



# Teacher agency: the effects of active and passive responses to curriculum change

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## Abstract

Teacher agency is enacted when teachers attempt to control or influence curriculum in an effort to achieve their desired outcomes. This article presents the results of a longitudinal qualitative case study which explored teacher agency using the Triadic Reciprocity Framework Core Agency Concepts (TRFCAC) model. The current study identified teacher agency manifested in three ways—proactively, reactively and passively, as influenced by the many contextual factors (determinants) which affected teachers. Teacher effectiveness in implementing curriculum change was shown to be heavily dependent on school leadership, teacher relationships with leaders and colleagues, and school operational practices and school culture, as well as personal motivation. Collegiality and perceptions of trust increased the likelihood of proactive agency, whereas job intensity and constant curriculum change led to increased occurrences of reactive agency. Passive agency resulted from poor relationships with school leaders, personal reluctance to change curriculum or lack of knowledge of school procedures.

**Keywords** Agency · Contextual factors · Curriculum change · Efficacy · Leadership

## Introduction

Increasingly, teachers are recognised as the interface between the formalised curriculum and the school-enacted curriculum. There is an expectation on the part of many education authorities that teachers have the knowledge and capacity to either develop or adjust formal curriculum to meet school context (Leite et al. 2018) and engage with curriculum development at the school level (Biesta et al. 2015). To enact curriculum change, teachers require professional teacher agency

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(Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. 2017); however, many teachers find this difficult. Agency is dependent on a number of key influences involving a combination of environmental, personal and behavioural contextual factors (determinants) (Bandura 2006). Environmental contextual factors are numerous, including the complex and rapidly evolving recent and historical school environment; school leadership approach to curriculum change; the role of principals during curriculum change; and additional factors such as collegial relationships. This article reports on a research study focused on teacher agency when teachers tried to control or influence curriculum change as it occurred in their school, department or classroom. To explore teacher agency, this longitudinal qualitative case study, conducted between 2011 and 2013, in a time of great curriculum change in Queensland schools, used the Triadic Reciprocity Framework Core Agency Concepts (TRFCAC) model to capture the complexities and obstacles teachers encountered. Results revealed that teacher agency manifested in a combination of three ways: as proactive agency where teachers planned for and initiated curriculum change as a personal choice; as reactive agency where teachers were required to make change as a result of an environmental influence such as a directive from their leadership; and as passive agency where teachers chose to passively resist a required curriculum change yet may have appeared to their leadership to have implemented it.

Teacher agency is enacted when teachers attempt to influence curriculum change in their school, department and/or classroom in an effort to achieve a desired outcome. Recent interest in professional teacher agency by educational researchers has resulted in much conjecture about the types of agency enacted by teachers (Ahearn 2001; Vahasantanen 2015) and the level of agency teachers enact (Vahasantanen 2015). Some studies have suggested that agency should not be measured, but rather, be recognised (Ahearn 2001; Oliveira 2012). An ecological approach to agency contends that agency and a teacher's ability to act are inseparable from the contexts in which they operate (Bandura 2006; Biesta et al. 2015; Biesta and Tedder 2006; Campbell, 2012; Lasky 2005). This approach considers teachers as "actors acting by-means-of-an-environment rather than simply in an environment" (Biesta and Tedder 2006 p. 19); and teacher action as a response to their environment (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2016). Likewise, with Albert Bandura's conception of agency, context is embedded in the agentic act, and there is said to be a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the contexts in which they work and live.

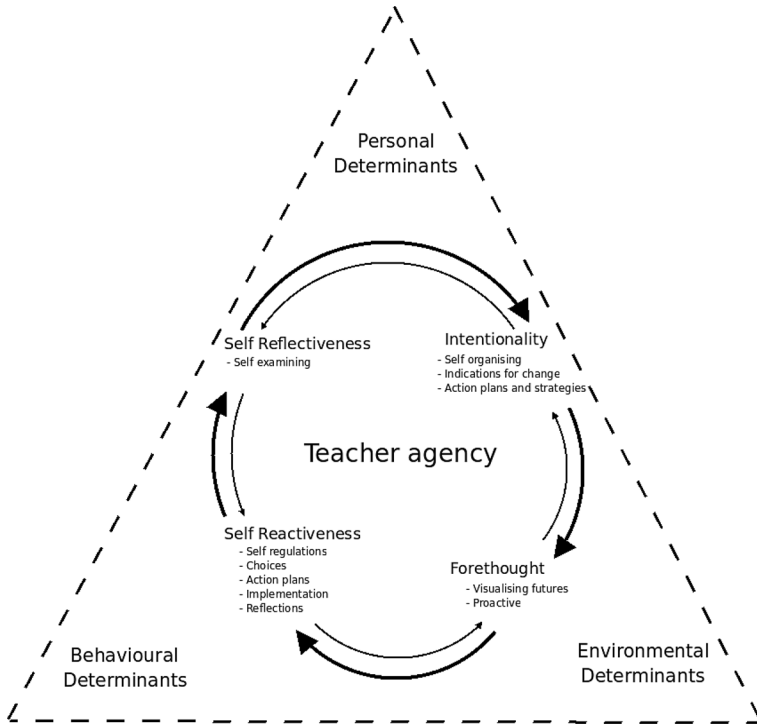
At the time of the study, the Queensland school environment, comprising state and private education sectors, had experienced significant and continual curriculum change (Queensland Government 2014; QSA 2007, 2009). These changes included the introduction of the Australian Curriculum into some schools; national and state testing and assessment changes as a result of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); increased comparisons between schools through the introduction of the *MySchool* website (Rogers et al. 2016; Swain et al. 2018); and structural changes to school organisation, such as the Year 7 students' amalgamation into the secondary school system. Each change resulted in changed environmental and contextual factors which impacted the working lives of teachers. In this challenging environment, school leadership teams were expected to initiate curriculum changes, and teachers were expected to enact agency to develop and

implement contextually appropriate curricula. Effective and supportive leadership at school level is considered essential for this to be successful (Dinham 2007; Fullan 2007; Luke et al. 2008; Marsh 2004). Dinham and Scott (2002) identified the school Principal to be a key player in influencing others to improve educational practice. Sustained curriculum change in schools can be directed and supported by strong school leadership, provided there is adequate involvement, impetus and support for all involved (Priestley 2011). Linked to this is the availability of appropriate professional development (PD) directed toward improving teacher desire and capacity to engage with curriculum change.

There is no agreed-upon successful method of implementing changes to curriculum, and implementing change is not easy, as many attempts in the past have shown (Fullan 1993). The result has been significant global variations in implementation methods including top-down approaches using mandates and testing, and bottom-up approaches through teacher-driven initiatives. In addition, measuring the success or otherwise of the implementation process also can prove to be difficult (Marsh 2004). In the past, some success in implementing new curriculum has been achieved using a bottom-up approach (Larson 1992; Luke et al. 2008) that enabled those involved in the change to understand and be clear about what the change will involve and require. A top-down implementation approach to curriculum change is where educational authorities produce policy mandates which are considered to be mandated directives and are implemented using a range of incentives or accountability measures (Larson 1992). These generally occur when a school system, state or federal body decides on significant changes for all the schools in their control. Problems identified with this approach include teacher resistance (Knight 2009), a lack of ownership and commitment to the changes by teachers, a lack of clarity of the nature of the reforms and a lack of shared meaning (Fullan 2007). It is for these reasons that school leaders play important roles in successful curriculum change.

Strong and appropriate school leadership is critical to effective curriculum change. Good leadership can create an environment in which clear lines of communication are established, and all participants can be empowered to exercise effective agency. Key players in this process are school principals whose influence on secondary school curriculum is significant (Cranston 2006; Dinham 2007). There is, however, wide variation between schools in how principals involve themselves in curriculum decision-making and the extent to which principals involve others (Cranston and Ehrich 2005). For example, decisions such as the allocation of resources and the designation and appointment of staff members to positions of responsibility such as Head of Department (HOD) or Subject Coordinator are environmental contextual factors. Increasingly, time and resource allocation in schools have become contentious issues, and many teachers have been required to advocate for their subject within the school curriculum. Principals who involve an administration team and teachers in decision-making are able to implement a more collaborative approach (Cranston and Ehrich 2005) which can improve teacher agency. Positive curriculum change necessitates involving teachers and the school community (Priestley 2011), facilitated by clear communication between all involved (Dinham 2007).

The Triadic Reciprocity Framework Core Agency Concepts (TRFCAC) model (Fig. 1), generated by the researcher, combined Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal



**Fig. 1** The Triadic Reciprocal Framework Core Agency Concept (TRFCAC)

Causation model (Bandura 1999) and Bandura's (2001) Model of Core Concepts of Agency. The purpose of the model was twofold. It enabled the complex dimensions of the act of teacher agency as described by the teachers, to be identified and mapped from the beginning., and it enabled exploration of the contextual factors that impacted the teachers as they acted.

Teachers exercise agency in their workplace when they attempt to influence or control aspects of curriculum change in their schools. When Albert Bandura's agentic theory is applied in these circumstances, teachers are producers of experiences and shapers of events (Bandura 2000). Teachers try to control the events that occur in their lives. To do so, they exert influence on things they believe they can influence in an effort to achieve their desired futures and prevent undesired ones. In turn, they themselves will be made different (Bandura 1997).

There is a triadic interrelated and interacting connection between the personal determinants of a person, their behavioural determinants and the environmental determinants in which they live and work. The interrelationship between contextual factors (determinants) constantly changes and varies in pressure and influence. Teachers can be both the subject and the agent of change (Measor and Sikes 1992). This is illustrated when teachers alter their approach to curriculum changes as they are exposed to them.

## Research questions and model

The study explored Home Economics teacher agency during the introduction and implementation of the Queensland school curriculum initiative—the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework (QCAR) (QSA 2007), and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Queensland schools. The research questions addressed in the study were the following:

1. What are secondary school Home Economics teachers' perceptions of their current teacher agency?
2. What are secondary school Home Economics teachers' understandings of how contextual factors have affected the reciprocal relationship between their teacher agency and their consequent teaching practice?

## Methodology

This qualitative study used an interpretive paradigm (Merriam 1998) to explore teacher agency during a time when teachers were engaged in the very complex process of developing or adapting school, department and classroom curriculum in their schools. Ethics approval was sought and approved for this study through the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee. The descriptive case study conducted over 3 years, used interviews with teachers to elicit subjective ways of knowing and was sensitive to specific socio-cultural contexts following Simons (2009).

Twelve Queensland Home Economics high school teachers from both state and private school systems were selected, as highlighted in Table 1.

Participants self-nominated through an advertisement in a Home Economics teachers professional journal. At the time of the study, all participants were teaching

**Table 1** Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age (Approx)	School system	Time teaching	Leadership position
1. Joyce	Female	50+	EQ	25+ years	nil
2. Lucie	Female	35+	EQ	10–15 years	nil
3. Andy	Male	35+	Private	10–15 years	HOD—Home Economics
4. Dawn	Female	50+	Private	25+ years	nil
5. Nicole	Female	50+	Private	25+ years	nil
6. Carol	Female	50+	EQ	25+ years	HOD—Home Economics
7. Rachelle	Female	25+	EQ	5 years or less	nil
8. Sandra	Female	50+	EQ	25+ years	Year 12 Coordinator
9. Jenni	Female	25+	EQ	5 years or less	nil
10. Kellie	Female	45+	EQ	10–15 years	HOD—Home Economics
11. Amy	Female	35+	Private	10–15 years	nil
12. Shannon	Female	25+	Private	5 or less	HOD—Home Economics

at least one Home Economics class or a related school subject in the Home Economics discipline, such as Textiles, Hospitality or Food Technology. Seven of the participants were teaching in Education Queensland (EQ) schools, and five were teaching in private schools. Six of the participants held no leadership positions in their school, four teachers were Home Economics Department Heads (HODs), and two held leadership positions in areas of responsibility other than a subject area, such as VET (Vocational Educational and Training) Coordinator and Year level Coordinator.

Data collection occurred in three phases over 3 years. The initial interview at the beginning of the study used semi-structured interview questions (Suter 2010) developed using the TRFCAC model. This was followed by interviewing the same teachers 1 year later, asking the same questions and seeking explanations for any change in responses. The final phase of the research occurred in the third year, and presented teachers with the findings from the first and second interviews for discussion. This final stage occurred after the Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics and Science had been embedded in Queensland schools for over a year.

Data were analysed using the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Inductive category coding began with open-coding, where sentences and paragraphs were analysed to identify key messages. These chunks of information were then placed by the researcher into predetermined categories identified from the TRFCAC model or allocated new categories. Themes that emerged from the data included gender, teacher age, past experiences, teacher identity and motivation, subject hierarchy and subject image in schools, and job intensification.

## Findings

Teacher agency was evident in all twelve teachers who took part in the study. The study found agency varied over time and manifested in three ways, proactively, reactively and passively. Proactive agency occurred when teachers initiated the curriculum change in response to a perceived need, independent of any outside directive. Reactive agency occurred when teachers, once required to make curriculum change, engaged with curriculum development to make the change at classroom, department or school level. In these instances of reactive agency, teachers were not the initiators of change; rather they reacted to a mandated change and worked toward controlling its effects. Passive agency occurred when teachers chose not to engage with the mandated curriculum change but rather, focused on maintaining the curriculum they had previously taught, or modified curriculum within their own classroom to suit their personal agenda.

Proactive agency was enacted by teachers when they initiated a curriculum change. These teachers were motivated to pursue the change to achieve their desired outcomes. Motivators included the teacher's desire to improve student outcomes or to make change in an attempt to "*modernise the curriculum*" (Andy). The results of proactive agency were innovative, original curriculum programs that teachers believed met specific school and students' learning needs. This agentic approach required support from colleagues and administration and aligned with the bottom-up approach to curriculum change that has been

recognised by curriculum change researchers to provide teachers with the greatest sense of ownership and pride (Larson 1992; Luke et al. 2008). Proactive agency resulted in enactment of all the core properties of agency; intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness (See Fig. 1). At the first interview, eight teachers indicated they had enacted proactive agency at some level in their school. An example of this was provided by Andy (all teacher names are pseudonyms), who stated:

*When I first got here I saw there was a need to change the program because it was so old fashioned and girl focused, so I did.*

An example provided by Nicole further highlights this:

*I knew the students and their parents wanted a lot more textiles in the program. That is what they liked and that's why they chose the subject, so I changed it.*

Nicole's description was an example of proactive agency as she had planned for and initiated the changes and then implemented them in her class curriculum in response to students' learning desires. There was, however, no imperative that directed her to make the changes. One year into the study, proactive agency was described by only two of the teachers, both of whom indicated that their motivation was to improve their students' learning and outcomes. By the third year of the study, no teacher described proactive agency as it became apparent through discussion with the teachers they had been required to implement multiple curriculum changes and had little time, energy or inclination to proactively plan for their own curriculum change.

Reactive agency occurred when teachers responded to top-down decisions made by leadership. The incidences of this increased over the course of the study. Reactive agency situations were described by eight teachers at the first interview, 1 year later this number had increased to eleven teachers. This was attributed to the elevated number of mandated changes to school curriculum. The identified catalysts for these changes varied among schools and teachers. They included the movement of Year 7 into secondary college for some schools, which took place in 2012; administrative pressure to improve school NAPLAN results; the melding of subject departments into larger super departments; changed student enrolment numbers in the subject area; and alterations to school priorities with resultant reduction of resourcing. In addition, it became very apparent that teachers were subject to increased demands which occupied most of their time and energy, meaning that personally no motivated curriculum changes were attempted. For example, Shannon described increased program requirements had been occupying most, if not all her time in the following way:

*I have had to do quite a bit of work with the new senior Home Economics program. We had to write a new program for the current year 11s and it still isn't approved. It has gone back three times and I still have more to do.*

An example of a typical reactive change to curriculum as a result of an administration decision was provided by Andy, who stated:

*I had to make the change because they [administration] shortened the time I had to teach the Year 8s. Once I adjusted it, it was okay, not as good as it was, but it was the best I could do in such a short time.*

Jenni also described another example:

*My school has been trying to improve the literacy level of Year 8s in the school so they told us all to teach a specific literacy skill at the beginning of each lesson. I have had to include a five to ten-minute literacy task at the start of each lesson. It takes time out of my lesson so I have had to change them.*

It would appear that reactive agency does not necessarily mean low agency. For example, Shannon described the required curriculum change as mandated, which meant the initial core property of intentionality was not her choice. Once she accepted that change was inevitable, she planned for and implemented the new curriculum. In this case, taking ownership of the change indicated agency.

The extent to which teachers influenced the curriculum at the different levels of schooling varied, for example, Amy described her engagement with curriculum change at her school in the following way:

*I do what I need to do in the classroom. They [administration] leave me alone, as I'm the only one in the school that can teach this stuff so they don't interfere. I can't do much outside the classroom though.*

Passive agency occurred both in and outside of the classroom when teachers completely removed themselves from input, influence or implementation of department and school curriculum changes. This mode of agency was exercised as teachers enacted an approach to curriculum change that enabled them to avoid making any change to their classroom practices they did not agree with or did not want to do. In some situations, teachers described themselves as appearing to others in their school to have implemented the mandated change to their classroom curriculum, but in reality, not much had changed. Outside of their classroom, they described having low efficacy or little motivation to engage in department and school curriculum changes as a result of various contextual factors. Lucie (Participant 2) described her reason in the following way:

*It's not worth the effort it takes to make curriculum changes because most of the time they [administration] just tell you "no" anyway.*

Contextual factors that contributed to this were hostile environments in their school, exhaustion, being excluded from all curriculum decisions by administration or HODs, or disagreeing with the changes. At the first interview, three of the twelve teachers indicated they had enacted passive agency in one or all of their classes, 1 year later this had decreased to one teacher. Descriptions of contextual factors that influenced passive agency included the following examples:

*I just mind my own business now and stay in my classroom. When I stick my nose out it gets chopped off anyway so why bother? Joyce (Participant 1).*



*I just don't get along with my Principal. We are always at loggerheads.* Shannon (Participant 12) (Note: By Phase 2, Shannon described her relationship with the same Principal as improved).

For the two teachers who had moved from passive to reactive agency over the course of the study, the motivating factors were administrative support and increased experience and confidence with curriculum development; both of which improved teacher efficacy. For example, Lucie, a middle career teacher, described having little input or influence outside her classroom at the first interview which she attributed to her HOD and administration, who at that stage, she described as very unreceptive to changes initiated by classroom teachers. At the second interview, this had changed and she described both proactive and reactive agency in her subject areas as a result of support and approval from administration. It is important to note here, neither the HOD nor the administration had changed over the course of the year. What appeared to have changed was Lucie's confidence in participating in curriculum change opportunities and her attitude toward administration. For example, she stated:

*So, I got the idea that we would do a unit where they were developing the sets of skills that we were using in Year 11 and 12 [Hospitality and Tourism] ... and developed that and he [principal] said that was great.*

Another example of the move from passive agency to reactive and proactive agency was demonstrated by Rachelle. In the first interview, she described passive agency and expressed doubt about her future as a teacher; 1 year later, she described proactive agency and high job satisfaction. This move she accredited to increasing experience and confidence in herself, recognition by her peers and administration of her developing skills in curriculum, and improved efficacy. When asked to identify what helped her to improve her engagement with curriculum she stated:

*Part of it was my behaviour management improved so I found I had more time. ... As I have been at the school longer I am more aware of all the protocols so I didn't have to worry about those things as much, I know what the system expects of you so, those sorts of things have become second nature so I have more time to then focus on curriculum and those sorts of things. A whole lot of things have happened.*

In this case, it became apparent that time in the classroom, teacher mentoring and PD opportunities were pivotal in furthering this teacher's confidence in developing curriculum.

In summary, teacher input into whole school curriculum decision-making decreased over the course of the study. Teachers engaged increasingly with reactive agency at a department or classroom level as a result of numerous top-down mandated changes by their schools. Subsequently, there were decreasing examples of curriculum change enacted thorough proactive agency. However, all twelve teachers perceived themselves to have exercised some form of agency in making or resisting change to classroom curriculum.

## Discussion

The mode of agency teachers used to either develop new curriculum or resist curriculum change can be task and expertise specific; in that a teacher can demonstrate proactive agency in one area of their teaching (for example, their classroom or their subject area curriculum) but not have that same proactive agency outside of these areas. Teachers who enacted proactive agency were personally motivated to make the changes and were supported by a number of contextual factors such as administrative support, positive collegial environments and good quality PD. A critical aspect of enhancing proactive and reactive agency was providing opportunity for teachers to engage with leadership and peers in a collegial environment with PD support, to plan for and implement the changes. Collegiality improves efficacy, and implicit within the act of agency is self-efficacy, where teachers make judgments about their own capabilities to be effective in making change (Bandura 1997). Efficacy influences aspirations, goal setting, outcomes expectations, effort, how failure and setbacks are dealt with, and receptiveness to change or innovation (Bandura 1997). Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) identified that efficacy beliefs also influence what people attempt and their work-related performance. This was evident throughout the study and highlighted the need for school leaders to promote and develop in teachers what Pyhalto et al. (2015) identified as all aspects of teacher learning, including knowledge of everyday practices, motivation to learn and self-efficacy, as well as learning skills.

Proactive agency resulted in teachers developing what they described as innovative and contextualised programs that met their school and students' needs. For this to happen, teachers required sufficient motivation to engage with curriculum change, time and energy to put into planning, and encouragement and support by leadership, particularly from the principal. A feature of curriculum change as a result of proactive agency was that school leadership had less control over the direction of the curriculum, a feature recognised by Marsh (2004). Proactive agency, however, did not account for most of the curriculum changes that teachers were required to engage with. Instead, teachers increasingly changed curriculum in accordance with an administrative directive which resulted in reactive agency.

Reactive agency occurred where teachers were required to make curriculum changes, such as changes to class times, lesson content and subject offerings, as a result of a leadership decision. This top-down approach meant teachers still maintained agency in controlling what happened in their department and classes by planning for and implemented the required changes. Motivation to make the curriculum changes successful was still high because teachers described being compelled to minimise any negative effects the mandated changes might have had on their teaching and student learning. A strength of this top-down approach was that it enabled leadership to retain control and direction of curriculum, while teachers took on the task of managing the changes in their subject areas. However, the current research highlighted the necessity for good relationships with administration, clear communication strategies during implementation and involvement of teachers in the initial planning stages, in an attempt to mitigate the problems of a

top-down approach to curriculum (Sutherland and Yoshida 2015). There were significant descriptions of job intensification as teachers increasingly were required to spend time and energy addressing either mandated curriculum changes or other administrative duties, all of which contributed to increases in reactive agency and decreased opportunities for proactive curriculum changes. The result was teacher fatigue where they described not having the time or energy to develop and implement new curriculum as they were fully occupied with implementing mandated curriculum changes. An example was provided by Carol (HOD); who, when asked what inhibited her work with curriculum, stated:

*Just my energy levels...with energy levels you have got to be on every committee that means you need a lot of energy, and time is a big factor. ... I'm sick of fighting for our place in the curriculum.*

Positive relationships assisted successful curriculum changes implemented through proactive and reactive teacher agency. These relationships included teachers' perceptions of their value and worth in their school and school community. Teachers who enacted proactive and reactive agency considered themselves to be trusted, supported and respected. They were able to speak confidently about their capacity to positively affect and influence curriculum. In contrast to this, the teachers who described themselves as unsupported or having poor relationships with their leadership, also described responding to curriculum change with passive agency.

Passive agency occurred when teachers withdrew to their classroom and either did not engage in curriculum change or made changes within their classrooms without bringing attention to themselves. The most common explanation given for a passive agency response to curriculum change was a hostile working environment, caused by either poor relationships or a top-down mandated change that was forced onto teachers without consultation. Teachers associated hostile working environments with dysfunctional relationships and conflicts with administration or colleagues. Other factors that contributed to a passive agency response included descriptions of little or no involvement in or consultation about the required curriculum changes; poor communication; perceptions of lack of respect for Home Economics and its teachers; lack of time, energy, interest, or little motivation to take on the challenge of implementing change; self-protection; lack of support and knowledge of how to go about making any changes in their schools, or little efficacy. On occasions teachers described combinations of these factors as having contributed to their withdrawal to their classroom. This can be problematic as teacher withdrawal from engagement with school-wide curriculum change to focus on their own classroom curriculum can prevent planned school-wide intended curriculum changes impacting student learning. These results are in line with Poole's (2008) findings which demonstrated that when there is a lack of communication, understanding and respect between teachers and administrators, teacher stress is increased and teachers feel compelled to react negatively, in this case with passive agency. In addition, teachers who experienced poor relationships described themselves as being unsupported and lacked motivation to involve themselves in curriculum decisions. These findings echo those of Nias (1989) and support both Bandura (1991) and Fullan's (1993) findings which

established that personal motivation on its own is not enough to maintain teacher involvement in curriculum.

As clearly illustrated in this study, for effective proactive and reactive agency to occur, there needs to be effective and appropriate leadership (Dinham 2007; Fullan 2007; Luke et al. 2008; Marsh 2004). A consequence of poorly implemented curriculum change is passive agency. Planners of curriculum change need to be aware of teachers' understandings of the proposed changes and provide for teacher capacity building (including allocated time) to plan for and implement curriculum change. There needs to be clear communication with all stakeholders through shared understandings about the purpose and intended outcomes of the curriculum change. Priestley (2011) identified that sustained curriculum change in schools can be largely directed by strong school leaders as long as administration provides both the impetus and the support. As did Priestley's (2011) study, this study found that teachers who are supported and encouraged by their administration are more likely to respond in a positive manner to top-down curriculum change. Inclusion of teachers and the school community in the curriculum change process and drawing on the cultural resources of collegial and HOD support during the time of change can enhance teachers' agency.

The differences between the types of agency can be attributed to a number of determinants including individual school environments and teacher relationships with colleagues and administration. The teachers who considered themselves very influential and effective, also described themselves as being accepted by and part of, or close to, the leadership team. Poor relationships combined with a top-down approach to curriculum change resulted in disengagement for some teachers (Fullan 2007; Knight 2009; Larson 1992). Dinham (2007) also identified that long-term implementation success of mandated curriculum changes using a top-down approach is unlikely. Rather, teachers need some ownership of their curriculum change. They need to be involved and have effective input, something a top-down approach does not encourage unless there are pre-established positive relationships with administration which enable teachers to respond to change in a reactive manner, these findings were also reflected in this study.

Teachers can also be disempowered by having little knowledge of existing school practices, or being excluded by embedded school operational practices and school cultures which suppress teacher involvement. Examples from this study included hostile interactions including bullying and intimidation by colleagues and leadership. Other factors included changed working conditions that discouraged involvement, or job intensification that inhibited involvement. An example of this was found in over half of the schools with the formation of mega-departments or what Brooker (2002) described as amalgams of knowledge; which resulted in significant changes to the size of departments, the function of departments, and changes to the HODs and teachers' roles, findings that correlate with Rosenfeld's (2008) study. Under the newly formed mega-department structure, some HODs had little knowledge of the subjects in their department and lacked the basic knowledge and skills to complete the day-to-day management of their subject areas and were unable to complete the traditional role of HOD. This shortfall required subject teachers to take on the tasks normally allocated to the HOD; however, these teachers indicated they

had not received the extra time allocation or remuneration traditionally associated with the extra work, which resulted in increased workload and time pressure. It is at this department, or middle management level that many curriculum reforms become stuck. Dinham and Scott (2002) described this as the “pressure point” (p.50) where the greatest pressure is felt during curriculum change, and it was here that the greatest impact of mandated curriculum change was felt by the teachers in this study.

## Conclusions and Implications

Curriculum change is currently the lived reality for schools and teachers. Results from this study indicate teachers can enact agency to engage in curriculum change at a whole school, department and classroom levels, and teachers’ agency can be encouraged developed and directed towards achieving planned for curriculum change. The TRFCAC model can provide an effective approach to explore teacher agency. It enabled agency to be analysed in stages and provided an opportunity for the contextual factors that impacted each stage to be identified and explored. When teachers enacted proactive agency, they engaged with curriculum change of their own volition. As a result, they owned the curriculum and were prepared to invest time and energy in developing and implementing it. This often resulted in innovative and school-specific curriculum programs. Success in curriculum change increased teacher confidence and motivation to engage further. Reactive agency occurred when teachers perceived they were forced to make curriculum changes as a result of decisions made by their leadership, either curriculum or resource related. Reacting to mandated curriculum change in some cases increased job stress and reduced teacher capacity to develop new curriculum programs using proactive agency. Reactive agency contributed to teachers attempting to control the changes to their department and classroom curriculum in an effort to minimise any potential negative impacts. Passive agency occurred when teachers made the choice to withdraw into their classrooms and not to implement any changes or to only implement their own preferred changes. The current research confirmed that passive agency was the least productive and most stressful for teachers of the three manifestations of agency.

Teachers moved between all three manifestations of agency, which meant professional teacher agency was neither static nor consistent over time and context. Agency response was dependent on the contextual factors impacting teachers and their school. These included their relationships with administration and colleagues and their own personal journey in teaching. This study highlighted that relationships between teachers and their school leaders, including HODS, are important factors to consider if school curriculum changes are to be effective. In addition, inclusive communication practices that enabled teachers to have input into the proposed changes, improved teacher agency. Teachers require adequate time to visualise and plan curriculum. This needs to be supported with PD and quality leadership, as both had the potential to enhance and develop productive teacher agency. This study highlighted the need for further research into the support and development of proactive and reactive teacher agency. The capacity for teachers to engage with and develop school curriculum is important in a changing world. Enabling teachers to proactively develop

new curriculum and manage directed curriculum changes to meet the diverse needs of their community, school and their students will be of benefit to all.

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