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TEACHERS' DIVERSITY AWARENESS AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS – *SINE QUA NON* OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on teacher's role in social justice and explores how teachers perceive and react upon diversity and inequality in their classrooms. Through a literature review, we aimed to answer three research questions: 1) *what* are diversity awareness and critical consciousness in education; 2) *why* are diversity awareness and critical consciousness important; and 3) *how* can diversity awareness and critical consciousness be supported in teachers. The literature review has revealed that most papers on teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness have been published within the last few years and that the importance of the two concepts has been recognized for a wide range of educators. There seems to be a growing interest in this topic due to the increase of the diversity in classrooms and the recognition of the teachers' role in addressing diversity and inequality. However, large-scale studies would be a needed contribution to the field, as most of the existing studies are small-scale. Based on this review, we argue that both diversity awareness and critical consciousness need to be supported through preservice and in-service teacher professional development programs, if we are to make education systems more inclusive for all.

Key words:

teachers, diversity awareness, critical consciousness, social justice, teachers' competencies.

■ INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing growing cultural and social diversity throughout the world as a result of global migrations and rising social inequalities. This is also reflected in the education system through diversity of students regarding socio-economic background, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and migration background. Frequently, members of minority groups have lower academic achievement, unequal access to educational opportunities and receive less support in the education system compared to students from majority groups (Eurofound, 2016; Flisi, Meroni, & Vera-Toscano, 2016). Teachers' role in shaping students' educational outcomes has been recognised as important in addressing the problem of social injustice in education. Namely, teachers' beliefs, behaviours and competencies can greatly influence students' schooling experiences and outcomes (Turetsky *et al.*, 2021). Along these lines, recent policy initiatives aiming to build social justice and inclusion in education have begun to focus on supporting teacher competencies (Cerna *et al.*, 2021). In order to provide adequate support, it is important to apprehend the

nature of teachers' awareness of diversity, inequality and social justice, and to grasp their feelings of competence and preparedness for working in diverse classrooms. Therefore, we focus on two teachers' competencies important for achieving social justice in education - diversity awareness and critical consciousness.

The aim of this paper was to map the field of teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. Following on Bell's (2016) notion that diversity and inequality (related to social justice) are inseparably connected, we focused on the literature that explored how teachers perceive and react upon diversity and inequality in their classrooms, rather than how teachers teach diversity matter. The role of teachers in their students' achievement, especially of minority students, is well researched from the perspective of social psychology, e.g. through the work on negative effects of teacher stereotypes and prejudices (e.g., Chin *et al.*, 2020). In this paper, we take teachers' competencies as the focal point and we explore what teachers can do to support diversity and enhance social justice in schools. In our opinion, competencies needed to support social justice in education can be learned or further developed. We see this approach as socially relevant, timely and congruent with recent educational policies. This premise opens up the possibility of a positive change in the education system by providing quality training for the teachers.

We begin our paper by providing a wider theoretical overview of diversity, inequality and social justice in education, bringing together different but complementary theoretical concepts and points of view, thereby answering our first research question of **what** are diversity awareness and critical consciousness in education. At the end of the section, we propose the scheme of the relations between the main concepts: social justice, diversity awareness and critical consciousness. We then proceed with the literature review on the role of teachers' attitudes, practices and competencies in shaping students' experiences and achievement, thereby answering the second research question of **why** are teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness important. Finally, we provide insight into methods of developing and strengthening teachers' competencies of diversity awareness and critical consciousness, thereby answering the third question of **how** these competencies can be supported in teachers.

The literature search for international peer-reviewed scientific papers that cover the topic of teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness was conducted in November and December 2021 in different bibliographical databases, library catalogues and websites, including Web of Science, Scopus, Proquest, Summon, Google Scholar, Sage, and Taylor & Francis. The following keywords were used in search in various combinations: teachers, educators, diversity, inequality, social justice, critical consciousness, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. We decided to exclude papers dealing with e.g. only self-awareness of teachers (in general), or papers about teachers teaching topics of social justice, diversity or inequality. Sixteen papers

were selected as suitable for the topic of this paper, and were further supplemented with additional papers and book chapters that we found important for the review.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' DIVERSITY AWARENESS AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In order to gain a more profound perspective on the theoretical background of teachers' competencies important for supporting social justice in schools, an overview of the relevant theoretical concepts and their relations is presented.

Social Justice: a Framework for Education

Social justice refers to the principle of building a society in which all social groups deserve equal respect and recognition, and in which no group is advantaged at the expense of others (Bell, 2016). Such a vision of social justice includes a *structural dimension* (i.e., the fair and equitable distribution of resources in society), as well as a *cultural or diversity dimension* (i.e., the recognition of the historical experiences and cultural practices of culturally stigmatized and oppressed groups) (Fraser, 1997). Having in mind the interconnectedness of these two dimensions, it can be said that without acknowledging diversity, one cannot effectively address issues of inequality, while without addressing issues of inequality, one cannot acknowledge diversity (Bell, 2016; Fraser, 1997). Building on these broader normative premises, the recognition of social justice in education should „enable individuals to develop critical analytical tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems” (Bell, 2016, p. 4).

Since gender and sexuality, class and race/ethnicity represent the main axes of injustice in modern societies (Fraser, 1997), they hold a central position in developing a social justice perspective in education. Other social categories, such as religion, language, disability and age can also be in focus when theorising or studying social justice and diversity (Adams & Zuniga, 2016). Although the inequality and diversity dimension of social justice are intertwined, they are, however, different. The *inequality dimension* involves eliminating injustice and requires confronting the ideological frameworks and institutional practices that structure social relations unequally, whereas the *diversity dimension* highlights the importance of full inclusion and participation of all individuals and groups in society (Bell, 2016). In order to accomplish that, the inequality perspective aims at gaining understanding and acknowledgement of one's role in a system of oppression, as well as willingness

to drive the change towards equality, while the diversity perspective focuses on developing genuine knowledge and respect for marginalized and stigmatized social groups, including their values, histories and ways of producing meaning.

It can be assumed that awareness and understanding of oppression and diversity may lead to commitment in teachers and students to develop the skills needed to create lasting change. Such a position can be seen as part of a *rational pedagogy* that recognizes socio-cultural differences instead of ignoring or justifying them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). In doing so, teachers should take into account the fact that different types of pedagogic relation may lead to different educational outcomes dependent on students' social origin. This being said, the critical analysis of different teaching practices includes the diversity and inequality perspectives. Furthermore, it involves an ongoing process of self-reflection that may open up the possibility for transcending self/other binaries related to teachers' and students' identity categories (Blell & Doff, 2014). This process of self-reflection may involve challenging power asymmetries and deconstructing stereotypical identity categories, as well as opposing stigmatizing processes of "othering" (we vs. you). The anticipated result of such an ongoing process is a transformation of singular notions of identity into multiple ones, an affirmation of stigmatized socio-cultural identities, as well as less discrimination in society (Jugović, Puzić, & Mornar, 2020; Katunarić, 1994).

Defining Diversity Awareness

Diversity awareness is defined as "a person's acknowledgement of culture and social context variables like class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, and religion" (Mosley-Howard, Witte, & Wang, 2011, p. 66). Important factors in developing diversity awareness include the adoption of a social justice mindset, general knowledge and learning, intercultural connection and interaction, as well as value and appreciation of others. Viewed through this lens, diversity awareness is a multidimensional competence that encompasses cognition, affect and behaviour. It assumes a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for the preparation of teachers and young people to live in socio-culturally diverse societies.

As previously mentioned, it is crucial that the development of diversity awareness includes a critical dimension through which teachers acknowledge the significance of culture in relation to differences in power, social status and collective experience (Auernheimer, 2003; Jugović, Puzić, & Mornar, 2020). This critical view allows teachers to become aware of the connections between established social and mental structures and their current behaviour, as well as for exploring how different aspects of one's identity intersect with one another and create specific forms of oppression that are connected and mutually constituted (Adams & Zuniga, 2016).

Defining Critical Consciousness

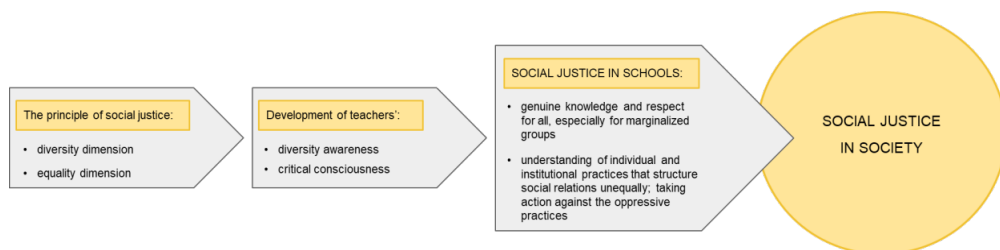
The acknowledgement of diversity through critical reflection is central to the social justice framework and especially to critical pedagogy as a concept that encourages teachers and students to question common assumptions and taken-for-granted ideologies (Leal, 2021). In order to guide their students in this, teachers need to develop critical consciousness. Freire (2005) views *critical consciousness* as an ability „to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2005, p. 35). As Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) put it, critical consciousness is a fundamental and necessary skill to understand oppression and privilege, and is composed of two main components: awareness/reflection and action.

Teachers’ critical consciousness is reflected in their social justice orientation in teaching, as well as in their ability to address, within the school curriculum, the importance of social, cultural, economic and political processes for their own and their students’ lives. In order to create schools that are more just and democratic, teachers themselves need to develop awareness of inequality and oppression at micro- and macro-levels in society, as well as acknowledge the privilege that some students hold compared to others (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017). Many of them were never given the opportunity and incentive to deconstruct their ideologies and were not exposed to a critique of the hegemonic practices in teaching and learning (Ek, Sánchez, & Cerecer, 2013). Furthermore, teachers need to understand how the social inequalities become embodied in the school settings, especially when they are hardly evident. Along with the awareness and understanding of the principles of equality and social justice, teachers need to be devoted to modelling commitment to anti-discriminatory practices toward diverse students (Achilleos, Douglas, & Washbrook, 2021).

Further, it has been noted that it is important to move away from conceptualizations of diversity awareness as approach that ignores power (Chan & Coney, 2020), towards understanding of diversity awareness and multiculturalism as more critical approaches that question dominant norms and address systemic oppression. As relations between socio-cultural groups often build on power differences, teachers must become aware that focusing exclusively on cultural awareness may essentialise minority groups and “make them even more vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination” (Jugović, Puzić, & Mornar, 2020, p. 69).

We propose that the principles of social justice, including its diversity and equality dimensions, need to be implemented into teacher professional development in order to foster social justice in schools. More precisely, we view teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness as competencies that can be developed and that can have a transformative potential for social justice in education and, consequently, in wider society. This transformative potential should become evident in both teachers' and students' genuine knowledge and respect for all, especially for marginalized and stigmatized groups, in their understanding of practices, both individual and institutional, that structure social relations unequally, as well as in their proactive action-taking directed against the oppressive practices. Our understanding of the relations between the concepts of social justice and teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness is depicted in Figure 1. Of course, this is just one of the possible pathways toward social justice and we by no means argue that the only way to obtain social justice in schools, let alone in society, is through the development of teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness. Although very important, this path should always be accompanied by all available means to achieve the ideal of social justice.

Figure 1: Scheme of relations between the concepts of social justice and teachers' competencies (diversity awareness and critical consciousness).



EVIDENCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS' DIVERSITY AWARENESS AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Teachers' attitudes and practices represent the greatest influence on students' achievement "over which we can have some control" (Hattie, 2012, p. 25). Teachers' perception of students' needs and educational potentials is formed through an interplay of a myriad of factors, such as teachers' traits, attitudes, social status, prior learning experiences, educational choices, general life experiences, beliefs about ability, beliefs about group differences, etc. (Turetsky *et al.*, 2021). Teachers strongly influence their students' academic achievement and choices, as well as the overall classroom climate by teaching, interacting, grading, and advising students about educational paths (Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2019; see Turetsky *et al.*, 2021) for a complex theoretical model outlining the mechanism between teachers' beliefs and students' achievement.

As summarized by Denessen, Hornstra, van den Bergh, and Bijlstra (2022), teachers often adapt their teaching to the presumed needs of their students, e.g. they give different feedback on the assignments, vary the time needed to complete the tasks, or adjust the difficulty of the questions depending on their presumption of their student's needs and capacities. However, research has shown that teachers sometimes misjudge students' needs, biasedly form expectations of students, and rely on stereotypic beliefs when teaching them (Chou, 2007; Ready & Chu, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2015). This can do harm to students, and negatively influence their academic outcomes and well-being (Herppich *et al.*, 2017). Studies that have explored teachers' expectations revealed that students have better opportunities to learn and achieve more in school when their teachers have higher expectations of them (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Timmermans, Rubie-Davies, & Rjosk, 2018). This phenomenon is known as *self-fulfilling prophecy* or *expectancy theory*. It occurs when teachers' expectations of students' characteristics or behaviours shape students' academic outcomes to a greater extent than students' own characteristics or behaviours (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy is often at place in classrooms with great diversity, leading to an unequal treatment of the diverse student body. For example, numerous studies pointed out that students from groups that are perceived more negatively, e.g. students from families with low socio-economic status, students from cultural or ethnic minorities, and in some cases boys, were affected by low expectations and underestimations by their teachers (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018; Ready & Chu, 2015). At the same time, more positively perceived groups, e.g. high socio-economic status students, students from cultural or ethnic majorities, and in some cases girls, were more likely to experience higher expectations or

overestimations of their competencies and knowledge by their teachers (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018; Ready & Chu, 2015).

Teachers often reside with stereotyping and prejudice, even toward their own in-group (e.g., Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Jackson, Kazembe, & Morgan, 2021). This can be evident in a patriarchal stance of female teachers, pro-majority attitude of a teacher from a minority group, different meritocratic and tokenism argumentations, etc. Alfaro and Bartolomé (2017, pp. 12-13) provided an example of Latino and bilingual teachers' and their deficit approach to the nonstandard language use by Mexicanos/Chicanos in the United States. These teachers saw the social order as fair and just and considered that their role is to assimilate their students into the school culture. They did not see it as necessary to "work against the grain", as they believed their students just needed to fit in and leave their "deficient" cultural and language practices behind. In order to avoid biased presumptions against students, teachers need to build their competencies and assure better understanding of their students' background. Biased beliefs that teachers may hold about students from a disadvantaged group can stem from different perspectives. As Baggett (2020) notes, these perspectives may include: a) a colorblind/colorevasive perspective that ignores institutionalized racism in education and its intersections with other identity statuses; b) deficit views about students perceived as 'Other' than white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied etc.; c) education as a meritocratic system, assuming everyone can achieve their goals if they invest enough effort; and d) "naive egalitarianism", advocating an one-size-fits-all approach (Baggett, 2020).

Teachers' biases and discriminatory practices can take various forms and are often subtle, non-deliberate, and beyond teachers' awareness. The studies exploring teachers' implicit attitudes confirmed that these attitudes were related to differences in achievement between different groups of students (Hornstra *et.al.*, 2010; van den Bergh *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, teachers' with more negative implicit attitudes toward ethnic minority students were less likely to advocate respect among ethnically diverse students and to tackle interethnic conflicts (Kumar, Karabenick, & Burgoon, 2015). Yet, teachers cannot be exempted from the responsibility for resorting to biased beliefs. These findings shed light onto the importance of developing teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness as a process through which teachers raise their awareness on their personal as well as on students' stance on different diversity issues. Without understanding the ways in which teaching practices can privilege or marginalize students along the identity domains, teachers risk enacting harmful practices when working with students from disadvantaged groups (Baggett, 2020).

Thus, it is important for teachers, but also for school leaders, policy makers, researchers and other educational specialists, to disentangle teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding diversity, and to critically reflect on them. Many teachers feel unprepared or unmotivated to deal with issues of identity, power and oppression and thus decide to stay 'neutral'. They can rationalise their unwillingness to tackle these topics by offering excuses related to students (e.g., 'Students are too young to understand...'); leadership (e.g., 'My principal would not support it...'); policy (e.g., 'Documents do not foresee it...'); parents (e.g., 'Parents might complain...'), etc. (Baggett, 2020). Hence, it is not surprising that there is not much empirical data on teachers' views on the existing social order in terms of diversity, on whether or not their views affect how they treat and teach diverse students and on how these insights can be used to improve the educational processes and outcomes of a diverse student body (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017).

The existing empirical findings speak in favour of the two competencies that are in the focus of this review – teachers' critical consciousness and diversity awareness. Namely, teachers from ethnic minorities or working in ethnically diverse educational contexts showed less biased attitudes toward ethnic minority students than teachers from the majority group or those employed in ethnically homogeneous schools (Glock, Kovacs, & Pit-ten Cate, 2019; Glock & Kleen, 2019). Likewise, language teachers with higher critical consciousness relied more on learner-centred practices and employed critical cultural analysis in their classrooms. In contrast, teachers with lower critical consciousness, i.e. the ones that have not been reflective about the ethno-racial, cultural, and linguistic identities of their students and that see these as irrelevant for teaching and learning, more often reported traditional didactic teaching practices (Baggett, 2020). Along these lines, a recent large-scale examination of TALIS 2018 data, showed that lower secondary teachers teaching in classrooms with a greater percentage of students of immigrant origin felt more prepared for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms compared to their counterparts working in less diverse school settings (Kim & Cooc, 2022).

Nurturing diversity and encouraging social justice in classrooms enables disadvantaged students to maintain and develop several aspects of the "cultural wealth" they bring to schools (Yosso, 2005). Primarily, it enables them to keep their *aspirational capital*, i.e. the ability to maintain or develop hopes and dreams for the future, despite real or perceived barriers. It helps them nurture their *linguistic capital*, i.e. intellectual and social skills attained by communicating in more than one language and/or style. Then, it encourages students to rely on their *familial* and *social capital*, using cultural knowledge, community history, memory and cultural intuition, as well as instrumental and emotional support provided by the family members, networks of people and community. It also increases their *navigational*

capital, i.e. skills of manoeuvring through social institutions, as well as their *resistant capital* evident in knowledge and skills cultivated through actions that challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005). Some forms of cultural wealth are more relevant for some groups of disadvantaged students, e.g. linguistic and familial capital for racial and cultural minority students, while others, such as aspirational, social, navigational and resistant capital are beneficial for a broader array of disadvantaged groups. Nonetheless, all aspects of the cultural wealth are valuable of preserving through positive educational experience of all students.

When biased expectations and beliefs about various groups of students affect teachers' approach to students, achievement gaps and other forms of educational inequalities may arise and persist. Furthermore, the cultural wealth of students from disadvantaged groups may perish, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of social injustice through education (Denessen *et al.*, 2022). Hence, in order to ensure social justice for all students, it is important to promote teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness (including its critical reflection dimension), as well as their understanding and modelling of social justice in school settings. In Alfaro and Bartolomé's words (2017, p. 13), teachers "must learn to identify hurtful dominant culture ideologies and their manifestation in the classroom so they can be prepared to intervene and create optimal learning condition for all their students." At the same time, recent international evidence from TALIS 2018 participating countries shed light onto rather low levels of teachers' self-reported preparedness for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Kim & Cooc, 2022). Hence, both pre- and in-service teachers need to be granted additional opportunities and support in understanding diversity and social justice issues and their consequences for their students' well-being, aspirations and success. In the following section, we outline some methods aimed at developing and strengthening of these competencies.

DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' DIVERSITY AWARENESS AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

As Robinson (2017) stated, the ever-growing socio-cultural diversity in schools today requires that teacher preparation programs incorporate diversity training as a critical component of teacher education. That could lead to better professional outcomes of teachers, more harmonious relationships at school and, on a larger scale, it might contribute to social justice. That notion has had implications for all educational levels, subjects and areas, from science education to arts. As literature shows, teacher education programs usually combine diversity trainings with the development of teacher's critical consciousness and self-reflection, given that teachers understand their own as well as their students' cultures and its effects on education process in order to make teaching appropriate for diverse students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Rodríguez (2008) emphasizes that most teacher education programs place attention on equipping teachers with skills and methodologies they can apply in the classroom. He notices that, in contrast, there is limited attention placed on why particular skills are necessary, who the students will be, and very little examination of the ways in which teacher-student relationships facilitate learning, as literature shows that student-teacher relationships impact learning (Rodríguez, 2005). As Chou (2007) suggests, broadening the conceptual, methodological and content foundations of teacher training for development of diversity awareness and critical consciousness should include five elements, or five opportunities for teachers:

- 1) become *reflective* — develop an awareness of their own cultural perspectives in order to understand the cultural assumptions underlying their own expectations, beliefs, and behaviours;
- 2) *appreciate* the value of diversity — understand relations between diversity, power, and inequality in education and consequences for students' lives;
- 3) *examine* the nature of teaching — be able to evaluate their own teaching practices and understand what viewpoints influence their teaching style;
- 4) *learn* the significance of students' culture and language — enhance understanding of various cultures among students, become sensitive to students' needs and learning styles and incorporate diverse cultures into the curriculum; and
- 5) *deepen* and broaden understanding of the teaching, and the lives of students — develop a better understanding of teacher-student relationships (Robinson, 2017).

In order to support teacher competencies for dealing with diversity and enhancing social justice, Kang and Zinger (2019) have suggested the following pedagogical activities: discussing articles that provide critical perspectives on the subject, participating in service-learning projects, conducting critical ethnographies, participating in critical book clubs, and exploring historically disadvantaged students' ideas in practice. Gay and Kirkland (2003) have also recommended various techniques to develop competencies of diversity awareness and critical consciousness in preservice teachers. One of them is to provide learning opportunities for them to engage in critical conversations with each other about racial and culturally diverse dilemmas in education. The other is to provide example by modelling the process, e.g. when university professors/instructors demonstrate principles of social justice in their instructional practices, instead of just talking about them. Another technique that Gay and Kirkland (2003) have recommended is to stop the discussion during lessons and to shift the attention towards the process that is occurring, in order to increase awareness of personal feelings, thoughts and biases and share insights provoked by the discussion.

Raising awareness of teachers about diversity is necessary, but it should also include sensibilization for the topic of social justice, in order to educate teachers about broader structural inequalities that still exist or have existed in the past. Freire (2021) uses the term “conscientization calls” for “lessons individuals learn related to injustice and inequity affecting minoritized populations” (Freire, 2021, p. 233). This includes becoming aware of one’s own privileges and being able to empathize with the ones who are in a disadvantaged position. Chan and Coney (2020) advocate using the critical approaches regarding race to develop teachers’ critical consciousness, examining the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion (Chan & Coney, 2020, p. 2).

Picower (2011) emphasises the importance of curriculum design for the development of teachers’ competencies. She states that the following six elements provide a framework for an effective social justice curriculum: self-love and respect, respect for others, issues of social justice, social movements and social change, awareness raising and social action. These topics could be integrated in teacher education curriculum as courses or professional development programs, and covered both theoretically and practically (e.g. through exercises of active/empathic listening, role-playing or perspective-taking exercises, community engagement, practising self-expression and communication with others, etc.).

Sleeter (2018) additionally describes projects in which competencies of teacher candidates for enhancing social justice in education were supported by engaging them with members of the marginalized communities in which schools were located, in order for them to develop empathy and to understand the political context that creates conditions for schools. One important concept in order for any intervention to be successful is radical honesty (Williams, 2016), as it implies honesty about our identities, practices and dispositions. The concept of radical honesty, as a method, could underpin the realization of all of the desired aims – development of diversity awareness, critical consciousness, critical reflection, critical pedagogy or achieving equality and social justice, on all levels.

As for the obstacles for successful development of diversity awareness among teachers, the authors mention teachers' vague concepts of self-reflection process or inability to self-reflect; not explicitly claiming their stance on diversity in the classroom; feeling shame or guilt over the past (non-personal) oppressions or injustice or even negating that there are problems with inequality/race/marginalization in society (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

As research shows, many of the implemented programs for teachers aiming at developing diversity awareness and critical consciousness had positive and long-lasting impacts on teachers. García and Guerra (2004) wrote about their teacher staff-development project in which a sociocultural framework was used in order to challenge teachers' deficit views about students from culturally/linguistically diverse communities and to redefine the presumed interrelationships between culture, teaching, and learning. Culture is viewed as the context in which teaching and learning occur for all students, not just children from disadvantaged sociocultural, racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups (García & Domínguez, 1997). Their results have shown that teacher training experience resulted in cognitive dissonance for some teachers because their own personal beliefs were very different from the assumptions reflected in culturally responsive pedagogy they were exposed to. It was shown that teachers who were eager to resolve these conflicting beliefs, became more aware of culture in educational settings, were able to re-evaluate and often reject their previously held biased views, and were more likely to acknowledge their role as teachers in student learning and achievement. In addition, these changes resulted in modification and improvement of teachers' instructional practices to be more culturally responsive (García & Guerra, 2004).

In a reflective analysis of his experiences in teaching preservice teachers for critical consciousness as a university teacher at a university in the United States, Rodríguez (2008) has noted many changes in beliefs of his students due to being exposed to critical consciousness topics. Rodríguez (2008) has recollected that the views of one preservice teacher about the treatment of minority students in education has changed dramatically from the beginning to the end of the critical consciousness course: from believing that minority students are not treated any differently from the

majority students, to gaining awareness of biased and unfair treatment of minority students and their culture in the education system. Other preservice teachers' reflections have also confirmed that they have critically analysed their biased ideologies and gained more awareness of the wider context of social inequality and its influence on parent involvement in schooling as a result of participation in critical consciousness course.

Jocyl Sacramento's (2019) study on preservice teachers and their professional development has also shown that when they became critical of who they are, what and how they are teaching, as well as who their students are, they also became more aware of their educational role and impact they have on their students. Similarly, Bukko and Liu (2021) found that preservice teachers who participated in a training that has supported their critical consciousness were more eager to implement practices that foster equity in education. Also, Christopher and Taylor (2011) and Stewart, Flint and Núñez (2021) found that workshops and teacher training for the development of critical consciousness enhanced teachers' understanding of social justice education, that they gained more knowledge on the subject and some of the participants were also more ready to take action to support social justice in education.

In sum, there is an evidence that diversity awareness and critical consciousness can be developed through training. The aforementioned examples point out that strengthened competencies and awareness regarding diversity, inequality and social justice result in more equitable teaching practices.

■ DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With this paper, we aimed at mapping the field of diversity awareness and critical consciousness understood as teacher competencies, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. We see these competencies as a necessity for building social justice in education, given that teachers play a significant role in supporting or hindering educational opportunities and achievement of students, especially from disadvantaged groups. In an attempt to offer some clarity in the field, we have offered a conceptual scheme of our understanding of the relations between social justice and teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness. We have adopted a competence perspective that treats diversity awareness and critical consciousness as skills that can be learned. This approach accentuates the transformative potential of teachers and their beliefs, behaviours and competencies for social justice in education.

Our review of literature on diversity awareness and critical consciousness has revealed that most of the papers were published within the last few years (e.g. Achilleos, Douglas, & Washbrook, 2021; Baggett, 2020; Bukko & Liu, 2021). This can be regarded as an indicator of the enlarged need for addressing teachers' response to growing diversity in classrooms. It also reflects the relevance and timeliness of the review we performed. Majority of papers were written by the authors from the United States which has a specific social context (e.g. racial problems, identity politics, culture wars, etc.). We must therefore be careful in making conclusions about development of diversity awareness and critical consciousness among teachers in other countries, cultures and social contexts that are different from the United States. It is also important to notice that the majority of research in this field is focused on smaller scale studies (Stewart, Flint, & Núñez, 2021), including action research (Christopher & Taylor, 2011) or studies based on qualitative methods (Achilleos, Douglas, & Washbrook, 2021; Sacramento, 2019). Only few studies are large-scale studies (e.g., Kim & Cooc, 2022). Even though small-scale studies provide important insights into educators' experiences and awareness of diversity and social justice, for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, more large-scale studies are needed. In addition, many researchers investigated this topic with a sample of preservice teachers and teacher candidates (e.g., Adams & Rodriguez, 2019; Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Robinson, 2017). We believe that this indicates the recognition of the higher education institutions' responsibility for the preparation of future teachers for the demands of their profession. Finally, diversity awareness and critical consciousness were recognized as important for a wide range of educators, including language teachers (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Baggett, 2020), preservice music teachers (Robinson, 2017), novice science teachers (Kang & Zinger, 2019), informal educators in a youth and community work programme (Achilleos, Douglas, & Washbrook, 2021), or university teachers (Rodríguez, 2008).

There is some empirical evidence that teachers' critical consciousness and diversity awareness lead to better teaching practices (e.g. Baggett, 2020). However, more research on how to best support teachers' critical consciousness and diversity awareness, as well as how these competencies affect educational experiences of diverse students, is needed. Also, as we focused on conceptual rather than on practical issues, more research on the methods and practices for developing critical consciousness and diversity awareness is welcomed.

The readers should be aware of the two limitations of this review. Firstly, it cannot be said to represent a *systematic* review of the field. Nonetheless, its aim is to provide more conceptual clarity and we believe it can serve as a starting point for the future studies on teachers' diversity awareness and critical consciousness as competencies that contribute to social justice in schools. Secondly, as literature search resulted mainly with the papers from the United States, there should be a certain caution in generalising the conclusions about the nature of teachers' diversity

awareness and critical consciousness and their role in fostering social justice to a considerably different educational and societal contexts.

Policy recommendations stemming from our literature review include incorporating diversity awareness and critical consciousness in preservice and in-service teacher training. This is in line with the recommendations from the recent international policy documents. For example, the OECD policy framework on promoting inclusive education for diverse societies states that the key role in supporting diversity, equity and inclusion in education lies within capacity development (Cerna *et al.*, 2021; Santiago & Cerna, 2020). In order to ensure inclusion of diverse students and support their achievement and well-being in education, both initial teacher education as well as continuous professional development of in-service teachers has to equip teachers with relevant knowledge, skills and values. These include understanding of diversity issues, self-reflections about identities, perspectives and practices, teacher empathy, implementing fair assessment of students (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon, 2019). It is also important to keep in mind that in-service and preservice teacher education should include raising teacher's awareness and understanding of the social and political context that influences the school system, in order to prepare and empower teachers to work with students from disadvantaged groups (Sleeter, 2018). Having in mind that teachers are often less aware of more critical approaches based on social justice and systemic inequality in education than of approaches that centre on diversity and sensitivity (Gorski, 2009; 2016), our recommendations for policy and practice are that both diversity awareness and critical consciousness need to be supported if we want education systems to be more inclusive for all students.

Finally, we want to accentuate that, although we focused on teachers, we strongly advocate that ownership, accountability and responsibility for equality and social justice resides with the institutions (not just educational, but also political, economic, cultural), as much as with the individuals (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Cousin *et al.*, 2018). This implies that we are aware of the limitations of educational policies aimed at reducing social inequality. This is partly so because education, in its present form, simultaneously challenges and reproduces unequal opportunities (Bourdieu, 1977). Along these lines, we support the possibility of a more rational pedagogy (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) in which efficient pedagogic action is not at odds with a critical mindset. Or as Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) point out, such pedagogical action “lets the cat out of the bag” (p. 73) instead of masking unjust social relations. We believe that, despite its limitations, this opportunity cannot be ignored.

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