context-based PD as multi-layered and complex, affected by teacher-, school-, and learning activity related factors (Opfer and Pedder 2011).

General PD studies point to the importance of teachers' context-specific needs and practices to be attended, and involving teachers in engaging learning activities (e.g. Caena 2011, Creemers *et al.* 2013, European Commission 2013, Gilbert 2011, Menter *et al.* 2010). Such PD can be arranged in many ways, for instance, literature mentions formal workshops, varied forms of collaborations in school, and partnerships with other entities, researchers and experts (Burbank and Kauchak 2003, Day and Sachs 2004, Vescio *et al.* 2008, Avalos 2011); moreover, notes that teachers learn a great deal informally (e.g. Bakkenes *et al.* 2010). In terms of diversity and inclusion, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) literature review found the main forms of PD were participating in action research projects, on-site or university-based workshops, PD arranged in schools and online courses. What concerns this study is the way context-based PD is organised in relation to cultural diversity, teachers' needs and engagements, and how this arrangement supports teacher change for critical, responsive practices. To this end, Kennedy (2005) states that transformative PD might not have a specific outlay of learning forms but integrate a number of features with an overarching transformative goal.

Specifically in terms of teacher learning for diversity, Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008) see PD as an interaction between contents of diversity and teachers' learning experiences embedded in the socio-cultural and learning environment of PD. Here it is crucial to note that, from a critical perspective, the context-based socio-cultural and learning environment of PD fundamentally include students, families and communities into teacher learning where student and community voices are not simply seen as sources of consultation *about* students, but as equal partners in teacher learning, defining a 'dialogic, reflective model of professionalism, forged in alliance with students in the first instance' (Wisby 2011, p. 41). For example, when student voices are involved in teachers' PD, it greatly helps teachers to understand what 'responding to diversity' actually means and change practice in ways it is meaningful to students (Messiou and Ainscow 2015, Messiou *et al.* 2016).

Regarding contents and aims of PD, Leeman and van Koeven (2018) summarised trends in PD for cultural diversity. PD emphasising cognitive development usually aims at broadening teachers' knowledge in terms of facts about people, cultures, languages as well as abstract concepts and theories related to diversity. Reflection-based PD emphasises teacher reflection either as broad societal reflection, or as teachers' self-reflection on their own position in society and how it relates to teaching and learning. PD focusing on emotional aspects often develops cultural sensitivity and positive intergroup relations by engaging in interactive, cooperative activities. As mentioned before, rather than segmenting the aims and contents of PD for cultural diversity, it is suggested to see PD as a system aiming at transformation, integrating critical reflection and supporting teachers in finding pedagogical responses (Szelei and Alves 2018, Creemers *et al.* 2013, Leeman and van Koeven 2018). Forghani-Arani *et al.* (2019) add the need for PD to persistently reconnect practice to theory, to be driven by teachers and supported by school leaders. Studies that focus on whole-school learning for cultural diversity confirm the importance of teachers' collegial collaboration and school leaders' active role in establishing a supportive environment for PD (Read *et al.* 2015, Ohi *et al.* 2019).

In sum, what cuts across these PD studies coupled with perspectives from critical multiculturalism is the importance to establish PD environments for teachers that 1) re-centre the concepts of culture, language and diversity towards social justice and equity in education (e.g. Gorski 2016, Souto-Manning 2019), 2) provide opportunities to reflect on and challenge own assumptions and beliefs on cultural diversity, students, society and practices (e.g. Santoro 2009, Acquah and Commins 2015, Santoro and Forghani-Arani 2015), 3) facilitate developing pedagogical frameworks such as pedagogies of empowerment, student voice, cultural relevance/

responsiveness and multilingualism (e.g. May 2013, Souto-Manning 2017, Wiggan and Watson-Vandiver 2017), 4) redefine relationships within the whole school community including teacher-student-community relationships towards trustworthy, respectful, equal partnerships to learn from and with each other and improve school together (e.g. Read *et al.* 2015, Lees 2016).

Despite these ideals, many empirical studies point to teachers' challenging work situations in schools such as lack of time and resources, as well as teachers' reported feeling of personal and professional insecurities related to cultural diversity (Zembylas 2010, Miller 2011, Hajisoteriou 2013, Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Karousiou *et al.* 2019). In this study we contribute to nuancing the picture of understanding teachers' context-based PD for cultural diversity: we note fruitful potentials but we also shed light on the fact that current arrangements in a specific case might further add to teacher insecurities rather than ignite justice-driven change.

Professional development and cultural diversity in portugal

In Portugal, an intercultural[1] approach in school policies is widespread (e.g. Martins 2008). Intercultural education is officially part of the national curriculum as a transversal area of development, under the umbrella concept of citizenship education (DGE 2013). Moreover, the 'Intercultural School Stamp' initiative has been developed (DGE 2016), which evaluates schools and awards them to differing levels, depending on how school practices 1) promote the recognition and value of diversity as an opportunity and source of learning for all, and 2) implement specific strategies/actions to promote interculturality, equal opportunity and educational success for all. This framework also encourages schools to critically examine and improve their practices towards interculturality, and motivates schools to share knowledge and experience (Direção Geral de Educação 2016).

The Portuguese law regulates PD (Decree-Law 22/2014) and emphasises 1) promoting teaching quality and school results, 2) contextualisation, 3) adequacy to teachers' and school needs, 4) valuing scientific and pedagogic knowledge, 5) scientific and pedagogic autonomy of training providers, 6) cooperation between primary-, secondary- and higher education, scientific and professional institutions, and 7) promoting a culture of monitoring and evaluation targeted to improve quality. Portuguese schools are usually organised into school clusters and each cluster is associated to a teacher training centre that offers formal PD opportunities. Schools also plan PD for their school staff, and have the autonomy to establish varied forms of context-based PD. Previous research highlight that teachers seem to rely on informal learning opportunities such as everyday experiences in practice and in context, by the projects and roles they undertake in their career, and interacting with colleagues informally (Flores 2005, Forte and Flores 2014). Teacher collaboration has also been gaining more awareness, but it still seems to be somewhat lagging behind, and teachers perceive leadership and organisational/structural features to be key components in facilitating or constraining collaboration (Forte and Flores 2014, Silva *et al.* 2017, Pinho and Mesquita 2018). Teachers in Portugal seem to experience diversity as a challenge and an incentive to learn but yet might feel unprepared for practice (Forte and Flores 2014, Flores and Ferreira 2016, Pinho and Mesquita 2018, Lourenço *et al.* 2018). Moreira (2017) specifically notes that ´lack of attention to issues of language diversity (...) has been a weakness in preparing teachers for social justice in Portugal as in elsewhere in the world´ (p. 4). According to the Eurydice report (2019) teacher education systems in Europe usually address teachers´ competences in general to teach in diverse, multicultural classrooms and/or to address discrimination related to cultural and linguistic diversity to differing extents. In the case of Portugal, the report notes that initial teacher education does not indicate these areas of development in its shared top-down framework, therefore addressing these areas of development might depend on university and departmental arrangements. However, the report also notes Portugal as one of the countries where continuing PD suggest to acquire knowledge for one of these areas. Consequently, there might be a discrepancy between initial and continuing teacher education in terms of cultural

diversity in Portugal. Since a comprehensive understanding on context-based PD for cultural diversity is an expanding field both in Europe and in Portugal, more explorations are necessary in order to unpack how PD arrangements support teacher learning on the matter.

Research aims and questions

This article is part of a larger project that aimed at understanding teachers' conceptualisations, responses, and PD for cultural diversity in a school cluster in Portugal. Previous work with this case study revealed unsettled rather than unified conceptualisations and practices in the school cluster: while there was a tendency that seemed to Other students, there were also enactments of universal and difference-blind strategies, as well as some advocacy for a more just education with student voice and participation (Szelei *et al.* 2019, Szelei forthcoming). This article presents the third angle of the project that elaborates on the role of PD by addressing the following questions:

- What are teachers' self-perceived needs for PD for cultural diversity?
- What are the PD opportunities and challenges for cultural diversity in the school cluster?
- What is the potential of current context-based PD in the school cluster to facilitate teachers' justice and equity centred understandings and pedagogical responses to cultural diversity?

Methods

The school cluster of this case (Stake 1995, Simons 2009) is located in an urban migratory area in Portugal. It consists of 6 schools, five primary- and a secondary school, out of which four agreed to participate in the study (school A secondary, B, C, D primary). This school cluster was purposefully selected according to 1) acknowledging cultural and linguistic diversity in the student population; and 2) having an explicit vision or initiative on cultural and linguistic diversity. These criteria were checked by scanning publicly available school documents and consulting with experts. The school cluster has been found adequate to criteria due to the characterisation of its students, as well as by the programme it developed or have been involved in. The school cluster had a total of 1408 students from altogether 32 different nationalities (mostly from Portugal, Brazil, Nepal, Cape Verde, Bangladesh and India). Moreover, around half of the other than Portuguese citizen students were Portuguese language learners (identified *as Portuguese as non-mother tongue learners* ('PNML') by school and national framework). The school cluster was part of several national programmes. On the one hand, due to the school's lower results to national average, it was part of the TEIP (*Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária* – Educational Territories of Priority Intervention) initiative to increase school achievement and combat social exclusion and disadvantage. On the other hand, due to its diverse cultural and linguistic character, it was also a member of the Intercultural Schools Network. These policy frameworks encourage PD, but little is known about how it is implemented by schools in context; therefore, this case has provided potential insights to explore the issue.

Data consists of school documents and interviews with 28 school practitioners (23 teachers, 5 leadership members with teaching experience varying between 10 and 40 years – average 23 years), and specifically in this school cluster from 1 to 20 years (average 6 years). Teachers worked at different schooling levels of the school cluster: there were 15 subject teachers in the middle and secondary school level, 6 primary school teachers and 2 early childhood educators. School documents were gathered through online search on the school's publicly available website, as well as during fieldwork when provided by participants. Semi- structured interviews were conducted in three rounds: the first one targeted school practitioners knowledgeable about and involved in the school programmes described before; whereas the other two focused on teachers in general. The rationale behind the different rounds of interviews were to gather a wide range of perspectives and voices from the school cluster, both from the side of practitioners who had designated roles in the running programmes but as well any classroom

and subject teachers. The organisation of the interview rounds were also connected to the design of the larger project that involved two interview phases, and a classroom practice observational phase coupled with further interviews. In the project these interviews built on each other in order to gather multiple voices of the case, as well as to reach conceptual saturation (e.g. Charmaz 2008) in order to deeply understand the overarching aims of the project. One section of these interviews mapped PD opportunities for cultural diversity in the school cluster, and school practitioner' opinions about them. Complementary observations were conducted during five school-based PD workshops related to cultural diversity. Field-notes were taken on the contents and main forms of learning activities during these sessions. Data were analysed using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2011): analysis started with open coding which then were synthesised into categories corresponding to the first two research questions. Consequently, responding to these research questions allowed us to provide a descriptive account of the PD arrangement in the case and teachers´ perspectives on it. We applied research question three to connect this descriptive analysis to the theoretical underpinnings of critical multiculturalism. Thus, it serves as a question to discuss the described constellation of context-based PD in light of its potentials for change for equity and justice. The Findings section is organised according to the research questions and it embeds discussion: the first part maps teachers' PD needs, while the second depicts opportunities and challenges of teacher learning for cultural diversity. The third section discusses the role context-based PD in the school cluster might play in facilitating/hindering teachers' justice and equity centred understandings and pedagogical responses to cultural diversity.

Findings and discussions

Teacher needs for professional development

Contents of learning: prescriptions on cultures, students and pedagogical solutions

The teachers strongly felt the need for PD and expressed their needs for contents and forms of teacher learning. One of the areas that many teachers wished for was specific information on cultures and languages. They realised the importance of getting acquainted with where students come from, their languages and cultures, life histories, former educational systems and experiences. For example,

> 'On a general level, I think, to know a little bit about the cultures we have in the school, the countries, the religions, the cultural characteristics' B3

> 'Know a minimum about the pupil's culture, because if we don't know the minimum about the pupil's culture the child will feel completely out of context, that is, the teacher may have difficulty in integrating this pupil' A4

These findings show teachers´ awareness of the importance to acknowledge cultural diversity in the school and its relevance in connecting to school life (Acquah *et al.* 2016), which is an important step in breaking homogenised visions on school community and students´ identities, and developing culturally relevant pedagogies (e.g. Ladson-Billings 1995, 2009). However, often times it seemed to be a wish for knowing about students´ cultures and languages as unified entities in themselves, that might have carried the risk for cultures-as-essentialised in PD (Sleeter 2012).

The need for specific information on cultures and languages seemed to continue in wishing for direct pedagogical solutions as well. Teachers usually perceived abstract thoughts on cultural and linguistic diversity in PD that they were presented with not being useful for their practice. Instead, they preferred PD to provide pedagogical strategies and tools that directly impact practice, particularly when teaching ´PNML´ students. This request for a sharp connection between PD and practice manifested in the need of being shown what and how to implement in the classroom, and the desire for ready-made resources. For example,

> '[if it was like] Look, what you need to teach is this, it's ready, there's already a knowledge of the language and all that, the worksheets are ready, everything is accurate and all that, that would be a huge help' A6

'... teaching those who master the language, make them go forward, when they already are at completely different stages amongst themselves, try to work in different ways with pupils who are at different stages ... even more, those pupils who don't understand the language, who I need to support and to whom I also need to ... teach the curriculum! How is this done?! Please explain it to me! Explain it to me, that I don't mind, I want to learn, but do explain to me how is this done!' A12

These findings might be connected to teachers´ everyday difficulties in environments where they might not have adequate resources, for example, to respond to multilingualism in the classroom (Miller 2011). Teachers´ wishes for direct pedagogical solutions could also be related to the fact that alternative pedagogies might not have been part of their pedagogical repertoires during initial teacher education (Moreira 2017). However, it is also important to note that pedagogies in the critical multicultural frame do not aim solely at making teaching technical by overemphasising the practical execution of teaching: it also facilitates rethinking underpinning epistemologies and thoughts on cultural diversity, students, teaching, learning; as well as relationships in education (Ladson-Billings 2009, Acuff 2018).

To this end, some teachers also thought PD had to address attitudes, dispositions, and perspective-change. They referred to this aspect under terms such as being open-minded, open to difference, change and learning; accepting, respecting and valuing cultures and students. For instance,

'I think that the best someone can have, is to be open-minded and know that there is all this difference, isn't it. The best training we can offer someone' A11

'It is related to the devotion to the profession and love for the students. That is what one needs to make a good work. In my opinion, isn't it? Because any shortcoming that we might have at the level of a more technical training, be it pedagogical or didactical, or scientifically, we can always, we've got life-long learning activities' A10

In these perceptions, we can see how teachers noted the importance of working with attitudes, dispositions, and thoughts about the teaching profession, cultural diversity and students. These complementary perspectives also show that teachers were aware of the need for a more holistic PD approach when addressing cultural diversity.

Needs for a supportive organisational environment and more collaboration

Another strong wish was to have a more supportive organisational environment that enables PD and effective teacher work. More time was requested along with freedom or autonomy from bureaucratic and curricular demands. A few also wished for feeling more supported by leadership and colleagues, and more support for teachers' social circumstances and wellbeing. For instance,

'The teachers lose time for reflection. They are under bureaucratic burdens that should not be ... They don't have time to think about how to prepare material, who are the students they have in front of them? What is it that the students ask? Where do we want to go with them? Yes, the teaching material is here, but ... what is essential here? What is fundamental? How can I go beyond? ... We need more time' A13

Most teachers also wished for more collaboration that mainly referred to teacher colleagues. The teachers seemed to welcome the idea of having someone in the classroom to learn together. For instance,

'We should open the classroom and I believe that in the Portuguese schools sometimes it`s still too difficult, because especially in the elementary school, there is the idea a long time ago, it`s one teacher. And I don´t think that can be the future because I think that the more we learn from each other and the more help we get from each other, and the sharing of opinions, of ideas, of resources ... I can work with the student, and it doesn´t work, and a colleague of mine can work with that student and his ideas work. So why don´t we work together?' C4

'I think that in the midst of all this, most of the teachers are very unhappy, they feel bad and very tired, and it would be necessary to find forms of joint work that is rewarding, the people to help each other instead of being very isolated' A17

Some teachers were also aware of the importance of collaborating with parents, communities or other entities that could bridge school and community. However, just like in the case of teacher collaboration, they often perceived structural and organisational constraints, such as lack of time, in establishing such partnerships. This implies that such collaborations might be seen as 'extra features' rather than an integrate part of a collaborative, community-based school policy. Moreover, some teachers felt that working with communities was harder in this school cluster, given the perceived absence of already established communities in the neighbourhood. This observation might be related to the fact that the schools are located in a migratory region where students and families usually move in and out, and are in unstable migration statuses. It might be that communities are not yet established to be able to formally represent themselves in school, or trust is not yet established between school and communities in order to start learning together. Yet some teachers noted the importance of such collaborations:

> 'I would be the happiest to have someone in my classroom always, someone from the community, who would be there and offer us his/her experience … there would be many ways of providing context. But we lack time' A5

> 'We would need someone who would come and support us in the matters of religion. Why not relying on the religious leader … ?' C1

In sum, regarding teachers' PD demands this study corresponds with other country contexts in Europe revealing that teachers' wish for PD related to cultural diversity (Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Acquah *et al.* 2016). However, there seem to be tensions regarding learning contents and forms. For example, teachers hoped that PD would solve their currently experienced challenges in the classroom and requested very specific information on cultures, students and pedagogical solutions in a prescriptive manner; yet at the same time wished for more collaboration and professional autonomy. This finding can be explained by the fact that linguistic diversity for many teachers in the sample was a new classroom reality, it might be that they did not yet feel empowered enough to bring about pragmatic change and they asked for specific pedagogical tools and resources as a first indispensable step. The nature of teachers' learning needs might point to the fact that practicing teachers can take multiple roles: be starter learners of an area and experts of another; resulting in multi-layered, co-existing learning needs. Within these multiple learning needs, we found a tendency to be acquainted with ´cultures´ as unified sets of knowledges, experiences, languages, and educational systems that seemed to be the mobilised concept within the wishes for prescribed strategies and teaching resources. These views might have imagined solving pedagogical ´problems´, and somewhat undermined the role of critical reflection and close collaboration with students and communities that PD within a critical and culturally relevant paradigm would involve (Santoro 2017, Souto-Manning 2017). On the other hand, teachers also noted the importance for attitude change as well as working with students, communities and colleagues as promising starting points for thinking differently about PD. These tensions could imply that teachers´ PD needs are at intersecting points wishing to satisfy everyday practical difficulties and an awareness for conceptualising teacher learning for cultural diversity in more equitable ways. Alternatively, these ambiguities might also be related to the differences in teaching experience as well as teachers´ different understandings of PD.

Context-based professional development for cultural diversity: portraying the challenges

Formal professional development opportunities: conflicting agendas, conflicting teacher learning methods

The majority of teachers noted that they had no formal courses on cultural and linguistic diversity during their initial teacher education, but they had some components within other broader

modules that somehow can be connected to the issue. The topics of these modules varied largely; for example, foreign language teaching, social and religious education, school integration and inclusion. Most teachers observed that these module components were overly theoretical and did not equip them with insights for pedagogical practice, but raised awareness for cultural diversity in general. It is important to note that the teachers in this study had at least 10 years of teaching practice; therefore, the curriculum of their former education might not reflect the current state of initial teacher education.

Cultural and linguistic diversity was seen as a demand for teacher learning, and most teachers revealed their needs and willingness to learn in order to better respond to this context. This need was accentuated regarding Portuguese language learners, since many teachers rarely encountered linguistically heterogeneous classes to this extent in their career before. Whereas language teachers felt more at ease in modifying strategies due to their background in foreign language teaching, many other subject teachers expressed insecurities and feelings of powerlessness. As most teachers perceived their former education inadequate and irrelevant on this issue, they sought extra formal studies either at the training centre, or at other entities such as universities or independent providers. The most common formal PD course teachers attended were the 'PNML' courses, and they found those useful.

> 'I had to go and learn about it *[PNML as subject]* also because I never had anything like it and I felt the need to go and learn first, so that I could know how to teach them and help them in a better way. Here I felt it was more needed than in the other schools I have been' C4

Apart from the 'PNML' courses, a variety of other workshops and courses were offered on the topics of diversity, differentiation, inclusion and interculturality. These formal PD opportunities engaged teachers in a variety of learning activities depending on provider and trainer: frontal lecturing with minimal active teacher participation, episodic collaborative tasks (e.g. group discussion, creating mindmaps), self-reflection, long-term pair work, and quasi-action research by engaging with students' voices. The theoretical frameworks approaching cultural and linguistic diversity in these courses also seemed to be dependent on provider and trainer. The variety of approaches and information teachers encountered during formal training (coupled with information from their informal learning sources), might have confused teachers in developing conceptual thinking on the issue, and consequently, designing practices. For example:

> 'I think that most people do not understand anything about what is interculturality. Even myself who has a lot of experience with interculturality personally, if I want to implement, if I want to organise activities to implement, I easily become lost in the quantity of information, in the quantity of cultures and the quantity of approaches' A14

Although more studies are necessary to closely investigate the theoretical backgrounds of these trainings, it seemed that a critical understanding on cultural diversity was rather absent. The contents noted inequities in society and combating discrimination being a part of the general agenda, but the focus seemed to rather lie upon cultural exchange, mixing and dialogue. On the other hand, there was a workshop that focused on understanding diversity through student voice and developing student voice work through quasi-action research with students and teacher collaboration in pairs. Regarding linguistic diversity, it seemed that the main focus of acquiring teaching strategies for developing Portuguese language skills from a monolingual Portuguese perspective, rather than through multilingual pedagogies. Understanding multilingualism in terms of minority and migrant languages seemed to be missing. However, a peer-led session raised awareness for the unequal situations of language learners in the classroom by merging teachers in a language environment they did not understand. This conflicting character of contents in PD might contribute to teachers' conceptual confusion (Cochran-Smith *et al.* 2004, Hajisoteriou 2013) on the area.

Tensions were not only found in the approaches to cultural and linguistic diversity, but a mismatch between teacher expectations and diverse course contents was also clear. Some teachers felt that formal trainings were about abstract ideas, less connected to practice; and therefore, perceived them as irrelevant (except 'PNML' courses). The possible confusion around terminology due to the proliferation of perspectives and perceived irrelevance of formal PD is well symbolised by a participant's ironic expression 'trainings on multiblabla' schools:

> 'When I see trainings on multiblabla schools … I have to select very well, which training I can do so that in fact it wouldn't be a training that doesn't tell me anything. So, if I invest time, let it be something good … And this is what I feel clearly, the need to do training, but that I have to select very well from the offers … also in terms of the training quality in general, because they offer training that's … it doesn't mean that it's of quality, or that after the time the teacher invested it will be reflected in practice. This is a challenge for all the training providers' A18

Informal learning opportunities: practice, context, students

Most teachers noted that they mainly learnt through practice, by teaching in different schools and classrooms along their careers, and by participating in the school context, interacting with students and families. As mentioned before, many teachers felt that learning, at least in terms of raising awareness, was inevitable and necessary due to student diversity. For example,

> 'It was just … during fieldwork, directly teaching, that I gradually became aware of the issue. I started by having children, at the beginning most of them were Chinese, who showed up in my classroom, then Ukrainian children … and now, lately, from India, Nepal, Bangladesh' A3

> 'They *[teachers]* learn in their day-to-day activities. I think that we're always learning, also because the kids that we've got are different' D1

Therefore, most teachers acknowledged the impact of informal learning through practice, but it remained unclear what such learning entailed. This might be due to the fact that informal learning experiences without complementary planned PD opportunities (e.g. structured reflection) remained unconscious.

About half of the participants also signalled the importance of learning from/with students, and its primacy over formal PD opportunities. For example,

> 'But I, in principle, considering that although training is valuable, being with them *[students]* is the most important. We gradually find out, by being with them, our feelings and, look, to be receptive to everything … See what is good for them' A8

The teachers therefore realised the importance of student voice in teacher learning. Through interacting with students, many teachers referred to attitudinal development in broad terms such as learning to always keep an open mind, respecting students and not to impose teacher ideas on them. Regarding pedagogical practice, about half of the participants recognised the importance of interacting with students and parents in everyday life, and modifying strategies accordingly. For example:

> 'This year was spent a bit trying out what they *[students]* enjoyed, to what things would they react. I realise that often I did things with them that were of no use. But that also helps us to grow as teachers' B1

However, since these types of interactions almost exclusively fell into unplanned, informal learning experiences, teacher learning seemed to happen on a trial-and-error basis. Furthermore, little was revealed about how students and families were positioned in this learning relationship. The predominantly informal way of engaging with students and families in teacher learning might leave this interaction depending on individual teacher cases rather than a salient feature of a whole-school PD system. Regarding involving families, the odd case seemed to be school D that appeared to have strong parental relations and active parent presence in school. However, school D had the lowest number of recently arriving students and ´PNML´ students.

Scattered commitment and collaboration

All the teachers showed a willingness to learn to cater for cultural and linguistic diversity, and found some ways of learning out of own initiative, interest and possibility, let these be formal or informal PD opportunities to varying extents. At the same time, the teachers noticed that learning motivation and commitment was not shared within the whole teaching team, and lamented that not everyone was engaged in PD. Many believed this was related to personal and organisational problems such as disinterest in the topic, resistance to change and to cultural and linguistic diversity; teachers' inability to participate in PD due to conflicting schedules, lack of time and insufficient financial support.

> 'Enrolment was open for everybody. We were just three from the primary school sector, which was a pity … There should have been more teachers there, but that's up to each person' B1

> 'It depends a lot on the teacher. So, depends on who's there, and depends a lot on if and what each teacher wants to sacrifice … I do something, but I know there are people who do more than I do. I know others who are not even interested in' C3

Most teachers noted that there are some forms of collaboration in the school cluster that could be seen as platforms for collaborative PD. Such were, for example, class- and departmental meetings, and informal conversations with colleagues. These opportunities were platforms for teacher discussions generally, and it remains unclear how they addressed cultural and linguistic diversity during these meetings. On the other hand, it seemed that a few teachers formed pairs or small groups for collaboration informally to support each other with planning, sharing thoughts and ideas. There were also formal initiatives in the TEIP programme that encouraged teaching in pairs, or having a supporting teacher in the classroom, but interestingly, this cooperation with the supporting teacher was rarely identified as a collaborative PD opportunity, and seemed to remain on the level of technical support. A workshop on 'intervision' (peer classroom observation, reflection and planning) was initiated, and another workshop specifically on diversity involved teachers in pairs to engage with students' voices as a way to learn about and for diversity. These workshops were attended by some teachers, but collaboration in the sense of shared planning and inquiry with the aim of supporting students seemed to be a start-up feature in the school cluster. Therefore, some teachers noticed that current collaboration was not enough and expressed a feeling of isolation, both on the level of individual classrooms and across the school cluster. For example,

> 'I think that the schools are left alone, you see? We've got no teams, we don't work in teams, we can't solve half of the problems, we've got no translators, the kids are sent at any time, we've got no training, no support, you see?' C1

Scattered commitment and collaboration might be due to several personal and structural/organisational issues. The fact that many teachers work in the school cluster and might not even have the opportunity to meet makes collaborative PD difficult. The rotating system of teacher employment in Portugal was also noted as a hindrance in establishing a stable teaching team. Some teachers experienced tensions between the teams and between individuals that might have discouraged collaboration. Lack of time and bureaucratic obligations were also listed. Moreover, some teachers noted colleagues possibly experiencing exhaustion or psychological discomfort that might also contribute to scattered collaboration and commitment. Thus, these findings add to previous ones revealing teachers' distress related to organisational/structural support and cultural diversity (Fine-Davis and Faas 2014, Karousiou *et al.* 2019, Zembylas 2010), and point to the need for a supportive organisational environment that enables collaboration (Forte and Flores 2014, Silva *et al.* 2017) also in terms of teacher learning for cultural diversity.

Consequently, some of these collaborative PD forms seemed to remain on the level of exchanging information, consultation and technical support, but some other opportunities seemed to carry the possibility for transforming for diversity. Such were the initiatives both in

formal and informal ways to form pairs to work together, which teachers even received training on. The long-term workshop on involving teachers in collaborative planning in pairs and engagement with students' voices through quasi-action research projects particularly seemed to enhance collaboration between both teachers and students, and at the same time teachers could learn about and respond to diversity (Messiou and Ainscow 2015, Messiou *et al.* 2016). Such opportunities should be kept alive, encouraging more teachers to attend and undertake similar work, moreover, enabling the teachers who already participated to share their knowledge within the whole team. Although collaboration at the moment did not seem to expand to larger teams or across the schools, the existing micro-level collaborations should be encouraged and provided sufficient conditions and platforms to flourish. However, more investigations are necessary on how cultural and linguistic diversity is approached in these learning opportunities, in order to truly collaborate for improving student learning and schooling experience (Vescio *et al.* 2008) taking into account the particular situations that cultural and linguistic diversity carries.

Context-based professional development, cultural diversity, and the potential for justice and equity-oriented change

In the previous sections we described and discussed context-based PD for cultural diversity: teachers´ needs for PD and the ways context-based PD currently happened in the schools cluster according to teachers´ perceptions. Now we return to critically reflect on its potential to support teacher learning in facilitating justice and equity centred conceptualisations and practices. We look through the lenses of critical multiculturalism (May and Sleeter 2010) and PD on the field by reflecting on 1) the underpinning concepts of culture, language, diversity that seemed to be present in context-based PD and their relation to justice and equity (in general and in classroom pedagogy) 2) the role of critical reflection on self, students, practices and society 3) the relationships between colleagues, students and the larger school community.

Starting with the underpinning concepts, we found a variety of frameworks that might have approached culture and language with different focus points and understandings. Consequently, teachers seemed to be acquainted with competing and complementing educational discourses on the issue that might have exacerbated conceptual confusion (Cochran-Smith 2004, Hajisoteriou 2013). Although more studies are necessary on the contents of these trainings to conclude on the matter, it seemed that culture and language with a justice focus remained marginal. This finding might contribute to the debate questioning how teacher education itself serves the mission for cultural diversity and teacher support in order to interrupt reproducing inequalities (e.g. Fylkesnes 2018, Souto-Manning 2019). This also seemed to be prevailing in terms of pedagogical frameworks on culture and language since there seemed to be less attention given to, for example multilingualism including minority and migrant languages in the classroom, empowerment and student voice work. Familiarity with these pedagogies rather depended on teachers´ previous life and professional experiences as well as self-initiation, rather than a shared vision on cultural and linguistic diversity in pedagogy that PD could facilitate. This finding adds to previous indications that teachers need pedagogical support in the classroom in meaningfully developing classroom strategies related to cultural diversity and support student learning (Leeman and van Koeven 2018, Forghani-Arani *et al.* 2019).

In relation to critical reflection, there were several opportunities that could potentially include moments of reflection, for example, individual reflection during self-initiated learning activities, as well as during practice, with students, and while interacting with colleagues. Reflection, however, did not seem to be a consciously planned part of PD and some teachers noted that organisational arrangement might not have fostered time and opportunity enough for actual critical reflection. Consequently, some teachers´ wished for more time for reflection, as well as thought of teacher learning more holistically in rethinking the teaching profession, the purpose of schooling; changing attitudes and dispositions towards cultural diversity and students, both on the level of classroom

pedagogy and being in the profession (Acuff 2018). This shows that some teachers were aware of the importance of critical reflection on self, knowledges and practices in relation to cultural diversity and student learning (Santoro 2009, 2017, Acquah and Commins 2015, Santoro and Forghani-Arani 2015), but the current PD environment might still have to respond to this need.

Finally, in terms of redefining relationships in the school community we also found a mismatch between teachers´ awareness and the current arrangements. Although there seemed to be an acknowledgement that students are the best sources of learning, and teachers´ wished for more collaboration with parents and communities, these intents for partnerships at times were articulated for solving immediate problems (e.g. mediating translation during meetings and lessons) to ease teachers´ perceived anxieties, and less frequently for starting a broader dialogue to think about diversity differently together. Moreover, learning from students and communities at the moment was almost exclusively informal, unplanned and self-initiated. Since closer relationships with students and communities help teachers´ understand how to conceptualise culture, language and diversity in meaningful ways, as well as build trustworthy relationships with the school community (Messiou and Ainscow 2015, Lees 2016), these kind of actions would need to be uplifted to a conscious effort at the school level.

In sum, several existing PD opportunities were detected, yet it was ambiguous how those were acted on in terms of situating PD as a step towards finding better responses to cultural diversity. Although there were some fruitful avenues for teacher learning, we also found PD for cultural diversity being yet a start-up feature in the school cluster. Since teachers in this study articulated a number of concerns and proposed ideas for meaningful PD for cultural diversity, we build on teachers´ contextualised knowledge, experience and opinions in suggesting some ways forward for PD and school improvement.

Implications

The findings of this case study carry several implications for PD providers, school leaders and further research. PD designs should rely on teachers' strongly articulated needs: to be meaningful to practice, involve collaborative forms, teacher autonomy but as well support the development of specific pedagogical skills. Formal PD can still be beneficial especially when teachers experience cultural and linguistic diversity as a new phenomenon and look for support. This study showed that teachers had a strong wish to expand their pedagogical repertoires in order to improve student learning. Therefore, PD should reinforce these needs by familiarising teachers with meaningful pedagogical contents. Such are, for example, multilingual pedagogies, culturally relevant teaching, pedagogies of student voice and empowerment that support teachers in pedagogically conceptualising their practices, and at the same time attempt to avoid Othering by focusing on students and improving student learning. However, this case study also showed that teachers were already acquainted with a number of formal PD frameworks that seemed to be rather confusing, and teachers might have felt overwhelmed with the plethora of theoretical perspectives taken on cultural and linguistic diversity. In these situations it also matters to establish PD environments for teachers where criticality can be developed towards the contents they are presented with, and view multiple PD contents through the lens of justice and equity.

Regarding school leadership, this study pointed to the fact that teachers' challenges were embedded in larger problems around teachers' self-perceived powerlessness for learning and for change in the absence of top-down organisational guidance or support. Consequently, school leaders and organisational structures would need to provide an environment that helps teachers in transcending the stages of feeling that they struggle under perceived structural and societal constrains, to feeling empowered at least in their own classrooms to support students the best way possible, and regain a feeling of joy in the teaching profession. For example, all teachers would need to be provided equal opportunities for receiving information on school life, and for participating in formal and informal PD. Equitable organisational structures (e.g. transparent

communication, equal opportunity to participate, financial support), supportive leadership and colleagues, and promoting PD that respond to teachers' needs would be important for easing teachers' discomfort and encourage whole-school collaboration.

School leaders should also count on students and communities in PD. In this study, the teachers were enthusiastic to know more about students, cultures and communities, seemed willing to welcome families and communities in school, and many admitted that the best way of learning is to learn directly from students and parents. However, the position of teachers and students/communities in such a learning relationship remained unclear. However, building on teachers' openness to learn from/with students, parents and communities might be a promising sign in involving students, families and communities as equals in order to avoid tokenistic engagement and superficial learning *about* cultural diversity. Such collaborations are not easy to achieve, yet micro-level collaborations could be ways to initiate and gradually expand. This form of learning would be crucial in supporting teachers' breaking away from the perception that cultural diversity has to be learned about in formal courses as in factual knowledge; and realising that the best way to actually do it is establishing collaborative PD with students.

Finally, we also suggest possibilities for future research based on the findings of this study. Since there seem to be many studies with pre-service teachers, we continue to stress the importance of taking the case of experienced teachers seriously, and support them in their practices – especially when changes in the classroom might happen that teachers were not prepared for. We suggest to further inquire what might work well for in-service PD in forms of longitudinal studies, as well as multi-case studies both in the paradigms of qualitative interpretative inquiry and action research with teachers. Furthermore, specifically in the European sphere, since there seem to be many studies reporting on teacher struggles related to cultural diversity, it would also be important to show cases of teachers whose first identification point is not necessarily the immense difficulty with the issue. These portraits could show teachers´ professional and life trajectories, knowledges and ways of learning with the educational community. Learning from these practices and experiences might facilitate rethinking PD and the teaching profession in relation to cultural diversity in Portugal, Europe and worldwide.

Note

1. The differences and similarities between inter/multicultural education have been widely discussed and authors might hold different opinions on the matter. There are scholars who regard them as only different in linguistic and geographical terms (multicultural: US, intercultural: Europe), others think there are fundamental epistemological and ontological differences between the two, and yet others use these terms as synonyms. This article does not make a distinction between these two terms, but rather analyses all practices (regardless how they are called by other actors) through the lenses of critical multiculturalism.

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