WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EMPOWER TEACHERS?

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Does empowerment sometimes feel like this?

TODAY

Curriculum – concepts and practices

Empowerment through the lens of teacher agency

Developing teacher agency

SCOTLAND'S CURRICULUM (FOR EXCELLENCE)

https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/

1. It is a single point of entry – a one-stop shop – for relevant documentation to guide schools as they develop their curricula.

2. It offers a process for engaging with CfE, structured around <u>why</u> questions, <u>what</u> questions and <u>how</u> questions.

EDUCATION?

What <u>knowledge, skills, attitudes and values</u> will today's students need to <u>thrive and shape</u> their world?

How can instructional systems <u>develop</u> these <u>knowledge, skills, attitudes and values</u> effectively?

(OECD, 2018, my emph.)

Grounded in <u>why</u> questions?

- What is education <u>for</u> at this stage?
- <u>Environmental</u> (e.g. sustainability), <u>Economic</u> (e.g. world of work, financial), <u>Social</u> (e.g. aging, migration, critical citizenship)
- The need to build critical reflexivity (as opposed to actions being habitual)

WHAT IS THE CURRICULUM?

A product?

- Glossy booklets – green folders
- Lists of content

Everything planned in schools?

- 'the totality of all that is planned for children and young people throughout their education' (Scottish Government, 2008).

Or practices?

- 'The <u>multi-layered</u> social practices, including infrastructure, pedagogy and assessment, through which education is structured, enacted and evaluated' (Priestley, 2019).

CURRICULUM MAKING

Curriculum not a product which needs to be delivered or implemented.

Instead, something that <u>happens</u> – or which is done – differentially across different layers of the education system, as the curriculum is [re]<u>made</u> in different institutional settings.

'Building the curriculum'

NEED TO CONSIDER

Questions relating to curriculum <u>for what</u>, b<u>y whom</u> … and <u>for whom</u>?

Other curricular practices – pedagogy, assessment, provision

The necessity of considering context, including the 'hidden curriculum', when engaging in local curriculum making.

The importance of teacher professional development – no curriculum development without teacher development (Stenhouse, 1975).

The role of system dynamics as barriers to and drivers of curriculum making.

The perspectives and experiences of traditionally marginalised groups.

<u>**These are all questions that place the teacher at the heart of curriculum making**</u>

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES

'Teachers matter' – the rhetoric

- Curriculum policy – teachers as 'agents of change'
- School autonomy
- Teacher empowerment – the empowered school/system

But what does it all mean?

Are we also witnessing a changing practice?

- From de-professionalisation to re-professionalisation?
- A genuine enhancement of teacher agency?

EMPOWERMENT

Devolution of power, or just responsibility?

Just another slogan, or a clear concept?

Is empowerment about:

- Governance from a distance, outcomes steering, personal responsibility and self-regulation?
- Subsidiarity – delegation of authority, decision making where it makes most sense?

If the latter, how do we promote/support it?

BUT…..

A 'giving with one hand and taking away with the other' (Leat, 2014).

Reduction in <u>input</u> regulation accompanied by increasing <u>output</u> regulation:
- External inspections, local authority audits.
- Frameworks of performance indicators.
- Measurement of performance by attainment data.
- Insight tariff points

Potential for perverse incentives:
- 'Play the game' (Gleeson & Gunter, 2001).
- Fabrication of the school's image (Keddie et al., 2011).
- Concealing 'dirty laundry' (Cowie et al., 2007).
- Tactical and even cynical compliance

TEACHER AGENCY

A new term/concept:

- In scholarly writing
- In policy

But how do we prevent it becoming yet another slogan:

- Obsession of the year, 2017

Need for clear conceptualisation

- What is it?
- How do we develop/support it?
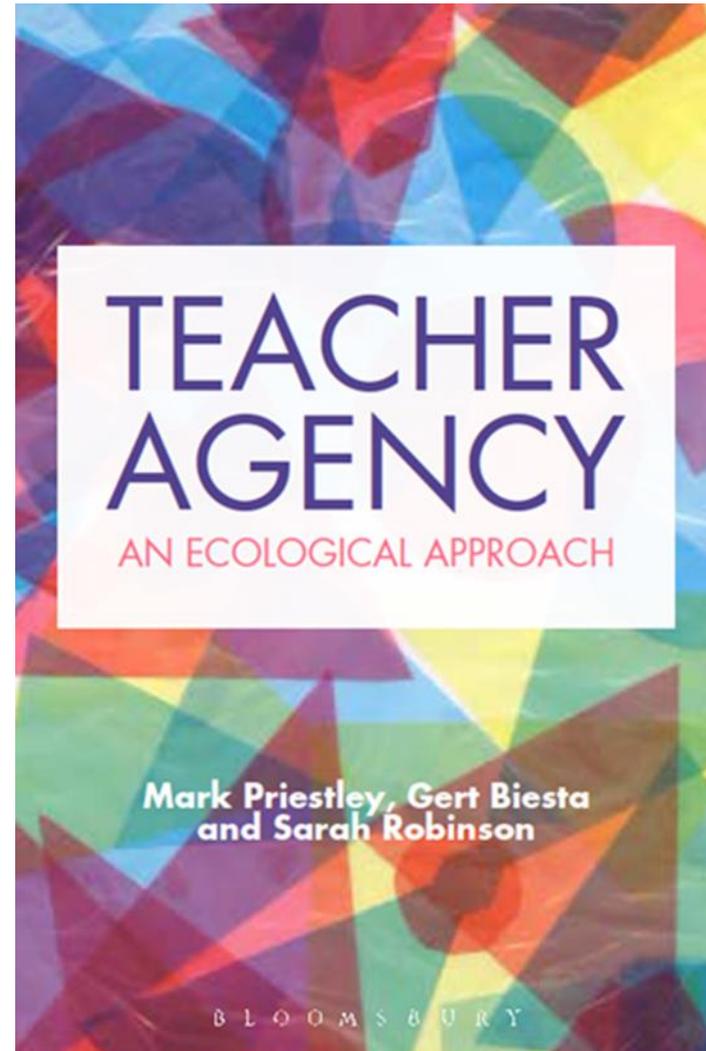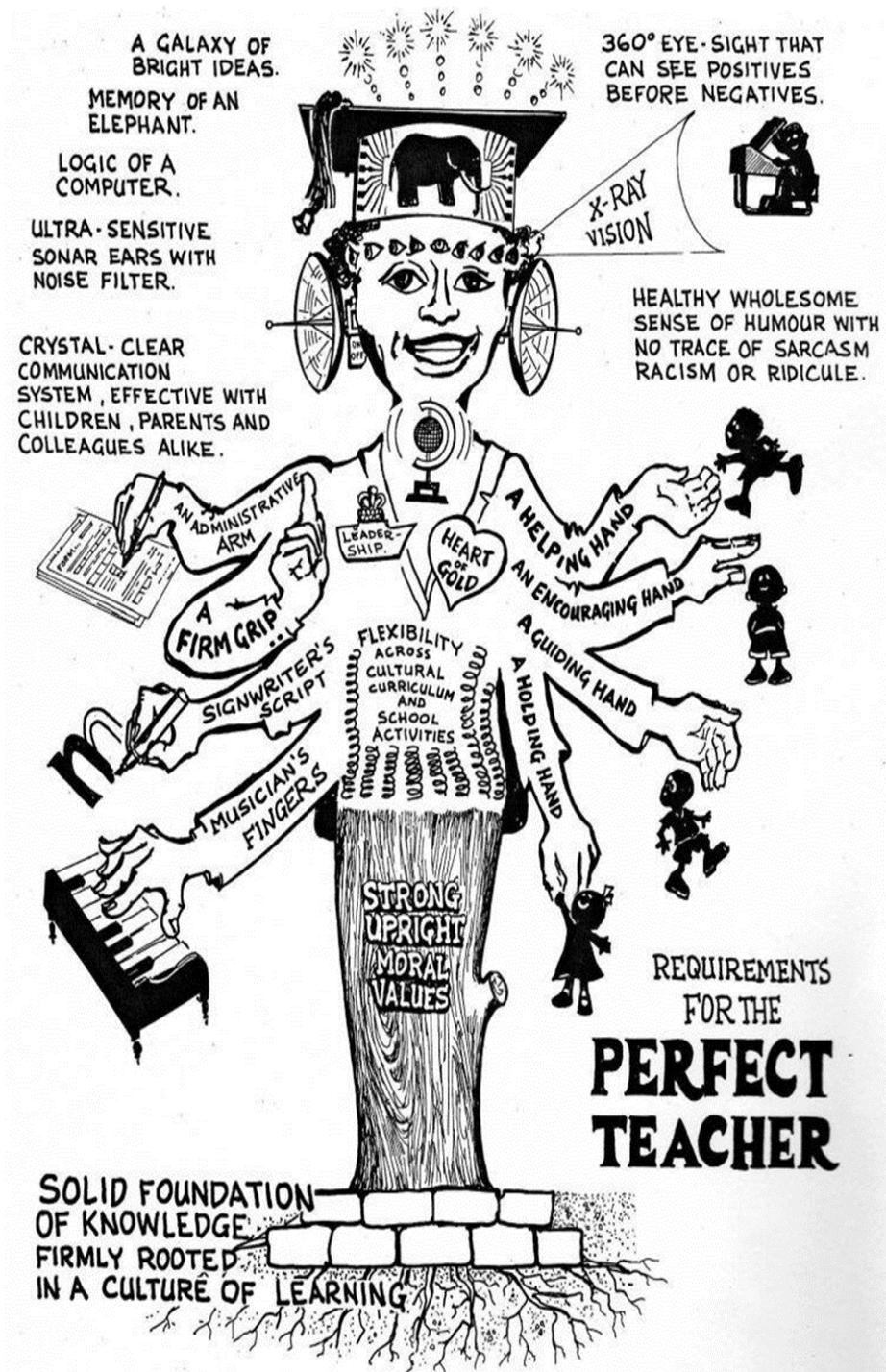
- Are these the right attributes?
- What is missing? What is wrong with this?
- What resources do teachers need?
- What support/protection to teachers need?

TEACHER AGENCY

Requires teachers who:

- Can take the initiative – the activist professional
- Have expansive educational aspirations
- Are able to work collegially

Teacher capacity is therefore important

- But we also need to address the cultural and structural domains of teaching
- A context for teaching that does not disable excellent teachers
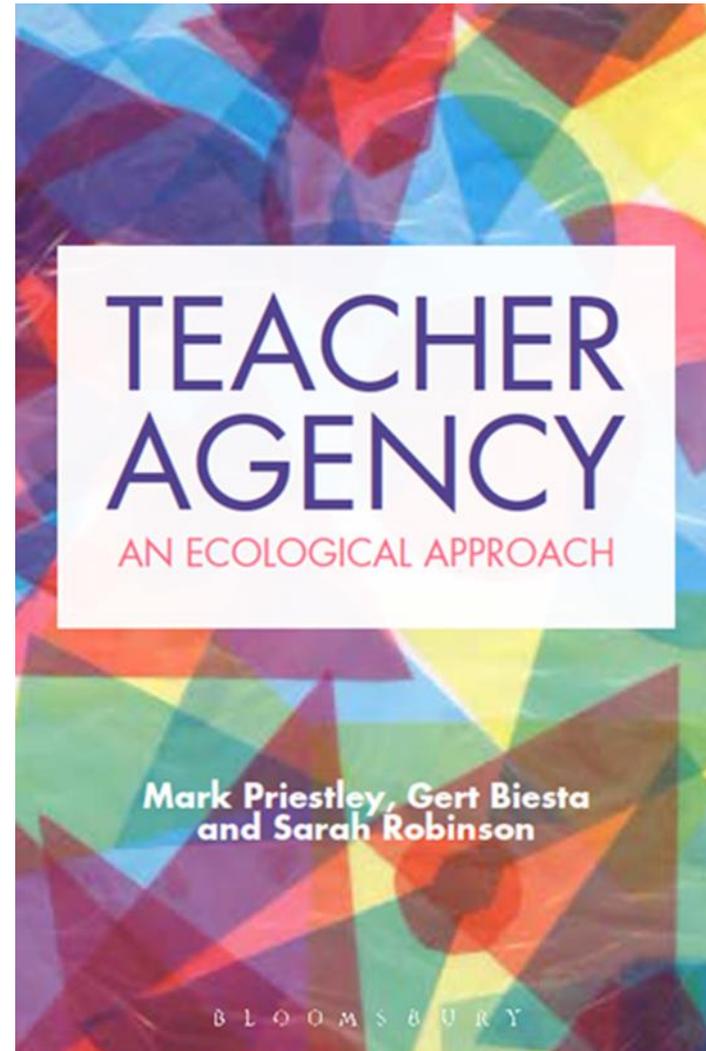
WHAT IS AGENCY?

Agency: the ability to critically shape one's responses to complex situations
- Decision and judgement
- Manoeuvre between repertoires
- The ability to do otherwise

An <u>ecological</u> view of agency
- Not something people have, but something that people do;
- Outcome of the interaction of individual **and** social/material environment

The question is therefore:
- Not: What is an agentic individual?
- But: How is agency achieved?

TEACHER AGENCY MODEL
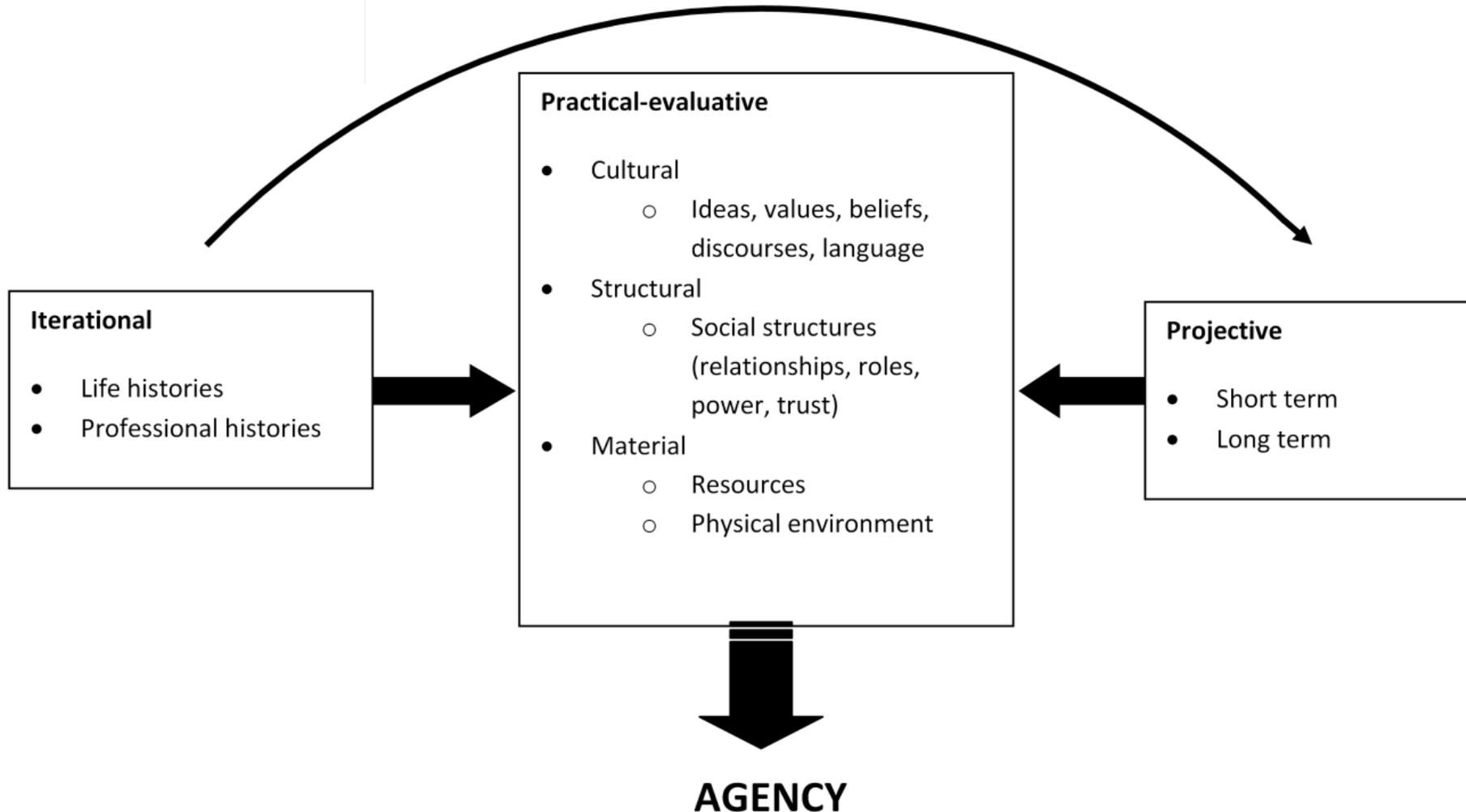
IMPORTANT!

The importance of context:
- Over-emphasis on the individual
- More attention needed on cultural and structural domains for action

Agency is more than going with the flow – e.g. to be a change agent in line with prevailing orthodoxies.

Autonomy is not the same as agency:
- Prescription (output or input) can reduce agency
- So can a laissez-faire environment
- Well-constructed policy can offer affordances for teacher agency – through impetus, permissions, cultural/cognitive resources etc.

HOW DO WE BOOST TEACHER AGENCY?

Individual/cultural

- Sense-making opportunities
- Technical skills (e.g. teaching methodologies)
- Developing a language for critical engagement
- Future orientation

Structural/cultural

- Auditing the school context
- Relational resources, spaces for generative dialogue
- Clear processes for innovation and engagement – collaborative professional enquiry
- Good leadership – approachable, facilitative, protective, trusting

[COLLECTIVE] SENSE-MAKING

New curricula are <u>different</u>

- New terminology and concepts
- New theories of knowledge and learning
- Potential for misconception

Educational change is <u>complex</u> – and often superficial and/or unsuccessful

- 'Schools change reforms as much as reforms change schools' (Cuban 1998) – teachers mediate change

Sense-making takes <u>time</u>

- Need to build understanding of concepts and purposes, and clear vision
- Need to see how new policy is different and how if may result in different practices
- Avoid the 'activity trap'

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Teaching methods
- Cooperative learning
- Formative assessment
- Inquiry-based learning

Important, but:
- Understood? Or box-ticking?
- Fit-for -purpose? Or off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all approaches

A LANGUAGE FOR CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT
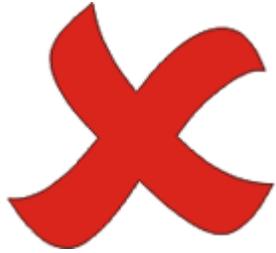
Applying the language of new policy to existing practice

Partial understandings of new terms – active learning, formative assessment

Policy-speak rather than educational language

Educational concepts

Educational values

Framed in educational language

Developed through reading, study and dialogue

FUTURE ORIENTATION

High levels of professionalism and technical expertise in schools

But the orientation can bebe short term:

- Getting through the day
- Raising attainment
- Limited future imaginary

3 levels of professional responsibility (Salomon, 1992)

- A proper carrying out of role as teacher
- Responsibility for learning processes and outcomes.
- Selection of method and content in the light of normative and moral criteria. This responsibility is about 'giving serious consideration to the desirable and less desirable long-term effects of the constantly improvised learning environment' (p46).

BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

Material – e.g. classrooms, department location

Structural – e.g. timetabling, spaces for dialogue, accountability systems

Cultural – e.g. dominance of existing subjects, teacher education, language/discourses, tradition

Address barriers, strengthen drivers

RELATIONAL RESOURCES

Four teachers working in two secondary schools – remarkably similar.

- Largely explained by their common experiences (in terms of their own education, their aspirations and the wider discourses that frame their work).

However, they achieve agency very differently.

Difference lies in characteristics of their working environments, particularly relationships experienced.

HILLVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

Relationships limited in nature and scope

- Structures tended to be vertical – whole school dissemination and within faculty
- Few opportunities for dialogue in meetings
- Focus on routine business, not curriculum development
- Disappearance of peer-observation
- Limited opportunities to work across faculties – tended to be informal and ad hoc

LAKESIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Strong collegial culture

Leaders supportive of risk taking

High levels of trust – reciprocal

Informal relationships across faculties

Formal relational structures across faculties (peer observation)
- 'Some have just come about accidentally. But some have come about because of those meetings that we had.'

External links

RELATIONSHIPS

Dimensions to relationships which impact on teachers' achievement of agency

- *Orientation* – i.e. horizontal or vertical
- *Symmetry*
- *Reciprocity*
- *Formality*
- *Strength*
- *Frequency*
- *Span*

At Lakeside, the existence of relatively reciprocal, symmetrical relationships with a horizontal orientation seemed to generate a collaborative culture where strong, frequent, and informal teacher working was able to flourish.

CRITICAL COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL ENQUIRY

University/Local Authority partnership (Priestley & Drew, 2019).

- Making sense of the big ideas of new curriculum policy.
- Consideration of fit-for-purpose practices.
- Input of cultural resources (research literature, etc.).
- Peer support/mentors.
- Teacher-led innovation.

Capacity development (EAS SE Wales/FV&WL RIC) for future CCPE leadership

CCPE AND TEACHER AGENCY

Individual

- Enhanced professional knowledge
- Changed dispositions to practice
- Professional confidence
- More expansive and varied aspirations

Cultural/structural

- Less hierarchical ways of working
- Mitigation of risk
- Enhanced relational resources

Sustainable engagement with curriculum policy and emerging changes to school practices

DEVELOPING TEACHER AGENCY

Government
- Formulation of policy that facilitates and provides resources
- Avoidance of conflicting demands on school leaders and practitioners
- Identification of processes

Agencies
- High quality CPD – participative, not something done to teachers
- Provision of leadership and expertise
- An infrastructure for curriculum making – spaces, connections, resources

School leaders
- Creating and sustaining a vision
- Creating dialogic spaces and communication channels
- Provision of external resources – research, visiting speakers, external links
- Encouragement of risk-taking and innovation – support, permission, protection
- Minimising bureaucracy

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