

Power Is Power: Exploring the Significance of Teacher Agency in the Primary Teaching Profession

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This research project aims to explore the significance of agency for public primary school teachers. The comparative study explores this issue in: New York State, United States; Victoria, Australia; and Ontario, Canada. The project is guided by the major research question, what is the significance of teacher agency in the teaching profession? An important aim of the project is to explore and understand how teachers define and exercise agency in their profession, especially within the constraints of external governance which is causing teachers to lose their agency. Specifically, this study is exploring teachers' agency during times of disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic provides scope to potentially (re)imagine the teacher profession with regards to how teachers exercise their agency.

The project incorporates a qualitative research design through the carriage of semi-structured interviews and generation of photovoice which is being used as a prompt during the interview. These two methods has generated in-depth data on the main aim of the project which is understanding and exploring how teachers define and exercise agency in their profession, particularly during a time of "disruption". Preliminary data analysis through qualitative coding has elicited two major themes: (1) Value-added models impede teacher's perception of their agency; (2) Times of disruption increases teacher autonomy.

This study is timely as it is being conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a topical and unprecedented point of disruption. Even though there is a plethora of literature on teacher agency and the profession (Apple, 1986; Ballet et al., 2006; de Saxe et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2000; Leicht et al., 2009; Sachs, 2016; Taylor, 2007), there is limited literature on how times of disruption, such as COVID-19, impacts and informs insights on teacher agency. This study is contributing to an imperative need to further explore teacher agency during the COVID-19 context because times of disruption provide possibilities to (re)imagine teachers' role in the education system (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; De La Rosa, 2020).