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A model for study of teacher agency for social justice

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Introduction

Calls to develop teachers as 'agents of change' have become common in policies and literature worldwide, often linked to the agendas of social justice (Florian, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 2009). In Scotland, for example, a recent review of teacher education *Teaching Scotland's Future* (TSF) has established that teachers are to be prepared for their roles of 'prime agents' of educational change (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 4). In this landscape it becomes essential, equally for policy makers, teachers and those who educate them, to clarify the meaning of teachers' agency for change. What kind of change are teachers expected to contribute to? What are the conditions supportive of their individual and collective acting and development as agents of change? Can professional agency manifest itself in resistance to as well as acceptance of change directions defined in policies?

Empirical evidence about the ways in which teacher agency operates in schools and beyond is scant, partly due to the lack of conceptual clarity about the nature and purpose of teacher agency and change. Empirical analyses of teacher agency require an articulation of the purpose and content of such agency, which could then help us specify appropriate units of analysis and generate hypothesis based on the insights provided by previous research.

This paper presents a model for the study of teacher agency focusing on its contribution to greater social justice as a prominent idea of educational changes in many Western countries (see e.g. European INCLUDE-ED Report, 2009; Sachs, 2003; Zeichner, 2009). Although social justice is widely promoted, it might be one thing to agree about its value as a desirable aim in education, but quite another to agree what justice actually means (Carr, 2003) or what it means in different cultures, or for different students in different circumstances (Campbell, 2004). In Scotland, for example, significantly lower educational outcomes of children and young people from the least advantaged backgrounds than of those of the most advantaged (OECD, 2007) is seen as one of the major injustices to be addressed by teachers. The TSF review suggests that among other knowledge and skills, 'all new teachers should be confident in their ability to address underachievement, including the potential effects of social disadvantage' (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 36). In this context, we regard addressing exclusion and underachievement by extending what is ordinarily available to create learning opportunities for all children (Ainscow, 2005; Florian, 2009) as the substance of teacher agency for social justice. The model takes into account a variety of possible interpretations and enactments of the principles of social justice by allowing for exploration of teachers' own sense of purpose as agents and understanding of social justice.

Specifying social justice as the desired direction of teacher agency enables the use of relevant research evidence to identify appropriate variables that might constitute different aspects of teacher agency and potential factors that support or impede such agency. For example, there is overwhelming evidence about the powerful role teachers play in students' learning by maintaining high expectations for all students and developing positive relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2009). The proposed model draws on research findings to identify potential variables related to teachers' espoused and practiced competence as agents of social justice.

As will be shown later, the model also recognises that teachers' exercise of their agency is highly relational and context-contingent rather than a matter of 'application' of the knowledge generated by research. The way teachers act in a particular environment is likely to result from complexly interdependent relations of their personal and professional beliefs and dispositions, degrees of autonomy and power, and interactions with other actors within the social contexts in which they work. The model adopts a socio-cultural perspective of professional agency which sees agents as embedded in their contextual conditions, yet capable of transforming these conditions (Edwards, 2007; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013; Lasky 2005). The aim of the study of teacher agency for social justice is to explore how these interdependences play out in teachers' engagement, in their schools and beyond, in practices aimed at transforming the situations of exclusion and underachievement of some learners.

This paper presents a conceptual model that articulates the components and potential factors that influence teacher agency for social justice as units of analysis that could be subject to empirical analysis in future research. Simultaneous study of agents' sense of purpose, competence and contexts can help us understand their complex interactions and mutual influences over time. The model also enables the development of tools for research and reflection that can inform, and be used in the preparation, professional development and support of teachers as agents of social justice.

The development of the conceptual model

The work on the development of the model for the study of teacher agency is guided by the social theories of human agency applied to the work of teachers. We sought to validate the model combining research-based inputs and insights from various relevant practitioners. Firstly, some of the most influential social theories of human agency have been considered such as Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration and Archer's relational theory of agency (Archer, 2000). The theoretically proposed components of agency and its contextual (structural and cultural) determinants are presented in the first part of the paper. These theoretical propositions could be applied to any aspect of educational change and tested empirically in a given

context. In our model we explore their usefulness for understanding teachers' transformative potential and development as agents of social justice.

Next, research-based insights specific to the work teachers are 'fed' into this theoretical model with a view towards identifying potential units of empirical analysis of teacher agency for social justice. Finally, Critical Communicative Methodology was used to engage experts and potential users in the design and face validation of the model by creating safe environment for egalitarian dialogue (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011). Twelve representatives of teachers (2), (depute) head teachers (2), local and national policy makers (2) and teacher educators including programme coordinators and researchers (6) formed an Advisory Committee which discussed the model and its relevance for teachers, teacher educators and policy makers. The Advisory Committee met 4 times (in 3 half-day meetings and 1 one-day workshop) over one year, with the principal researcher making adjustments to the model after each meeting. A draft model has been circulated among the Advisory Committee members for comments used by the researcher to make adjustments to the model. The discussions were very lively and rich in in-depth insights from both researchers and practitioners often demonstrating alignment between the professional knowledge and research insights, but sometimes also revealing important tensions. The model was most significantly revised following the Committee's strong reservation towards the possibility of reducing the data to the existing measures of relevant variables. An additional meeting was organised to explore innovative analytical tools that build on previous research, yet allow for simultaneous analysis of the rich contextual data in each environment. Elsewhere we discuss in detail the methodological implications of the model (Author, submitted).

The adjusted model for study of teacher agency for social justice is presented in the second part of the paper outlining potential units of analysis and their related variables. Finally, the implications for future research and teacher development are discussed.

Theoretical perspectives on human agency

Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration treats agency as contingent with social structures. To act as an agent implies an ability to 'intervene in the world', to 'act otherwise', to 'make a difference', to exercise 'some sort of power' (p. 14). Some of the main defining features of such agency are intentionality, influenced by the agents' 'knowledgeability' and human power to reflexively monitor both self and social contexts. In other words, human beings are *purposeful* agents who engage in intentional acts which they know, or believe, will have a particular quality or outcome. They use the knowledge of the act (competence) to achieve this quality or outcome. *Competent* agents will usually be able to describe what they do, elaborate on the reasons for their behaviour, rationalise and motivate their own and others' actions. Giddens (1984) describes the rationalisation of actions as actors' routinely maintaining a continuing theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity,

3

although the questions about the reasons and intentions often posed by philosophers are only put by actors when a piece of conduct is specifically puzzling or there is a 'lapse' in competence. While competent actors, when asked, can nearly always report discursively about their intentions and reasons for acting as they do, they cannot necessarily do so of their motives because unconscious motivation is a significant feature of human conduct (Giddens, 1984, pp 5-6).

Another defining influence on human agency is the power actors are able to mobilise within social structures, which presume relations of *autonomy* and interdependence between agents, and which are elaborated in social interaction. 'Structure' refers to the rules and resources implicated in the (re-)production of social systems (Giddens, 1984). In many contexts of social life strategically placed actors engage in processes of selective 'information filtering' as they seek to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them. An important implication of Giddens' theory is that social (or organisational) structures can be modified over time through the agency of individual and collective actors. To what extent subordinate agents can, individually and collectively, influence the activities of their superiors through use of resources open to them, differs very substantially between different social contexts. Moreover, the very scope of agents' intentions, knowledgeability and reflexivity is defined by their levels of power and autonomy within given structures (Giddens, 1984). This implies a need to study the effects of different structural factors (such as levels of system centralisation, or terms of employment) on teachers' agentic power, i.e. sense of purpose, competence, scope of autonomy and reflexivity.

Like Giddens, Archer (2000) emphasises the dependence of agency on structures while arguing that their separation is a necessary condition for social scientific research into the ways structure and agency relate to one another over time. Archer's critical realist theory of agency departs from a clear analytical distinction between structure and agency with their unique properties and powers that cannot be reduced to one another although they intertwine with one another. Archer also places 'culture' as a key concept alongside structure and agency. Culture refers to the ideational contexts (e.g. ideology, societal or institutional views which can be articulated or implicit in rooted traditions and ways of being). She suggests that material structures need to be distinguished from the 'ideational' influences on agency although they are related (e.g. cultural change can lead to the transformation of structures). Agents (our social selves) emerge in a dialectical process in which *structural* and *cultural* powers impact upon the human powers of 'self' and 'personal identity' (Archer, 2000, pp 254-255). We become the kind of social beings that we are in a process that involves both social reproduction and transformation.

In contrast to Giddens' view that an agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', Archer argues that a lack of say in a systematic organisation is not the same as having no effect upon it, only the reaction and response to the context is uncoordinated and unarticulated. For Archer, agency is

always collective, while individuals are actors who shape the context not in a way any particular actor wants but as a result of interactions. Their efficacy is entirely dependent on what agents make of their contexts. Agentic power lies in humans' *capacity to reflect* on and evaluate social contexts, creatively envisaging alternatives and collaborating with others to bring about their transformation. Articulation of ideas (culture) and acquisition of organisation (structure) for agents' purposes are quintessential to *transformative agency* (Archer, 2000).

Biesta and Tedder's (2007) ecological view of agency positions it within the contingencies of contexts in which agents act upon their beliefs, values and attributes they mobilise in relation to a particular situation. In this view agency is conceived as something that is achieved, rather than possessed, through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action. The achievement of agency results from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources, and other contextual factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations. Such ecological agency also encompasses the interplay of time dimensions, i.e. influences from the past (e.g. adopted routines), orientations towards the future purposes (e.g. hopes, fears, desires) and engagement with the present (e.g. judgments about the limits and opportunities provided by the present structural contexts). An important implication of this view of agency is that agents need to be seen as whole persons with their past experiences, emotions, commitments and concerns for their own well-being. They consider the potential gains and losses of engagement in in an activity within the complex interplay of cultural, institutional and education labour market contexts. Study of such context bound agency requires rich qualitative data and could involve a life-course perspective (Evans, 2007), and mixed method studies of teacher agency at various career stages (Day, Sammons & Gu, 2008). At the same time common structural features and similar transformative practices have been identified in schools around the world (Hayes, Mills & Lingard, 2005) holding promise for learning across contexts.

In summary, the theoretically proposed components of agency are purpose, competence, autonomy and reflexivity. Invariably, these theories suggest a dialogical interaction between agency and structures (and cultures). Agency depends on structures and cultures which can either foster or suspend it, but also contributes to their transformation or reproduction over time. In turn, agency itself is transformed or reproduced in the course of structural and cultural transformations (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

Archer (2000) suggests that this interrelation of human agency with structures and cultures involves a three phase cycle of change over time:

1) Structural and cultural conditioning - actions take place within a set of pre-existing, structures (e.g. schools' organisational set-up or education system structures) and cultures (e.g. school ethos & cultures or broader societal views of social justice) that affect the way people understand their position in relation to others;

2) Socio-cultural interaction – groups and individuals interact exercising their own particular abilities, skills, personalities, seeking to advance their goals and interests[1] and to affect outcomes; and

3) Structural and cultural elaboration – as a result of the action in the previous two phases the structural conditions and cultural contexts may be changed at least to some extent, or reproduced if the individual or group action fails to bring about desired changes, or seeks to maintain the status quo. Social structures can be highly durable in nature and, thus, difficult to transform.

The end point of each cycle is at the same time the beginning for the new analysis of later change, with agents now being conditioned by the changed[2] structural and cultural contexts. Experience of successful change is likely to nurture agency. This theoretically-based hypothesis could be empirically tested in a longitudinal study. Even though it would be reasonable to expect more evidence of reproduction than of transformation of structures and cultures, it is important to understand the conditions and patterns of agents behaviour in both processes with regard to claims about teachers' acting as agents of change.

The model of teacher agency for social justice

We drew on the above theoretical propositions to develop a model for empirical analysis of teachers' practices directed towards the promotion of social justice – a professional commitment endorsed by the Scottish policy and strongly supported by practitioners themselves. For example, a deputy head teacher in the Advisory Committee informed of the voluntary engagement of a group of teachers in his school in restorative justice practices aimed at combating exclusion and underachievement of some students. Specifying contribution to social justice as a shared desirable *purpose* of teacher agency enabled us to focus on effective practices identified in previous research. For example, teachers who conceive of themselves as agents of change are reported to engage in school development and professional networks, initiate collaborations with colleagues and other professionals or engage in inquiries seeking to address exclusion and educational disadvantage (Ainscow, 2005; Edwards, 2007; Frost, 2006; 2012; Liston & Zeichner, 1990; Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Sachs, 2003).

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[1]In line with agents' own understanding of their interests (see e.g. Kemp, 2011).
[2] Even when structural and cultural contexts are reproduced, such reproduction is never an exact photocopy, there is always a 'slippage' which makes room for human agency (see e.g. Harker, 1984).

The Advisory Committee members recognised the value of similar research findings generated in studies across different contexts for building the knowledge base for developing teachers' *competence* as agents of social justice. At the same time, a few Advisory Committee members suggested that building capacity for transformative agency might be more about the ways of engaging with a given workplace structures and cultures, than about teaching teachers *what* they need to do. The Committee repeatedly pointed to the need to focus on *how* teachers exercise their agency by negotiating the meaning as well as ways of achieving their purposes through engagement with other agents.

Acknowledging the temporal nature of agency we aimed to develop analytical model that can help us understand *why* the same agents will sometimes act as transformative agents and sometimes as role-implementers. In the model this aspect of agency is labelled 'scope of autonomy' aiming to cover variables such as sense of individual and collective efficacy as well as perceived constraints and opportunities afforded by the given structures and cultures. Although we see an attempt to separate relevant variables as necessary for empirical analysis, we also recognise that the reality is unlikely to neatly fit into any theoretical model. For example one might expect variables such as degrees of power and trust in agents' relationships to be critical for both teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2012b) and for the elaboration of structures and cultures, e.g. through building collaborative relationships effective for teachers taking responsibility for improved learning of the under-achieving students (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996). Such relationships can then be expected the function as part of transformed cultures and structures which can nurture future collaborative agency.

The Advisory Committee discussions of adequate methods of data collection repeatedly pointed to the need to capture the complexity of context-embedded agency, e.g. by simultaneous use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Our aim was to develop a conceptual framework and tools for empirical study that could help teachers *reflect* on their practices and working environments and identify ways of transforming the conditions that obstruct their purposes, e.g. through feedback on the effects of collaborative activities on students' achievement (Grangeat & Gray, 2008).

In summary, our model positions teacher agency for social justice, within the complex interrelations of teachers' individual and collective sense of purpose, competence, scope of autonomy and reflexivity, including meaning making of their present structures (roles and resources) and cultures (relational and ideational contexts). Simultaneous study of these complexly interdependent aspects of agency can help us understand a fundamental question of the ways in which teachers can direct their individual and collective professional agency – sometimes in face of enormous constraints – towards the achievement of their professional commitments. Below we present the relevant units of analysis and their potential variables. Table 1

outlines the potential variables for each of the aspects of teacher agency developed in consultation with the Advisory Committee.

Insert Table 1 here

Sense of purpose

Teachers' transformative power inside and outside classrooms has long been recognised in teachers who conceive of themselves as agents of change believing that all students can learn and progress, and linking their agency to a moral vision (Freire, 1970; Fullan, 1993; Giroux, 1988; Nieto, 2007). Archer (2000) suggests that agents need to find the reasons embedded in a role sufficiently good to make them their own. It is not uncommon that moral purposes, including a commitment to social justice, strongly underpin teachers' professional identities, reflected for example in the frequently reported reasons for entering the teaching profession, such as a desire 'to make a difference in the lives of students' (Hargreaves, 2003; Fullan, 1993; Olsen, 2008). Teachers' perceptions and understanding of their professional and moral roles is an essential part of the model aiming to enable analysis of agents' sense of purpose and motivation. Do teachers see agency for social justice as part of their professional role? If so, what is their own understanding of social justice? Competing understandings of the concept and implications of social justice are likely to influence different strategies for enactment of the principles of social justice in teaching practices. An exploration of teachers' sense of purpose as agents of social justice could then involve:

- teachers' perceptions of their moral roles (Pantić & Wubbels, 2012), sense of identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Day, 2002; Olsen, 2008) and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Richardson & Watt, 2010),
- teachers' understanding of social justice (Brown, 2004; Campbell, 2004).

Competence

Research has identified some common practices of teachers and schools that actively promote social justice, e.g. by engaging in inclusive pedagogies (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian, 2009; 2012), sharing responsibility for the outcomes of all learners, planning strategies to address exclusion and underachievement of some learners, and working with other professionals, communities and families (Ainscow, 2005; Edwards, 2007; INCLUDE-ED Report, 2009). Teachers' engagement in these practices does not happen in isolation from the structural and cultural contexts that might encourage or impede such practices, e.g. school cultures or broader education system set-up. Thus, agency for social justice might involve efforts to transform the structures and cultures as well as acting within them. Fullan (2005) suggests that systems are transformed through

proliferation of 'system thinkers' and creation of mechanisms and processes that allow people to collaborate within and across departments, schools and communities or systems. Studies of teacher agency could explore teachers' espoused and practiced beliefs about system development as part of their professional competence (Pantić, Wubbels & Mainhard, 2011).

Giddens (1984) describes agents' competence as 'knowledgeability' of rules and tactics of practical conduct in the milieu in which agents move, which may or may not include knowledge about those which apply in contexts remote from their own experiences (pp. 90-92). For example, agents from different cultures or social groups might not know the rules of others in less privileged sectors of life, and *vice versa*. In relation to teachers' contribution to social justice such competence might involve an understanding of how broader social forces influence exclusion and disadvantage (Slee, 2010), and how they as professionals can individually and collectively affect the conditions for schooling and learning of all (Liston & Zeichner, 1990). This might involve teachers' broader political awareness as well as a micro-political competence of finding allies to change their schools to better meet their commitments (Blase, 1991; Bondy & Ross, 1992). An exploration of the competence aspect of teacher agency could then study:

- Teachers' engagement in practices effective towards promotion of social justice, e.g. involvement in school and system development and collaboration (Ainscow, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Pantić, Wubbels & Mainhard, 2011)

- Teachers' understanding of broader social forces that influence schooling (Slee, 2010) and (micro-)political competence (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Autonomy

How teachers practice their agency is expected to depend considerably on the contingencies of the contexts (of school, policy or broader societal and cultural environments) that can be seen as structures and cultures. A competent agent committed to social justice will act differently in different contexts and at different times depending, for example, on the ways he or she perceives the locus of power or collective efficacy. Empirical studies could explore the potential of teachers' individual and collective agentic power within the contextual variables. Below we outline some potential variables proposed by related research and affirmed by the Advisory Committee.

Individual and collective efficacy and agency

Social cognitive theory sees beliefs about self-efficacy as a central mechanism for exercise of human agency which determines levels of motivation reflected in how much effort people will exert in an endeavour and for how long they will preserve in face of obstacles (Bandura, 1989; 1997). Efficacy means having an effect, and a capacity to have an effect is shaped by the extent to which we believe we can do

something or achieve a worthy outcome. People tend to avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities but they take challenging activities and select social environments they judge themselves capable of handling (Bandura, 1989). Individual and collective efficacy could be assumed to be key in teachers' deliberations as agents of social justice.

Individual agency operates within a broad network of socio structural influences. People are producers as well as products of social systems (Bandura, 1989; 2001). Thus, persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply conveyers of environmental influences. Central to the individual agency is a capacity to exercise control over one's motivation and action – a distinctive human characteristic (Bandura, 1989). Teachers can affect change in themselves and in their situations because their judgments and actions are partly self-determined (Day et al., 2007; Luttenberg, Imants & van Veen, 2013). Teachers' efficacy beliefs are likely to be a necessary condition, although not a guaranty, for their acting as agents of social justice. It is reasonable to expect that different teachers will have different levels of confidence, control over and resilience against the challenges which is neither innate nor stable (Gu & Day, 2013).

Teacher efficacy has been shown to be a powerful construct positively associated with student outcomes, motivation and sense of efficacy; teachers' openness to new ideas and willingness to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students, higher levels of resilience in the case of setbacks, working longer with a student who is struggling, being less likely to refer a difficult student to special education, having greater commitment to teaching; positive school atmosphere and so on (see e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2006; and Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998 for review). On the other hand, attributes that can impede teachers' agentic behaviour include: despair that change is possible, resistance of those in privileged positions, lack of personal understanding of exclusion and empathy for those who are excluded or marginalised, for example due to little contact with people different from themselves and lack of first-hand experience of the way inequities are structured into the educational and social systems, or lack of relationships across socio-economic boundaries (Lucas & Villegas, 2002).

Interpersonal interactions and relationships are likely to be key for teachers collaboration and acting strategically with other agents to reshape or retain structures - in other words for collective agency required for a systemic change (Archer, 2000; Bandura, 2001; Fullan, 2005). In our model, collective agency might involve collective sense of purpose, competence, autonomy and reflexivity, although it is through individuals that organisations act. Teachers' collective agency could be expected to interdepend with their capacities and opportunities for articulating shared goals and organising the collective action or exercising corporate influence in decision making (Archer, 2000; Sachs, 2003). Teachers' individual and collective agency involves a dynamic relation between motivation and intentions, and power relations (Priestley et al. 2012a; 2012b) which individuals usually consider when

making decisions to act or not. This is not always the case with social systems, except where actors behave in cognizance of what they take to be social needs (Frost, 2000), which could be seen as teachers' collective competence or knowledgeability. Teachers' collective autonomy is likely to be determined by the levels of decision-making powers vested in teachers by the education policies and systems, but also by the relational structures and cultures created through their own interactions over time (Daly et al., 2010; Wubbels et al, 2012). For example, strong formal, vertical relationships are found to be less supportive of agency than horizontal, reciprocal relationships (Priestley et al., 2012b). Trust and respect are often cited by teachers as key for collaboration, advice seeking and transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge (Daly et al., 2010; Priestley et al., 2012b).This is why the levels of power and trust in teachers' relationships are explored in the model as part of the structures and cultures within which teachers' exercise their agency (see below). Finally, collective reflexivity could manifest, for example, in teachers analysing what constitutes inclusiveness of their school, what resources are available, what barriers must be overcome, etc. (Ainscow, 2005).

Goddard, Hoy & Hoy (2000) developed an operational measure of collective teacher efficacy – teachers' shared beliefs that they can work together to produce effects – and found it to be associated with differences between schools in student-level achievement. Teacher efficacy is context-specific and therefore needs to be assessed in relation to the task at hand. It would be reasonable to expect that teachers' sense of efficacy might differ depending on the degrees of competence and power teachers have and the resources that are available for transforming practices and policies at different levels – classrooms, schools and systems. Teacher efficacy may also change and develop over time and it would be reasonable to expect that it will thrive on the gains of collective performance (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000).

The variability of teacher efficacy in contexts is even more specific than that of school or general population served by the school, even though school-level variables do appear to influence efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). The contextual variables for the study of teacher agency could include different structural and cultural features of school, policy, and broader societal environments.

School environment

Teachers' sense of efficacy is related to a number of school-level variables, such as school climate and sense of community, behaviour of the principal and decision-making structures (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). School cultures and principals' leadership have a key role in (re)shaping teachers' response to the institutional and situational constrains of schools as their workplace (Flores, 2004; Gu & Johansson, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Weiss, 1999).

Below we outline how these variables could be explored with the view to their potential to support or suspend teacher agency. School climate has been shown to influence achievement when the effects of socioeconomic status are controlled for (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). Eraut (2001) suggests what might be attributes of a learning supportive climate: a blame-free culture which provides mutual support; learning from experiences, positive and negative, at both group and individual level; encouraging and talking about learning; trying to make full use of the knowledge resources of its members; locating and using relevant knowledge from the outside; enhancing and extending understandings and capacities of both groups and its individual members. The study of teacher agency could explore the relations between teachers' perceptions of these variables and their agency for social justice.

School cultures are a key factor in teacher and school development, associated with teacher commitment, morale and retention (Flores, 2004). The interdependence of school cultures and teacher agency could be examined to identify the opportunities for negotiating a common purpose and building a shared vision for teaching at a school level, the extent to which teaching is seen as collective enterprise in which teachers learn from one another, shared professional community, collegial relations and inclusive school cultures (Flores, 2004). Existing classifications could be used to study the interactions between agency and various school cultures. For example,

Hargreaves (1994) distinguishes main forms of school culture: individualism, collaborative cultures (which can be spontaneous, voluntary or contrived, imposed collegiality which may be seen as a stage towards collaborative cultures), and balkanisation – strong loyalty to a given group. Levels of collaboration in schools have been linked to teachers' higher efficacy, readiness to embrace change and take collective responsibility for all students' learning (Louis et al.,1996; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The dimensions of power and trust in interpersonal relationships could be expected to matter most for teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2012b). Power has been explored as involvement in and degrees of influence over decision-making (Corrigan & Chapman, 2008; Nemeržitski, Loogma, Heinla & Eisenschmidt, 2013). Trust has been operationalised as willingness to take risk based on a sense of colleagues' benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness (Hoy, Tschannen-Moran, 1999). These and other tools can be used to explore how relationships among teachers and other school staff over time influence the (re-)creation of structures and cultures that impede or support further agency.

Principal's leadership is another potentially significant factor affecting teacher agency influential for spearheading the change efforts (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004), setting shared goals and vision, building of professional communities within schools, and for developing teachers, including their sense of efficacy and self-worth by recognising accomplishments, providing opportunities for participation in decision making and collaboration (Flores, 2004; Gunter 2012) for fighting educational inequality (Gu & Johansson, 2012). Existing typologies could be used to study the

interactions between agency and various principal's leadership models and characteristics (see e.g. Bush, 2011; Day & Leithwood, 2007).

Policy and sociocultural contexts

Other institutional factors that delimit teacher decision making power as part of their autonomy have been identified in: the hierarchical nature of the education system (including formal means for involvement in decision making outside the classrooms); bureaucratic nature of the education system; conditions (including resources and time) and opportunities to engage in sustained process of reflection, collaboration and inquiry; and levels of teachers' participation in policy making (Lucas & Villegas, 2002). Practitioners experience directly the social and political forces that place limits on their freedom to act according to their professional judgment and consciences (Flores, 2004; Frost, 2006). For example, Frost (2006) argues that agency of both teachers and pupils is seriously compromised by the narrowing of curriculum, pedagogy and the external imposition of targets for measured attainment. Munn and Lloyd (2005) argue that focus on attainment is not sufficient for fighting social exclusion, and that performance measures are needed that will help rather than constrain the ambitious goal for schools to fight exclusion e.g. those of developing pupils sense of self-efficacy, self-worth and sense of belonging. On the other hand, Robinson (2012) illustrates how, despite the performance, accountability and control driven policy, strong collegial relationships enabled teachers to construct their professional agency by adaptation of policy requirements to fit some practices and reshape others. In these contexts teachers acting as agents of social justice might involve both taking forward and resisting the official policies (Luttenberg et al, 2013; Sachs, 2003).

Archer (2000) suggested that if actors are allowed to diminish to the point where they are nothing but the role-takers or objects of roles instead of being subjects who are active role-makers, we exclude them as a source of role change. She argued that organised interest groups (material or ideal interest groups, e.g. unions or professional associations) can help participants realise their power of organisation and articulation. However, teachers' unions can also present obstacles to the relationships between teachers and their communities (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). In his critique of Archer's argument Kemp (2011) stressed the importance of grasping agents' own conceptions of their interests and identifying problems that these conceptions might have. An empirical study of teacher agency would need to account for teachers' own perceptions of their roles, e.g. in system and school development within given structures such as (de-)centralised education systems (Pantić et al., 2011). It could further explore the ways in which teachers engage in social and professional networks, collaborative projects and strategic positioning with decision makers and power brokers to take forward or to thwart change (Datnow, 2012; Sachs, 2003).

Teachers' perceptions of their roles are also likely to be rooted in the broader cultures of their social context (e.g. ideological climate or deeply rooted socio-cultural feature of society). For example, perceptions of agency as a property of individual persons or collectives differ in North American and Chinese cultures (Morris, Menon & Ames, 2001). One could explore the implicit theories of agency underling the perceptions of teachers working in different cultures. Menter (2008) points out that we cannot think simply about the current state representing structure on the one hand and teachers representing agency on the other. We must acknowledge that the current condition of teachers' work is complex, dynamic and a manifestation of a long history of interplay between cultural, social and economic forces. He illustrates the point exploring links between national cultures and teacher identities – collective and individual – in England and Scotland. Significance of education and role given to teachers in a society are expected to have an impact on teachers' sense of their professional identity. For example, one could explore whether the alleged greater commitment to values and more reflective approaches in Scotland (Menter, 2008) influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as agents of social justice. Richer and fuller understanding of the great variety of meaning and enactment of agency for social justice could be sought by comparative studies from more diverse cultures.

In summary, potential variables for study of autonomy as an aspect of teacher agency include:

- teachers' beliefs about individual and collective efficacy (Bandura, 2006; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; 2010)

- levels of confidence, control and resilience (Gu & Day, 2013; St Clair-Thompson, Bugler, Robinson, Clough, McGeown & Perry, 2014)

- levels of collaboration and collective agency for social justice (Sachs, 2003)

- levels of power and trust in teachers' relationships (Corrigan and Chapman, 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)

- perceptions of school cultures and principal's leadership (Bush, 2011; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Eraut; 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Flores, 2004)

- perceptions of teachers' roles as school and system developers (Pantić et al., 2011) and opportunities for participation in school development (MacBeath, 2000), policy making and networking (Lucas & Villegas, 2002, Sachs, 2003)

- broader education policy and socio-cultural contexts (Menter, 2008; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007)

Reflexivity

Teachers as social actors possess, apply, and produce bulk of practical knowledge (Verloop et al., 2001) in day-to-day social encounters, which is relational and often tacit. The challenge for making teachers' tacit knowledge useful for individual and collective agency is developing teachers' capacity to articulate and transfer such professional knowledge and use it to justify their practices (Frost, 2012). Archer

(2000) suggested that human agents can transform structures and cultures when they bring their reflexivity to exploit the degrees of power they have to attempt a given transformation. Reflexivity has also been critical in teachers' individual and collective attempts to transform situations of exclusion and under-achievement in their schools (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011). For Thompson and Pascal (2011) reflective practice is a matter of opening up a range of possibilities, leaving behind routinised mechanistic practices, stepping back from a situation to make sense of it and act positively and constructively upon it. Actors' powers of reflexive monitoring of both self and society enable them to make commitments and re-commitments (Archer, 2000). Because actors change as persons and so do organisations, they make re-commitments and adjust the groupings in which they can work towards the accomplishment of their purposes. This process is common in educational change as teachers re-evaluate their own practices and motivate each other (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). Thus, teachers' development as agents of social justice over time could be explored with a view towards:

- development of teachers' capacity to articulate practical professional knowledge and justify actions (Frost, 2012)

- teachers' meaning-making of the structures and cultures in their schools as sites for social transformation (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011)

- critical and open reflection on their assumptions, practices and exploration of alternatives (Luttenberg & Bergen, 2008; Mezirow, 2000)

Conclusion

This paper outlined a model for study of teacher agency for social justice and articulated some potentially influential variables for the future empirical analysis of such teacher agency in contexts. The model also has implications for the development of teachers as agents of change.

Implications for further research

The proposed model could be used in empirical studies of teacher agency exploring the transformative potential of teachers within the structural and cultural environments across different school, policy and social contexts. The following units of analysis have been identified, with potential variables validated by the Advisory Committee including researchers, practitioners and policy makers:

- Purposes (including teachers' perceptions of their moral roles, identity, motivation and understanding of social justice)

- Competence (e.g. understanding broader issues influencing their practices, collaboration with colleagues, families and communities, engagement in professional and social networks, (micro-) political competence)

- Autonomy (individual and collective efficacy, degrees of power and trust in relationships, school climates, principal's leadership, opportunities for participation in decision-making, broader policy and sociocultural contexts),

- Reflexivity (including capacity to articulate tacit knowledge, meaning-making of structures and cultures, critical reflection on own practices and transformative learning).

The studies of teacher agency could use a number of (adapted) existing tools for exploring various aspects of teacher agency, e.g. teachers' own perceptions of their roles (Pantić & Wubbels, 2012) and scope of their competences (Pantić, Wubbels & Mainhard, 2011); teachers' inclusive practices (Florian & Spratt, 2013), student-teacher relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005), individual and collective teachers' efficacy (Bandura, 2006; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000) and so on. Other complementary tools could be developed to study for example teachers' interactions and reflexivity around issues of social justice. Mixed methods are likely to be required to understand how these variables interact in and across real settings and a longitudinal design could help us understand the conditions for development of teachers as agents of social justice over time.

Implications for teacher development

According to Archer (2000), changing social identities involves preparation, training, acceptability and 'self-worth', without which people become passive executors of minimalistic and enforceable expectations. Teacher education is needed that encourages a sense of 'wholeness' that leads teachers to see themselves as active agents within school structures (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). Developing teachers as agents of social justice might involve cultivation of *purpose* and commitment to social justice; expanding the scope of teachers' *competence* by bringing their practical, relational, tacit knowledge to the level of explicit professional capital; helping teachers understand the full transformative potential of their actions and interactions within the given *autonomy* and considering the constraints of the structural and cultural environments; and promoting broader understanding, critical *reflection* and engagement with education policies.

Acknowledgments

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