

**Stimulating teachers' equity literacy through drama and theatre-based work forms: a
systematic review**

Alie Meedendorp

University of Groningen

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Supervisor: dr. M. I. Deunk

Second assessor: prof. dr. J. W. Strijbos

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Abstract

As classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, teachers often find themselves in a prominent position within initiatives to provide a safe learning environment with equal opportunities for every student in the classroom. This requires preparation for diversity within teacher education. This systematic review explores the use of drama and theatre-based work forms in pre-service and in-service teacher education and training to elicit critical reflection among teachers, as a means to prepare them for the diverse classroom. A comprehensive search in electronic databases found 26 eligible articles that were analysed using Gorski's equity literacy approach (2016) as a framework. Various drama and theatre-based work forms emerged from the data, mostly Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) exercises. The drama and theatre-based work forms could be categorised as work forms focused on embodiment, stepping in, prompted drama, and collective playbuilding. The equity-related outcomes for teachers involved skills and competences such as empathy, perspective-taking and collaboration, shifts in attitude regarding diversity and inclusion, as well as advocacy and willingness to teach for social justice. The findings suggest that drama and theatre-based work forms can enhance teachers' equity literacy by strengthening their equity literacy skills through critical reflection. Consequently, these work forms have the potential to play an important role in preparing teachers for the diverse classroom.

Keywords: Equity literacy, teacher education, professional development, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, drama, theatre, critical reflection, Theatre of the Oppressed, social justice, diversity, systematic review

Stimulating teachers' equity literacy through drama and theatre-based work forms: a systematic review

In many parts of the world, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. This diversity can manifest in various ways, including differences in race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation. Students belonging to minority groups often experience a deficiency in gaining equitable access to educational opportunities that are affirming, safe, and just (Moyer & Clymer, 2009). Teachers often find themselves in a prominent position within initiatives to provide a safe learning environment with equal opportunities for every student in the classroom (Parkhouse et al., 2019). This requires from teachers a commitment to social justice, and a genuine concern for students who differ from them and from one another in a variety of ways (Bakken & Smith, 2010). It also requires preparation for diversity within teacher education (Mills, 2008).

Different frameworks have been used as guidance to discuss diversity in classrooms. Examples of these frameworks are culturally responsive teaching (Ebersole, Kanahele-Mossman & Kawakami, 2016), cultural competence (Beach et al., 2005), and cultural proficiency (Moyer & Clymer, 2009). However, cultural education initiatives based on these frameworks often fail to identify deeper, structural sources of inequality (Gorski, 2016) and teacher education as well as professional development programs provide superficial and insufficient discussions on diversity (Mills, 2008). Indeed, numerous teachers graduate from preparation programs feeling ill-equipped to teach in diverse classrooms (Parkhouse et al., 2019). Consequently, many teachers tend to keep concentrating on surface-level differences such as race and language when it comes to equity education. In this manner, equity initiatives may paradoxically pose a threat to achieving true equity (Gorski, 2016).

As a response to this paradox, Gorski (2016) clarifies the distinction between cultural initiatives and equity initiatives by introducing the term equity literacy. Equity literacy refers to the knowledge and skills of teachers to actively counteract inequity within their domains of influence. This approach acknowledges the fact that inequity and injustice stem from issues of power, rather than being solely cultural problems (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Within the equity literacy framework, teachers are to be prepared for teaching in diverse classrooms by acquiring the following skills related to equity education:

1. the ability to recognise inequity;
2. the ability to respond to inequity in the immediate sense;
3. the ability to effectuate long-term equity;
4. the ability to sustain this equity, despite resistance (Gorski, 2016).

The challenge at hand is how we can aid teachers in this process towards equity literacy. For one, teachers need fundamental knowledge of the essence of inequity and its impact in education (Gorski, 2016). However, merely including instruction about inequity in teacher education and teacher professional development programs falls short of what is needed. Teachers are generally unaware of their implicit associations and biases (Warikoo et al., 2016), and those taught about unconscious prejudice are prone to perceive it as an issue belonging to others (Chiu et al., 2022; Ghoshal et al., 2013). Therefore, self-reflection is essential. By actively contemplating experiences and considering alternative viewpoints, individuals are more likely to adapt and evolve, explaining the transformative power of reflection (Dervin, 2023; Svojanovsky, 2017). Through reflection in teacher education, a more conscious and goal-directed learning

process is established, enhancing teacher agency and teachers' sense of competence and autonomy (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2022; Kramer, 2018).

Because of the transformative power of reflection, multiple scholars (e.g., Liu, 2015; Nieto, 2006) have characterised reflection as an important component of education for social justice. In the context of equity education, the term critical reflection is used. Critical reflection, more than reflection, is an intentional process of examining one's assumptions and actions regarding issues of equity and justice. It involves a deep exploration of personal biases, cultural perspectives, and the systemic structures that contribute to inequities in education (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). Critical reflection encourages teachers to be agents of change, strengthening the conditions for social justice within both their educational institutions (Chattopadhyay, 2013; Ross, 2015) and the broader societal context they engage with (Liu, 2015). Critical reflection thus focuses on moving forward towards equity literacy. It not only benefits individual teachers and students but also could contribute to a more just and equitable society as a whole.

In this study, drama and theatre-based work forms in pre-service and in-service teacher education will be explored as a way to elicit critical reflection, as a step towards equity literacy. Drama and theatre-based work forms are ways of active learning that provide opportunities for practice (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009). This kind of learning is appropriate to produce the kind of changes in teacher practices that are needed to not only recognise inequity, but also respond to inequity, effectuate equity and sustain this equity. Through enactment, teachers can gain an embodied understanding of the connection between power and education and experiment with what would happen if they acted differently (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019). This embodied approach combined with the provision of room for experiment fits well with the connection of reflection to practice that is central to critical reflection (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Smith, 2011),

encouraging teachers to become agents of change. Additionally, sensitive topics such as discrimination and bias can be challenging to discuss, and students may fear judgement when these topics are brought up (Chiu et al., 2022; Gorski, 2016). Drama and theatre offer a unique and constructive environment for expression and exploration of socially sensitive topics in which "the divisions of fiction and reality are deliberately blurred in order to provide a safe space for participants to transform experiences into dramatic metaphor" (Nicholson, 2014, p.68). Moreover, engaging teacher students in critical reflection activities has proved itself to be challenging. Students may not see the value of critical reflection or describe reflection assignments as lacking appeal, unless the reflective aspect is connected to practical application (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Liu, 2017). Due to the distinctiveness of theatre and drama-based activities, students are more engaged in learning and they tend to find their learning process both challenging and enjoyable (McCammon et al., 2011). According to Cawthon and Dawson's (2009) study, teachers and school personnel perceive drama-based professional development as a valuable investment of time, more enjoyable than conventional development programs and worth the commitment required for success.

A meta-analysis by Lee et al. (2015) shows that drama-based work forms in education have a positive effect on students' attitudes towards marginalised groups. Additionally, some studies exploring the integration of drama and theatre in teaching mention equity literacy related outcomes for teachers as a side effect (Iyer & Ramachandran, 2019; Jones et al., 2021). However, there is a notable scarcity of research linking drama and theatre-based work forms specifically to aspects of equity literacy among teachers. Thus far, to our best knowledge, no overarching research has been carried out to bring together empirical evidence for drama and theatre-based work forms as a means to stimulate teachers' equity literacy. The purpose of this

study is to provide an overview of empirical studies that relate drama and theatre-based work forms in teacher education and teacher professional development programs to aspects of teachers' equity literacy. The main research question is: What is the state of affairs and available evidence for using drama and theatre-based work forms for stimulating pre-service and in-service teachers' equity literacy? This question is divided into the following two subquestions:

1. How are drama and theatre-based work forms used in teacher education and teacher professional development as a means to stimulate teachers' equity literacy?
2. What are the outcomes of these drama and theatre-based work forms related to teachers' equity literacy?

Method

To answer the research question, a systematic review was conducted. This method allows for the identification of all relevant studies and a systematic evaluation of the relevance of these studies towards answering specific research questions (Moher et al., 2009). The study was designed according to the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).

Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted in January 2024 in the following databases: ERIC, PsychINFO, and Web of Science. The search terms, presented in Table 1, are categorised according to the *Population Intervention Comparison Outcome* (PICO) framework (McKenzie et al., 2013):

Table 1*Search string according to PICO-framework*

<i>Population</i>	'teacher education' OR 'pre-service teach*' OR 'teacher train*' OR 'teacher preparation' OR 'professional development' AND 'teacher' OR 'intern' OR 'trainee' OR 'student teacher' OR 'educator' OR 'educational*'
<i>Intervention</i>	'drama*' OR 'theatre' OR 'theater' OR 'performing art*' OR 'improvisat*' OR 'enact*' OR 'role-playing'
<i>Comparison</i>	-
<i>Outcome</i>	'equity' OR 'divers*' OR 'includi*' OR 'equality' OR 'intercult*' OR 'multicult*' OR 'educational justice' OR 'social justice' OR 'cultural awareness' OR 'disadvantage*' OR 'oppress*'

The search terms could appear in any search category. The search was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed journals and available in English, with no restrictions regarding year of publication. The search resulted in a collection of 2125 files, which were exported to EndNote (Gotschall, 2021). Duplicates were detected by this software and then removed manually by the author. After deduplication, 1772 articles were left. These articles were exported to the screening tool Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016). Rayyan found 206 remaining duplicates, of which 104 were deleted. This second deduplication left 1668 articles to be screened against the inclusion criteria.

Study Screening

Primary research that qualified assumed a relationship between drama and theatre-based work forms in pre-service and in-service teacher education and teachers' equity literacy. This equity literacy includes everything that could contribute to teachers being more equipped for the context of the diverse classroom. To illustrate: Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo et al. (2019) researched the use of theatre in teacher education as a means to promote teachers' courage to confront injustice in education. This study was included in the systematic review. In contrast, Levanon (2022) employs theatre in teacher education to introspect on the ways in which she has felt oppressed as a teacher herself. Despite focusing on theatrical methods in teacher education and producing an equity-related outcome, the intervention described in the study does not contribute to the preparation of teachers for the diverse classroom and was therefore excluded from the systematic review.

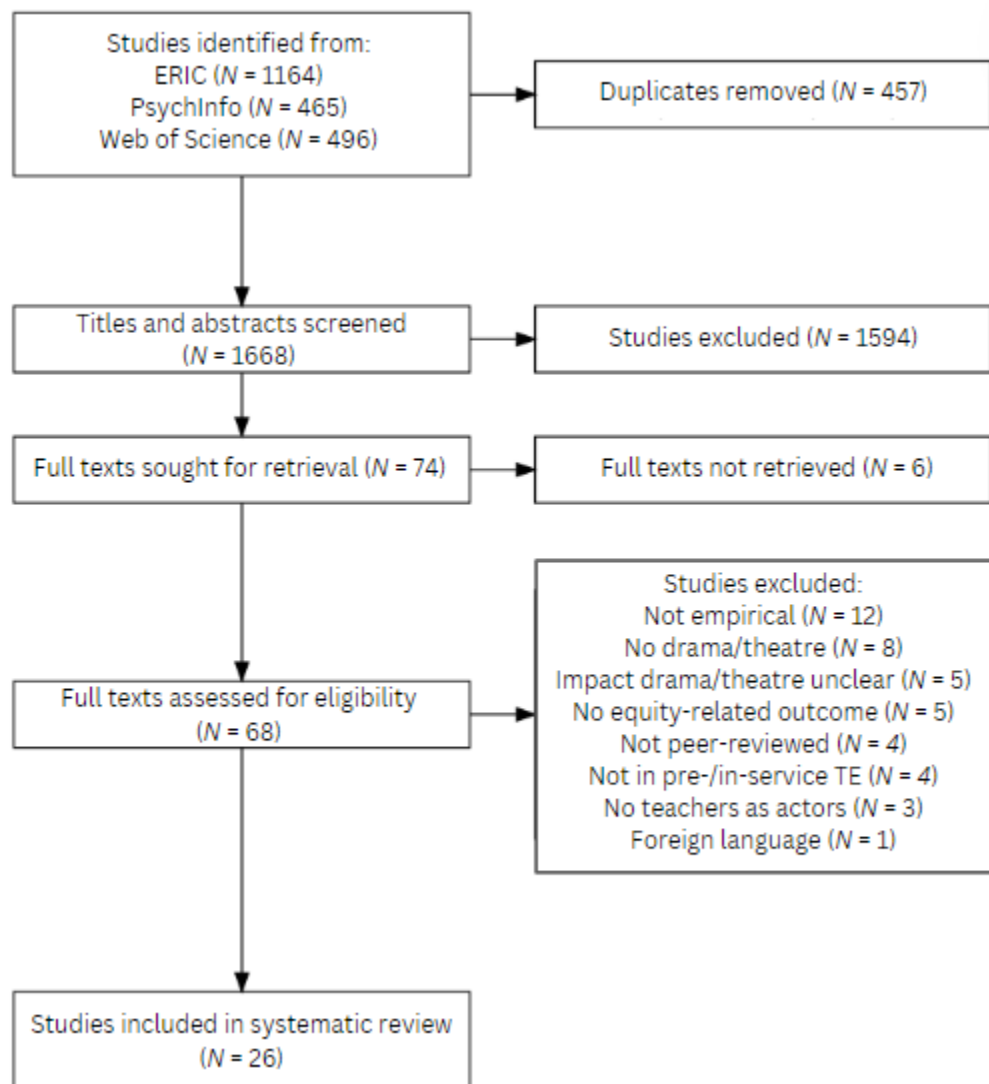
The selection process was recorded in sufficient detail to complete a flow diagram of the study selection process as shown in Fig. 1. First, an initial screening of the titles and abstracts was conducted. Two independent reviewers evaluated the first 50 studies in the abstract screening process. All discrepancies in study selection were due to different textual interpretations ($N = 2$) and were resolved through discussion. The remainder of the selection process was carried out by the author only. In case of doubt, the article was provisionally kept in the selection.

To be included in the systematic review, a study had to (a) be written in English, (b) be an empirical study, (c) be published in a peer-reviewed journal (d) describe the use of a drama or theatre-based work form (e) in pre-service or in-service teacher education or training, and (f) describe an outcome related to teachers' equity literacy. Moreover, (g) the drama or theatre-

based work form described in the study should require teachers to be actors themselves. For example, if the intervention consisted of watching a theatre performance and reflecting on it (e.g., Elsbree & Wong, 2007), or playing a role-playing video game (e.g., Mirliss, 2014), the study was excluded from the systematic review.

Figure 1

Flow diagram of study selection process



Analysis

The data analysis was based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All included studies were thematically coded, using different codes for text fragments providing information on the following four aspects: (1) study characteristics, including study design and participant characteristics; (2) intervention specifics: what were the characteristics of the drama and theatre-based methodologies employed in teacher education or training?; (3) outcome specifics: what were the main equity-related outcomes of these drama and theatre-based work forms? And (4) any available data on teachers' critical reflection during their emergent equity literacy.

The coded text fragments regarding intervention and outcome specifics were used to write summaries for each article, facilitating the synthesis of comprehensive research summaries. Subsequently, text fragments were clustered together based on their shared codes and meanings. These clusters were preliminary themes. Some themes were revised or combined to better represent the data. For example, part of the intervention described by Edmiston (2016) while not explicitly denoted as Forum Theatre by the author, exhibited the characteristics of Forum Theatre (i.e., participant enactment of conflict situations and the engagement of spect-actors). The intervention was therefore reclassified as Forum Theatre in this systematic review. Similar iterations occurred in the thematic domains concerning teacher outcomes. Following this foundational data classification, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions. For the data regarding the drama and theatre-based work forms, this led to four themes that allowed for the exploration of similarities and differences: embodiment, stepping in, prompted drama, and collective playbuilding. The interventions' equity-related outcomes were analysed using Gorski's equity literacy skills (2016) as a framework.

Results

Description of study characteristics

A total of 26 studies was included in this systematic review. The study characteristics are presented in Table 2, ordered based on the types of work forms as categorised in the next part of the result section. It is notable that among the 26 included studies, 4 studies stem from a singular research project (Beltramo et al., 2020; Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo et al., 2019; Stillman, Ahmed & Castañeda-Flores, 2019; Stillman & Beltramo, 2019). Nevertheless, these studies present different parts of the data to illustrate their findings and were therefore all included in this systematic review. From now on, these studies will be collectively referred to as 'the Stillman studies'.

The included studies were mostly U.S.-based ($N = 20$). Two studies were based in Australia. The rest of the studies were conducted in Canada, Norway, South Africa, or the U.K. ($N = 4$). With the exception of three studies, all studies included in this systematic review employed a qualitative study design. Darvin (2011b) adopted a quantitative design using questionnaires as her data collection method, while two studies opted for a mixed methods approach. The qualitative and mixed methods studies employed a variety of data collection methods. The predominant method among these studies ($N = 23$) was the use of participant journals, which served as the primary data source in most studies.

The number of participants varied widely, from 3 to 420 participants. Eighteen studies solely included pre-service teachers as participants. In three of those studies, the participants were in-service teachers and in five studies the participants were a combination of pre-service and in-service teachers. More than half of the studies in this systematic review solely included primary education teachers ($N = 14$). Four studies had secondary education teachers as

participants. In four studies, both primary and secondary education teachers participated. The participants in the Stillman studies were teacher educators.

The included studies focused on various types of diversity. Most of them concentrated on cultural or racial diversity ($N = 9$) or linguistic diversity ($N = 4$). Some studies ($N = 5$) centralised more specific equity issues (i.e., bullying, inequity in mathematics education; systemic deficit discourses, Latinx immigration and deportation, and teaching students with disabilities) or, contrarily, remain within the general theme of inequity, oppression and exclusion ($N = 3$). The study by McLaren et al. (2021) is not specifically focused on equity but does have aspects potentially contributing to teachers' equity literacy as outcomes. The Stillman studies stand out concerning the type of equity issues they address because, while they focus on the more general theme of systemic injustice regarding minority students, they all use specific cases about the discrimination of Latinx people to illustrate their findings.

In all but two studies (Darvin, 2011a; 2011b), the drama or theatre-based work forms were the main intervention. The vast majority of the studies in this systematic review use some form of Theatre of the Oppressed as an intervention ($N = 19$, explained below), and most of these studies use Forum Theatre ($N = 15$) and/or Image Theatre ($N = 6$). Other drama or theatre-based work forms described more than once are collective playbuilding, process drama, role-playing, readers' theatre, and situated performance. Multiple studies ($N = 11$) use a combination of drama or theatre-based work forms.

Equity-related outcomes for teachers include advocacy ($N = 11$), perspective-taking skills ($N = 11$), empathy ($N = 8$), collaboration skills ($N = 7$), confidence ($N = 7$), enhanced understanding of social justice ($N = 7$), preparedness to teach social justice ($N = 7$), awareness of the role of the teacher in equity issues ($N = 5$), cultural sensitivity ($N = 4$), the embracement of

diversity in the classroom ($N = 3$), and the ability to recognise inequity ($N = 1$). The "Outcomes" section illustrates these constructs and how they relate to equity literacy in greater detail.

Summaries for each article are provided in the appendix.

Table 2*Study characteristics*

Study	Country	Study design	Participants		Type of equity issue	Main drama / theatre work form	Duration / intensity	Data collection	Main outcomes	
<i>Embodiment</i>										
Powers & Duffy (2016)	U.S.	Mixed methods	21	pre-service	primary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Image Theatre (T.O.)	12 weeks	I, PJ, Q, V	Awareness of teacher role; cultural sensitivity; perspective-taking
Souto-Manning (2011)	U.S.	Mixed methods	75	pre-service	primary education teachers	Racial diversity	T.O. games	15 weeks, with one or two 75-minute sessions each week	FN, I, PJ, Q	Understanding of social justice
<i>Stepping in</i>										
Beltramo et al. (2020)	U.S.	Qualitative	10-12	pre-service and in-service	teacher educators	Systemic inequality against minoritised students (Latinx)	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	3 years, with monthly 2- to 3-hour sessions	D, FN, I, PJ, V	Collaboration; confidence; teaching social justice
Caldas (2017)	U.S.	Qualitative	21	pre-service (bilingual)	primary education teachers	Linguistic diversity	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	Three sessions	FN, PJ, V	Advocacy; understanding of social justice

Caldas (2021)	U.S.	Qualitative	22	pre-service (bilingual)	primary education teachers	Linguistic diversity	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	One semester	I, PJ, V	Advocacy
Harman & McClure (2011)	U.S.	Qualitative	19	in-service	primary and secondary education teachers	Systemic deficit discourses	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	15 weeks	D, FN, LO, PJ, V	Understanding of social justice
Raphael & Allard (2019)	Australia	Qualitative	57	pre-service	primary and secondary education teachers	Teaching students with disabilities	Community theatre; Forum Theatre (T.O.)	One session	PJ, Q	Advocacy; confidence; empathy
Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo, et al. (2019)	U.S.	Qualitative	10-12	pre-service and in-service	teacher educators	Systemic inequality against minoritised students (Latinx)	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	3 years, with monthly 2- to 3-hour sessions	D, FN, I, PJ, V	Collaboration; confidence; teaching social justice
Stillman, Ahmed, & Castañeda-Flores (2019)	U.S.	Qualitative	10-12	pre-service and in-service	teacher educators	Systemic inequality against minoritised students (Latinx)	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	3 years, with monthly 2- to 3-hour sessions	D, FN, I, PJ, V	Collaboration; confidence; teaching social justice
Stillman & Beltramo (2019)	U.S.	Qualitative	10-12	pre-service and in-service	teacher educators	Systemic inequality against minoritised students (Latinx)	Forum Theatre (T.O.)	3 years, with monthly 2- to 3-hour sessions	D, FN, I, PJ, V	Collaboration; confidence; teaching social justice
Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor (2014)	U.S.	Qualitative	15	pre-service	secondary education teachers	Linguistic diversity	Forum Theatre (T.O.); Rainbow of Desire (T.O.)	One semester	I, V	Advocacy; perspective-taking

Prompted drama

Boylan (2009)	U.K.	Qualitative	44	pre-service	secondary education teachers	Inequity in mathematics education	Creative action methods	2 weeks	PJ	Advocacy; awareness of teacher role; embracement of diversity; empathy; perspective-taking
Brindley & Laframboise (2002)	U.S.	Qualitative	115	pre-service	primary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Readers' theatre; process drama	One semester	D, FN, LO, PJ	Cultural sensitivity; empathy; perspective-taking; teaching social justice; understanding of social justice
Darvin (2011a)	U.S.	Qualitative	17	in-service	primary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Situated performance	One semester	FN, I, LO, PJ, V,	Advocacy; awareness of teacher role; cultural sensitivity; perspective-taking; understanding of social justice
Darvin (2011b)	U.S.	Quantitative	43	in-service	secondary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Situated performance	One semester	Q	Advocacy; cultural sensitivity
Larsen (2023)	Norway	Qualitative	9	pre-service	secondary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Role-playing	One 90-minute session	F, PJ, LO	Awareness of teacher role; embracement of diversity

Nganga (2019)	U.S.	Qualitative	47	pre-service	primary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Process drama; role-playing	One semester	F, LO, PJ	Advocacy; collaboration, perspective-taking; teaching social justice
Stanton & Gonzalez (2011)	U.S.	Qualitative	10	pre-service	primary and secondary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Ethnodrama	13 weeks, with two 80-minute sessions each week	A, FN, PJ	Embracement of diversity
<i>Collective playbuilding</i>										
Athiemoolam (2021)	South Africa	Qualitative	72	pre-service	primary education teachers	General	Collective playbuilding	Three 70-minute sessions	PJ	Advocacy; awareness of teacher role; empathy; understanding of social justice
Belliveau (2006)	Canada	Qualitative	12	pre-service	primary education teachers	Bullying	Collective playbuilding	6 weeks	D, FN, LO, PJ	Collaboration; confidence; empathy; perspective-taking; recognising inequity; teaching social justice
McLaren et al. (2021)	Australia	Qualitative	420	pre-service	primary education teachers	No equity related theme	Collective playbuilding	One semester	PJ, V	Collaboration; confidence; empathy; perspective-taking

<i>Embodiment/stepping in</i>										
Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider (2012)	U.S.	Qualitative	7	pre-service	primary education teachers	Cultural diversity	Forum Theatre (T.O.); Image Theatre (T.O.)	Six 2-hour sessions during 10 weeks	I, LO, V	Empathy; perspective-taking
Caldas (2020)	U.S.	Qualitative	40	pre-service (bilingual)	primary education teachers	Linguistic diversity	Image Theatre (T.O.); Forum Theatre (T.O.)	Fourteen 3-hour sessions	D, I, PJ, V	Advocacy
Shelton & McDermott (2010)	U.S.	Qualitative	-	pre-service	primary education teachers	General	Forum Theatre (T.O.); Image Theatre (T.O.)	-	FN, P, PJ	Empathy; understanding of social justice
<i>Prompted drama/embodiment</i>										
Miller et al. (2019)	U.S.	Qualitative	12	pre-service	primary education teachers	Latinx immigration and deportation	Process drama; Image Theatre (T.O.); role-playing	-	A, D, F, P, PJ,	Perspective-taking
<i>Prompted drama/stepping in</i>										
Edmiston (2016)	U.S.	Qualitative	3	pre-service and in-service	primary and secondary education teachers	General	Dramatic inquiry; Forum Theatre (T.O.); readers' theatre	One semester	I, PJ, Q	Advocacy; perspective-taking

Note. T.O. = Theatre of the Oppressed; A = audio recording; D = documents; F = focus group; FN = field notes; LO = live

observation; I = interview; P = photographs; PJ = participant journals; Q = questionnaire; V = video recording. Empty cell (-)

indicates the study did not provide information on the number of participants or method of data collection.

Drama and theatre-based work forms

The following drama and theatre-based work forms were identified: embodiment-based work forms; work forms where participants were required to 'step in'; prompted drama, and collaborative playbuilding. Since some studies in this systematic review employed more than one drama or theatre-based work form, they appear across multiple categories.

Of the many different work forms described in the included studies, the majority of the studies used a work form based on Theatre of the Oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatre-based practice developed by Augusto Boal (Boal, 1979). Boal was deeply influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire, particularly Freire's concept of critical pedagogy and the notion of dialogue as a means for social change. Theatre of the Oppressed aims to empower marginalised people, encouraging them to engage critically with their social and political realities (Stillman & Beltramo, 2019). Theatre of the Oppressed offers a variety of techniques and exercises designed to facilitate dialogue, promote awareness of power dynamics, and inspire collective action. Central to its approach is the belief that theatre can be a tool for social transformation, allowing participants to explore and challenge oppressive structures in a safe and creative space (Caldas, 2020). Theatre of the Oppressed involves components that can be carried out apart from each other. The studies included in this systematic review use various components of Theatre of the Oppressed in a variety of ways.

Embodiment

Embodiment in theatre refers to the process by which actors embody situations or characters in a nonverbal manner. It involves using the body to depict thoughts, emotions, and physicality regarding a subject to make it feel more real (Shelton & McDermott, 2010). Although theatre by its nature involves embodiment, 13 out of the 26 studies explicitly describe

embodiment as (a part of) their interventions. Most of them do so using Image Theatre. Image Theatre involves using the body to create still or dynamic images around a theme representing social issues and injustices. Participants can manipulate these images to explore different perspectives and emotions, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of complex issues (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012). In the majority of the studies containing embodiment-based exercises, they primarily serve as a warming-up. While most studies merely mention the incorporation of these embodiment-based warming-ups, others explicitly highlight their significance in stimulating teachers to think about social justice and connect the subject to their personal experiences (e.g., Athiemoolam, 2021; Caldas, 2020).

In two studies (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012; Shelton & McDermott, 2010), embodiment-centred activities comprise roughly half of the intervention. Both studies used Image Theatre, creating frozen images using prompts based on their own suggestions (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012) or based on concepts such as democracy and power (Shelton & McDermott, 2010). The audience was invited to give an oral response and think of alternatives to change the depicted oppressive situations. Three studies (Miller et al., 2019, Powers & Duffy, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2011) centralise embodiment in their interventions. Miller et al. (2019) started with nonverbal warming-up games and followed up with Image Theatre in response to bilingual poetry in the first session. The second session focused on an immigration news article, whereafter teachers created an imagined immigrant sound machine and engaged in an Image Theatre activity portraying different perspectives on immigrant arrests. Powers and Duffy (2016) used a series of embodiment-focused activities. Starting with warming-up games, teachers made their feelings and difficulties concerning cultural diversity visible. They subsequently used Image Theatre exploring their roles as teachers within the context of culturally

relevant pedagogy. Focusing on an image depicting the isolation of a transgender student, they further developed it through an exercise involving images of reality and ideal images, envisioning the transformation of the situation. The intervention by Souto-Manning et al. (2011) consisted of the kinetic Boalian theatre games *Columbian Hypnosis* and *Power Shuffle*. In *Columbian Hypnosis*, one participant initiates a movement, and the other participant mirrors or follows that movement. In *Power Shuffle*, participants line up based on various categories to make differences more visible and to explore multiple dimensions of power.

Stepping in

A significant share of the studies ($N = 15$) uses a theatre-based work form called Forum Theatre, where participants create short scenes that depict a conflict or situation of oppression. The audience, referred to as spect-actors, can at any time step into the scene, take on the role of the oppressed character, and propose a solution (Beltramo & Stillman, 2020). Commonly, a facilitator known as the 'Joker' is present to guide the participants through the theatrical experience, enhancing the participation of the spect-actors and facilitating meaningful dialogue (Stillman, Ahmed, & Castañeda-Flores, 2019). One of the most pivotal characteristics of Forum Theatre is that it translates oppression into concrete situations, which empowers spect-actors to analyse this oppression and possibly transform it. Since the spect-actors can intervene in the onstage actions, they become part of the transformation. Forum Theatre thus bridges spect-actors' ideas and applies them in real situations through performance, acknowledging the need to look beyond abstract solutions, as well as the power of collective action for sustainable change (Caldas, 2020). Among these 15 studies, all but five (Belliveau, 2006; Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snyder, 2012; Edmiston, 2016; McLaren et al., 2021, and Shelton & McDermott, 2010) use Forum Theatre as their main work form. In two studies (Belliveau 2006; McLaren et

al., 2021), Forum Theatre comprises only a small part of the intervention. The other three studies incorporate this form of theatre next to Image Theatre (Bhukhanwala & Allsah-Snyder, 2012; Shelton & McDermott, 2010) or dramatic inquiry (Edmiston, 2016), although Forum Theatre remains slightly predominant in all three interventions.

The Stillman studies, along with the study by Harman and McClure (2011) take a problem-solving approach using Forum Theatre. Participants shared stories from their personal experiences and engaged in improvised reenactments. Through the involvement of spect-actors who intervene and interact within the scenarios, diverse strategies for addressing oppressive situations were collaboratively learned. Caldas (2017; 2020; 2021) as well as Raphael and Allard (2013) perceive Forum Theatre performances as a way to “rehearse the game”. Their participants enacted situations inspired by practices witnessed (Caldas, 2021) or encountered through written materials (Caldas, 2017; Caldas, 2020; Raphael & Allard, 2013) in the teachings of other educators, using these enactments to explore different ways to be an inclusive teacher. They thereby prepared for their own future inclusive teaching practices. In the last study (Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014) the input for the Forum Theatre enactments were diversity-related struggles the pre-service teachers experienced. Forum Theatre was mainly intended to adopt different perspectives. The Rainbow of Desire technique extended this concept: the facilitator, also known as “Joker” could pause the performance at any moment and ask spect-actors to embody each character's underlying reasons to act, which helped the teachers to move from simplistic assumptions to more nuanced ones.

Prompted drama

While most of the included studies in this review describe general equity-related concepts or personal experiences as starting points for the drama or theatre-based work forms, in 10 studies, the content of the theatrical performances was guided by specific prompts.

Two of these studies (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002; Edmiston, 2016) used readers' theatre, working with children's books as the basis for theatrical exploration. The teachers took on the fictional characters from the stories, with the freedom to explore how different actions could influence the courses of the narratives. In two studies, the researchers created prompts that were specifically designed to achieve the purpose of the study (Boylan, 2009; Larsen, 2023).

Five studies took cultural or political events as starting points for theatrical performance. The studies by Darvin (2011a; 2011b) used fictional Cultural and Political vignettes to be enacted through situated performances, encompassing role-play along with critical reflection and revision of the actions performed. Miller et al. (2019) as well as Nganga (2019) used a CNN news video and a news article on immigration (Miller, 2019), and historical political events (Nganga, 2019) for theatrical processing through role-plays. In Stanton and Gonzalez (2011), pre-service teachers engaged in ethnodrama, delving into personal and historical cultural events which served as the foundation for creating monologues.

Collective playbuilding

Three studies involve teachers collaboratively writing plays. In McLaren et al. (2021) the teachers explored their identities using a variety of theatre techniques and then collectively developed a play, portraying their learning process as a group. The plays produced by the teachers in the other two studies were specifically focused on equity-related themes. Belliveau (2006) describes the process of teachers working together in the development of a play about

anti-bullying. In the study by Athiemoolam (2021), the teachers were divided into groups and created a total of nine plays about various social justice issues. In Belliveau (2006) and McLaren et al. (2021), the emphasis lies on the collaborative process. In Athiemoolam's study (2021), the focus extends to the social justice issues subject to the plays, with teachers learning through both their own plays and by observing the plays created by other groups.

Equity-related outcomes

Many different aspects contributing to teachers' equity literacy emerge as outcomes from the articles. Nearly every article underscores teachers' personal identity development as playing an important role in their process towards equity literacy. As teachers come to understand themselves and how they refer to others in a different way through drama and theatre, the stereotypical notion of cultural diversity becomes personal (e.g., Belliveau, 2006; Caldas, 2017). For this reason, the four equity literacy abilities – recognising, responding, effectuating, sustaining – as framed by Gorski (2016) are construed more expansively in this section, encompassing not only the “knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to become a threat to the existence of inequity in their spheres of influence” (Gorski, 2016) but also the convictions and attitudes teachers have regarding social justice.

Recognising inequity

One study particularly delineated *recognising inequity* as an outcome for teachers. Through playbuilding around bullying issues, the pre-service teachers recognised people's roles within relationships and gained insights into power imbalances (Belliveau, 2006). Other aspects described in the studies contributing to recognising inequity include *perspective-taking skills* and *cultural sensitivity*. Eleven studies documented the increase in teachers' perspective-taking skills through their involvement in drama or theatre-based work forms. Theatre equipped prospective

teachers with tools enabling them to view situations from their students' perspectives (Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider, 2012). Moreover, these perspectives are noted to become more critical and nuanced following teachers' practice through theatre (Wooten & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2014). According to Miller et al. (2019), employing theatre to stretch and diversify perspectives enabled teachers to contemplate the concerns and uncertainties of Latinx families. This principle could pertain to any kind of inequality, depending on the focus of the theatre exercises. A teacher in Edmiston's study (2016) states after role-playing the character of a girl subjected to discrimination: "I got to feel what it was like to be discriminated against ... it got me to be a better observer of children" (p.342).

Four studies describe how their drama and theatre-based work forms prompted teachers to reassess their cultural beliefs, fostering increased cultural sensitivity. The teachers in the study of Brindley and Laframboise (2002) became increasingly troubled by their deficiency in cultural sensitivity as the intervention advanced. The participants in both Darwin's studies also reported their increasing awareness concerning the impact of cultural and politically sensitive issues on students (2011a), which made them feel better prepared to deal with such matters in the classroom (2011b).

Responding to inequity in the immediate sense

Important for teachers to address manifestations of inequity immediately is the recognition of the influential role they hold in equity issues. As teachers are in a position of authority within the educational setting, teachers directly shape students' experiences of equity through their actions or lack thereof. Five studies describe the *awareness of the role of the teacher in equity issues* as one of the outcomes. For instance, teachers realised that teaching extends beyond simply transmitting knowledge and that students' experiences should also be

reckoned with (Athimoolam, 2021; Boylan, 2009). A teacher in Darwin (2011a) realised that “each little ... decision that we make as teachers is much bigger than we think” (p.288). Two additional studies have increased awareness about the teacher's role as outcomes. However, these articles critically note that, while the teachers participating in their studies recognised they have an important role to play in equity issues, they failed to think about these roles in terms of being allies rather than the central figures (Powers & Duffy, 2016) or didn't critically reflect on the impact of their own cultural identities in the classroom (Larsen, 2023).

Other aspects adding to the preparedness to address inequity in the immediate sense are *advocacy* and *confidence*. Eleven studies documented advocacy as one of the equity-related outcomes. In these studies, the emphasis shifted towards how teachers could implement their knowledge about equity in practice, developing approaches to promote justice in the classroom (e.g., Caldas, 2021; Nganga, 2019). Knowing how to respond to inequity is further complemented by having confidence in one's ability to do so and having the courage to take action when needed. Confidence is reported as an outcome in seven studies. For example, increased insight into bullying, along with the drama processes, boosted teachers' confidence and empowered them to put their understanding to practice (Belliveau, 2006). Correspondingly, Raphael and Allard (2013) found an increased sense of efficacy in working with Special Educational Needs students among the teachers who participated in the theatre workshop, which motivated them to take responsibility for creating positive and inclusive classroom environments.

Effectuating long-term equity and sustaining equity

Advocacy and *confidence* are important not only for responding to equity in the present moment but also for effectuating and sustaining equity beyond the immediate reality of the classroom. This is nicely illustrated by the pre-service teachers in Caldas (2017; 2021) who

started to think of themselves as teacher advocates, eager to expand the boundaries of their work beyond the classroom. They also perceived the classroom as a critical space to initiate social justice beyond its walls. The participants in the Stillman studies acknowledged the fundamentality of courage in their role as teacher educators to confront deficit ideologies in education (e.g., Stillman, Beltramo & Castañeda-Flores, 2019). The theatre-based rehearsals prepared them to face up to conflicts with teachers holding such deficit ideologies (e.g., Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo et al., 2019). Teachers in McLaren et al. (2021) also became confident to “act as positive disruptors in their future lives” (p.259).

Another aspect central to effectuating and sustaining long-term equity is *collaboration*, an outcome reported by seven studies. For one, a sense of community helps teachers to maintain resilience in the face of resistance (Stillman & Beltramo, 2019). Collaborative reflection on social issues and collective awareness regarding social justice issues can catalyse wide-ranging actions, even when those actions are individually enacted (McLaren et al., 2021; Stillman, Beltramo & Castañeda-Flores, 2019). Moreover, change towards equity in education can only come about in collaboration with students, parents and colleagues. As the teacher educators in the study by Stillman and Beltramo (2019) realised, interactions with learners or teachers are permeated by ever-present relational and social conditions, and collaboration skills are essential in accomplishing anything in a world made up of relationships.

Finally, seven studies observed *teaching social justice* as an outcome, referring to teachers' desire to impart principles of equity to their present or future students. For the teacher educators in the Stillman studies, this was the main goal of the research project they participated in. In the other three studies, the drama or theatre-based work forms prompted teachers to think about how they could use these kinds of activities to teach social justice in their own future

classrooms (Belliveau, 2006; Brindley & Laframboise, 2002; Nganga, 2019). In two studies, the teachers went as far as discussing lesson concepts together and creating activities to explore social justice with children (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002; Nganga, 2019).

Prerequisites

Several aspects that were identified as contributing to teachers' equity literacy in the reviewed articles do not align directly with one of the four equity literacy skills outlined by Gorski (2016), but are nonetheless essential for the ability to develop and apply these skills at any step of the way towards equity literacy.

The first one of these is *empathy*, an attitude described as an outcome in eight studies. For example, the teachers in Bhuhkhanwala and Alleksaht-Snyder (2012) showed an increase in empathy that they identified as the basis for their relationships with their students and that helped them to navigate classroom diversity. Teachers in other studies indicated similar attitudes after participation in drama or theatre-based activities, such as personal engagement in inclusive teaching practices (Athimoolam, 2021; Raphael & Allard, 2013) or a personal concern for student feelings and perceptions (Boylan, 2009; Shelton & McDermott, 2010).

The second prerequisite outcome is the *understanding of social justice*. Seven studies reported an enhanced understanding of social justice among their participants. In all cases, this encompassed an understanding of how injustice manifests in both society and schools. The intervention in Harman and McClure (2011) specifically targeted the examination of social justice issues as a product of institutional power dynamics. In four studies, this understanding was tied to self-reflection. As teachers developed a deeper understanding of social justice, they became more conscious of their own presumptions and privileges (Brindley & Laframboise; Darwin 2011a; Shelton & McDermott, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2011).

Lastly, three studies reported that the drama or theatre-based work forms they employed helped teachers to start *embracing diversity* in the classroom. In two cases, this involved appreciating cultural diversity in its complexity (Larsen, 2023; Stanton & Gonzalez, 2011). Some mathematics teachers in Boylan (2009) were prompted to consider more inclusive teaching approaches to accommodate classroom diversity after participating in a diversity-focused enactment.

Potential associations between work forms and outcomes

The data from the included studies show that the same type of work form can lead to various outcomes. Likewise, the same equity-related aspect can be the outcome of various work forms. Nonetheless, some patterns can be identified.

Stepping in is the type of work form that was most often used in the included studies. This work form mainly has outcomes that relate to responding, effectuating and sustaining equity ($N = 18$). The second most used work form is prompted drama. Of all work forms, prompted drama has the most variety in equity-related outcomes. Seven of its outcomes were prerequisite competences or attitudes, nine of its outcomes related to recognising inequity, and 11 of its outcomes related to responding, effectuating and sustaining equity. The three studies using collective playbuilding activities also reported outcomes related to all levels of equity literacy abilities. The most prominent outcomes were empathy, perspective-taking, and collaboration. These outcomes were shaped not only by dramatising equity-related topics, but also by the process of collectively developing a play. Embodiment-based work forms were mainly used as warming-up exercises or in combination with other types of drama or theatre-based work forms.

Discussion

The systematic review identified common themes across 26 included studies, shedding light on the state of affairs and available evidence for using drama and theatre-based work forms for stimulating pre-service and in-service teachers' equity literacy.

The main drama and theatre-based interventions included Theatre of the Oppressed activities like Forum Theatre and Image theatre, collective playbuilding, process drama, role-playing, and readers' theatre. Multiple studies use a combination of drama or theatre-based work forms. The interventions were organised into the following four categories: embodiment-based work forms; work forms where participants were required to 'step in'; prompted drama, and collaborative playbuilding. Embodiment-based activities comprised of Image Theatre activities and kinetic theatre games, which required teachers to embody situations or characters nonverbally. The majority of the included studies used Forum Theatre, where teachers were spect-actors stepping into scenes to alter the course of the enacted situations. Prompted drama included readers' theatre, process drama, situated performances, ethnodrama and other role-play activities that were guided by specific prompts. In three studies, teachers collectively wrote a play.

Most equity-related outcomes of the teachers could consistently be linked to Gorski's (2016) equity literacy skills. Teachers' increased ability to take different perspectives and cultural sensitivity were aspects contributing to the ability to recognise inequity. Teachers' awareness of their role in equity issues, advocacy, and confidence were important aspects in responding to inequity in the immediate sense. The abilities to effectuate and sustain inequity in the long term were also supported by teachers' sense of advocacy and confidence, as well as by collaboration skills and their preparedness to teach social justice to their future students.

Furthermore, empathy, an enhanced understanding of social justice, and embracing classroom diversity were identified as prerequisites for developing and applying equity literacy skills. With this addition of prerequisite attitudes and competences, Gorski's equity literacy approach proved to be useful framework to analyse the outcomes of drama and theatre-based interventions aiming to prepare teachers for the diverse classroom.

In an attempt to find promising practices, potential associations between the various drama and theatre-based approaches and specific aspects contributing to teachers' equity literacy were explored. The outcomes of work forms requiring teachers to step in were mainly related to responding, effectuating and sustaining equity, while prompted drama and collective playbuilding rendered outcomes related to all Gorski's equity literacy skills. Prompted drama in particular showed a great variety in equity-related outcomes. Embodiment-based exercises were mainly used for warming-up or in combination with another type of work form.

The role of critical reflection

From the articles emerges that critical reflection has a central role in drama and theatre-based methods because theatre is not just about performance; it's also about exploration, analysis, and interpretation. The concept of 'metaxis', as first introduced by Plato in a spiritual context and adopted by Boal to describe his theatrical work (Allern, 2002), is helpful in characterising what happens to many teachers in the included studies: they are performing their roles as actors yet continuously considering how this work form fits into their development as teachers (e.g., Belliveau, 2006; Edmiston, 2016).

Many researchers rationalise their adoption of drama or theatre-based approaches precisely because of this, highlighting that critical reflection is integral to praxis (e.g., Athiemoolam, 2021; Belliveau, 2006). The creation of safe spaces to engage in critical reflection

is also noted as important in multiple studies. For instance, Souto-Manning (2011) explains theatre games as safe spaces for teachers to acknowledge, validate, and confront their cultural experiences. Likewise, Edmiston (2016) illustrates how dramatic inquiry fosters safe spaces for teachers to grapple with responding to students' experiences of oppression in schools, encouraging learning from one another in genuine dialogue. Shelton and McDermott (2010) even state that teachers' self-reflection and advocacy are suitable objectives for judging the effectiveness of interactive theatre.

The prevalence of interventions based on Theatre of the Oppressed also fits well with the focus on power and oppression that is central to critical reflection. Theatre of the Oppressed encourages agency by inviting every participant to be part of the transformation taking place on stage (Caldas, 2020). According to Bhukhanwala and Alleksaht-Snyder (2012), both Image Theatre and Forum Theatre offer teachers "another approach to critical reflection ... in an esthetic learning environment to explore the topics that matter the most to them" (p.688). Wooten and Cahnmann-Taylor (2014) also describe Forum Theatre as an iterative process of critical reflection.

Furthermore, critical reflection is an ongoing and dynamic process. Multiple studies suggest that their participating teachers critically reflect over time, continuously examining their prior knowledge, beliefs, and practices, and remaining open to new perspectives and learning opportunities (e.g., Nganga, 2019). For example, Caldas (2017) proposes that becoming an advocate teacher is a lifelong process and that critical reflection continues long after the intervention. Moreover, the Stillman studies underscore that teaching is "an act of continual learning in the context" (Beltramo et al., 2020; p.40). This suggests that critical reflection is not only ongoing but also influenced by teachers' specific contexts and experiences.

Strengths and limitations

The use of PRISMA-guidelines throughout the research process ensured the transparency of this systematic review. A wide-ranging search strategy enabled the identification of all relevant studies within the searched databases. This allowed for a comprehensive examination of the diverse range of drama and theatre-based methods in teacher education and training for stimulating pre-service and in-service teachers' equity literacy.

A limitation that should be acknowledged is that nearly every study included in this systematic review used a qualitative study design, and the data was mostly based on participant journals. While such sources offer rich data, they are less robust in providing evidence regarding the effectiveness of drama or theatre-based interventions. As a result, this review can only provide insight into the varying ways in which teachers' equity literacy can be stimulated through drama and theatre-based work forms, but does not provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches.

In addition, the wide range of drama and theatre-based methods used across the included studies result in an even wider range of outcomes. It was therefore not possible to pinpoint specific factors within these methods fostering particular outcomes. Consequently, the findings are context-specific and preclude broad generalisations.

As this systematic review is solely based on published studies, the possibility of publication bias cannot be disregarded. In case of publication bias, the representation through the included studies may be overly positive and not accurately reflect the true state of evidence. While in some studies it was noted that not every teacher felt equally comfortable (e.g., Powers & Duffy, 2016) or that not all teachers found every assignment valuable (Boylan, 2009), many of the studies solely positively reported on teachers' increased equity literacy.

Implications

As shown in this systematic review, the same type of work form can lead to various outcomes and vice versa. There were many different factors influencing the outcomes of the included studies, regarding both study characteristics and the way the various work forms were employed within their specific context. These should be acknowledged as they have implications for research and practice. The implications for practice concerning three of these factors will be considered in more depth, namely, the focus of the intervention, the amount of input by participants themselves, and the role and functions of warming-up activities for participants. Furthermore, implications for research will be discussed.

In all studies but one, the drama and theatre-based exercises used were specifically focused on equity-related subjects like discrimination and cultural diversity. This explicit linking of theatre with equity-related subjects is likely necessary for these work forms to effectively stimulate teachers' equity literacy, as "learners need carefully crafted prompts prodding them into deep reflection about power and oppression, especially around forms of injustice associated with their privileged identities" (Gorski & Dalton, 2020, p.366). The variation in outcomes, especially for prompted drama, also underscores the importance of alignment between the aim of the intervention and the focus of the drama or theatre-based work form.

Still, there are significant variations in the extent of input from the teachers in the studies. This spectrum ranges from teachers being participant-researchers working from their personal experiences (e.g., Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo et al., 2019) to teachers being subjected to an intervention in which they are part of enactments structured by the researcher (Boylan, 2009). On the one hand, substantial input from teachers aligns with the notion that teachers want

assignments to speak to their real-life experiences in order to see them as valuable (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Liu, 2017). On the other hand, Miller et al. (2019) noted:

the tendency for our students to assume the role of teacher regardless of the role-play context. This time ... they could be anyone except a teacher ... we highlight how the students entering roles beyond those of a teacher created an important place for movements into more nuanced and critical ways of considering deportation (p.208).

This indicates that sometimes teachers may need a little more guidance to achieve true critical reflection. It is important to consider teachers' experience with both drama or theatre and with social justice topics when determining how much guidance is appropriate.

A third factor is whether and how warming-up exercises are part of the intervention.

While some studies do not mention the inclusion of warming-up exercises or only mention them briefly without specification, other studies underscore the importance of such exercises to create trusting environments, stimulate group cohesion, and physically and emotionally prepare the bodies (e.g., Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snyder, 2012; Caldas, 2020). These benefits of warming-up exercises are important to consider, especially in light of studies indicating that some of the participating teachers felt less comfortable engaging in drama or theatre-based activities, which influenced the effectiveness of their learning processes (e.g., Powers & Duffy, 2016; Darwin 2011a, McLaren et al., 2021).

To accommodate for the many ways in which a similar drama or theatre-based work form is employed in in teacher education or training, future research could examine how particular drama or theatre-based work forms are employed more thoroughly, focusing, for instance, just on the various implementations of embodiment-based work forms. This would allow for more concrete recommendations regarding the use of a specific work form. In addition, the use of

more quantitative study designs would contribute to strengthening the body of evidence supporting the use of drama or theatre-based work forms stimulating teachers' equity literacy. Observations of teachers' classroom practices before and after engagement in drama and theatre-based work forms, for example, would be valuable to examine the impact of such interventions. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to determine where teachers stand regarding the third and fourth skill put forward by Gorski (2016) – effectuating long-term equity and sustaining equity, despite resistance – after participating in equity-focused drama or theatre-based work forms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggest that drama and theatre-based work forms strengthened teachers' equity literacy skills through critical reflection. Methods rooted in Theatre of the Oppressed appear to have a particular significance in this regard, because the stimulation of critical reflection is inherent to these methods. The variety in drama and theatre-based work forms, and their diverse applications within specific contexts, warrant deeper investigation. Nonetheless, these work forms have the potential to play an important role in preparing teachers to recognise, respond to, effectuate and sustain equity, both within their educational settings and in society.

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Appendix

Summaries per included article, ordered alphabetically

Athiemoolam (2021)

Pre-service primary education teachers ($N = 72$) from South Africa were divided into groups to write plays based on social justice issues they selected themselves: gender inequality, racial inequality, inequality based on socioeconomic factors and language inequality. They developed scripts, directed plays and presented these plays to the other groups. The actors and the audience reflected on the issues addressed in the play after each performance. The personal reflections of the pre-service teachers showed identification with the themes addressed in the plays, enhanced awareness of social justice issues, new insights on social justice, awareness of the teacher's role in social justice issues, and personal engagement with these issues.

Belliveau (2006)

This arts-based research project in Canada used drama as a method of inquiry to explore the learning of 12 pre-service primary education teachers who collectively wrote a play about bullying. The author wrote the findings in the form of a drama script, based on participant journals, field notes, live observations and the final script of the play. The theatre work form was meant as an opportunity for teachers to better understand bullying and social justice, rather than a means to find solutions to bullying. The participating teachers learned to recognise power imbalances in relationships and found the confidence to deal with bullying issues. The challenges the teachers experienced working together helped them to develop their communication, empathy and perspective-taking skills. Moreover, they realised that in the future, they could offer their own students such empowering experiences.

Bhukhanwala & Alleksaht-Snider (2012)

In this study, seven U.S. pre-service primary education teachers participated in six Theatre of the Oppressed sessions. Every session started with a warming-up theatre game and proceeded with Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, or both. In Image Theatre, the teachers created frozen images based on prompts derived from themes they proposed in previous sessions. The participants then named their images and reflected on them, which led to new ways of thinking and feeling about the pictured story. In Forum Theatre, participants enacted classroom dilemmas and rehearsed interventions to address them. The Forum Theatre sessions also concluded with reflections on the rehearsed strategies and an invitation for the teachers to try out the strategies in their classrooms. The intervention aimed to engage the student teachers in perspective-taking and empathic reflection to be better prepared to deal with differences in the multicultural classroom. Data from interviews, live observations and video recordings revealed Theatre of the Oppressed as having potential for supporting teachers in all these things.

Boylan (2009)

Forty-four prospective mathematics teachers from the U.K. took part in four enactments that were designed by the researcher and that were based on creative actions methods. In the first enactment, the teachers were put back in the classroom in the roles of school students, offering them a shared experience of how unjust mathematics teaching practices can feel. The second enactment was designed to prompt reflections on the roles of teachers by exploring various similes and discussing those. The third enactment was an invisible theatre piece on the gendered nature of learning mathematics, meaning the teachers believed they were part of a real-life interaction, provoking spontaneous reactions. The fourth enactment was about classroom diversity and required the teachers to take on the roles of various students and act from these

students' perspectives. After each enactment, written feedback was collected. The enactments supported teachers' recognition of diversity in the classroom and the importance of the role of the teacher therein. Some teachers mentioned growing in cognitive empathy and desiring to change their teaching approaches to more inclusive ones, while others did not think of each enactment as valuable.

Brindley & Laframboise

This study took place in the U.S. and followed four classes of a course on children's literature for pre-service primary education teachers. Each class had 25-30 students, and the total number of teachers was 115. The teacher students read three books as sources for readers' theatre, process drama, and role-playing. Furthermore, they wrote reflections on their experiences. The theatre activities focused on interpretation rather than reproduction, so students could take on characters' roles and improvise conversations and actions that extended the story. This allowed them to view incidents from the perspectives of the different literary characters and reexamine their cultural beliefs. The findings were derived from a variety of written artefacts and included an increase in reflection on students' cultural beliefs, empathy, examination of their presumptions, and the realisation of the importance of promoting multiple perspectives in their future classrooms.

Caldas (2017)

The participants in this study were 21 preservice Bilingual primary education teachers in central Texas. After some warming-up activities, teachers reenacted challenging situations in Bilingual education classrooms using Theater of the Oppressed, specifically Forum Theater. In this work form, a situation is improvised and the audience may interrupt the play, replace a character, and offer a solution. The study aimed to understand how Theatre of the Oppressed

helped preservice Bilingual teachers reposition themselves in Bilingual education. In addressing the research question, the researcher employed critical discourse analysis of video-recorded performances, supplemented by written reflections and field notes as additional data sources. There was a shift in discourse among the teachers regarding immigration and racism. Pre-performance, the teachers approached these issues as the burden of the marginalised. Post-performance, the teachers recognised themselves as potential advocates.

Caldas (2020)

Forty bilingual pre-service primary education teachers from the U.S. engaged in a combination of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. To gather data, all sessions were videotaped. In addition, data from oral and written participant reflections, interviews, and artefacts created by the participants were collected. The goal was to examine how daily interactions at schools are influenced by discourses of power. Image Theatre was used as a warming-up, embodying teachers' identities as affected by past experiences. Before engaging in Forum Theatre, the teachers read literature on linguistic discourse and bilingualism. The participants then reenacted vignettes about bilingualism using Forum Theatre. Spect-actors could intervene in the actions on stage and take over to change the course of the reenactment. Through the enactments, the teachers connected theory to practice, which allowed them to reflect on themselves as future bilingual teachers and advocates.

Caldas (2021)

Twenty-two bilingual pre-service primary education teachers from the U.S. created and performed Forum Theatre sketches based on scripts they wrote after visiting bilingual classrooms. In these sketches, they depicted the teacher in dialogue with peers, parents, and school staff, being an advocate defending the language rights of students. The goal of this

intervention was for participants to dramatise specific situations in which they felt disempowered, and bend them into situations where they were the agents of change. Video recordings, semistructured interviews and written reflections were used to gather data. The data indicates that teachers came to see themselves as critically aware advocates, prepared to address linguistic, racist, and xenophobic issues at schools.

Darvin (2011a)

The participants in this study were 17 in-service primary education teachers who also were students in a graduate course called Teaching Content in Multilingual Classrooms at a university in New York City. The study used written Cultural and Political Vignettes (CPVs) and investigated if these vignettes helped teachers to feel better prepared to address equity issues at their schools. The teachers were asked to respond to the vignettes in writing, create and exchange their own CPVs, and engage in situated performances. The situated performances consisted of role-play, critical reflection on their actions, and revision of these actions. The written reflections of the participating teachers showed increased awareness about how cultural and political issues affect students as well as a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between identity and culture, including the role of their own cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Additionally, teachers realised the importance of taking more time to consider multiple perspectives before reacting to sensitive issues in the classroom.

Darvin (2011b)

This is a parallel study to Darvin (2011a), having the same research aim and using the same CPV-based intervention. However, this study took a quantitative approach using surveys to gather data from 43 in-service secondary education teachers taking a course titled Literacy Instruction for Diverse Learners at a university in New York City. This study found that the CPV

activities did indeed help teachers to feel better prepared to address equity issues at their schools. The teachers reported situated performances as the stage of the CPVs that had the most impact on their cultural/political views, but it was also the activity that they felt the least comfortable with.

Edmiston (2016)

This pilot case study was conducted in the U.S. and analysed three teachers' responses to dramatic inquiry using a questionnaire, participant's written reflections, and focused dialogues led by specific research questions. One of the teachers was a seasoned K-12 teacher, the second teacher taught English as a second language and the third was a pre-service elementary teacher. The goal for the teachers was to change their perspectives on what it means to be a 'good' teacher. A storybook was used to introduce the topics of exclusion and oppression within schools. The teachers then acted out the different perspectives of the characters in the story. The teachers discussed their embodied perspectives and how power relations within schools work through dramatic inquiry, being present both as themselves and as their imagined characters at the same time. Subsequently, Forum Theatre was used to improvise possible alternative actions. The dramatic inquiry allowed the teachers to take up other perspectives, which helped them to take advocative actions against prejudice, discrimination, exclusion and oppression within schools.

Harman & McClure (2011)

The goal of this study was to empower teachers to break through hierarchical deficit views within their schools in order to promote social justice. The study employed ethnographic observation and systemic functional linguistics analysis to explore how theatre could contribute to this goal. 19 teachers from mainstream and special education classrooms in the U.S.

participated in a three-day Theatre of the Oppressed-based intervention called Critical Performative Pedagogy. The teachers first warmed up with theatre games. Thereafter, they wrote about oppressive experiences in their own schools and decided which of these stories would be improvised using Forum Theatre. This intervention provided teachers with a space to reenact and confront systemic tensions that impact their work. The use of theatre deepened the discussion on discourses that disadvantage some groups of students and teachers, and privilege others.

Larsen (2021)

Nine pre-service secondary education teacher students from Norway role-played parent-teacher meetings in groups of three. The aim of this activity was for students to practically understand cultural diversity within schools. The topics of the role-plays had to be related to cultural diversity. The theme of differences in majority and minority cultural traits emerged in all of the role-plays. Afterwards, the students took part in a focus group discussion to discuss their learning and wrote individual reflections. The researcher's observations of the role-play were also used as a data source. The study found that before writing and acting the role-plays, the students thought of cultural diversity as a simple matter to be embraced. Role-playing enhanced their understanding of the complexity of cultural diversity. Another finding was that all students left the cultural origin of the teacher role in the role-plays implicit, assuming a teacher of majority cultural origin like themselves. After this was pointed out, the students became a little more aware of the cultural positioning of the teacher, but they did not reflect more deeply on this issue, possibly strengthening an us-them notion.

McLaren et al. (2020)

The study collected data through video recordings and participant journals from 420 pre-service primary education teacher students from Australia across 3 years: 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Three teaching staff worked with eight student groups each. The groups engaged in ethnodrama: creating dramas based on their own lives and experiences. Each group developed multiple short dramas and eventually collaborated to compose a theatrical piece that mirrored their collective educational journey. The ethnodrama performances challenged teachers to think differently about the construct of knowledge: to think about learning as something physical, emotional and intellectual. The work form created a place of discomfort that encouraged risk-taking and playfulness among the teachers. The teachers showed increased respect for others, confidence, collaboration, communication skills and empathy.

Miller et al. (2018)

This collaborative arts-based inquiry was conducted in the U.S. and explored 12 pre-service primary education teachers' perceptions of Latinx immigration and deportation experiences. The intervention consisted of two 3-hour workshops. Both workshops started with a CNN news video or article related to Latinx immigration and were followed by process-oriented drama work like Theatre of the Oppressed games, frozen image interpretations, and improvisational segments. The students reflected on the arts-based inquiry individually in written journals and together in focus groups. Furthermore, audio recordings, course documents and photographs taken during the workshops were analysed. The drama-based work forms helped teachers to embrace other perspectives and reminded them of the challenges that Latinx families face as a result of immigration and deportation.

Nganga (2019)

The study used role-plays and mock trials to examine the perceptions of pre-service social studies teachers ($N = 47$) from the U.S. relative to teaching for social justice. The role-plays included a reenactment of the Montgomery Bus Boycott initiated by Rosa Parks and a trial

of Columbus by indigenous people. The aim was to help the development of knowledge and skills related to social justice through the use of critical thinking skills, creativity, communication and collaboration (4Cs) among the participating teachers. As indicated by data from classroom discussions, participant journals, and live observations, the teachers grew in the 4Cs and learned to look at issues from multiple perspectives. Additionally, the teachers were willing to tackle social justice issues using unbiased information and were open to exploring new approaches to teach such content in their own future classrooms.

Powers & Duffy (2016)

Twenty-one primary education teacher students from the U.S. engaged in Theatre of the Oppressed activities as a part of a course called 'Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Early Childhood Classrooms' to investigate the complexity of their own identities as well as those of their future pupils. Following four stages—knowing the body, making the body expressive, theatre as language, and theatre as discourse—the students took part in several Image Theatre activities. Each stage created opportunities for the students to reflect on their own and others' intersectional identities physically. A variety of verbal and visual data was collected during this research process. Although the students reported improvements in their sociocultural awareness and ability to consider diverse points of view, the students' experiences differed. While some of them claimed to have developed much, others appeared to just start to understand new concepts.

Raphael & Allard (2013)

A group of 57 pre-service teachers from Australia participated in a workshop led by adults with intellectual disabilities. The workshop was designed to motivate pre-service teachers to think critically about diversity and special educational needs and to develop teachers' knowledge and skills regarding inclusive education. Warming-up activities, physical group

problem-solving activities, and Forum Theatre improvisations were employed. Participant journals, and questionnaires at the beginning and end of the unit indicated that the drama activities deepened teachers' understanding of how exclusion feels. There was an increase in pre-service teachers' confidence in working with students with disabilities and a commitment to ensuring that the needs of these students would be met in their future classrooms.

Shelton & McDermott (2010)

The authors conducted workshops for U.S. pre-service primary education teachers (number of participants not reported), using a participant-observer research design. Through an Image Theatre workshop, the students investigated concepts of power, equality, democracy and discrimination. In another workshop, students shared personal experiences of oppression, which they reenacted using Forum Theatre. The aim was to reexperience situations from a perspective of empowerment and to provoke discussion and reflection among the participants. After each workshop, the participants wrote reflections about what they learned and how they might apply this in the classroom. Additionally, the researchers collected field note data, including note-taking and photographs. The findings suggest that teachers connected their personal experiences to theory and practice, which led to a deepened sense of empathy and got the students to think about how language conveys power. They considered how power is distributed asymmetrically across certain groups, and how this affects people.

Souto-Manning (2011)

Seventy-five white pre-service primary education teachers from the U.S. played two Theatre of the Oppressed games, specifically Columbian Hypnosis and Power Shuffle. These games were meant as tools to recognise their privileged place in society, to ultimately impact their racial identities and attitudes. A mixed methods data analysis revealed that the teachers

became more aware of ethnic identities, racial issues and power. The theatre games unveiled White supremacy, and the teachers came to recognise that their privileges are a constructed norm.

Stanton & Gonzalez (2011)

The intervention took place in a combination of two courses for pre-service primary and secondary education teachers in the U.S.. One of the courses was on historical and sociological issues of race and education and the other was on improvisational performance. Ten teachers participated in the study. The teachers were asked to research migration stories that impacted their own family history as well as historical cultural moments, and create a monologue from an archetypal character's point of view. A qualitative approach was taken to analyse field notes, audio recordings of the performances and teacher journals. The study found that through embodied practice, all participants took ownership of history. The study also found that white teachers better understood multiculturalism and that they were more open-minded to a multicultural curriculum than before.

The Stillman studies

The studies summarised under this heading describe the same research project, yet they accentuate distinct aspects of the data in their respective articles.

Beltramo et al. (2020)

A group of U.S.-based novice teacher educators participated in a 3-year research period of Theatre of the Oppressed and culture circles, using an ethnographic approach. Various data points were gathered throughout the research period, including field notes, videos, written reflections and interview transcriptions. The group met every month, with 10 to 12 participants attending at any one meeting. Forum Theatre was used to reenact conflicts involving various

forms of systemic injustice against marginalised student groups, which were based on real-life situations reported by the participants. In this particular study, a scenario where a participant hears deficit comments about Latinx students made by a group of administrators is taken as an example. The situations were re-imagined as spect-actors acted out possible approaches to influence the conflicts. Freirean culture circles provided a space for members to have discussions about the dilemmas and approaches presented during the reenactments. The project facilitated transformative learning among the teacher educators, as they tested out new methods to challenge deficit perspectives and promote equity and justice.

Stillman, Ahmed, Beltramo, et al. (2019)

Novice teacher educators from the U.S. engaged in a qualitative project, inspired by Freirian culture circles and Forum Theatre, that unfolded over the course of 3 years. Multiple data sources were drawn on during the project. The teacher educators met monthly in an informal setting. The composition of the group varied, but there were 12 core participants. The participants were committed to equity and the topics for Forum Theatre emerged from their lived experiences. In this study, a specific focus was how they could critically interact with teachers who hold deficit views regarding students from minority groups. The teacher educators reenacted their experiences and exchanged roles to try out alternative reactions. This process allowed them to transform conflicts into learning opportunities. Furthermore, they reflected on the utility of these dramatisations in dialogue. The teacher educators equipped themselves to transform teacher education into an enterprise that promotes equity and justice.

Stillman, Ahmed & Castañeda-Flores (2019)

In a 3-year project taking place in the U.S., 10 to 12 novice teacher educators participated in Freirean culture circles and Theatre of the Oppressed to develop their abilities as justice-

oriented teachers. Throughout the project, the learning process was documented in different ways, including interviews with individual participants and video recordings of meetings. The teacher educators used Forum Theatre to reenact themes from their experiences. Following reenactment, spect-actors imagined possible futures by rehearsing different responses. This study highlights an example where the teacher educators try out different ways to embody courageousness in conversations with a teacher making offensive and stereotypical remarks regarding Latinx parents. Throughout the process, the teacher educators reflected in dialogue to explore the feasibility of their dramatisations. Through their engagement in the project, the teacher educators found courage to behave as justice-oriented teacher educators. They came to recognise courage as the most important aspect of justice-oriented teacher educators' work. They also noted a shift in their behaviour, becoming more proactive than passive and no longer "standing by" despite feeling uncomfortable about it, as many of them had done in the past.

Stillman & Beltramo (2019)

A group of novice teacher educators from the U.S. engaged in culture circles and Theatre of the Oppressed as participant-researchers for almost 3 years. Every month, the group met for theatre-based sessions. The circles averaged around 10 participants per meeting, but sometimes there were up to 15 participants. There were 12 core participants. The group collected ethnographic data, including participant written reflections, audio/video recordings, fieldnotes and interviews. They used Forum Theatre to reenact conflicts they had faced in their work. The general theme was: "The difficulty of having critical conversations in practice if/when teachers have not unpacked their own biases, assumptions, knowledge, and beliefs" (Stillman & Beltramo, 2019). The example highlighted in this study focused on a situation experienced by one of the teacher educators in which multiple teachers made denigrating remarks concerning

Mexican students. This situation was improvised, with spect-actors intervening in the reenactment and experimenting with new approaches. The usefulness of these approaches was discussed in dialogue. As they engaged with justice-related issues throughout the project, the teacher educators developed themselves as educators for social justice.

Wooten & Cahnmann-Talor (2014)

Theatre of the Oppressed exercises were used to help 15 pre-service world language teachers from the U.S. address racialised discourses in education. Data was gathered through interviews and video recordings. The exercises started with various warming-up games. The teachers were then asked to identify stories in which they struggled as world language teachers. They performed their stories using Forum Theatre, through which they could rehearse alternative actions to change the course of the stories. This work form expanded teachers' sense of agency and provided them with options for actions in the future. The teachers also engaged in Rainbow of Desire, a theatre technique in which spect-actors physically represent every character's motivations in any moment in the interaction. This helped teachers to look at situations from the perspective of all people involved. The combination of these two forms of theatre created a shift from teachers' monochromatic perceptions to more nuanced and humanistic understandings.