CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF BAHAMIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This mixed methods explanatory study examined the level of critical consciousness of high school students in The Bahamas and the contribution of school to its development. Developing critical consciousness in students makes education relevant to their lives and equips them with the skills needed to think critically about social conditions. The Critical Consciousness Scale was completed by 10th-grade students (N = 202) at four public high schools. Results indicate a lack of awareness of inequality in Bahamian society. Though students strongly support equal treatment of groups in society, few had participated in any related activity. Interviews with high- scoring students yielded five themes related to the role of school in developing critical consciousness: the importance of discussion and dialogue, the need for guidance and mentoring, the role of clubs, community service, and the influence of class activities and peer interaction.

Keywords: critical action, critical consciousness, mixed method, sociopolitical participation

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> We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people (King, 1963, p. 4)

Critical consciousness is the "deepening of the attitude of awareness" about social conditions and issues (Freire, 2012, p. 109). It is the process by which individuals reflect on and act to change their social conditions (Watts et al., 2011). Freire described critical consciousness as insightful interpretation of social problems that results in action. Studies reveal that critical consciousness contributes to the understanding of human dignity and social responsibility. Watts et al. (2002) found that young men who developed critical consciousness were empowered to critically analyze popular culture messages on gender, culture, race, and social class. College students expressed commitment to social justice principles after engaging in service-learning projects aimed at developing critical consciousness (Rondini, 2015). Wong (2014) noted that through critical pedagogy, and the development of critical consciousness, students can be convinced to think differently and to challenge assumptions and practices. Wong observed that by developing a democratic environment in the classroom in which the professor and students evaluated their beliefs and assumptions, "I might have disrupted my students' prior knowledge and influenced their learning" (p. 59). Likewise, through the Social Justice Education Project, young people of color were motivated to change their behavior and their school and society, showing the importance of a critically conscious curriculum (Cammarota, 2016).

Preparing the next generation of students entails equipping them with the skills needed for civic engagement and cultural transformation (Lee & Givens, 2012; Silva & Langhout, 2011). This involves teaching students how to think critically and solve problems, how to look at the root cause of issues, and how to consider systemic perspectives as opposed to merely accepting things at face value (Doughty, 2006; Noddings, 2013; Wagner, 2008). Doughty (2006) described four types of critical thinking skills students can be taught: Socratic dialogue,

hermeneutics, critical analysis, and critical consciousness. He asserted that perhaps the highest calling of the teacher is to help students develop critical consciousness. Yet the emphasis on testing in schools may not allow sufficient time for critical reflection (Noddings, 2013; Stillar, 2013). Kravatz (2007) contended for greater focus on raising the critical consciousness of students so that they ultimately contribute to building a better society. Developing critical consciousness in students makes education relevant to their lives and equips them with the skills needed to think critically about social conditions (Freire, 2012).

There is growing interest in the development of critical consciousness of both teachers and students (Haynes, 2013; McDonough, 2009; Riley, 2014; Weis, 2012). This concern for the development of critical consciousness in students continues to be reflected in international studies. Abednia and Izadinia (2013) studied the impact of critical literacy on the development of critical consciousness in students in Tehran, Stewart and Gachago (2016) investigated the use of collaborative digital storytelling to develop the critical consciousness of students in South Africa and the United States, while Stillar (2013) examined the impact creative writing in an English as a foreign language class had on the development of critical consciousness of students in Japan. Yet, while many studies have focused on the development of critical consciousness in students in various parts of the world, research on the development of critical consciousness in Bahamian students is absent in the literature.

In the *White Paper on Education* (1972), the government of The Bahamas promoted "ideals of conduct and endeavor that are valued by a Christian and democratic society" (p. 3). The government articulated that it aims to ensure "the system provides an education for our people which... meet the intellectual, moral, emotional and physical needs of all" (p. 3). The Bahamas Ministry of Education, which is responsible for the development of the national curriculum, has articulated a commitment to developing curricula relevant to the needs of individuals and society (Bahamas Ministry of Education, 2009).

Despite this, there have remained concerns about the academic and social trajectory of students in the nation (Caribbean Human Development Report, 2012; Maura, 2012). School dropout rates have raised

questions about the relevance of education to the lives of students (Cartwright-Carroll, 2012; Department of Statistics; Jones, 2013; Maura, 2012). Reports reveal only 50% of public school students are graduating from high school with the knowledge and skills needed for the workplace (Smith, 2016). The Minister of Education stated, "Part of the issue we feel is that we need to make the education system more relevant to the students" (Jones, 2013). Critically conscious educators contend it is not enough to provide students with labor market skills without also equipping them with skills to critique society and their situations: "Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). Freire (2012) noted that as students develop critical consciousness, education becomes less abstract: "[They] develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83). Yet even where moral and character development are promoted, little time has been devoted to the development of critical consciousness in youths (Adams et al., 2015).

This study seeks to examine the level of critical consciousness of 10th-grade students in The Bahamas and the role of schooling in its development. It follows a mixed method approach in which a survey instrument, the Critical Consciousness Scale, along with interview questions, are used for data collection. The findings of the study have implications for curriculum development and teacher training and suggest that additional opportunities for reflection, analysis of social issues, and critical action need to be integrated throughout the curriculum.

PROCESS OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT

Fostering critical consciousness is not a simple process. Freire (2005) described the development of critical consciousness as a progression from semitransitive to naïve transitive, and finally to critical

consciousness. In semitransitive consciousness the individual cannot apprehend problems that do not relate specifically to their biological needs, as the main concern is survival. There is disengagement from or lack of understanding of societal issues. Naïve transitive consciousness is characterized by oversimplification of problems and underestimation of people: "Naïve transitivity is the consciousness of men who are still almost part of a mass in whom the developing capacity for dialogue is still fragile and capable of distortion" (p. 14). If this stage does not develop into critical consciousness it can lead to extremism (Freire, 2005).

Critical Transitive Consciousness or critical consciousness is demonstrated by insightful interpretation of problems. The critically conscious individual is not guided by emotions alone, but also uses reason and sound judgement when analyzing problems:

> The critically transitive consciousness is characterized by the substitute of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's findings and by the openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them. (Freire, 2005, p.14)

Progress toward critical consciousness can be hindered by both general and specific obstacles (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Gay and Kirkland (2003) observed general obstacles as a lack of understanding of what constitutes self-reflection, lack of quality guided practice opportunities, and the belief that teaching techniques are easily transferable to all contexts and all populations. Specific obstacles were diversion or deflecting attention from the issue; silence by avoiding participation in discussions and pleading ignorance or lack of exposure; guilt without examination of the cause of the guilt or how to move past it; and benevolent liberalism, the expression of remorse and commitment to eradicating injustice without actually changing personal and professional behavior (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CRITICAL CON-SCIOUSNESS

Researchers have found spirituality, parents, peers, and the school's curriculum impact critical consciousness development (Diemer & Li, 2011; Garrido, 2009; Silva & Langhout, 2011). A qualitative study on the influence of spirituality on the development of critical consciousness revealed that spirituality raises awareness about social injustice, encourages critical analysis of oppression, and fosters praxis: reflection and action (Garrido, 2009). The combination of social and political support from parents and peers were found to impact youths' participation in social action and their perception of their capability to effect social and political change (Diemer & Li, 2011).

In an ethnographic study of first graders using an ethnographic art-focused critical multicultural curriculum, Silva and Langhout (2011) discovered that the first-grade teacher was able to engage students in discussions about social issues, offer students new ways of viewing their world, and provide them with opportunities to help reduce social problems. Students reflected upon their emotions; discussed negative stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice; and engaged in social action.

Raising the critical consciousness of students requires educators to understand their role in the process. The development of critical consciousness necessitates at the very beginning that the teacher-student contradiction be resolved: "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (Freire, 2012, p. 80). The teacher and students are simultaneously teaching and learning:

> Teacher education students can benefit from critical consciousness raising strategies: For teacher education programs to truly meet the needs of Indigenous learners, or indeed of any learner, more value needs to be placed upon encouraging critical discussions across disciplines about how teachers' behaviors, values, and teaching methods may influence learner achievement. (Riley, 2014, p. 150)

Developing critical awareness among teacher candidates involves promoting Indigenous knowledge, experiential learning, caring as teaching practice, high expectations, respect for students' cultural identity, and practicing and reflecting on newly acquired knowledge. Moreover, teacher education students should be educated on practices promoting equitable classroom environments and the influence their biases may have on decisions and expectations they have for students (Riley, 2014).

The disposition of the teacher is essential to the development of critical consciousness (Lee & Givens, 2012). Critical pedagogy cannot take place without love, which infuses dialogue: "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. . . . Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (Freire, 2012, p. 89). The teacher must be compassionate, competent, and committed (Lee & Givens, 2012). Compassion enables teachers to assist students in identifying barriers to their full potential and humanization, and become advocates for students. Competent teachers know their students and which teaching approaches, learning methods, and instructional techniques to use for maximum effectiveness. Competence requires the teacher and student to be engaged in the learning process:

> This kind of competence relies on the cooperation of teacher and student to engage in dialogue, which is at the heart of all democratic relationships, and as students engage in a cycle of theory, application, evaluation, and reflection, they become competent themselves in their own movement toward social transformation. (Lee & Givens, 2012, p. 206)

Commitment denotes the teacher views education as pivotal to changing an unjust society, and as a vehicle for intervening in the world to effect change.

The teacher can be instrumental in bringing attention to inequalities and promoting social justice (Palmer et al., 2014). Freire contends that when teachers view themselves not as mere depositors of knowledge, but as problem-posing educators who promote dialogue to critique the world around them, both student and teacher become more critically conscious. The role of the teacher is to intervene in the

world: "We cannot sit idly by and fold our arms. . . . I cannot be complicit with a perverse system" (Freire, 1998, p. 92).

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study examined the level of critical consciousness of 10-grade students in The Bahamas and the role of schooling in its development. Two primary questions guided this study:

1. What is the level of critical consciousness among 10th graders in public schools in The Bahamas?

2. What is the contribution of the school to students' critical consciousness development?

TYPE OF STUDY

This study followed a mixed method approach (Gay et al., 2012) by integrating a quantitative instrument, the Critical Consciousness Scale, with a qualitative measure: interviews. Diemer et al. (2015) advocated for research that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches as the use of survey instruments alone may only yield partial understanding of how critical consciousness develops and operates. They noted that a mixed method approach can reveal how critical consciousness may be evident in some areas of a person's life but not in other areas; this approach provides more insight and deeper understanding about the development of critical consciousness.

INSTRUMENT

In the quantitative phase of the study, a Likert-type survey instrument, the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS), was used to answer research question one, "What is the level of critical-consciousness of 10th graders in The Bahamas?" The CCS was developed and validated by Diemer et al. (2016) with students of diverse backgrounds. The CCS initially included 46 items written at a 10th grade reading level. These items were developed as uniquely designed items or were modified from other measures and surveys. Using exploratory factor analysis, 24 items were removed, resulting in a final scale of 22 items.

The CCS was selected because it measures both critical reflection and critical action relative to race, ethnicity, gender, and class dispari-

ties, which are inequalities also present in The Bahamas (Russell, 2009; Simon, 2014). Critical reflection is the ability of students to "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (Freire, 2012, p. 83). Critical action refers to students' actual participation in efforts to effect change in society (Diemer et al., 2015). The CCS is comprised of three subscales: 1) Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality, 2) Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism, and 3) Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation. The Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality subscale measures critical examination of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered constraints on educational and occupational opportunity. The Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism subscale measures youths' support of equal treatment of groups in society, and the Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation subscale measures youths' involvement in social and political activities to change perceived injustices and inequalities. Developmental psychologists argue that due to the age-based constraints of students, more emphasis needs to be placed on critical motivation through critical reflection (Watts et al., 2011). A pilot of the CCS was conducted with a group of eight 10th-grade students from the island of New Providence to ensure the instrument was understandable to students in The Bahamas. Participants in the pilot were excluded from the actual study.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This study was conducted in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, where the Ministry of Education oversees the operation of public schools. This ministry develops the national curriculum and grants permission to conduct research in the country.

The population for this study included all 10th graders in The Bahamas. The sample was selected from four public high schools on the island of New Providence, the most populated island in The Bahamas. Seven schools were invited to participate in the study, six from the island of New Providence and one from the island of Eleuthera, a more rural island. Out of the seven schools asked to participate, four consented to participant and returned consent forms and completed surveys. A total of 202 students selected by the principals based on class groupings completed the survey. The sample consisted of 81 males and 121 females between the ages of 13 and 19 with similar

socioeconomic background. Participants were invited to participate in this study without reward.

DATA COLLECTION

To ensure compliance with research procedures in The Bahamas, a written request to conduct the study was submitted to the Bahamas Ministry of Education and approved. Six weeks prior to the collection of data, the primary investigator sought permission from principals to conduct the study in their schools. Consent forms for parents/guardians and students were sent four weeks prior to the study and were distributed by the school. Consent was obtained from principals, teachers, parents, and students.

The CCS was administered by classroom teachers during school hours as both a paper-based and web-based survey. Schools with internet capabilities and computer access administered the survey electronically, and the other schools used the paper-based survey. To ensure confidentiality, students were assigned study identifications (IDs) prior to the administration of the survey. Participants used their IDs on the survey in place of identifying information. The CCS required approximately ten minutes to complete.

Following the collection of data using the CCS, purposive sampling was used to conduct the qualitative phase of the study and answer the second research question: "What is the contribution of the school to students' critical consciousness development?" Purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing participants based on specific qualities (Ilker et al., 2015). In this study, participants with highest scores on the CCS were chosen. Diemer et al. (2016) advised that total scores for the survey should not be calculated but that each subscale should be calculated separately. Therefore, students were selected who received the highest scores on two or three subscales, demonstrating higher levels of critical reflection and/or critical action. The top students from three participating schools, seven students in total, were selected and individually interviewed using semistructured interviews, a conversational technique that is guided by pre-written questions but allows for exploration of issues that unfold in the conversation. The interview questions focused on students' perceptions of the contribution

made by school experiences to their development of critical conscious-ness. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and phone with the assis-tance of school administrators.

The following open-ended questions helped to guide the inter-view process:

1. Can you describe any experiences in your school or classes that contributed to your awareness of social issues?

2. Can you describe any experiences in your school or classes that have motivated you to help to make changes in your school or community?

3. How did your teachers help you to broaden your awareness of social issues?

4. How has the school's curriculum encouraged you to be-come actively involved in improving your school and com-munity?

5. Are there things you wish your school would have done to help you learn even more about social issues and commu-nity participation?

6.   How can your school help more students to develop greater awareness of social issues?

7.   How can your school help more students to become more actively involved in improving their schools and communi-ties?

DATA ANALYSIS

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

I used SPSS to perform descriptive statistical analysis on data collected using CCS. A frequency count was conducted on each de-mographic variable—age and gender. Diemer et al. (2016) advise calculating each subscale separately. Scores were calculated for each subscale and tabulated for each participating school.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher utilized the data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2013) to analyze the interviews. After transcribing and organizing the data, I engaged in reading and memoing in an effort to "[get] a sense of the whole database" (Creswell, 2013, p. 183). I then moved to coding, forming themes, and interpreting the data. Interpretation of the data involved "abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 187).

RESULTS

The purpose of this mixed method study was to examine the level of critical consciousness of 10th-grade students in The Bahamas and the role of schooling in its development. The first research question is addressed by results from the CCS. The second question is addressed by the analysis of interview data.

STUDENT SURVEYS

The subscales which make up the CCS are The Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality subscale, questions 1–8; Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism subscale, questions 9–13; and Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation subscale, questions 14–22.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PERCEPTION OF INEQUALITIES

Descriptive statistics for each subscale are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1

Mean Scores for Each Subscale of the Critical Consciousness Scale

Subscales of Critical Consciousness Scale	Mean Score	Possible Maximum Score
CR:PI	23.66	48
CR: E	24.24	30
CA:SP	12.91	45

Note: CR:PI = Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality; CR:E= Critical Reflection, Egalitarianism; CA:SP = Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation

TABLE 2

Mean Scores for Each Participating School

School	1	2	3	4
CR:PI	24.01	21.77	23.32	27.76
CR:E	24.19	24.46	23.74	25.00
CA:SP	12.39	13.83	12.55	14.06

Note: CR:PI = Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality; CR:E= Critical Reflection, Egalitarianism; CA:SP = Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation

Table 1 presents the overall mean score for each subscale. The total mean score for the Critical Reflection: Perception of Inequality subscale was 23.66 out of a possible 48, slightly less than half the possible points. Higher mean scores indicate greater perception of societal inequalities. With a mean response of 2.96 to items in this subscale, students indicated that they "slightly disagree" with statements regarding the existence of inequality based on ethnicity, poverty, and gender. School 4 obtained the highest mean score of 27.76 while School 2 obtained the lowest mean score of 21.77 on the Critical Reflection: Perception of Inequalities subscale (see Table 2).

CRITICAL REFLECTION: EGALITARIANISM

Descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 shows the mean score for the subscale Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism as 24.24 out of a possible 30 points. Participants scored highest on this subscale, obtaining more than 80% of the possible points. With a mean response of 4.85 to items in this subscale, students indicated that they "mostly agree" with statements endorsing equal treatment of groups. Descriptive statistics in Table 2 reveal that participants from School 4 scored highest on this subscale with a mean of 25.00 while School 3 scored lowest with a mean of 23.76.

CRITICAL ACTION

The total mean score for Critical Action as presented in Table 1 is 12.91 out of 45 possible points. Participants scored lowest on this subscale, obtaining less than 30% of the possible points. This reflects a

low level of participation in helping to change unjust and inconsistent practices in their schools and communities. School 4 scored highest on this subscale with a mean score of 14.05 while School 1 scored lowest with a mean of 12.39.

INTERVIEW DATA

The second research question was, "What is the contribution of the school to students' critical consciousness development? To answer the second research question, the researcher conducted interviews of participants. In order to gain insight into the contribution of the school's explicit (planned) and implicit (hidden) curricula (Van Brummelen, 2002) to the critical consciousness development of participants, interviews were conducted with seven students who scored highest on two of the CCS subscales. Five themes emerged from the interview data.

DISCUSSIONS/DIALOGUE

Participants expressed that class discussions were instrumental in helping to raise their level of awareness of social issues. One participant reported that "most of my teachers have class discussions about matters in The Bahamas." Another participant described discussions that took place during free time in class: "We would take time to talk about stuff that appear on the news and stuff that's happening in the country and the teacher would get involved."

One student noted that current issues and conditions were commonly discussed in Civics class. In biology class they discussed pollution and the problems resulting from fires in local dumps. When asked what their school could do to help students learn more about social issues, one suggested "a program where we sit and talk about social problems and see how we can find a solution to the problems." A recurring theme throughout the interviews was dialogue and discourse that allowed for sharing of opinions and ideas.

CLUBS

Five of the seven participants either mentioned the impact that school clubs are having on their level of awareness or suggested that clubs can assist in raising awareness and encouraging critical action. Participants mentioned club activities such as field trips, camping,

clean-up campaigns and visits to a children's home. In response to how her school could help her learn more about social issues, one student recommended they "start more clubs that teach students about how to be a young individual who is responsible and actually knows what goes on in The Bahamas."

MENTORING/GUIDANCE

Students expressed the need for mentoring and guidance. When asked who had helped in broadening awareness of social issues, one student described the role of her guidance counselor in encouraging and motivating her. Students felt that the guidance counselor has a role to play in helping more students become involved in improving their schools and communities. One participant felt that frequent reminders about social issues can assist in raising awareness and motivating students to become actively involved in improving their school and community.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Another theme that emerged was the influence of community service on critical consciousness development. In response to how the school's curriculum has encouraged him to be actively involved in improving his school and community, a student referred to the requirements of the new high school diploma: "With the new high school diploma, it's mandatory for us to do community service... to help our community and be better Bahamians and better civilians." He noted that he had completed his school community service and was planning to complete additional community service hours during the summer. When asked how students can be motivated to improve their school and community, another participant suggested, "We can go out to places" and "we can go to different schools."

CLASS ACTIVITIES AND PEER INTERACTIONS

Participants referred to engaging activities in their classes that helped to raise their awareness of social issues. One participant referred to a video from her language class: "It was a video of two boys fighting. It was showing how the children were surrounding them watching instead of separating them." Another student described ac-

tivities in her family life class: "We read about [issues] . . . warn each other and act out plays." Participants also suggested activities that can be used to raise awareness and motivate community participation, such as "taking them out to field trips" and "have guest speakers to talk about cultural issues."

For one student negative peer interactions contributed to her awareness of social issues and motivated her to want to be a force for change. She saw how her classmates treated those of a different nationality and said, "I mean, when I see things happening I just want to be like a voice for those people who don't want to speak about it." Another participant suggested that raising students' awareness requires the school to "pay attention to what children are doing in the school."

DISCUSSION

This mixed method study examined the level of critical consciousness of high school students in The Bahamas and the contribution of school experiences to their critical consciousness development. In the quantitative phase of the study, the Critical Consciousness Scale was used to measure the level of critical consciousness of participants. Interviews were used in the qualitative phase to gain insight into participants' perception of the contribution of school experiences to their critical consciousness development.

Analysis of data revealed that participants scored lowest on the Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation subscale and the Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality subscale. The low mean scores on these subscales corroborate prior research, which found significant correlation between Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality and Critical Action, suggesting that perceptions of inequality provide motivation for critical action (Diemer et al., 2016). The fact that participants earned only half of the possible points in the Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality subscale, suggesting the need for more critical reflection on inequalities, may explain the low scores in the critical action subscale. The study by Diemer et al. (2016) found that older study participants received significantly higher scores on this subscale than younger participants (15 years old and younger). This may be an indication that older students are more critically reflective about inequali-

ties faced by social groups (Diemer et al., 2016). However, Diemer et al. found a negative association between Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism and Critical Action, indicating that participants' endorsement of group equality may not be sufficient motivation for critical action.

Qualitative data analysis revealed that dialogue was instrumental in raising participants' level of awareness of social issues. This finding that dialogue was influential in developing critical consciousness is consistent with Freire's (2012) assertion that "dialogue is thus an essential necessity" (p. 88). Participants also highlighted the impact of mentoring/guidance, clubs, community service, and class activities and interactions on their critical consciousness development. Conspicuous in its absence was any detailed description of the content of the regular school curriculum contributing to critical consciousness development. Except for general references to class discussions, participants did not provide any description of how the classroom curriculum integrated critical action and community involvement. A reasonable conclusion to draw from these findings is that the pedagogical practices, extracurricular activities, and overall culture of the school must be considered in the critical consciousness development of students. What is needed is a school where "caring for others is a basic norm . . . and the curriculum integrates social and political issues in didactic and experiential ways" (Berman, 1997, p. 155).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study provide several implications for practice:

1. The curriculum should be designed to develop the critical and analytical skills of students. Results of the study suggest that students are not being provided with sufficient opportunities for reflection and analysis of social issues. Freire (2012) contended that education aimed at developing critical consciousness must be problem-posing thereby stimulating critical thinking, reflection, and action to transform injustice and inequities.

2. Classroom activities should include an action component that connects directly to the community service requirement of the new high school diploma implemented by the

Ministry of Education. Designing community service projects as fulfillment of lesson objectives would elevate this requirement to service learning, which has been found to be effective in raising the critical consciousness of students (Rondini, 2015). Experiential learning leads to a deeper understanding of sociopolitical issues and is more likely to encourage future community participation (Berman, 1997). Furthermore, since quantitative data revealed low mean scores in the critical action subscale, purposefully including opportunities for participation in addressing social injustice and inequities would be beneficial. Such opportunities might include serving in organizations dedicated to fighting poverty, designing programs to raise awareness about ethnic groups, or using photos to showcase the work of women in the community to help promote gender equality.

3. Teachers themselves must be critically conscious and must be equipped with the skills needed to raise the level of critical consciousness of students. Pedagogical practices, along with teachers' beliefs and values, should stimulate critical reflection and analysis (Riley, 2014). Teacher training and professional development should allow for opportunities to engage in critical discussions and self-reflection (Riley, 2014; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Educators should also be provided with multiple opportunities to develop and refine critical pedagogy, which Freire contended is key to critical consciousness development.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although critical consciousness has been the focus of a number of studies around the world, there is still much to be explored in this area in The Bahamas. Students in the present study came from public high schools that are similar in structure, demographics, curriculum, and instruction. Schools were selected to represent districts on the island of New Providence, the most populated island in The Bahamas. Further study should include a sample from public and private high schools in The Bahamas. Including participants from private high schools may allow for comparison between curriculum and pedagogical practices

since private schools tend to build on the national curriculum. This may also allow for comparisons between different ethnic/racial groups and socioeconomic groups.

This study did not allow for a comparison of critical consciousness development between age and gender. The Diemer et al.'s (2016) study compared mean scores on the CCS subscales among younger and older participants. Further study on participants in The Bahamas could allow for this age and gender–related analysis and subsequently compare the age and gender–related mean scores to that of other studies.

Additionally, the present study did not examine the critical motivation of participants. Critical motivation focuses on students' expressed commitment to assist in bringing about social change (Diemer et al., 2016). Developmental psychologists argued that due to the age-based constraints of students, more emphasis needs to be placed on critical motivation through critical reflection (Watts et al., 2011). Since the development of the CCS, a critical motivation subscale has been added to the survey instrument specifically for the purpose of measuring this component of critical consciousness (M. Diemer, personal communication, March 28, 2017). Further study should include an examination of this component.

Finally, since Freire (2012) contended that the critical consciousness of educators significantly impacts the critical consciousness development of students, further study can examine the correlation between the critical consciousness level of teachers and administrators in The Bahamas to that of students.

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