Conceptualisations of empathy in K-12 teaching: A review of empirical research

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Abstract

The discourse on ideal teachers and teaching has recognised the importance of empathy. Despite the popularity of the concept in educational training and practice, research knowledge remains limited and fragmented. The present paper aims to analyse the empirical research on empathy in K-12 teaching. The search for empirical studies has yielded 28 articles, which were grouped according to four conceptualizations: empathy as a trait, empathy as a state, empathy as communication, and empathy as a relationship.

1. Introduction

Although the concept of empathy is widespread, research about it has been limited until the mid-1990s. Research interest in empathy was revived in the developmental and social psychology domains, fuelled largely by the general interest in "emotional intelligence" (Elliott et al. 2011). Since then, there has been a renaissance of empathy research, for example, in psychology (Zaki 2014) and medicine (Pedersen 2009), which only partly affected educational research. A synthesis of educational research knowledge on empathy specifically concerning teaching is missing.

Since the legitimisation and popularisation of the "multiple intelligences" and "emotional intelligence" models, in the 1990s, there has been vivid interest in the social and emotional skills of teachers, including teachers' empathy (Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson 1996; Sutton and Wheatley 2003). The importance of teachers' social and emotional skills, such as empathy, has received considerable validation with the introduction of the theory of "social and emotional learning" (Durlak et al. 2011). According to this theory, the development of students' social and emotional skills, including empathy and perspective taking, are considered key educational goals (Elias 1997), and it has been suggested that these skills affect not only students' academic success but also, in post-school life, the graduates' prospects and lifelong learning abilities (Zins 2004). Recently, even the OECD has acknowledged the value of policies that promote social and emotional learning in schools (OECD 2015). It appears, therefore, that the idea that teachers' empathy is vital for students' wellbeing and for developing their empathic abilities is becoming increasingly common. Thus, a synthesis of empirical knowledge on K-12 teachers' empathy is greatly needed.

The objective of the present research is to review and present earlier empirical findings on K-12 teachers' empathy. The findings were arranged according to four conceptualisations relevant to K-12 teaching that have been discussed in the literature: (a) empathy as a trait, (b) empathy as a state, (c) empathy as communication, and (d) empathy as a relationship.

2. Historical Developments in the Research of Empathy

The word "empathy" was coined a century ago, in 1909, by the psychologist Edward Titchener, as a translation of the German word "Einfühlung" (Wispé 1986), but the core ideas associated with the concept are as old as philosophical thought itself (Stotland et al. 1978). Discussions of empathy in the 20th century are rooted in psychological thinking and discourse. Carl Rogers's body of work, in the mid-20th century, brought the term to the attention of both psychotherapists and the general public (Duan and Hill 1996; Elliott et al. 2011). In a nutshell, Rogers, who belonged to the humanistic psychology stream, created grounded insights, based on his psychotherapeutic and counseling experience with clients, about empathy as a path to support the development of human potential (Gould 1990).

Elliott et al. (2011) pointed out that with the popularisation of the concept and with training aimed at developing empathy-related skills, a counter-reaction came about in the 1960s-1970s, manifested in increased criticism of the concept of empathy on the part of the academic community. Between 1975 and 1995 few research studies dealt with empathy (Watson 2001). Overviews of the concept critiqued empathy definition for lack of clarity, and noted the low agreement between researchers and the conflicting research outcomes (Moore 1990; Sexton and Whiston 1994). But

despite a period of academic skepticism toward the concept of empathy, it remained broadly embraced by professionals, particularly in the helping professions. For example, empathy sparked considerable interest among nurses, who found empathy-related ideas of care and understanding of patients highly appealing (Gould 1990). Empathy was similarly embraced in social work theory, practice, and research (Keefe 1976).

Empathy also found its way into education and teaching. Allen and Krasno (1968) suggested that "in viewing the teacher as a facilitator of learning, as Carl Rogers suggests, it becomes obvious that we must develop and encourage such personal attributes as realness, acceptance, and empathic understanding during the teacher training process" (39). Rogers himself promoted such a move in his lectures and writings. His most concerted effort to advance the popularity and legitimacy to empathy in education and teaching was in his book, "Freedom to learn: A view of what education might become," published in 1969. Rogers's writings elicited polarised opinions: while some criticised him for lack of educational background and knowledge in educational theory, others viewed his ideas as an extension of ongoing efforts (e.g., Perry 1965) to move from a "traditional" model of education to a "child-centred" one (Peters 1970). Rogers (1968/2001) promoted empathy as a revolutionary idea for teachers, arguing that it was no longer accurate to call those embracing it teachers: "They are catalyzers, facilitators, giving freedom and life and the opportunity to learn, to students" (38).

3. Conceptualisations of Empathy

Duan and Hill (1996) argued that there is a "diversity of the ways in which empathy is conceptualized," suggesting that "such diversity needs to be understood but not discouraged" (261). Thus, one way to conceptualise variety regarding empathy is to view it as related to different ontologies. For instance, the psychology literature often contrasts the concept of "empathy as a trait" with that of "empathy as a state" (Lennon, Eisenberg, and Carroll 1986). According to the "empathy as a trait" conceptualisation, empathy is an inborn, natural ability or tendency, which cannot be taught, but can be identified and strengthened (Alligood 1992). Empathic responses are virtually automatic, culturally conditioned rather than learned (Kunyk and Olson 2001). By contrast, according to the "empathy as a state" conceptualisation, empathy is a fluctuating ability, whose automatic activation is contingent upon situations that influence one's perception of another person's condition (Shen 2010). Hence, empathy is not dispositional but situational, as it is always associated with given circumstances and persons (Lennon et al. 1986).

In addtion to these basic ontological conceptualisations of empathy in the psychology literature, which focus primarily on empathy from an intra-person perspective (that of the emphthiser), two addational ontological conceptualisations emegre in the occuptional literature (health care and social work) that focus largely on empathy from an inter-person perspective. The latter often includes "empathy as a communication process" and "empathy as a relationship" (e.g., Forrester et al. 2008; Kunyk and Olson 2001; Lim, Moriarty, and Huthwaite 2011). The conceptualisation of "empathy as communication" suggests that empathy is a conversational process that involves a transmitter and a receiver. The transmitter not only perceives the partner's emotions but also reacts expressively in a verbal or nonverbal manner, and

the receiver perceives the transmitter's empathic response (Duan and Hill 1996). This approach emphasises a set of empathic practices that can be learned, their enactment in social interaction, and the target's perception of the transmitted empathy (Suchman et al. 1997). At the same time, according to the "empathy as a relationship" conceptualisation, empathy is part of an ongoing bond sustained over time, often involving social acceptance and some level of reciprocal sharing (Kerem, Fishman, and Josselson 2001). In this sense, empathic relationships have much broader implications, as they not only improve wellbeing but also serve as meaningful attachments, generate coping abilities, and empower individuals (Kunyk and Olson 2001).

Based on the educational literature, one can suggest that the four conceptualisations of empathy described above are often echoed in the discourse on teaching. The classic view of professionalism in education suggests that it is both a trait-like (natural) and a state-like (developing) characteristic (Sergiovanni 1992). For example, the discourse on teachers' professionalism associates empathy with character, particularly at the elementary level (Ben-Peretz 2002), suggesting that teacher selection processes should take into account their socio-emotional tendencies, such as empathy (Baker and Cooper 2005). At the same time, the literature associated teachers' empathy with one's control of empathic communication skills and with developing self-awareness and self-regulation that help navigate communication episodes successfully (Bierman, Carkhuff, and Santilli 1972). There is also a moral outlook on empathy in teaching, which places it in the context of a relational approach to ethics. For instance, Noddings (1984) regarded the carer's empathy (which she called engrossment) for the person cared for as necessary for gaining an understanding of the other person's needs. In this view, empathy is a deep

understanding of another person's emotional suffering, which results in taking responsibility and acting for the benefit of individuals in need (Noddings 2013).

3. Method

The present review used a qualitative thematic method based on directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This method is directly related to the main purpose of the research, which is to describe findings by the four conceptualisations of empathy. The non-automated literature search focused on identifying relevant empirical studies in educational research, that is, articles pertaining to the empathy of K-12 teachers based on the collection and analysis of data and published in educational journals. The manual literature scan was conducted through the ERIC database, with no limitation on the year of publication. ERIC is the most comprehensive database that covers strictly educational research, and it is frequently used as a data source in reviews in the field of education concerning K-12 (e.g., Leithwood and Jantzi 2009; Sirin 2005). The following combinations of keywords were used: empathy and teacher/s; empathy and teaching; empathic and teacher/s; empathic and teaching. Empathy-related keywords, such as compassion, care, and understanding were not included, not to bias the results toward any given conceptualisation. The searches produced 1,561 results.

Next, the documents were screened based on their abstracts, using the following criteria to determine whether or not a study falls within the scope of the present review: (a) only empirical studies were included in the review, that is, only research that according to the abstract appeared to use quantitative evidence, qualitative evidence, or mixed methods (theoretical studies, commentaries, and other

non-empirical research were omitted); (b) only studies that according to the abstract addressed K-12 teachers' empathy as a key concept, or in which empathy could have been a main component of the key concept discussed in the abstract (e.g., compassion) were selected;[1] (c) only peer-reviewed research was used. In other words, the review included only journals and doctoral dissertations[2] that were classified as peer-reviewed by ERIC.

At the next stage, the remaining 83 studies were scanned, and only those containing sufficient detail on method and results were included. This ensured that all the included studies provided details on the identity of participants and their selection, on the measures used to collect the data, and on strategies of analysis, and contained a detailed description of results in a manner that allowed to analytically identify and separate findings on K-12 teachers' empathy from other factors included in the results. The final corpus included 28 studies.

The review used the directed content analysis approach, in which initial conceptualisations serve as schemes guiding the analytical research (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This method is directly related to the main objective of the research, which is to use ontological conceptualisations as an organizing guide to describe findings on the empathy of K-12 teachers. Table 1 displays the coding scheme used in the analysis of the studies.

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[1] A few articles that did not include an abstract were read with the aim to determine their relevance.

[2] Although not all doctoral dissertations are peer-reviewed, the present study made sure to include only those published in the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database that professes that "[a]ll dissertations and theses [in the database] are peer-reviewed" (ProQues n.d., 2), and those conducted at leading universities, as indicated by common national and international rankings.

Table 1. Coding scheme

Theme	Content
Theme 1: Empathy as a trait	Definition: an inborn or/and highly stable ability applied universally across situations.
	(Representative terms used in association with empathy: differences, abilities, etc.).
Theme 2: Empathy as a state	Definition: a fluid ability that is contingently activated only in certain situations and/or with specific individuals.
	(Representative terms used in association with empathy: events, situations, types of teachers and students, teacher-student matching, etc.).
Theme 3: Empathy as communication	Definition: a conversational interaction in which teachers use effective communication skills to transmit verbal and/or non-verbal messages of responsiveness, which are received and processed by the other party. Teachers also use messages to cause the other party to adopt a sympathetic attitude.
	(Representative terms used in association with empathy: communication, information, feedback, listening, etc.)
Theme 4: Empathy as a relationship	Definition: an ongoing bond, inclusive and open in nature, which manifests in deep commitment to the other party's broader wellbeing.
	(Representative terms used in association with empathy: moral, profound, culturally diverse, suffering, etc.).

Table 2 presents the following details on all the reviewed studies: country, type and number of participants, research approach (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method), method/instrument used to measure empathy, and type of design (e.g., comparative, correlative, grounded theory, case study, etc.).

Table 2. Characteristics of the reviewed studies on teachers' empathy by theme.

Study	Country	Participants	Approach	Empathy Measurement	Design
Theme 1: Empathy as trait					
Arnon and Reichel (2007)	Israel	89 students in education degree programs	Mixed methods	- Open ended	P1: Content analysis P2: Comparative
Barr (2011)	USA	100 teachers	Quantitative	- IRI	Correlative
Brunel, Dupuy-Walker and Schleifer (1989)	Canada	34 teachers and 203 students	Quantitative	- Index of discrimination of empathy - Observations	Correlative
Goroshit and Hen (2016)	Israel	543 teachers	Quantitative	- IRI	Correlative
Huang, Li, Sun, Chen and Davis (2012)	China	930 teachers	Quantitative	- IRI	Scale translation study
Klis and Kossewska (1996)	Poland	98 teachers	Quantitative	- Emotional empathy scale - Empathetic Understanding	Comparative

				Questionnaire	
Stojiljkovi, Djigi, and Zlatkovi (2012)	Serbia	120 teachers	Quantitative	- Emotional quotient questionnaire	Correlative
				- Emotional empathy	
Stojiljković, Todorović, Đigić, and Dosković (2014)	Serbia	120 teachers	Quantitative	- Emotional quotient questionnaire	Correlative
				- Emotional empathy	
Waxman (1983)	USA	83 students	Quantitative	- Teacher empathy questionnaire	Correlative
Wróbel (2013)	Poland	168 teachers	Quantitative	Empathic sensitivity scale	Mediation analysis

Theme 2: Empathy as state

Brown (1980)	USA	535 students	Quantitative	- Empathy questionnaire	Experimental
Cunningham (1975)	USA	108 teachers and 715 students	Quantitative	Teacher empathy scale	Classification and correlative
Drevets, Benton, and Bradley (1996)	USA	561 students	Quantitative	- Barrett- Lennard Relationship Inventory	Comparative
Lippitz and Levering (2002)	Germany	One teacher	Qualitative	- Secondary data analysis	Phenomenology/ critical pedagogy
Tettegah &	USA	178 pre-service	Quantitative	- IRI	Vignette

Anderson (2007)		teachers		- Open responses	
Tettegah (2007)	USA	115 pre-service teachers	Quantitative	- IRI	Vignette
				- Open responses	

Theme 3: Empathy as communication

Black and Phillips (2010)	Australia	105 pre-service teachers	Quantitative	- Hoggin scale	Descriptive/ comparative
				- Cazela index communication	
Boyer (2010)	Canada	60 pre-service teachers	Qualitative	- Reflective essays	Grounded theory
Cunningham (2009)	England	4 teachers	Qualitative	- Interviews	Case study
				- Observations	
Motataianu (2014)	Romania	Unknown number of teachers	Quantitative	- Empathy questionnaire	Case study
Warren (2013)[a]	USA	4 white teachers and their black students	Qualitative	- Interviews	Phenomenology
				- Observations	
				- Focus group	
Warren (2014)[a]	USA	4 white teachers and their black students	Qualitative	- Interviews (IRI used to stimulate reflection)	Phenomenology
				- Observations	

Williams (2010)	USA	P1: 61 teachers P2: 10 teachers	Mixed methods	- Focus group - Teacher Level Empathy Scale - Students perception of care survey - Interviews - Observations	P1: Correlative P2: Phenomenology

Theme 4: Empathy as a relationship

Cooper (2004)	UK	16 teachers and pre-service teachers	Qualitative	- Interviews - Observations	Grounded theory
Cooper (2010)	UK	16 teachers and pre-service teachers	Qualitative	- Interviews - Observations	Grounded theory
McAllister and Irvine (2002)	USA	34 teachers	Qualitative	- Written documents - Interviews	Content analysis
Oplatka and Gamerman (2017)	Israel	14 teachers	Qualitative	- Interviews	Phenomenology
Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012)	USA	7 pre-service teachers	Qualitative	- Dialogue journals	Phenomenology
Warren (2013)[a]	USA	4 white teachers and their black students	Qualitative	- Interviews - Observations	Phenomenology

| Warren (2014)[a] | USA | 4 white teachers and their black students | Qualitative | - Interviews (IRI used to stimulate reflection) | Phenomenology |
| | | | | - Observations | |

Note. P = Phase; IRI = Interpersonal Reactivity Index. [a] indicates studies coded for more than one theme.

4. Results

The analysis clustered the empirical evidences into four conceptualizations: (a) empathy as a trait, (b) empathy as a state, (c) empathy as communication, and (d) empathy as a relationship.

4.1 Theme 1: Empathy as a trait

Studies belonging to the empathy as a trait theme adopted the idea that the empathy of K-12 teachers is inborn or highly stable ability, or both, and that it is applied universally across all situations. In the review of the literature, 10 studies (9 quantitative studies and 1 mixed-method study) pertaining to the theme of empathy as a trait were identified. In total, 2,168 teachers participated in 8 studies, 83 students participated in 1 study, and only one study included a sample of both teachers and students. Four studies attempted to infer about teachers' level of empathy. Stojiljković, Djigić, and Zlatković (2012) concluded that in general, teachers' empathy is high. Their average cognitive empathy (i.e., ability to understand others' emotions and identify socially appropriate emotional response) was 68.84, on a scale ranging from 22 to 88, and their average emotional empathy was 7.85, on a scale ranging from 1 to 10. Another study used data from other samples as reference points to better understand teachers' level of empathy. Huang et al. (2012) found that the teachers' scores (specifically those of the male teachers) on perspective taking (a form of cognitive empathy associated with understanding the situation from the other person's viewpoint) and empathic concern (a form of emotive empathy having to do with sensing emotions similar to those of someone in distress) were significantly higher than the scores of other groups (a sample of Internet users and prisoners). At the same

time, male teachers did not score higher on the personal distress (a negative self-focused affective reaction (e.g., anxiety) to another person's emotional state) than did the other groups. The researchers concluded that individuals attracted to teaching had an ideal personality and scored high on "good" aspects of dispositional empathy, but not on its "bad" aspect (i.e., personal distress), compared with the other groups.

Klis and Kossewska's (1996) study compared cognitive and emotional empathy among special education teachers (n=30) and teachers working in regular secondary education (n=68). The results indicated differences in empathy levels, with special education teachers scoring higher than teachers working in regular secondary education. Arnon and Reichel (2007) used open-ended questions distributed to 89 students of education (pre-service teachers and beginning teachers) in Israel, to glean their perceptions of what an ideal teacher is and what the respondents' self-image as teachers was. The findings indicated that in both groups, being "an empathic and attentive teacher" was the most prominent personality trait of the ideal teacher, noted by over 90% of participants. The researchers noted a large gap in the beginning teacher group between the ratio of participants who considered empathy to be central for an ideal teacher (94%), and those who considered it to be central in their self-image as teachers (53%).

Five studies addressed the links between teachers' empathy and their other self-concepts. For example, Stojiljković et al. (2014), investigated the self-perceptions of 120 Serbian teachers to ascertain how their cognitive empathy and emotional empathy on one hand, and self-concept (sense of competence, attractiveness, social value, self and intellectual confidence, etc.) on the other, are related. The results indicated that teachers' cognitive empathy correlated moderately with almost all dimensions of self-concept (0.25-0.42), whereas emotional empathy correlated

moderately with only half of the self-concept dimensions (global competence, social evaluation, and self-esteem, 0.24-0.32). Another study by Stojiljković, Djigić, and Zlatković (2012) sought to determine whether teachers' cognitive empathy and their emotional empathy (ability to enjoy others' emotions) were linked with their view of their roles (as information givers, motivators, evaluators, regulators of relations in the classroom, etc.). Moderate correlations (0.34-0.49) emerged between teachers' cognitive empathy and their views of teaching roles, and low correlations (0.14-0.23) between their emotional empathy and their views of teaching roles. The importance of teachers' empathy to their related self-concepts was also manifest in Goroshit and Hen's (2016) study, which included 543 Israeli teachers and explored the link between their self-efficacy and empathy, using self-report questionnaires. Results indicated that both types of self-efficacy (teacher and emotional) predicted empathy in teachers, but the contribution of teacher self-efficacy to explaining empathy was greater.

Teachers' empathy, however, appears to correlate not only with positive self-concepts and outcomes of teaching but also with negatives ones. Barr (2011) explored 100 teachers enrolled in graduate courses to investigate the link between their empathic abilities (perspective-taking and personal distress, reflected in self-focused emotional response, such discomfort or anxiety) and school culture. Results indicated that on one hand teachers' perspective-taking was positively related to student-peer relations, school norms, and educational opportunities, and on the other hand, teachers' personal distress was negatively associated with student-peer relations. Wróbel's (2013) study examined the mediated links between teachers' empathy and

their emotional exhaustion through emotional labour[3] (surface and deep acting, as well as positive and negative mood induction). The research included 168 Polish teachers. Results indicated that teachers' deep acting and negative mood induction were significant mediators in the relationship between their empathy and emotional exhaustion. The researcher argued that empathy and emotional labour play a role in the development of teacher burnout.

The search yielded two studies that addressed associations between teachers' empathy and students' attitudes and achievements. Brunel, Dupuy-Walker, and Schleifer (1989) explored the operational aspect of empathy by investigating the ability of 34 teachers to predict their students' responses on a self-concept test. The researchers concluded that highly empathic teachers overestimate their students' self-concept, whereas teachers showing low empathy underestimate it. Waxman (1983) studied 83 students in grades 3-8 to examine the link between teacher empathy and student motivation. The results indicated that teachers' empathy predicted students' academic self-concept and achievement motivation, controlling for students' *a priori* motivation.

4.2 Theme 2: Empathy as a state

Studies belonging to the empathy as a state theme adopted the idea that the empathy of K-12 teachers is a fluid ability that can be contingently activated only in certain situations or with specific individuals. The review found 6 studies (5 quantitative and 1 qualitative) related to empathy as a state. In all, 294 teachers participated in 3 studies, 1,096 students participated in 2 studies, and only one study included a sample of both teachers and students. Three studies explored situations in which teachers'

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[3] Emotional labour is an effortful process of managing internal feelings (i.e., deep acting) or external expressions (i.e., surface acting) to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job.

empathy is most valuable. Tettegah's research focused on teachers' empathy in situations of victim and perpetrator among students. Tettegah (2007) studied 115 pre-service teachers in the US using an animated narrative vignette (ANV) design aimed at exploring participants' reactions to vignettes portraying low-level student classroom aggression (name-calling, isolation, etc.). The results indicated that that only 25.6% of participants mentioned the victim in a concerned way. Tettegah and Anderson (2007) investigated empathy in 178 pre-service teachers (30% white Caucasian) using an experimental ANV design that described victim and perpetrator situations characterised by subtle racial discrimination and aggression among students. The participants' open-ended responses were numerically coded and analysed using statistical models. Findings indicated that the race of the victim and perpetrator in the vignette was not related to the level of empathy expressed by teachers. The authors also found that only 10% of pre-service teachers expressed a high level of empathy toward the victim.

Lippitz and Levering (2002) focused on the more ordinary but memorable situation of the first day of school. The authors investigated the teacher's welcoming talk to children and parents on the first day of school, using the descriptions in Combe's (1992) research. They adopted an alternative approach to the critical pedagogical analysis used by Combe to analyse the dynamic between teacher and children based on a phenomenological interpretation. Thus, they proposed not to consider the experience of strangeness between the children, parents, and teachers as a "destructive feature of socializing power practices," but as a "constitutive aspect of our social and corporeal being" (Lippitz and Levering 2002, 209). The researchers argued that the strangeness of the first day is temporary, and an empathic teacher promotes a loving atmosphere and intimate relations in the classroom, overcoming the

sociological hierarchical structure associated with the functional roles. The authors also contended that this compensating behaviour is related to the teacher's pedagogical ideal of what teaching is.

Three other studies examined the importance of teachers' empathy based on various student characteristics (e.g., gender, age, etc.) and the characteristics of teacher-student pairing. Cunningham (1975) explored how the benefit that kindergarten students derive from teachers' empathy differs as a function of their characteristics and those of their teachers. The researcher identified four types of students and four types of teachers, and discovered that a certain type of teacher was more effective (measured by success in math and language arts) with a certain type of student, indicating the importance of teacher-student matching. For example, a type of teacher whom Gunningham characterised as "inexperienced/student-centred/empathic" was most effective with students characterised as "young/advantaged" and least effective with students characterised as "introverted/disadvantaged/white/female."

Drevets, Benton, and Bradley (1996) studied the ratings of a parent and a teacher on the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory by 561 high school students in the 10-12 grades (using random assignment). The results indicated a gender similarity effect. For example, gender similarity was found among 12th-grade students, who rated same-gender teachers higher on warmth (i.e., expressed empathic concern). The study offers insights on the importance of teachers' empathy in certain periods during adolescence. For example, 10th-grade students perceived greater warmth from teachers than from parents, but 11th- and 12th-grade students perceived greater empathy from parents than from teachers.

Brown's (1980) vignette study manipulated student exposure to levels of teachers' empathy using four videotaped vignettes of teacher behaviours (three vignettes with varying degrees of teacher empathy based on differences in positive verbality, and a forth vignette featuring an unfair teacher). The research included 237 female and 298 male white middle-class students, and the researcher were particularly interested in understanding how grade/age and gender differences affect student responses ranking the videotaped teacher on empathy or fairness questionnaires. The study also found that younger students are more likely to view teachers as empathic, and that for these students, their view of the teacher's empathy is likely to affect their view of the teacher's fairness. The study also revealed that female students tended to rank the same teacher's empathy higher than did their male peers.

4.3 Theme 3: Empathy as communication

Studies belonging to the empathy as communication theme adopted the idea that the empathy of K-12 teachers is revealed in a conversational interaction, in which teachers use effectively communication skills to transmit verbal and non-verbal messages of responsiveness, which are received and processed by the other party, and that teachers use messages to cause the other party to adopt a sympathetic attitude. Seven studies (4 qualitative, 2 quantitative, and 1 mixed-method study) addressed the idea of empathy as a communication process. Altogether, 230 teachers participated in 5 studies, and two studies included a sample of both teachers and students. Three studies investigated the use of empathic communication skills by teachers in pedagogical interactions. Cunningham (2009) conducted a case study research aimed at exploring the beliefs of four history teachers in England about historical empathy, and how they cultivate it among students in their classrooms. The accounts of teachers

revealed that there was a tension between their efforts to cultivate the understanding

of students about how historical figures or groups felt about events, and other teaching

goals they were required to achieve. Warren (2013, 2014) studied empathy in an

urban and multicultural context, specifically in the classroom communications of four

white female high school teachers with their black male students. Findings suggest

that two stages are needed for empathy to serve professional teaching in an urban and

multicultural environment: first, the teacher must acquire new information about the

student's perspective using cognitive empathy; and second, the teacher must tactically

negotiate the information and understand the student's feedback. This use of empathy

enables teachers to perform needed pedagogic adjustments in future student-teacher

interactions.

Three studies explored the development of teachers' empathic communication

skills. Boyer's (2010) grounded theory study investigated the reflective essays of 60

pre-service teachers participating in a training program, which emphasised the naïve

learner perspective and included a mentorship component. The analysis of the

participants' reflective accounts produced a developmental model of how future

teachers develop their empathic teaching personas. Study results seem to indicate that

pre-service teachers develop a growing recognition that they needed to be empathic

toward students, cultivate their emotion recognition ability, understand empathy in the

context of other professional demands, and engage in discussion with the aim of

actively resolving tensions between empathy and professional demands.

Motataianu (2014) briefly outlined her personal experience in academic

training of teachers focused on developing their empathy and communication skills.

The training included ten 2-hour sessions and addressed, among others, the

communicative ability of active listening and empathy. Motataianu found that these

skills have a native basis, but argued that they can be built by learning, particularly through mentoring, with the mentor's use of empathy and communication skills developing these aspects in teachers. The author reported that the questionnaire at the end of the training indicated an increase in teachers' awareness of empathy and communications skills, as well as their emphasis on communication and effective use of empathy in their teaching practices. Black and Phillips (1982) explored the effect of an intervention program aimed at developing empathic skills of 105 pre-service Australian teachers. Results indicated a significant improvement in pre-service teachers' communicated empathy. Male pre-service teachers improved more than females in empathic understanding. The authors also found that students with high initial authoritarian inclination showed less improvement in empathic understanding.

Only one study addressed the communicated empathy in teacher-student interactions. Williams's (2010) mixed-method study explored empathy in US teachers both quantitatively and qualitatively. Regression analysis suggested a significant correlation between teachers' self-reported empathy and students' perceived teacher care. The qualitative phase included interviewing ten female high school teachers identified as having high empathic communication skills, and observing their classes. The analysis suggested that, among others, prior life experiences, experiences as a parent, and mentor-teacher interactions were perceived as contributing to developing empathic communication skills.

4.4 Theme 4: Empathy as a relationship

Studies belonging to the empathy as a relationships theme adopted the idea that the empathy of K-12 teachers is an ongoing bond that is inclusive and open in nature, and is manifested in deep commitment to the other party's broader wellbeing. The review

identified 7 qualitative studies concerning empathy as a relationship. Overall, 87 teachers participated in 5 studies, and two studies included a sample of both teachers and students. One research attempted to shed light on the meaning of empathy as a relationship. Oplatka and Gamerman's (2017) qualitative study explored 14 teachers' views on "compassion" in teaching. The researchers defined compassion to include empathy (Oplatka and Gamerman 2017). The accounts of the teachers, who were pre-identified by peers as highly compassionate, indicated that compassion contains several components: (a) attention to the other's suffering, (b) empathic concern for the person in need, and (c) acts aimed at relieving suffering. Some teachers viewed the teachers' compassionate actions as an extension of their empathic concern for students' emotions or wishes, whereas others considered them to be related primarily to the students' best interests, independently of the students' emotions or wishes.

Two studies by Cooper addressed the constraints on promoting empathy as a relationship in teaching, and sought to determine its frequency. Cooper (2004) explored the role of empathy in teacher-student relations and its significance for moral modeling. The qualitative study used interviews and classroom observations to investigate 16 teachers and pre-service teachers in the UK, who were pre-identified as empathic. Findings indicated that despite teachers' wish to support and care for students, time pressures due to rigid curriculum and difficult working conditions (bureaucracy and teacher-student ratio) constrained their ability to be caring. The researcher interpreted this account as reflecting a greatly constraining situation, caused by economic and competitive pressures on schools, leading teachers to act in opposition to their moral outlook and to show low care. In the policy and management context described by the study, school working conditions have a hindering effect on the empathy teachers showed toward their students.

Cooper (2010) interviewed and observed 7 teachers and 9 pre-service teachers, preselected for their empathy, seeking to understand the nature of empathy in learning relationships, and its influence on teachers' moral modeling in a state educational setting. Findings indicated four types of empathy present in teacher-student relationships: fundamental, functional, profound, and feigned. Functional empathy was most frequently used by teachers, routinely in large groups, but it had negative consequences for moral modeling and learning relationships. Profound empathy was rarer, emerging in close and everyday interactions with students, and it offered the most favorable consequences for moral modeling and learning relationships. The researcher argued that the economic logic governing the design of state education, particularly large classes, hinders the development of profound empathy in teacher-student relationships.

Four research studies addressed empathy as a relationship when teaching (or training to teach) in diverse socio-cultural settings. McAllister and Irvine (2002) sought to describe the beliefs of 34 teachers regarding the role of empathy in working effectively with culturally diverse students. The content analysis of teachers' documents indicated that they considered empathy to be part of a caring, supporting, and responding teaching style, and described empathic disposition as motivating a supportive classroom climate and student-centred practices. The analysis also acknowledged the value of professional development that includes cross-cultural simulations to develop pre-service teachers' empathic dispositions and behaviours toward culturally diverse students. Warren (2013, 2014) examined teachers' empathy as culturally responsive teaching, focusing on the student-teacher interactions of four white female teachers and their black male students. Results suggested that empathy assisted teachers in achieving instructional flexibility and taking risks, enabled them

to build trust in their relationships with students, and enabled them to be proactive in making sure that students meet high academic expectations.

Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012) explored the effects of a study-abroad program. The four-week program included 7 future teachers. The course incorporated dialogue journals in which students reflected on cultural and linguistic transitions, which were somewhat similar to the experiences of immigrant students. The analysis of the dialogue journals indicated mixed outcomes regarding the students' ability to develop "critical cultural awareness" following the course. On one hand, students' expressions of critical cultural awareness were minimal in their journals, and did not attest to deep reflection on unjust power structures. On the other hand, some students acknowledged their limitations in truthfully identifying with the circumstances of other people, imagined their future roles as agents of change, and addressed the issue of how the course experiences would influence their teaching practices.

5. Limitations and future research

The purpose of this review was to investigate the empirical evidence on empathy in K-12 teaching, using ontological conceptualisations as an organizing guide. Several of shortcomings need to be acknowledged. First, the qualitative nature of the analysis and synthesis requires decisions about the thematic ontological meaning of the studies reviewed, which in some cases could be debated or challenged. Second, the review reflected a broad range of concepts used in the study of K-12 teachers' empathy such as teacher-student interaction and student-centered learning. These may be regarded as either different phenomena or as similar ideas whose terminology evolved over time. This review chose to adhere to the original terminology of the authors, but

different inferences based on these concepts are possible, and may alter some of the conclusions drawn in this study. Third, the review did not account for the manner in which differences in data sampling affected the robustness of the findings concerning each theme. For example, the studies associated with theme 1 included over two thousand participants, whereas theme 3 included fewer than three hundred. Setting these limitations aside, the present review study marks a fundamental step in promoting knowledge on empathy in K-12 teaching and will be instrumental in guiding future research on the topic.

The studies included in this review indicate that educational researchers apply different ontological conceptualizations when exploring K-12 teachers' empathy, such as (a) empathy as a trait, (b) empathy as a state, (c) empathy as communication, and (d) empathy as a relationship.

5.1 Empathy as a trait: Synthesis of evidence and future research

A synthesis of the findings on empathy as a trait suggests that teachers have high empathic traits (Stojiljković et al. 2012) compared with other groups (Huang et al. 2012). This is particularly valid for "good" dispositions, such as perspective taking and empathic concern (Huang et al. 2012). Among teachers, those in special education have the highest empathic traits (Klis and Kossewska 1996). There is broad consensus among teachers about the need for high empathic traits. A lack of the adequate natural empathy needed for teaching is part of the beginning teacher's experience (Arnon and Reichel 2007). It is not surprising, therefore, that teachers' empathic dispositions are positively related to their self-concepts, views of teaching roles, and teaching self-efficacy (Goroshit and Hen 2016; Stojiljković et al. 2012; Stojiljković et al. 2014).

Teachers' empathic dispositions seem to be best expressed in the context of a positive

school climate, where norms, educational opportunities, and student-peer relations are

dominant (Barr 2011). At the same time, highly empathic teachers experience

emotional exhaustion (Wróbel 2013). The results concerning the abilities of teachers

with high empathic dispositions are mixed: some findings suggest that they can more

accurately estimate students' academic self-concept and motivations (Waxman 1983),

others that they overestimate them (Brunel et al. 1989).

As noted above, this review was aimed, among others, to guide future research

on empathy. To this end, the review outlined several paths for future research

regarding empathy as a trait, which were found lacking in the present review. First, in

view of the fact that the organizational literature acknowledges the importance of

attraction, selection, and attrition processes in cultivating person-organization fit

(Schneider 1987), there is a need to explore teacher education candidates' initial

levels of empathy, school hiring procedure, and criteria regarding empathy, and how

beginning teachers with different levels of empathy cope and persist in schools.

Second, the lack of evidence on the effects of teachers' empathy on students' social

and emotional learning is puzzling, given that the link between the two is obvious and

has to do with the development of the students' empathic dispositions (Elias 1997).

Therefore, future research on this topic is recommended.

5.2 Empathy as a state: Synthesis of evidence and future research

A synthesis of the findings on empathy as a state suggests that teachers' empathy is

most valuable in emotionally charged situations, both ordinary and unordinary. An

ordinary situation is the first day of school, when teachers' empathy serves to

overcome the structural strangeness caused by the social roles of teachers, students, and parents (Lippitz and Levering 2002). Unordinary situations in which teachers' empathy is valuable are aggressive incidents between students, particularly when they occur against a racial background (Tettegah 2007; Tettegah and Anderson 2007). In these situations few teachers appear to have expressed a high level of empathy toward the victim, although it was clear who the victim was. The findings also showed the importance of differences in teachers' empathy based on student characteristics (age and gender) and on the characteristics of teacher-student pairing. Teachers' empathy is most valuable for young students and early adolescents, when empathic teachers are viewed as being warm and fair (Brown 1980; Cunningham 1975). Research also revealed gender effects, with female students found to rank teacher's empathy higher than male students (Brown 1980), and empathy ranked higher in same-gender teacher-student pairs (Drevets et al. 1996).

The above synthesis highlights several promising paths for future research regarding empathy as a state. First, there is a need for additional research on emotionally charged situations in schools and on how teachers identify them. Earlier research suggests that emotions are overlooked, possibly because of the teachers' role and self-view as insiders (Williams et al. 2008). Second, the review points out the need for further research on teachers' socialization in schools. Socialization leads to embeddedness in a given context and to becoming committed to its roles, tasks, and values of the context (Allen 2006). The dominant economic logic in the current schooling model, prevalent particularly in the West, may affect teachers' initial empathic inclinations.

5.3 Empathy as communication: Synthesis of evidence and future research

The evidence suggests that some structured development initiatives may assist teachers in advancing their empathic communication skills. Findings indicate that development and training programs enhance teachers' empathic skills, including awareness of the importance of empathy, improving emotion recognition ability, expressing empathy, and managing empathy in a professional context (Black and Phillips 1982; Boyer 2010; Motataianu 2014). Successful initiatives often incorporate mentors with high empathic communication skills as role models who are instrumental in the development process (Boyer 2010; Motataianu 2014; Williams 2010). Development initiatives appear to be more effective for individuals with low authoritarian tendencies, specifically males (Black and Phillips 1982). Teachers' self-evaluation of their own empathic skills is related to the students' sense of care by teachers (Williams 2010). Teachers' empathic communication skills can be used as a pedagogical instrument to foster better understanding of alternative viewpoints in students, but such endeavours are time-consuming and conflict with other demands (Cunnigham 2009). Teachers' empathic communication skills can also be used to bridge socio-cultural divides between teachers and students (Warren 2013, 2014).

There are several paths for future research regarding empathy as a communication process, which were found lacking in the present review. First, the exploration of teachers' empathic communication currently rests heavily on self-reports. There is a pressing need to explore empathic skills and behaviours in an unbiased manner, using observational designs (e.g., Bylund and Makoul 2005). Second, additional information is needed about training aimed at developing teachers' empathic communication skills. Specifically, we need investigations of empathy-related simulations, because the relevance of lifelike simulations is highly debated in

the research community, and therefore it is unclear whether insights derived from simulations are useful (Teherani, Hauer and O'Sullivan 2008). Third, the investigation of empathy as a pedagogical tool can be particularly helpful in situations of deep social conflict because critical instruction in these settings is emotionally charged (Zembylas 2013).

5.4 Empathy as a relationship: Synthesis of evidence and future research

The evidence suggests that empathy in the context of relationships is viewed by some teachers as an extension of empathic concern for the student, and by others as linked the students' best interests, regardless of their emotions and desires (Oplatka and Gamerman 2017). Findings attested to the difficulty of developing and sustaining profound empathy in teacher-student relationships, and identified class size and economic pressure on school organizations as key factors hindering teachers' efforts to develop profound empathy and intimate relationships with students (Cooper 2004, 2010). Empathy as a relationship was recognized as particularly important when teaching in diverse sociocultural settings (McAllister and Irvine 2002), particularly, when the teachers are external to the sociocultural context. Adopting the view of empathy as a relationship was reported to enable teachers to develop interpersonal trust, take risks with students, and set high expectations for them (Warren 2013, 2014). Training that focused on cultivating critical cultural awareness and reflection enabled pre-service teachers to be more empathic toward students, at the same time acknowledging the limitations of their empathy resulting from the fact that they are outsiders (Palmer and Menard-Warwick 2012).

This synthesis indicates several promising paths for future research regarding empathy as a relationship. First, empathy as a relationship may be more important to certain student groups, such as those with emotional and behavioural disorders (Mihalas et al. 2009). Further investigation of teachers' empathic relations with such students is recommended. Second, there is a need to examine how training may cultivate teachers' motivation to pursue empathy in relationships. For example, earlier research on the effectiveness of diversity courses suggests that a single course may be insufficient (Bowman 2010). Third, it may be extremely valuable to explore students' views about the bridges and barriers (see McHugh et al. 2013) that can shape their empathic relations with teachers.

6. Concluding Remarks

The centrality of empathy in teaching has been widely embraced by educators as well as by thinkers, who viewed it as fundamentally linked with teachers' professionalism and morality (e.g., Noddings 1984, 2013; Sergiovanni 1992). This has led to the popularity of the concept of empathy in both K-12 teachers' training and practice. In the last decades, however, the educational research on K-12 teachers' empathy has been limited and fragmented. This article sought to integrate the empirical findings produced to date on the topic of K-12 teachers' empathy using ontological conceptualisations as an organizing guide. The review is an important step forward in K-12 teachers' empathy research. On one hand, it sheds light on existing insights into teachers' empathy; on the other, it illuminates "blind spots" in the present knowledge. Therefore, the review can drive evidence-based practice and motivate future research. The small number of studies conducted so far on K-12 teachers' empathy demonstrates yet again the gap between research and practice. Additional research on

K-12 teachers' empathy can initiate a dialog between researchers and practitioners, which is missing in the educational community.

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