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ABSTRACT
To show the potential and limitations of pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in anti-racist and multicultural teacher education, this paper engages in an in-depth analysis of two ‘critical moments’ that are drawn from a series of teacher workshops. The purpose of the analysis is to show how discomfort and empathy may be combined together pedagogically in the context of multicultural and antiracist teacher education. The contribution to the literature is to highlight the importance of foregrounding attention to teachers’ discomfort and its pedagogical implications in multicultural teacher education.

Recent research in intercultural education shows that teacher education is crucial in creating an 'intercultural ethos' (Tarozzi 2014), if knowledge and competence acquisition are combined with teacher training that promotes emancipatory and empowering pedagogies. Specifically, it has been suggested that there is need for teacher professional development that actively promotes critical consciousness and a commitment to educational equity in multicultural teacher education (Gorski 2009). Developing a ‘decolonizing intercultural education’ (Gorski 2008) requires important shifts in teacher education programs and teacher professional development that prepare teachers to critically examine and respond to the complexities of their particular sociopolitical contexts. A growing body of literature indicates that these shifts often involve disconcerting emotions for teachers to deal with the challenges of intercultural education both during teacher professional development and afterwards, when teachers attempt to create an intercultural ethos in their classrooms and schools (Boler and Zembylas 2003; Chubbuck and Zembylas 2008; Kelchtermans, Ballet, and Piot 2009). This research emphasises the need for multicultural teacher education that acknowledges teachers’ discomfort and responds to it pedagogically (Cutri and Whiting 2015; Zembylas 2010b). Nevertheless, very few studies so far have examined what these pedagogies might look like in multicultural teacher education to respond to teachers’ discomfort.
The present study documents our efforts to approach a series of teacher workshops we designed on anti-racist and multicultural education from the perspectives of a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Boler and Zembylas 2003; Zembylas and Boler 2002) and a ‘pedagogy of empathy’ (Lindquist 2004; Zembylas 2012). We are two experienced, in-service teacher educators – one of us works at a Ministry of Education and the other is an academic at a public university – who have been responsible for developing an anti-racist policy in Greek-Cypriot schools. Our focus question in this paper is: What are the potential and limitations of pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in approaching anti-racist and multicultural teacher education? The implications of this investigation address the value of developing pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education in order to acknowledge teachers’ discomforting feelings and respond to these feelings productively.

To show the potential and limitations of pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in anti-racist and multicultural teacher education, we decided to engage in an in-depth analysis of two ‘critical moments’ that are drawn from the series of teacher workshops we designed and implemented. Our purpose is to show how discomfort and empathy may be combined together pedagogically in the context of multicultural and antiracist teacher education. The contribution of our analysis to the literature is to highlight the importance of foregrounding rather than backgrounding attention to teachers’ discomfort and its pedagogical implications in multicultural teacher education. Working from the assumption that promoting critical consciousness and a commitment to educational equity in multicultural teacher education needs to engage this discomfort in ways that have not been sufficiently addressed by the critical pedagogy rhetoric so far, we look to evidence that gestures towards pedagogies which consider emotional discomfort as a source of productive learning for teachers (Zembylas 2013a).

A final point of clarification before we begin: this article offers a conceptual analysis of evidence on teachers’ discomfort and its pedagogical implications through pedagogies of discomfort and empathy rather than sharing the full gamut of empirical data emerging from our study. Our purpose is to sort through of pedagogical strategies of discomfort and empathy that may be utilised together, in order to figure out how those practices may be fruitful and strategic in encouraging teachers to change their beliefs and practices in antiracist and multicultural education. Needless to say, the process of changing teachers’ emotions and beliefs is long, challenging and often emotionally painful and the intention of this article is not to show any such evidence – which would be impossible to document through an analysis of a few incidents. However, we hope to demonstrate how the combination of pedagogies of discomfort and empathy might actually offer important openings in antiracist and multicultural teacher education.

**Conceptual framework**

Research shows that demographic, social and cultural changes – such as the transformations that are presently experienced in Europe – create new emotional
challenges for teachers and specifically feelings of discomfort for teaching in multicultural schools, especially when the needed support or relevant professional development is absent (Kelchtermans, Ballet, and Piot 2009; Zembylas, 2010b; Zembylas and Iasonos 2010). An increasing body of literature documents that the process of learning how to teach in multicultural schools involves discomfort (Cutri and Whiting 2015). Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort and Zembylas’s (2010b, 2015) further formulation of an ethic of discomfort in teacher education highlight why this is important to take into consideration in multicultural teacher education. As a response to feelings of discomfort, this work suggests (mostly at a theoretical level) that empathy might actually make an important contribution, because pedagogies of discomfort or empathy are sensitised and responsive to learners’ emotional reactions in ways that other pedagogies may not be (Lindquist 2004; Zembylas 2012). We choose to focus on these two pedagogies here then, because we want to examine how their combination may or may not deliver the promises that their advocates claim.

A pedagogy of discomfort

‘Pedagogy of discomfort’ was initially suggested by Boler (1999) and then further developed by Boler and Zembylas (2003; see also Boler 2004a; Zembylas and Boler 2002) as a pedagogical framework to engage students and teachers with issues of difference, race and social justice by troubling their emotional comfort zones. This pedagogical approach is grounded in the assumption that discomforting emotions are important in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain stereotypes and social injustice and in creating openings for empathy and transformation. As Boler proposed, ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ as a teaching practice ‘begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others’ (1999, 177). Pedagogy of discomfort, then, has as its aim to uncover and question the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines and unconscious complicity with hegemony.

Boler (2004a, 2004b) notes that the emphasis of pedagogy of discomfort should be on challenging students to critically analyse their ideological values and beliefs that subordinate on the basis of race, gender, class and sexual orientation. In fact, it has been argued that some discomfort is not only unavoidable in talking about issues such as race and racism but may also be necessary (Berlak 2004). In contexts of social justice, antiracist and citizenship education, the term ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ has emerged as a call for critical inquiry not only of students’ but also of educators’ emotional positions towards issues of race, racism and multicultural education (e.g. see Faulkner and Crowhurst 2014; de Freitas and McAuley 2008; Leibowitz et al. 2010; Macdonald 2013). Given that ‘an educator’s own discomforts inhibit educational exchange with students, prevent the educators from taking
risks and eclipse the educator’s very capacity to see, for example, his or her own attachments to particular outcomes’ (Leibowitz 2011), we realise how important it is to acknowledge and examine what pedagogical practices might respond productively to teachers’ discomfort.

**A pedagogy of empathy**

In multicultural teacher education, a major challenge is how to connect the experience of discomfort with the experience of empathy (Zembylas 2012, 2013a). For example, the literature documents how teacher educators often struggle not only to develop empathy in their students but also to show empathy themselves with some of their students’ views (Berlak 2004; Winans 2010, 2012). Pre-service and in-service teachers also struggle to navigate their disconcerting emotions in productive ways so that they become a point of departure for transformative empathetic experiences. There are three important qualities in empathy (see Halpern and Weinstein 2004) that makes it particularly important for intercultural education. First, it entails seeking the individual perspective of another; this can serve as an important motivation and encouragement to place one’s self in another’s circumstances and accepts that he or she possesses the same rights. Second, empathy involves a genuine effort to get to know the Other and his or her perspectives. Third, empathy involves emotional as well as cognitive openness, and the toleration of ambivalence; this ambivalence entails viewing differences as an enriching part of creating an ongoing workable relationship. For these reasons, becoming able to empathise with the Other’s experiences and narratives is probably one of the most challenging goals for intercultural and anti-racist education.

‘Pedagogies of empathy’, in particular, are those pedagogical practices that offer opportunities so that students cultivate the qualities discussed above. For example, students are encouraged to understand the conditions (structural inequalities, poverty, globalisation, etc.) that give rise to suffering and acknowledge some sort of human connection between themselves and others – specifically what it might mean for one to encounter injustices (e.g. racism, discrimination) that students themselves might experience. An important element of ‘pedagogies of empathy’ that may not get so much attention in teacher professional development, yet we find it extremely important, is ‘strategic empathy’ (Lindquist 2004). Strategic empathy, according to Lindquist, is the use of empathy by the teacher in strategic ways, that is, in ways that empathise with the ‘difficult’ knowledge learners carry with them, even when this knowledge is disturbing to others (see also Zembylas 2012).

Lindquist (2004) narrates an incident in her undergraduate class in which students felt uneasy to talk about events in Iraq. Students, as she reported, came from politically conservative families and became very defensive about claims that the war was unjust. Lindquist described her own emotional difficulties to remain silent about their ‘uncritical’ positions. Yet, she decided to follow a strategy of empathetic engagement with students’ conservative and uncritical positions. Reflecting on this strategy, she wrote:
What made this strategy work, I think, was my willingness to make myself strategically naïve in two moments: first, in seeking advice about how we should conduct discussions about the war, and then later, when (working hard against my own emotional need to negatively evaluate some of the perspectives I was hearing about the war) I worked to communicate empathy for their positions as affective responses. (203, 204; the first emphasis is added)

In this incident, Lindquist describes how she uses strategic empathy in ways that help her ‘navigate’ through her students’ resistance to critique their emotionally held positions. In the context of teacher professional development, the goal is to strategically empathise with participating teachers, even when they express views that might be ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘uncritical’. Importantly, Lindquist’s notion of strategic empathy seems to recognise that students and teachers live within spaces of discomforting emotions. This notion entails that to be truly effective, teacher educators have to be willing to use empathy strategically to engage in in-depth critical inquiry of discomforting emotions, that is, an emotional willingness to engage in the difficult work of empathising with views that one may find unacceptable or offensive. But what do pedagogies of discomfort and empathy really ‘add’ compared to other pedagogies in multicultural teacher education such as critical pedagogy?

**Challenges and opportunities of implementing pedagogies of discomfort and empathy**

Although there have been accounts in critical pedagogy literature critiquing the overemphasis on rationality and reason (e.g. Giroux 1991; McLaren 1994), emotion and affect have not been particularly underscored or substantially pursued in much of this literature (Jansen 2009; Liston 2008; Seibel Trainor 2002, Zembylas 2013b). Ellsworth’s (1989) argument is well known by now, that is, how dominant tropes in critical pedagogy are associated with certain affects such as commitment, devotion and faith that may become normalised and even repressive. It has also been argued that the discourse of critical pedagogy establishes and maintains its own disciplinary affects (Yoon 2005) and functions as a ‘pedagogy of affect’ that mobilises dominant tropes, especially in anti-racist pedagogies (Worsham 2001). In particular, Amsler (2011) wonders about the affective dimensions of critical pedagogy when students’ desire for individual transcendence and social change appears to be absent, rejected or devalued. ‘What might conscientization mean,’ asks Amsler, ‘when exposing power relations affirms fatalism rather than inspiring hope?’ (2011, 53).

All these critiques highlight that there are important tasks that need to be further delineated in critical pedagogy, particularly in contexts within which there are issues that are strongly ‘emotionalized’ (Holmes 2010). There is already considerable empirical evidence showing learners’ resistance and rejection of critical pedagogical efforts for a variety of reasons (Berlak 2004; Boler 2004b; Boler and Zembylas 2003; Zembylas 2013b, 2015). This evidence exposes how some assumptions that are made in critical pedagogy may overlook the complexity of learners’ emotional investments in particular social positions and discourses. Therefore,
what is being suggested is that critical pedagogy’s rhetoric needs to be further enriched and the complexities of discomforting emotions in teacher education have to be analysed more deeply (Zembylas 2013b).

One of the challenges of enacting and modelling pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education settings is making sure that teachers are ‘emotionally and analytically engaged in the process’ (Cutri and Whiting 2015, 1013). Therefore, it is not enough to promote critical consciousness and a commitment to educational equity in multicultural teacher education (Gorski 2009); rather, teacher educators committed to promoting critical consciousness need to be aware of the emotional discomfort involved in the process as well as its consequences in terms of subverting the intended goals (Chubbuck and Zembylas 2008; Kelchtermans, Ballet, and Piot 2009). As Cutri and Whiting (2015) explain, teachers may fault the content of multicultural education as uncomfortable as well as be distressed in learning this content or having to implement it in their classrooms. Therefore, pedagogies of discomfort and empathy, as described earlier, may create opportunities to address these uncomfortable feelings by acknowledging these feelings in pedagogically productive ways and by offering compassionate support instead of more ‘traditional’ approaches that may avoid acknowledging and addressing these feelings. Thus far, pedagogy of discomfort has been predominantly theorised without any connection to pedagogy of empathy; in this article, we want to push these boundaries and explore how pedagogies of discomfort and empathy might be combined together in the context of multicultural and antiracist teacher education.

The study

We engaged in this study with a specific question in mind, namely, whether we could identify the potential and limitations of enacting pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in approaching anti-racist and multicultural teacher education. We have been involved in anti-racist and multicultural teacher education for more than ten years, albeit from different positions: Michalinos from his position as teacher educator at a public university and Elena from her position as a teacher trainer for the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) in Cyprus. Our recent role and commitment to developing and implementing a ‘Code of Conduct Against Racism & Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents’ (Papamichael and Zembylas 2014; ‘Code & Guide’, hereafter) has provided the context and opportunity for the present study. But before we say more about the background of this study, we provide a brief overview of intercultural education in Cyprus.

Brief overview of intercultural education in Cyprus

Traditionally being a country of out-migration, the Republic of Cyprus in the 1990s became, as a result of the quick economic boom, a host country for immigration and migrant workers (Spyrou 2009; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2009). The changing profile of the population in the Republic of Cyprus has affected the schools and the
educational system. As a result of the historical segregation of the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot educational systems, the Greek-Cypriot educational system has always been monocultural. Thus, immigration has brought major changes to the profile of Greek-Cypriot schools. An increasing percentage of 14.7% of primary school pupils in Greek-Cypriot schools are considered to be ‘other-language’ by the MOEC (2015); ‘other-language’ being merely one of the various names used to refer to non-indigenous students. Analysing education policy texts over the years 1997–2012, Theodorou (2014) groups the names used for non-indigenous students into three different categories: the ‘tolerable’, the ‘deficit’ and the ‘problematic’‘others’, constructed based on their cultural and linguistic background expressions.

‘Intercultural education’ is relatively new to Greek-Cypriot schools and society (Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou 2007; Papamichael 2009; Zembylas 2010a) and has mainly focused on two issues over the years: first, the provision of measures for language support, that is, the teaching of Greek as a second language to ‘other-language’ students; and second, the provision of measures for facilitating the smooth integration of ‘other-language’ children in the Greek-Cypriot educational system and society. In terms of the curriculum, the government-appointed Commission for Educational Reform (2004) expressed concerns about the narrowly ethnocentric and culturally monolithic Greek-Cypriot educational system and argued that this basically ignored multiculturalism. The measures and policies suggested and implemented were considered inadequate by the Commission, because they primarily targeted ‘other-language’ students and their ‘language deficiency’ in Greek, while neglecting wider issues of nationalism, racism and intolerance. The Commission considered intercultural education for all students to be a necessary response to these issues. Other studies by researchers in the Republic of Cyprus stress that the philosophy behind educational practices on intercultural education is mostly grounded in the notion of assimilation, and that the educational system views the diversity of migrant children as a form of deficiency that needs to be treated, so that these children can be assimilated to the mainstream society (Angelides, Stylianou, and Leigh 2004; Papamichael 2009; Theodorou 2014).

Furthermore, due to the observed ‘ghettoization’ of some, mostly inner city, schools and the racist incidents documented in some schools (Zembylas, 2010a), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2011) has strongly recommended the development of new policies in Cyprus – such as the review of the admission process in schools in order to eliminate discriminatory practices and the development of antiracist policies and practices. It is in this context that the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC hereafter) has take the decision to follow a recommendation by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and in collaboration with the Anti-Discrimination Body at the Ombudswoman’s Office, it has drafted a Code & Guide in schools, taking into account antiracist policies internationally. It is the first time that the government has officially recognised that there are racist incidents in Greek-Cypriot schools and has decided to do something about it, compared to previous denials of such events as ‘minor’ or ‘incidental’ (Zembylas 2010b).
Point of departure and a brief methodological note

The Code & Guide provides schools and teachers with a detailed plan on how to deal with and record racist incidents, which they may adjust to their specific needs before they adopt it and begin its implementation. It also provides the steps to be followed by schools for dealing with racist incidents in a practical rubric. The anti-racist policy was implemented on a pilot basis in five primary and two secondary schools during the school year 2014–2015. For the purpose of providing support to the schools participating in the pilot implementation of MOEC’s anti-racist policy, the pilot implementation team, including both authors of this paper, organised two series of five optional afternoon training workshops – as part of the teacher training programs of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute – in two cities of Cyprus. The main goals of the workshops were: (a) to familiarise participating teachers with the newly developed anti-racist policy of the MOEC, and provide them with opportunities to explore and critically discuss the policy and issues of anti-racist and intercultural education in general; and (b) to empower teachers in their attempts to implement the new policy into their schools. One of the authors (Elena), also the coordinator of the pilot implementation of the anti-racist policy, served as the ‘teacher trainer/workshop facilitator’, while the other (Michalinos) was a ‘critical friend’. Elena attempted to create ‘safe spaces’ in order to develop a constructive learning environment for the participating teachers. Such safe spaces would ensure the revelation and democratic management of the conflicts expected to arise in discussions regarding racism (see Bergold and Thomas 2012).

The critical moments we analyse below came from the five teacher workshops conducted in the capital city, Nicosia; each of the workshops lasted 2.5 h. The workshops were carried out between October and November 2014 in the afternoon hours and were attended by 22 primary and secondary education teachers (20 Greek-Cypriot and 2 Greek teachers). All but one of the participants were women, an unsurprising number, considering the percentage of male teachers working in Greek-Cypriot schools. The majority of teachers attending the workshops worked in two of the seven pilot schools. The workshops were experiential in form and were structured mostly around activities involving role play, debating, discussions, video projections, quizzes and games. We tape recorded the workshops after gaining permission from the participants. The participants completed brief questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the series of workshops, asking them in general about their conceptualisation of racist incidents and their perceptions of the workshops. We also kept notes of everything taking place during the workshops.

Our analysis of the critical moments below focuses on two issues: (a) the evidence of teachers’ discomfort and how it was handled by Elena as the teacher trainer; and (b) Elena’s pedagogical struggles to show empathy towards participants’ views. In particular we chose two such critical moments, because we saw them as ‘representative’ of similar ones taking place throughout the series of workshops in terms of participants’ reactions and Elena’s pedagogical approach, yet these particular moments were more ‘forceful’ and ‘intense’. In the first incident, we analyse
a debate that occurred during the first workshop, after Elena presented a short overview of the critique on superficial approaches to intercultural education. In the second incident, excerpts from the last workshop of the series are analysed, in which Elena conducted the activity 'World Maps' that caused the most explicit reactions of intense discomfort. What we are interested mostly through this analysis of these two moments is showing the consequences of the pedagogies of discomfort and empathy that are being implemented, and the openings and closures that are created in this professional development setting through these pedagogies.

Analysis of two critical moments

'That’s not exactly what I said'

Discomfort related to intercultural education became evident from the very first seminar, through the participants’ reaction to a presentation of the critique on the superficial approaches that were followed in intercultural education, that is, approaches which focused on food, music and dance festivals and failed to take

Excerpt 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines 315–349</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ifigenia: You said earlier that what we've been doing is wrong. But for me, what happens in research changes every 3–4 years, so this is what we knew, this is what we did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: I agree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ifigenia: It's a bit annoying to hear that the things – the things we used to do are wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: (laughing) I hope that's not exactly what I said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ifigenia: It's something that we know about research, every 3–4 years someone will introduce something and everyone will deal with this new thing and everything else that was happening is either considered wrong or put aside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: [inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ifigenia: Yes, but this is what we knew, these are the guidelines we had. It's very difficult, some people in research must understand what goes on in reality in a school and how you are expected to handle, in one 40-min period, 25 families – because it's not just about the children, it's about the families and even the communities. And let's say that what is expected by those who do research are specific things, but this is sometimes wrong. And after a few years, maybe you or me or anyone could say oh, what I used to do was wrong and we will negate it and do something else now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petroula: let's not forget that this thing with the festivals and the gatherings of the various foreigners, let's say, were guidelines of the curriculum. I mean, we didn't do these things by accident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Yes, of course, there is … I agree with everything you said, I don't think I used the word wrong …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ifigenia: It wasn't against you; it's just that it was something you said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: I agree and I'm glad you brought it up, you and Petroula […] The relief though, the consolation is that although we may have made these mistakes, because we haven't had to deal with these issues for decades, although we made these mistakes, almost all the countries went through this process. And there are still issues, even in England, even in the US – approaches such as these [superficial intercultural education] are still around, despite the reactions and the critique against them. For example, there is Black History Month in England. Every October, all schools discuss Black History, which has also been criticised by some. Instead of – which means, umm, these things are not over – it might not be a festival with dancing and cooking and singing, it has another form, but there are still superficial approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleni: But the last one to blame is the teacher, the last one to blame. It's the Ministry's policy and the guidelines they provide. So some people should be more serious on some issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(simultaneous talk by participants).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| E: I agree, I agree.
into account or to challenge racism. Elena gave examples of such approaches, common in Greek-Cypriot schools, as those were expressed in MOEC guidelines on intercultural education, such as: organising multicultural festivals, asking ‘foreign’ parents and their children to bring traditional objects or food from their country of origin, and requesting ‘foreign’ children to act as representatives of their country of origin. In the excerpt that follows, it is shown how Elena attempted to respond to participants’ intense expressions of discomfort about the criticisms of such practices, while at the same time her own discomfort became evident through a defensive stance.

As can be seen at the beginning of the above excerpt, several participants reacted strongly at hearing the criticisms of superficial intercultural education approaches, and became defensive upon realising the potential negative consequences of school activities they have been promoting and involved in so far. While Elena had not used the term ‘wrong’, the participants used the term repeatedly: ‘you said what we’ve been doing is wrong’; ‘it’s annoying to hear that what we’ve been doing is wrong’. Despite Elena’s initial denial of using the term ‘wrong’ (‘that’s not exactly what I said’), the participants continued to use it, employing defensive discourse which constructed research findings as generally unreliable (‘what happens in research changes every 3-4 years’). A participant also highlighted the gap between research and practice, constructing researchers as distanced from classroom realities, unable to grasp the complexities of dealing with as many as 25 pupils, their families and the whole community in each 40-min teaching period.

Furthermore, a participant referred to MOEC’s initial guidelines for intercultural education as ‘the curriculum’, which guided them towards the implementation of superficial intercultural education approaches. She thus ‘blamed’ past policy discourses and justified the implementation of superficial intercultural education activities by them. Elena’s repetitions of ‘I agree’ highlighted her desire to avoid being constructed as overly critical towards the participants’ approaches to intercultural education in their classrooms and her need to minimise the feeling of discomfort and intensity of debate that has been created in the seminar room. However, the repetition of ‘I don’t think I said the word wrong’ only intensified the discomforting reaction by the participants, making the transcription impossible at some point, as many teachers became angered and spoke simultaneously. It became clear that the participants’ discomfort stemmed from the perception of Elena’s presentation of the research-based critique of the specific approaches as an accusation directed to their teaching practices.

Excerpt 2
Lines 367–372

E: Our aim, our aim, similarly to what the Code of Conduct says, is not to demonize any perpetrator of racist behaviors. That is, our aim is not for you to … to feel guilt or regret or anything because you did things which, as we explain here, we know had no positive impact. We all did – I mean myself included … in 2003 I wrote a story for Health Education and used it with my first graders and I look at it now and think Oh my God, did I cause harm? But this is the only way forward, the fact that you are all here is a big – a big deal.
Elena finally used the term ‘wrong’ to describe not the teachers’ practices, but the fact that the policy guidelines the participants referred to, were given without an extensive overview of the literature and research already available abroad on intercultural education approaches that had already been proved to be superficial in places such as the UK or the US. She then went on to construct as ‘relieving’ and ‘comforting’ the fact that even though Greek-Cypriot education was characterised by these superficial approaches to intercultural education, it was a process which many countries went through when they first began dealing with diversity in their schools. In her reflections later, Elena admitted that her move to recognise this as part of the process was an attempt to empathise with the participants, by constructing their experiences as similar to those of other teachers around the world. The implications of this discursive move became more evident towards the end of the discussion, when, unlike previous interventions by participants, their discomfort did not target Elena any more, but the implied educational authorities who ‘need to be serious on some issues’.

Stating explicitly that the aim of this discussion as well as the workshops was not to cause feelings of guilt or regret to the participants, Elena referred to her own experience and wondered whether she had ‘caused any damage’ when

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**Excerpt 3**

*Lines 296–323*

Chrysa: Um, the north hemisphere is squashed and the south is extended.

E: Do you think the north hemisphere was squashed and the south was extended on purpose for this map?

Chrysa: Yes, yes, it wants to make a point.

Annita: Yes but we don’t know if this is the real one.

E: Oh, OK.

Chrysa: Where is this map given? In which country?

E: (laughing) It’s a global map. Why do you ask?

Chrysa: But in which country? In which educational system?

E: I’ll explain. Why do you ask?

Chrysa: The south is bigger, so it serves …

E: So it serves a purpose, for the south countries to look bigger?

Chrysa: Yes.

E: Interesting. I’ll tell you in which country.

Maria: In China? (they all talk together)

E: So you are suspecting that it’s the specific map that I gave you that has been counterfeited.

Sofia: No, it’s against Europe.

E: Ah, so it’s against Europe.

Dora: Is this the truth and we know otherwise?

E: Listen, Sofia says that the map was created against Europe, yes, Nadia?

Nadia: I think it’s true.

E: Is it true? (laughing)

Nadia: And we know the opposite.

E: And we know the opposite.

F: Maybe it’s real?

E: Could it be real? Is it out of the question?

G: So the globe is used the wrong way?

E: Well, let’s take it step by step. Look at your worksheet again and I’ll give you the answers.
reflecting back on her own teaching in relation to issues of diversity in education. She constructed feelings of discomfort as being embedded in the process of reflection and challenging of past practices and emphasised that it was ‘the way forward’, while acknowledging that the mere presence of teachers in these seminars was already ‘a big deal’.

‘It’s not an easy thing to handle’

Moving on from the first to the last of the workshops, we next focus our analysis on the ‘World Maps’ activity\(^2\) (see also Kübler and Reddy 2002), which caused the greatest discomfort among participants. Their discomfort became evident from the length of time it took to discuss the activity (almost 90 min), the constant exchange of dialogues between participants (making transcribing impossible at some instances), as well as their repeated questions and expressions of doubt and surprise.

For the purposes of the activity, participants first answered a multiple-choice quiz, asking them (a) to compare the sizes of continents based on world map images provided, (b) to draw the Equator on a world map image and (c) to estimate the square kilometres covered by the north and south hemispheres. Having presented their answers to the group, participants were shown various images of world maps and were asked to reconsider their answers. The participants raised several questions, which Elena purposely left unanswered, consciously aiming to build on their feelings of discomfort and get them to critique what they were presented with. Right before the following excerpt, participants already shared their quiz sheet answers with the group and repeatedly expressed concern and uncertainty by speaking all together and insisting that Elena should provide them with the ‘right’ answers. Instead, Elena chose to give out copies of Peter’s Projection map to push the participants to reconsider their answers to the quiz:

Participants began to question the origin of Peter’s Projection map and suspected that it was designed in a way that served the interests of those ‘against Europe’. Their discomfort became evident in the constant questioning and repeated questions, as well as the fact that they all talked at the same time. Elena left most of their questions unanswered, responding back with repetitions of the participants’ statements or questions, inviting them to further doubt the maps they had in front of them and their own interpretations of them. This caused even further discomfort in participants which led to the following two excerpts, in which Elena attempted explicitly to empathise with participants’ feelings of confusion and discomfort, yet without providing direct answers to their constant questions.
Presenting the participants with a stereotypical world map for children, showing the main sights around the world, the participants recognised the stereotypical representations of countries and the fact that the smaller countries were ‘lost’:

Excerpt 4
*Lines 341–346*

E: Yes, I will … I will simply tell you that all these feelings that you just felt are very much justified and there is still more to feel, because we have more to do next. Umm, and I will explain to you later why we are going through this. You will figure it out on your own, I think you are already starting to figure it out.

Maria: So the maps I use at school are wrong?

E: You’ll see in a bit.

The participants gradually responded more positively and they altogether admitted that challenging long-held stereotypes was deeply discomforting but necessary:

Excerpt 5
*Lines 403–412*

Sofia: Europe is right there, next to – next to the Arabian Gulf. Isn’t that the Arabian Gulf?

[several participants speak together]

E: I’ll let you wonder. Just the fact that you are having a hard time to … the fact alone that you are having a hard time to find it tells us something. Look at this map as well. It looks more familiar doesn’t it? Good. How many millions of children grow up with this map, including you and me?

Filio: These are stereotypes [referring to the sightseeing monuments on the map].

E: They are stereotypes, so let’s … even if we forget about the stereotypes for a moment, how does it differ as a map [from the Peter’s Projection map they have in front of them]?

Filio: (simultaneous talk of others) The small countries have disappeared.

A participant responded to Elena’s comment that dealing with the information they were presented was not easy because it was difficult to ‘accept’ what they did during the activity – the fact that the Mercator world map – the most commonly found and taught in schools – did not in fact represent the countries in accurate
proportions. Elena’s final comment urged the participants to critically think about other situations where ‘our’ awareness and judgments might be informed by stereotypes and propaganda.

**Discussion and implications**

We chose these two ‘critical moments’ in this exploratory study to highlight two issues: on one hand, the participants’ experiences of discomfort and how it was handled by the teacher trainer; and, on the other hand, how the teacher trainer struggled pedagogically to show empathy towards participants’ views. Both incidents show that the process of engaging discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education entails both possibilities and impossibilities. These (im)possibilities often range ‘from feelings of mutual understanding, attunement, and compassion to feelings of confusion, misalignment and singularity when confronting the, at times, impenetrability of others’ and our own subjective lives’ (Throop 2010, 771). Empathy was used pedagogically by Elena in her struggle to navigate through her participants’ discomfort, showing that the process of challenging previous held beliefs involved complex and difficult emotional experiences. Therefore, we want to suggest here something that has not been adequately emphasised in the literature, namely, that pedagogy of discomfort in itself might not be enough to challenge teachers’ long-held beliefs about stereotypes, racism and intercultural education; the strategic use of a pedagogy of empathy might be needed to enrich pedagogy of discomfort for a more ‘productive’ engagement with discomforting emotions.

A ‘productive’ engagement with discomforting emotions essentially means successfully addressing the potential pitfalls associated with a pedagogy of discomfort. One of the unpleasant consequences of pedagogy of discomfort documented in the literature (Berlak 2004; Boler 1999, 2004a; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012) is stirring feelings of guilt, embarrassment and uneasiness in participants. While some degree of such feelings is expected, as part of pedagogy of discomfort, in practice it is not always easy or productive for the teacher or teacher educator to navigate through such feelings. For example, in the two critical moments analysed above, the participants responded to the pedagogical workings of discomfort through a variety of ‘negative’ emotions such as confusion, uneasiness, anger, shame, fear and doubt. As the first incident shows, the participants did not always perceive Elena’s pedagogical approach in positive terms, as it seemed that learning through discomfort was not pleasant for teachers (see also Faulkner and Crowhurst 2014). However, when Elena used empathy more visibly and strategically – that is, in the second incident – the participants’ discomforting emotions seemed to become recontextualised and somewhat alleviated. Specifically, teachers’ discomforting feelings were recontextualised when they were taken from their original context (e.g. as feelings of uneasiness towards any new learning questioning teachers’ previous beliefs) to become reinterpreted as part of ongoing struggles to engage
with the challenges of intercultural education. Pedagogy of empathy was strategic for this recontextualisation, because it was used by Elena to develop emotional connections with teachers at a broader social and political level rather than a narrow self-centred perspective.

Admittedly, empathy as a pedagogical approach was not always productive, driving both participants and Elena in directions that were sometimes opposite or less promising. Thus, despite Elena’s efforts to show empathy to teachers’ struggles with intercultural education or stereotypes, some participants resorted to rationalised argumentation (Callahan 2004) or sentimental reactions (Zembylas 2013a) and failed to acknowledge how their own emotional attachments to certain views affected their knowledge and teaching practices at a broader sociopolitical context. Some of the participants also responded to the discomfort involved ‘by choosing to reinforce their own identities rather than risk self-transformation, while others feel overwhelmed and depressed by the dark side of history and culture, from which they have been sheltered’ (Wang 2005, p. 58). In other words, not all participants responded in the same way or benefited from a pedagogy of strategic empathy as a ‘response’ to teacher discomfort; some adopted an antiracist position, others resisted and still others experienced intense distress (Kumashiro 2002).

While Boler (1999, 2004a) argues that discomfort or empathy by themselves do not necessarily lead to more awareness of how we might change, we argue that it is important for pedagogies of discomfort and empathy to work in conjunction and strategically in order to create more possibilities for ‘safe spaces’ (Macdonald 2013; Zembylas 2012).

Although it is not always clear what ‘safe space’ entails, there is a tension emerging in the present analysis that deserves our attention: on the one hand, there is the assumption that transformation will not take place in the absence of safety; on the other hand, as Davis and Steyn (2012) point out, when people expect comfort the possibilities of growth may be actually foreclosed. Acknowledging this tension, the relevant discomfort and the role of empathy in multicultural teacher education, we propose here that teacher professional development takes into consideration these issues in the design of more productive yet relatively ‘safe’ learning spaces for teachers. As Boostrom (1998) suggests, the assertion that learning space should be safe does not necessarily imply that it should also be free of stress and discomfort. The creation of safety in teacher professional development is certainly a goal towards which teacher educators should strive; at its heart is a respect for learners’ emotions (Leonardo 2009). Safety cannot be constructed, then, as the absence of discomfort; similarly, experiencing discomfort should not be confused with the absence of safety (Adams, Bell, and Griffin 2007). An important implication for multicultural teacher education, then, is to create safe spaces that do not dismiss discomfort, but rather encourage a way of thinking, feeling and acting that fosters teachers’ critical rigour and empathetic understanding (see Davis and Steyn 2012).

All in all, what we suggest here is that discomfort has more chances to be dealt with pedagogically and productively, if it is combined with a pedagogy of
strategic empathy. Clearly, an analysis based on the value of examining a few critical moments is not enough; a more in-depth empirical exploration is needed to overcome the limitations of what we can learn looking at these few excerpts of trainer–teacher engagement. However, the analysis of these critical moments turns out attention to something that deserves a more careful examination and provides preliminary evidence that perhaps it would be more fruitful, if pedagogies of discomfort and pedagogies of strategic empathy are combined in helping in-service teachers deal with the challenges and tensions of engaging with antiracist and intercultural education in schools.

Notes


2. The activity is adjusted from the work of Annette Kübler for the Anti-Bias Netz, a freelance consulting, training and education organisation, specialising in anti-bias political education workshops http://www.anti-bias-netz.org/anti-bias/

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