Sabbatical Report

Teacher Agency as a Change Agent

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Term 2, 2018

Sabbatical Topic:

To inquire into teacher agency, in particular to look at how it applies in relation to facilitating and leading innovation and change in our school. To investigate how other schools are fostering and supporting teacher agency to find out what best practice looks like and how this might apply to our school.

Acknowledgements:

To undertake a Sabbatical is a wonderful opportunity to take time to look at something you are passionate about in a more in-depth way, and it is both an honour and a privilege to have the time to reflect, question and think.

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees of Beach Haven Primary for their support and in particular our Board Chair Ben McQuay, for his endorsement as I undertook this Sabbatical.

I would like to thank the selection committee from TeachNZ, without whom this opportunity would not have been possible.

A special thanks has to go to my Senior Leadership team, the office team and the teachers and support staff in my school, with a particular mention to Judy Mathias and Anoushka Dallow who ‘stepped up’ in my place during the term. I am thankful to have such an experienced, hard working and talented team to work alongside, which makes undertaking something like this a smooth and seamless process.

I would like to thank the Principals, teachers, and educational experts who welcomed me into their schools and made the time to talk to me about Teacher Agency. It is such a privilege to spend time visiting other schools and share with them in the journey that is education. The schools I visited included;

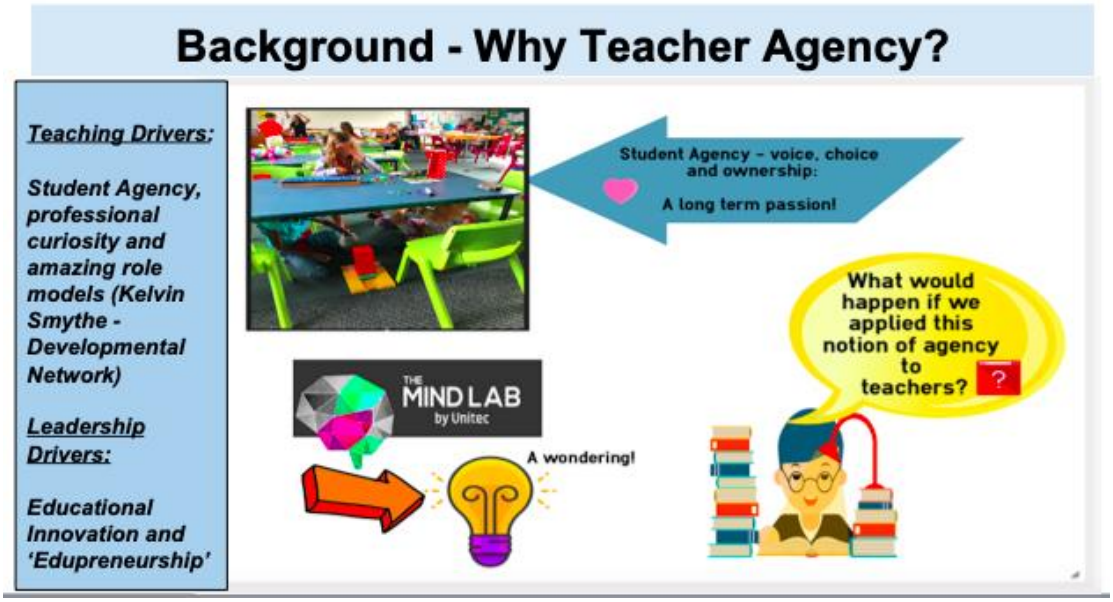
- Takapuna Primary (North Shore, Auckland)
- Kohia Terrace (Auckland)
- Timaru South (South Canterbury)
- Mairangi Bay (North Shore, Auckland)
- Miracle Beach (Vancouver Island)
- Rolleston Primary (Rolleston Primary, Christchurch)
- Ian Jukes (InforSavvy21)
- An honorable mention to Mark Priestley, author of 'Teacher Agency, An Ecological Approach' for his support via email

Finally I would like to thank my family – thank you for all your support, love and encouragement! One of the highlights of this Sabbatical was the time I spent with my family. I am especially grateful that I had the opportunity to visit my elderly Nan, who subsequently passed just prior to Christmas 2018.

Content:

1. *Purpose and Background*
2. *Rationale*
3. *Methodology*
4. *Findings*
5. *Recommendations*
6. *References*
7. *Future Considerations*
8. *Tools*

1. Purpose and Background



The purpose of my inquiry was three-fold:

1. To inquire into ways schools are enacting, supporting, and developing teacher agency within their schools. The planned outcome was to determine which tools are useful for my school (and others) to use in order to support them in this endeavor.

2. To use the information gained to improve the quality of teacher agency within my own school in order to enhance the way change is carried out.

3. To use the information gained to assist other schools in pathways they might use to improve teacher agency within their own schools, in order to assist in retaining and attracting teachers into the profession.

I have been a principal for over 17 years, at three schools, in a variety of contexts. I have been at Beach Haven, a decile 4 multicultural school on the North Shore of Auckland for the last 8 years. During my time in education, both as a teacher and leader, I have been privileged to work with a range of Agentic educators. These teachers and leaders have 'owned' what happens in their classrooms, across their teams and within the profession. What they have all had in common is a deep professional curiosity about the impact they have in education, and this professional curiosity has lead them to inquire into their practice, resulting in innovative and exciting outcomes!

As a teacher these role models inspired me to be creative and innovative within my own classroom, and my classroom was predicated on the notions of student agency and personalization. Early in my career I was fortunate to work for a Principal and Senior leader who encouraged me to be my 'own teacher', to innovate and to experiment with my classroom practice. Having the 'agency' to explore my professional curiosity has always been something I have highly valued, and it has been a key foundational blueprint for me as both an educator and a leader.

As a leader, I have had a deep fascination with educational innovation and 'edupreneurship', and a keenness to support and grow this in others. The notion of agency, in particular as it applies to students, always played a vital role within my classroom, and this practice of using agency to enable students to have voice, choice and ownership of learning and school processes continued as I entered principalship.

During 2016 I completed a postgraduate certificate through Mindlab. A focus of Mindlab is the practical application of 21st Century pedagogy's and innovations within education. During my study, I wondered about the notions of student agency and how it applied to teachers who were innovative. I spent time reflecting on the systems, structures and processes (including support) in my own school that helped grow teachers, where their voice, choice and ownership of curriculum development and professional development pathways underpinned the changes our school embarked upon.

I wondered what role the teacher's ability to enact agency (and by association, autonomy) played in the change process; (in particular innovative change) and what leadership, both senior and middle, needed to do to support this and how doing so might mean that there was more buy in and ownership about the direction we were moving in.

As a starting point and with this in mind, I hosted a Twitter chat with New Zealand educators as part of my regular hosting spot for the #NZBFC630 Twitter Group, where I asked 'in what ways is teacher agency fostered in your school?'. This Twitter group includes teachers and leaders from across the country, many of these educators would be considered innovative and 'cutting edge'. From the responses of these educators, it appeared that there is some confusion about what teacher agency is, and what it might look like in classrooms and schools on a day-to-day basis. This confusion, I felt, was echoed within my own school. On the surface, it would appear that many teachers have a good understanding of how agency applies to the students in

their classrooms, but not so much in relation to how it applies to them as teachers, leaders and change makers.

It is this confusion, alongside the postgraduate work I undertook through MindLab, which led me to wonder about the power of teacher agency, especially in relation to facilitating and leading innovation and change within our school, and to apply for a Sabbatical in order to clarify and investigate this further.

This lead me to the purpose of this Sabbatical Inquiry; to investigate what other schools are doing to support, grow and foster teacher agency in their schools, in order to determine which tools and conditions help and are more conducive to supporting agency within our schools.

It is important to note that this is not so that I can replicate any one schools journey, but more to see if there are things we can strengthen, and to compare elements with our own processes. In effect, it is a wider self-review in order to strengthen what we do.

2. Rationale

A definition of Agency (as it relates to teachers:

In order to investigate the notion of agency, one must have an understanding of what agency is. The history of Agency can be traced to Sociology (Priestley, 2015), where, in its simplest form, it is described at the 'capacity to act'.

There has been much written, researched and theorized in relation to student agency, but less in relation to teacher agency, particularly within a NZ context.

The notion of Agency and how it applies to students is a concept that is more widely understood, used and enacted in classrooms, what is least understood is how it applies to teachers, especially in relation to their work environments and their professional development (OBrien, 2016).

O'Brien (2016) describes agency for students as students having ownership over learning, giving them choice, ensuring there is flexibility in the classroom environment and subject matter, and that they are empowered. This is no different for teachers.

The notion of teacher choice and ownership is further expanded upon in the context of professional learning, which is best described as the 'capacity of teachers to act purposely and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of others' (Calvert, 2016). In this context, teachers are active participants; aware of what they need for growth as an

educator and what learning choices they might need to make to achieve their goals.

The definition of agency that most resonates for me is the one offered up by Priestly, Mark, Biesta, Gert, Robinson (2015) where they propose looking at teacher agency from an ‘ecological’ approach. In this respect, agency is not something that teachers have, rather it is something that teachers achieve, or not achieve, as the case may be. Furthermore, they go on to add that teacher agency is something that is achieved as the result of an ‘interplay’ between a range of teacher capacities and environmental conditions. In this respect it has ‘three temporal dimensions’ (Priestley, 2015); past experience (as in, if teachers have had previous experience of agency they are more likely to be agentic), future opportunities and experience (by setting goals and visioning future possibilities, teachers are able to tap into their aspirations as a motivator of achieving agency) and agency being acted upon in the present (where what can be achieved is dependent on the resources, support and constraints of the moment).

Therefore, in order to look at teacher agency, it is important to look at and consider not just how one teacher might enact agency but how the system and school culture the teacher works in, contributes and assists teachers to achieve agency.

Often, teacher agency is aligned with professional development, however, when agency is looked at through this more ‘ecological’ lens (Priestly, Mark, Biesta, Gert, Robinson, 2015), a more helpful picture about how to create and

support the conditions for agency to thrive, emerges. With this in mind, I am more interested in looking deeper into the notion of teacher agency, and how Agentic teachers are critically engaged and active participants in the change process, how leaders support them, and what distinguishes them from their colleagues (dispositions and beliefs).

For the purposes of this inquiry Teacher Agency is:

Teacher agency can be understood as the capacity of a teacher to influence, within the school and system, the change and improvement process, by making an impact or exerting power.

Teacher Agency explained: The Links to Teacher as Inquiry

Teacher Agency is not only about asking teachers what they want or what they think. It is much deeper than this surface approach and it is about tapping into their professional curiosity to reimagine their own classroom context and the school context they work in, by being active researchers. In this respect it is asking them to look at what is effective in other contexts and to reimagine what can happen in theirs. This is about teachers making decisions and having choice about how to make learning and teaching better at their school and in their classroom. (Fletcher, 2004b)

An Agentic teacher is one that is clear about the purpose of what they do and who they are as an educator. As leaders we want teachers to take a leadership role in our classrooms, schools and the system, and to contribute to the design of learning and teaching experiences. Teachers who are critically engaged are teachers who can re develop our New Zealand

Curriculum in innovative and constructive ways. It is deeper than just having high-capacity teachers, because teacher capacity is not enough (Priestley, 2015). Schools are 'complex social systems' and the systems and cultures of schools can limit even anexperienced, highly capable teachers ability to be agentic. Leadership, work conditions and school culture matter in relation to fostering and supporting agency in teachers.

The New Zealand Context in relation to the International Context

Prior to the implementation of National Standards (NS) in New Zealand, the introduction of the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (NZCF) indicated a change in policy direction that shifted the emphasis of 'top down' educational direction to one where teachers were expected to take a more active role as 'agents of change' in developing curriculum (Priestley & Drew, 2017). During this time teachers were co-constructors of localized curriculums alongside the community.

When NS were introduced, it can be argued that our teaching professions capacity to exercise their agency over curriculum matters was significantly eroded and hampered for nearly a decade. A loss of autonomy due to the influence of standards based assessment and strong centralized policy decisions has been a phenomenon experienced in a number of countries and is not unique to New Zealand.

In 2016, a report from the Center on Education Policy outlined how teachers were frustrated by a lack of voice and influence (agency) in the profession and that an overwhelming majority of teachers felt their opinions were not valued at either the local or national level (Rentner, Kober, & Frizzell, 2016). This

was resulting in fewer teachers entering the profession and higher numbers of teachers leaving. Whilst this research is from a US perspective, it resonates with the challenges being faced by educators currently in New Zealand, in particular within the Auckland context. Findings from this research suggested that one 'productive path forward' in addressing these concerns is to look at a systemic process for teachers so that they can share their views and engage in the decision making process (Rentner et al., 2016).

Now that NS have been removed, it is timely to relook at ways to encourage teachers to act in agentic ways, although it can be argued that this may be problematic as 'curriculum development, is to a large extent, a lost art' (Priestley & Drew, 2017). Going forward, giving people opportunities to be critical of what is going on, but also providing them with alternative outlooks helps to build their ability to have an informed discourse around matters educational. This builds the ability for teachers to be evaluative about initiatives – which is important in the achievement of agency.

Leadership matters

Making collaboration difficult or limiting the opportunities for collaboration stymies agency (Priestly, Mark, Biesta, Gert, Robinson, 2015). Professional environment matters – a key question one might ask, relating to this is; is teacher decision making about survival or the realization of long term aspirations? A culture of accountability or performance is counterintuitive to Agentic working practices. The notion of performativity is an important consideration –if teachers are required and pressured to 'perform in specific ways' (Priestly, Mark, Biesta, Gert, Robinson, 2015) (think National Standards) this significantly diminishes teacher agency. It is a disabler not an

enabler. It creates a professional and moral dilemma for teachers as they try to meet the expectations of external policy vs. what they know is best for students and families. This neoliberal drive undermines a teacher's ability to respond to the challenges in our profession in innovative and creative ways and instead, disregards their professional judgments and experience.

For agency to thrive in school settings, leadership must consider how the relational conditions within their schools grow and support it.

Is all Agency 'Good' Agency?

Some might counter that not all agency is effective or good agency. If teachers are acting against policy or in destructive, unprofessional ways that are against the best interests of students and colleagues, then this is not effective agency. Priestly, et al. (2015) would argue that in these scenarios, teachers are not acting as agents of change, even though they may be agentic.

This is not about advocating complete control and handover, nor is it advocating an abdication of leadership or for teachers to be strategically compliant. Giving teachers more agency will not solve all our educational problems, and not all teachers will choose options that make a significant change to their practice or grow the capabilities of both themselves and their colleagues. Where effective processes for enacting agency are in place, teachers feel valued and part of something bigger than them, and it is this one would argue that grows their capacity and capability. Agency is not just another 'programme' but a shift in how teachers participate within the context of education. 'Good agency', when it works well, has the potential to shift the

quality of education and to contribute to its future. Effective agency allows our system to be more intelligent, gives meaning to the work of teaching, and this in turn keeps teachers in the profession. Agentic teachers and leaders stop our system from going into complete failure because Agentic professionals fight for what they know is best for students (Priestly, Mark, Biesta, Gert, Robinson, 2015). It is a bottom up approach to managing the complexities in the system and for ensuring it is student centric. It is a sustainable way to ensure that what is good about education is fostered and what needs to be challenged, deleted, developed or repaired is done so.

What counts as good agency depends on the criteria applied to it.

3. Methodology

- To complete a Literature review
- Visits to six schools; three in Auckland, two in the South Island and One in Canada. The New Zealand schools are known for practices that support and encourage Agency – the Canadian school arose as an opportunity to look at a school from overseas, and how notions of Agency might be imagined in an alternative setting.
- Contact with, and conversations with educational ‘experts’.

4. Findings

I visited five schools in New Zealand, three in Auckland and two in the South Island to look at how each school enacted agency within their context. These schools were recommended to me because either the journey they have been on echoes a similar journey for my own school, or they are embarking on innovative journeys that would not be able to come to fruition without the skills of teachers who are agentic.

In addition I had the opportunity to visit a school on Vancouver Island, and used this visit to seek a beginning understanding of what agency might mean for a school within a different system to that within our New Zealand context. It is important to note that any conclusions made from visiting a school in the Canadian (British Columbia) context is based on one school and of interest only – not conclusive of a system in whole. I met with Principals in all schools, and a Deputy Principal as well as the Principal in one school. At each school I asked a series of questions.

Questions:

1. *What is your understanding of Teacher Agency?*
2. *How is it enacted in your school?*
3. *What conditions need to be in place in order for TA to thrive?*
4. *What role do you play in supporting TA to thrive in your school?*
5. *Why do you think TA matters?*
6. *What characteristics does an Agentic Teacher possess (dispositions)?*

Summary of Findings:

Understanding of Teacher Agency (TA)

- All the NZ schools talked about how TA was about empowerment, and the ability of teacher to be able to make and have ownership over decisions, and have a voice about what was happening in classrooms and within the school.
- All schools talked about how TA is about having a shared process for decision-making, and about linking this back to the strategic direction of the school. Alignment with where the school was going and ensuring teachers were on board with this was deemed as an important aspect of TA.
- In one school, TA was linked to ensuring there was appropriate challenge in place for teachers to be 'stretched', and that the 'locus of control' was in the hands of teachers.
- TA was described as being a process that allowed teachers the ability to design their own pathways for learning (both in relation to how they teach in the class but also to their own learning and professional development needs).
- Collaboration, teacher as inquiry and the use of evidence from which to base decisions on were key themes that came out of the conversations with the NZ leaders.
- Finally, TA was seen as teachers having the opportunities to do what they need to do to ensure successful outcomes for both them and their students, and this in turn, ensured success as a school.

How Agency is enacted

- How agency is enacted in the schools depended very much on the context of the school. Three of the schools have strong coaching cultures, which featured high as an agency enabler, and two were strong in play-based pedagogy and Emilio Reggio inspired practice. For these two schools, teacher agency plays a big role in being able to successfully implement innovative curriculum processes. It is fair to say that in one school the wider system itself stymies agency, however the Principal did note that his superintendent was interested in how to elicit more autonomy and agency within the schools he was responsible for. This would be an interesting inquiry at a later date!
- For the NZ schools, teachers participating in professional learning communities, leading self review within their schools, participating in teacher led initiatives (such as play based learning inquiries) and being an important voice into the annual plan and charter were key similarities.
- Coaching and appraisal processes highlighted an important way for teachers to enact their agency, by being drivers in a process that focuses on growth, collaboration and ongoing improvement, which then resulted in a sense of collective efficacy.
- In two schools, the notion of Simon Sinecks work in relation to knowing your why, was foundational in helping teachers enact agency that allowed them to not only know their why but to reach it.
- Being professionally curious and participating in a clear Teacher as Inquiry process really helped teachers to be agentic. Leaders talked

about how teachers had ownership and were the key designers and decision makers in this process.

- In most schools, the notion of invitational decision-making was important. Leadership sought the voice of staff on key areas of change, and invited teachers to lead these.
- Teachers leading professional development within school, and having the flexibility to trial new and innovative ideas were also seen as key ways for teachers to enact TA.
- In one school, teachers were offered the opportunity to spend a term redesigning assessment, reporting back on what works and what changes might be helpful going forward.
- Finally, the enactment of TA had the following in common – teachers voice was valued, they were encouraged to have ownership of new ideas and innovations, and they had choice around how things might be enacted.

Conditions required for Agency to thrive

- In all the schools, and echoed by experts I spoke with, there were a number of key notions that were agreed upon by all leaders I spoke with.
- The most important notion was that of trust. Agency is predicated on a high trust model, and leaders spoke at length about how they trust their staff to do their job, and to make good educational decisions.
- The reason they could trust their teachers is because they had ensured that their teachers were equipped with the skills, capabilities and capacity to enact on their agency. They achieved this by utilizing

coaching, having sound inquiry systems in place, providing a ‘safety net’ for staff (such as being non judgmental if an innovation did not meet expectations, instead helping the teacher find a way toward future improvement), and by providing explicit feedback and modeling.

- The leaders talked about having a school culture that was based on sound relationships, being open to new ideas, encouraging of innovation and of having high expectations of each other. They talked about recognizing that teachers can do it, and celebrating both successes and missteps.
- Leaders talked about the importantance of ‘knowing your people’, having a culture of learning and a strong clarity of purpose. They emphasized that they do not ‘know it all’ and wanted ideas from everyone.
- One leader talked about the importance of intrigue e.g.; ‘I am intrigued by this, I heard it might be…tell me more about…’
- In a number of schools, the leaders talked about how induction played an important role in ensuring new teachers were quickly embraced in the culture of the school, and valued for the new things they bought with them.
- All schools talked about how important it is to value teacher voice, and that although it might take longer to seek feedback and new ideas from all the teachers and staff in your school on issues such as how units are allocated, what curriculum changes need to be worked on, to assessment and data processes, the rewards outweighed any potential pitfalls.

- Several leaders talked about confidence – that as a leader you needed to have the confidence to let your staff take the reigns, and to encourage your staff to be confident enough to do so. This required modeling and flexibility on the part of the leader. Providing opportunities, for others to lead is important, as was helping others to find the opportunities to best grow them.
- All leaders talked about the need to ensure adequate resources were in place. These included:

- *Time – time to develop ideas, implement and reflect*
- *Leadership support (middle and or senior leadership)*
- *Physical resources if appropriate (letting teacher trial or pilot things and ensuring professional development and required resourcing was budgeted for was important)*
- *Providing a space for feedback loops and further consultation if required*

- Finally, all leaders agreed that being supportive and open was as important as trust and relationships.

A leaders role in supporting Agency

- Trust and Getting out of the way, topped the list for leaders. Furthermore, leaders talked about creating a shared sense of ownership – for one leader it was dependent on 'who and where the question is coming from'. One leader said that it was about being 'greedy' – 'I want the best from the people I employ' so it was their job to ensure they provided the staff member with what they needed, in order to be the best teacher they were meant to be.

- Having the Senior Leadership Team alongside you, so you could bounce ideas off them was important – the more agency they had the more likely they were to ensure members of their team had agency as well. Similar to having a vested interest in the process. In three schools, growing leadership and using coaching as the tool to do so was important.
- In one school, having strong transition plans meant there would be consistency and congrency over time.
- Being skilled at facilitation and an invitational leader where you delegate and agree on the shared principles were also key ways to support agency.
- Coaching conversations and accessing your networks were key enablers for one leader.
- Showing interest in teachers inquiries and maintaining a growth mindset ‘every teacher has the potential to do great things - I believe this” featured as important.
- Leaders providing forums for staff to share their voice and ideas, and implementing focus teams was a key process one leader used, but echoed in various forms in several other schools.
- Finally, leaders talked about how sticking up for the team, using the ‘Above the line/below the line’ tool and getting out the way were important.

Why Agency is important

- The leaders I spoke with said:

- *‘Its a vehicle for effective change to improve student outcomes’*

- *'We need to do things differently, and to embrace adaptive expertise'*
- *'Its important people are proactive and feel they have a contribution to make - its integral as a human'*
- *'You feel you have more agency when people believe in you'*
- *'Teachers have buy in'*
- *'Makes all the difference to good teachers staying in the job"*
- *'Autonomy and tapping into people's passions give us a sense of purpose'*
- *'Job satisfaction'*
- *'Teachers will grow their professional curiosity'*
- *'Why wouldn't you want teachers leading innovation?'*
- *'Principals job is to help teachers innovate!'*
- *'Teachers who have more say in the day to day will have more buy in overall'*
- *'I am not the gatekeeper'*
- *'Because leaders do not have the monopoly on ideas'*

Dispositions of an agentic teacher

- The following list are statements and words used by the leaders and experts I interviewed to describe agentic teachers. You will recognize within this list a number of dispositions that teachers and staff in your school display.

Dispositions of an agentic teacher	
- *Self directing* - *Realistic but optimistic* - *engaged , excellent, passionate with professional drive* - *'Doing a bloody good job even*	- *Middle of their career (not all)* - *Innate intelligence* - *Self efficacy and belief* - *They own it* - *Optimist* - *Inquiry is a way of being*

if the teacher next door - not so much' - *Self belief* - *Adaptable* - *Reflective* - *Positive* - *Relationship builder* - *Innovative* - *Collaborative*	- *Make things happen* - *Problem solver* - *Open to learning* - *Comfortable in challenge* - *Risk taking* - *Resilient* - *Adaptable* - *Curious*

- A key take out for me going forward after looking at this list, is that given this list of dispositions for agentic teachers is also similar to a list one might develop for a successful teacher, I continue to wonder why teacher agency is not more understood, encouraged and exploited within our schools and our system.

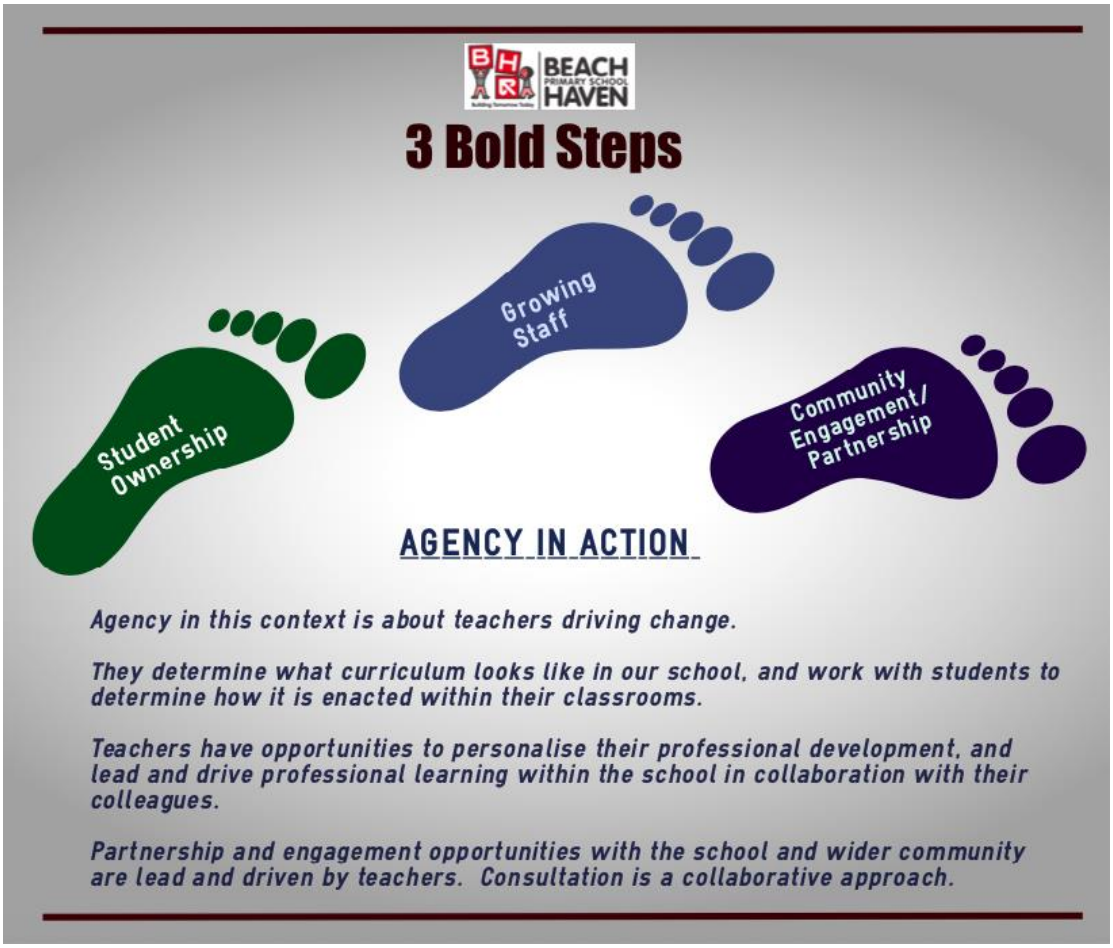
In conclusion

In our schools we strive to ensure our students are active learners, partners and contributors to their school, not just passive participants. We should want and expect the same from our staff, and our teachers.

At my own school we have our Three Bold Steps (Growing Staff, Student Ownership and Community Engagement) that form the foundation of our school vision and strategic direction.

Teacher Agency is central to all three because when teachers have agency they are in the driver's seat of the change process, and their voice and ability to have control and act on their ideas not only informs our direction, but also ultimately helps to lift student achievement and educational outcomes. Being able to grow, develop and foster Teacher Agency in our school allows us to adapt to the diverse challenges within a 21st Century classroom and school.

It grows our teachers capacity to make an impact, be resilient, feel valued and take collective ownership for our school. (see below)



We talk about students being learner centric and personalizing learning for students, and this applies to our teachers and support staff as well. Strengthening Teacher Agency would foster the belief that they are making a difference and have control.

5. Recommendations

Agentic teachers are critically engaged, professionally curious and 'own' what happens in the school. By being able to understand what Teacher Agency is, it is anticipated that teachers will be able to recognize when they have

agency, what agency can achieve and what conditions are required to ensure agency flourishes.

Just as there are huge benefits from having a school/classroom with Agentic leaners where student agency is fostered and supported, it stands to reason that having Agentic teachers who are modeling this and enacting it, is also beneficial

With this is mind I offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation One:

- For schools to have a shared understanding of what Teacher Agency is. Teachers need to become directly involved with the decision making processes in classrooms and schools, and encouraged to find ways to feed into the wider educational picture.

Examples of agency in action include:
• *Teachers having choice and autonomy in how they implement curriculum* • *Teacher voice impacting on how things operate in the school* • *Teacher led innovations* • *Teacher led professional development* • *Teacher led charter development* • *Teacher led improvement teams* • *Coaching* • *Personalized professional development* • *Curriculum development teams*

Recommendation Two:

- Stakeholders, including Board of Trustees and Leadership, need to believe that teacher's needs are important and that their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are key to success – that their voice is important and valued. To do this, schools need to have processes in place that capture and

utilize this, and ensure that the conditions needed for agency to thrive are in place. These conditions include:

Conditions for Agency to thrive
• *Providing teachers with opportunities for choice* • *Bespoke and personalized professional development* • *Tap into teachers' intrinsic motivations (providing opportunities for teachers to exercise autonomy and mastery)* • *Abandoning things that do not work – ask your teachers – they know* • *Hand over control to teachers* • *Provide opportunities for leadership and leadership development* • *Encourage engagement across the sector (networking) to have a voice* • *Hire people with an open to learning and innovative mindset* • *Contextualize agency to your school* • *Trust your teachers*

Recommendation Three:

- Schools need to find a way that is planned and part of the processes of the school, to capture teacher agency, and to increase their ability to support and foster their teachers own sense of personal agency and whànaugatanga so that they are constructively engaged with, and taking a lead role, in the change process. Agency does not happen in isolation – it is the implementation of a set of strategies and activities that are directed towards increased school success.

Ideas for leaders:
• *Partner with teachers to develop meaningful teacher involvement and school improvement* • *Establish a team to foster meaningful teacher involvement* • *Provide support – funding and time* • *Provide opportunities for advocacy – advocacy for students and for education* • *Provide opportunities for flipped learning – flip staff meetings to free up time* • *Lesson the 'administriva' – don't waste teachers time on the mundane, ask teachers how you might streamline processes*

• *Decisions about teachers and teaching need to involve teachers and be made by them – leaders can support teachers to do this*

Recommendation Four:

- Teachers need feedback and validation that their voices have been heard.

Things to consider:
- *Being a reflective practitioner and having a process to reflect on how agency is enacted helps stakeholders hold each other accountable for decisions and actions.* - *Partnerships require patience, courage and time (Fletcher, 2004a)* - *Communication is important – being able to listen and encourage and open dialogue and exchange of ideas is important* - *Respect is a foundational concept – it must be mutual*

As leaders, we can use the information from this Sabbatical to support our teachers in this area.

Teacher agency is not a 'one stop shop' that will solve all the challenges and complexities in our educational system (Calvert, 2016). It is however, an important ingredient in how we can engage, retain and attract teachers into the profession. It offers schools and our wider system an opportunity to develop processes and practices that minimize the frustrations teachers encounter, by valuing their input and giving ownership over to the profession.

I believe that tapping into teacher agency is an important tool as we move forward as a country. In the current educational context in New Zealand, we are not only managing a staffing crisis, but fundamental change has been signaled. Navigating this change is going to take innovation, adaptability and agility. In order for our profession to be at the forefront of the changes, we need to enact our agency, to lead the change and to make sure that we, as

leaders, capitalize on the agency of our teachers. Harnessing teacher agency as a change agent will help provide our teachers with a real sense of purpose and engagement. This will in turn help to retain our teachers (our most important asset) and inspire others to enter the profession. It is sustainable and it is free – helping teachers enact their agency is fiscally responsible and something that can be done immediately – it does not require huge amounts of money, it requires simply a mindset change. Most importantly, tapping into teacher agency means that we will have a valued, engaged and fulfilled workforce, who will improve the quality of education in our classrooms and schools. Ultimately, this is what education is all about.

7. Future Considerations

This inquiry has meant that I have merely scratched the surface of the concept of teacher agency. The notion of agency and what impact it might have on our education system going forward fills me with a sense of quiet optimism. I feel it is an untapped resource and that it has potential to be an educational game changer. My inquiry has left me thinking that there are still many areas of this yet to explore, and many questions yet to be inquired into.

Over time I would be most interested in following up on what role teacher agency might play in a number of areas, such as;

- Retaining staff and encouraging others to work in the profession
- What teacher agency looks like in other educational systems, what we might learn from that and how we might leverage this to improve our own going forward

- If teacher agency is grown or stymied in collaborative teaching environments (does individual teacher agency become superseded by collective teacher agency, and what impact does this have on classroom attainment and job satisfaction?)
- Will the changes to our educational context in New Zealand result in lessoned autonomy for leaders, and will this decreased leadership agency result in less teacher agency being afforded to teachers, or create new opportunities for teacher agency?
- What about systemic agency opportunities? Do agencies like the Ministry of Education have professional agency, and if not, does that impact on a schools ability to enact agency

7. Tools

Tool One:

SELF REVIEW QUESTIONS:

Self Review Questions
• *Does your school have a clear and shared understanding of what Teacher Agency is and why it is important?* • *How well do Senior and middle leaders have a good understanding about how to create and support the conditions that are required to ensure Teacher Agency is grown and thrives within your school?* • *Are teachers able to make decisions (and act on them) within the school and within their classroom?* • *Do teachers have ownership over their professional development? Do teachers take an active role in, and have influence over their professional development?* • *Who decides what 'teacher as Inquiry' looks like in your school?* • *Do teachers lead and develop your Curriculum in ways that improve student outcomes? Who makes the decisions?* • *Is Agency, both learner and teacher, at the heart of future focused learning in your school? How do you know? What does your evidence*

look like? What would your teachers say?

- *Are teachers able to exercise their initiative, make choices within their classroom and the school through their inquiries that have improved student outcomes at the core?*

- *Are teachers able to use their professional discretion to inquire into their practice to make changes to their practice, based on student strengths and needs in order to improve student outcomes?*

Tool Two:

STEPS TO AGENCY

(adapted from The Ladder of Student Involvement in School (Fletcher, 2004a), which was originally adapted from United Nations expert, Roger Hart (Hart, 1992) to reflect it from a teachers perspective)

8) Teacher-initiated, shared decisions with leaders. Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by teachers, and decision-making is shared among teachers and leaders.

7) Teacher-initiated and directed: Teachers initiate and direct a project, class, or activity. Leaders are involved only in a supportive role.

6) Leader-initiated, shared decisions with teachers: Projects, classes, or activities are initiated by leaders, but the decision-making is shared with the teachers involved.

5) Consulted and informed: Teachers give advice on projects, classes, or activities designed and run by leaders. The teachers are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by leaders.

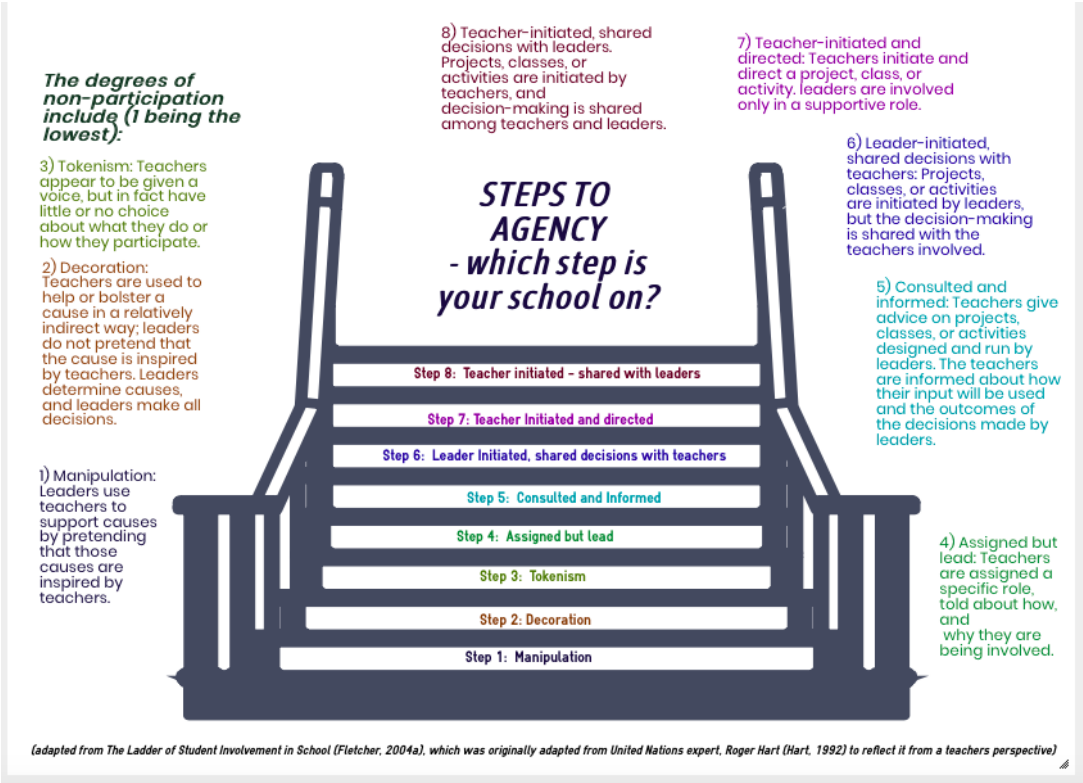
4) Assigned but lead: Teachers are assigned a specific role, told about how, and why they are being involved.

The degrees of non-participation include (1 being the lowest):

3) Tokenism: Teachers appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

2) Decoration: Teachers are used to help or bolster a cause in a relatively indirect way; leaders do not pretend that the cause is inspired by teachers. Leaders determine causes, and leaders make all decisions.

1) Manipulation: Leaders use teachers to support causes by pretending that those causes are inspired by teachers.



Tool Three

Conditions that enhance teacher agency and conditions that will not

- **adapted from (Calvert, 2016)**

Educational System Conditions	When Agency is not present	Actions that Support Teacher Agency
Professional Development – school approach	- planned by leaders, delivered by outside consultants/facilitators or 'experts' - Constrained by schedules and timetables - One off without follow up	- planned and presented by teachers - learning communities evident where trust and respect for expertise is foundational - happens across the school day where Teacher as Inquiry is foundational
What motivates teacher involvement	- compliance - mandates from external forces	- intrinsic desire to improve teaching and learning - connections with colleagues - a desire for ongoing improvement through reflection and inquiry - coaching
Source of solutions for	- assumption that solutions can only come	- look internally first

overcoming challenges	from outside facilitation	
Topics and skills covered	- little input from teachers - scattergun approach of topics picked by SLT and principal - Competing demands - Unrelated topics to need or areas of development	- teacher identified - based on data – classroom and school (both summative and formative) - focus is on growth of teachers and student - address specific challenges within the school context - personalized for the needs of teachers
Role of Teachers	- to implement and deliver content - Receivers of information – passive recipients of	- active in planning, designing and implementation - teachers are decision makers and engage in self review
Collaboration	- Predetermined topics for collaboration - no choice over who works with whom - Protocols, expectations and outcomes predetermined	- teacher led and determined - based on the needs of teachers - choice is evident - collective efficacy and ownership for shared accountability is in place
Format	- 'One size fits all' - sit and receive - Watch a presentation, listen, take notes – perhaps some small discussions	- has teacher as inquiry as a base - is research based and relevant to the context - collaborative, and about sharing expertise
Learning activities Tone	- tick box - passive - not purposeful - compliant driven	- professional - meaningful - solutions focused - clear agenda
Local and national priorities	- Driven by leadership - focus is on directives from a Ministry level	- data is contextual and shared accountability is a norm - feedback is a factor

Tool Four

7 WAYS TO IMPROVE AGENCY

1. ***Consult (at all stages)***
2. ***Provide opportunities to collaborate and time to collaborate***
3. ***Use data and involve teachers in the analysis of the data***
4. ***Create learning communities for problem solving and shared accountability***
5. ***Provide choice for PD***
6. ***Provide opportunities for growth not compliance***
7. ***Research and ensure people are onboard as opposed to mandating things***

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