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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of teacher agency for social justice in a primary school in Scotland. Mixed methods and tools, including a questionnaire, interviews and observations, were used to explore the expressions of teachers' sense of agency in their beliefs and context-embedded practices. Teachers perceived agency for social justice as part of their role in helping students adapt to the institutional structures. Relationships with students, families, colleagues and other professionals, and participation in decision-making were seen as both functions of agency, and as features of structural environments that enable agency. Methodological challenges for future research are discussed.

Key words: teacher agency; social justice; inclusive practice; teacher education.

1 Introduction

Development of teachers as agents of change has been promoted in the literature for some time (Fullan, 1993; Zeichner, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and is increasingly endorsed as a strategy for promoting social justice (see, e.g. Ballard, 2012; Scottish Government, 2011). Studies of teacher agency have begun to identify some common factors that seem to matter most for such agency, including relationships and collaboration with other agents (Heijden et al., 2015; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2012b; Soini, Pietarinen, Toom & Pyhältö, 2015). Although, 'agency for change' in these studies often implies a change towards more inclusive and equitable education, the link between teacher agency and social justice has not yet been explicitly explored. Similarly, although research in the areas of inclusion and social justice has not been articulated in the language of teacher agency, a number of studies offer valuable insights into the ways in which teachers can contribute to the transformation of classroom and school practices (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Florian & Spratt, 2013; Hayes, Mills & Lingard, 2005).

However, teachers' practices are highly contextualised and dependant on those of others, in ever changing constellations of human interactions located in complex, politically and culturally shaped educational settings (Berliner, 2002; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). While teachers often report commitment to making a difference towards social justice as a reason for entering the profession (Olsen, 2008), they may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of inequitable educational outcomes for some learners because of the assumptions embedded in the institutional contexts in which they work (Allan, 2006) or because of their own unexamined assumptions. Consequently, it has been difficult to make theoretical sense out of the why and how of teachers matter, despite the evidence that teachers and schools can and do make a difference in students' learning (Hanushek & Woessman, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Hayes et al., 2006). Moreover, contested theoretical knowledge and variable enactment of social justice in practice can leave researchers with the problem of varying and competing interpretations. As a result, empirical investigations have been small scale, mostly qualitative explorations of how agency is exercised within particular locations,

although calls have been made for complementary mixed-method analysis (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley & Miller, 2012a; Vähäsantanen 2015).

Designing studies that are both meaningfully contextualised and more broadly generalizable with regard to the more probable and less likely patterns in social behaviour (Opfer & Pedder, 2011) is essential for building the knowledge base for relevant teacher education. This case study examines the face validity of previously designed research tools for capturing teachers' beliefs and enacted practices, as well as structural conditions that support or impede agency with a view towards replication across contexts. A new analytical model of teacher agency is used for a comprehensive mixed-method analysis of agency for social justice that takes into account teachers' beliefs and context-embedded practices. We employ the tools designed to analyse different components (see section 2 below) that constitute teacher agency to explore how they can be adequately combined to address the above challenges and enable comparable studies across different contexts.

2 Theoretical background and related work

The conceptual model for study of teacher agency for social justice (Pantić, 2015a) was developed drawing on the broader theories of human and professional agency (Archer, 2000; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Giddens, 1984; Edwards, 2007; Eteläpelto et al., 2013) applied to inclusive teaching practices (Pantić & Florian, 2015). In this model teacher agency is constituted by their *sense of purpose* (belief that a certain practice is worthwhile for achieving a certain outcome), *competence* (knowing how to influence a desired outcome in practice), scope of *autonomy* (power to make a difference within given structural environments) and *reflexivity* (a capacity to monitor and evaluate one's actions and structural contexts). The model adopts a socio-cultural perspective of agency in which agents are embedded in their contextual conditions, yet capable of transforming these conditions (Edwards, 2007; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013; Lasky 2005). In an ecological view of agency (Biesta &Tedder, 2007) agents act upon their beliefs and values within the contingency of particular contexts-for-action. Agency is seen as temporal and situated within the complex interplay of cultural and institutional contexts (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Thus, actors might exercise agency in one situation but not in another considering the desired outcomes as well as potential gains and losses in a given environment.

Nevertheless, a growing number of studies that consider various aspects of teacher agency in different contexts point to the similar structural factors that support or constrain agency. For example, researchers have looked at the ways in which teacher agency operated in contexts of secondary education reform in US Lasky (2005), and in the implementation of the *Curriculum for Excellence* in Scotland (Priestley et al. 2012a). Recently, a Special Issue of *Teachers and Teaching* journal reported a number of empirical studies of teacher agency in a variety of contexts, including Finland, Netherlands, Scotland and US (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015; Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen & Hökkä, 2015; Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard & Popeijus, 2015; Toom, Pyhältö, & Rust, 2015; Stillman & Anderson, 2015).

The present study draws on the findings of these and other studies to explore the specific form of teacher agency employed to address issues of social justice and inclusion. Following the above model, the study focuses on agents' sense of purpose expressed in teachers' beliefs (about their role and about social justice), and competence (enactment of these beliefs in context-embedded practices, within given degrees of autonomy). The study addresses the following questions:

1) What are teachers' beliefs about their professional role and understandings of social justice?

2) How do such beliefs and understandings reflect in their context-embedded practices? What features of their working environment do teachers perceive as enabling or constraining their agency for social justice?

The study also refers to teachers' reflexivity but this aspect is not systematically explored in this paper.

2.1 Sense of purpose

Teacher agency involves a commitment to pursue a sense of, at least partly self-determined, purposes (Frost, 2006; Giddens, 1984) informed by the underlying beliefs about their professional roles (Biesta et al., 2015). Teachers might perceive their roles as implementers of their school or authorities' policies, as well as 'step up' above and beyond the perceived expectations of their roles, or 'push back' when there is a dissonance between their own beliefs and policies (Buchanan, 2015, p. 710). One of the basic assumptions of teachers acting as agents of social justice is that they *believe* such agency is part of their professional role.

With regard to agency for social justice, Villegas and Lucas (2002) regard teachers' beliefs about schooling and their roles as a continuum between views of teachers as 'technicians' who apply rules and procedures uncritically accepting standard school practices, and those of teachers as 'agents of change' who see schools as potential sites for promoting social equality (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, p. 54). In the present study such a continuum was used to explore teachers' perceptions of their roles (see section 3.3.1). We also sought to account for the contested and contextual nature of 'social justice' and its underlying principles. One of the most common theoretical distinctions is made between the distributional justice referring to the principles by which resources are distributed in society (Rawls, 1972), and the justice of power relationships which structure society (Gewirtz, 1998). Nancy Fraser's more recent theorisation (Fraser, 2008) also includes political justice referring to representation of different voices in the institutional set-up. These underlying principles will have varying implications for educational practice. For example, where disadvantage is thought to be an economic issue, redistributive measures might be prioritised; but where it is thought to arise from cultural barriers, the focus might be on increased cultural recognition (Keddie, 2012). Accordingly, teachers committed to the same broad cause of promoting social justice could act in considerably different ways. We included an explicit interview question (see Table 1) to explore teachers' potentially diverse understandings of social justice.

2.2 Competence

Guided by their sense of purpose and beliefs, competent agents use their knowledge to achieve the desired quality or outcome (Giddens, 1984). However, teachers' espoused beliefs may differ from their practiced beliefs or competence, i.e. the enactment of these beliefs in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Pantić, 2011). We explored how teachers' sense of purpose reflected in their competence, focusing on both beliefs and practices in relation to social justice.

In particular, the study focused on teachers' perceived influence in addressing the risks for vulnerable students relative to external influences, such as pupils' backgrounds and home situations, or the availability of resources, such as support from social and healthcare professionals (Belfi, Gielen, De Fraine, Verschueren & Meredith, 2015; Stillman & Anderson, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2015). We were interested in teachers' perceptions of the scope for their actions and whether their influence extended beyond their own classrooms (Hatch, Eiler-White & Faigenbaum, 2005), for example by participating in relevant school level activities, or in professional development and dialogue (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Quinn & Carl, 2015; Tam, 2015). Our study examined teachers' self-reported as well as observed practices, and their alignment to the principles of inclusive practice, such as seeking creative ways of working with others (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Pantić & Florian, 2015).

2.3 Autonomy

An aspect of human agency is the power actors are able to mobilise within social structures, given levels of autonomy and interdependence with other agents (Archer, 2000; Giddens, 1984). Accordingly, we explored how teachers' sense of agency and influence manifests within the given structural environment.

Research suggests that agency is shaped by different factors at micro (such as personal values), mezzo (such as institutional norms, cultures and practices) and macro levels (such as education policies, resources, and curriculum) (Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Lasky, 2005; Priestley et al., 2012; Toom et al., 2015). We explored the ways in which teachers exercise their agency within the existing degrees of autonomy, focusing particularly on the mezzo level influences, such as opportunities for participation in decision-making, as critical for creating conditions that enable or constrain agency (Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2015). For example, Eteläpelto et al. (2015) reported differences among schools in how far novice teachers can make suggestions and be taken seriously. Another important part of (relational) agency is a capacity for working purposefully and flexibly with others (Edwards, 2010; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Such agency is exercised through interpersonal interactions and relationship building (Quinn & Carl, 2015; Tam, 2015). A number of studies identified collaboration with colleagues as a key characteristic of 'agentic' teachers (Heijden et al., 2015; Soini, Pietarinen, Toom & Pyhältö, 2015; Toom et al., 2015) including support by peers, management and other professionals (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Tam, 2015). Strong social relationships in the school environment can contribute to efficacy, trust, support, shared norms and values among teachers, students and parents, and creating the environment supportive of student achievement (Belfi et al., 2015; Muijs et al., 2004; Priestley et al. 2012b). Therefore, the study focused on teachers' participation in school decision-making and ways of working with others.

2.4 Reflexivity

Archer (2000) suggests that agents' power lies in human capacity to reflect on and evaluate their social contexts, and envision alternatives to achieve certain outcomes. Reflective practice is a matter of opening up a range of possibilities, abandoning routinised mechanistic practices, stepping back from a situation to make sense of it, and to act constructively upon it (Thompson & Pascal, 2011). Reflection can help teachers take critical stances and shape their responses to accommodate certain policies and resist others, especially when helping disadvantaged students (Allen, 2015; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Thus, we were interested in the possibilities teachers recognise for transforming practices. This paper refers to the relevance of these findings for teacher education and development.

In summary, this study explores how research insights about these components or aspects of teacher agency apply to specific purposes of promoting social justice in education. A holistic understanding of teachers' thinking of themselves and acting as agents of social justice within a given structural context was sought by employing: a) the multi-faceted analytical framework above, and b) tools specifically designed for collection and analysis of data about the different aspects of agency (see section 3). The study also aimed to explore methodological implications for adequately capturing different aspects of teacher agency across contexts. A process of triangulation of data collected by different tools was employed to establish the most appropriate methods for exploring specific subtopics, including teachers' perceptions of professional role, understanding of social justice, espoused and practiced competence, perceived structural conditions, and interactions with other agents (see Table 1).

3 Research design and methodology

3.1 Participatory, mixed-method case study

A case study approach (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2006) was chosen for gaining a holistic understanding of the multifaceted concept of agency as it is exercised in the complex, real-life setting (Yin, 2003). Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration treats agency as contingent with social structures. Archer (2000) also 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. To disentangle the structures and components that constitute agency, we treated the above aspects of agency as separate but related units of analysis, with subtopics to be covered (see Table 1) drawn from previous research (Pantić, 2015a), and analysed with complementary mixed methods (Green & Camilli, 2003; Pantić, 2015b; Smith, 2006).

The research tools presented below have been developed in a process of participatory design over one year with a 12 member Advisory Committee involving 6 researchers and teacher educators, and 6 representatives of potential beneficiaries including teachers, school management, and local and national policy makers in Scotland. Subsequently, the tools have been tested and further refined in this exploratory case study, while the process of participatory research design, including the detailed description of tool development, has been reported elsewhere (Pantić, 2015b).

3.2 The school and participants

The case study was conducted in a primary school in Scotland whose head teacher was a member of the Advisory Committee. The school is situated in a small town near Edinburgh, employs 20 staff members and caters for 422 pupils from nursery to primary 7. At the time of conducting the study a new head teacher had been in post for a year and a half, while the teachers had worked in the school for up to 16 years and appeared to have well-established relationships with each other. The school served a relatively affluent population[1] of pupils. However, considering the exploratory nature of the study, the validity of the extrapolation from the case did not depend on its typicality or representativeness, but on the cogency of the theoretical reasoning (Macpherson, Brooker & Ainsworth, 2000). Thus, the case study was used analytically by embedding it in an appropriate theoretical framework (Macpherson et al., 2000) and with a view to exploring how the different research tools could be fitted together in a design that employs different methods as complementary to each other rather than merely mixed (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Following the initial visit and the presentation of the study by the researcher, teachers were asked to express their willingness (and sign a consent form) if they agreed to participate in all or some of the research activities. 14 teachers in total, including the head teacher, participated in the study by taking part in a focus group (11); filling an online questionnaire (11); participating in semi-structured individual interviews (10) and agreeing to be observed (8) in meetings with colleagues and other professionals, and in less formal interactions in the common room during lunchtime. Length of participants' teaching experience ranged from 2 to 21 years. Only one teacher was male. None were members of an ethnic, cultural or linguistic minority group, and four described themselves as religious. Only one teacher lived in a predominantly deprived area.

3.3 Research tools and procedures

Different tools were used as potentially more appropriate for the different (sub-)aspects of agency, e.g. questionnaire for perceptions of roles, environments; interviews for understanding of social justice, and observations for practiced competence (Pantić, 2015b). Table 1 presents the subtopics of the aspects of agency, which tools were used to capture data for each subtopic, and sample items from these tools.

Table 1. Units of analysis with their subtopics and tools with sample items.

Units of analysis (Aspect of agency)	Subtopics	Tools with sample items
Sense of purpose	Teachers' perception of their professional role	*Interview* (What do you see as the most important aspect of your professional role?) *Questionnaire* (Priority ranking e.g. 'Supporting pupils' wellbeing…')

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1 60 % of pupils reside within the 20 % least deprived areas of Scotland (deciles 9 and 10 of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation - the calculation based on pupils' home addresses classified by the level of deprivation released by the Scottish Government on 18.12.12) and no pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas.

	Understanding of social justice	*Interview* (What is your understanding of 'social justice'?)
Competence	Teachers' beliefs about their own and external influences	*Interview* (Who can do something about it?) *Questionnaire* (How important is e.g. 'teachers' ability to get through to the most difficult pupils')
	Self-reported practice	*Questionnaire* (How often do you e.g. 'Discuss the learning and participation of vulnerable pupils' *Interview* (Could you give an example of your involvement beyond classroom?)
	Observed practices	*Observation* (Collaborative activity e.g. working group meeting)
Autonomy	Perceived environment	*Questionnaire* (Dis/agree with e.g. 'Teachers here actively participate in decisions') *Interview* (What are the opportunities for your participation in decision making?
	Relationships, trust and influence in interactions	*Questionnaire* (Dis/agree with e.g. 'Teachers in this school trust the head teacher') *Observation* (Staff interactions, e.g. in staff meetings and staff room)

The data were collected over a period of six months starting in October 2014. First, a focus group interview with school teachers was held to discuss their views of the ways of addressing issues of social justice, and the conditions or features of the school environment that might enable or restrain those practices. The focus group data was used to adjust the tools initially developed on the basis of previous research in consultation with the Advisory Committee (see section 3.1). Mirroring teachers' own statements, as far as possible the same questions have been asked in the survey and interviews, with the aim of exploring the levels of congruence between teachers' responses to the different tools, and the observed interactions between teachers and other professionals in school decision making (Flecha & Soler 2013; Edwards, 2010).

3.3.1 Questionnaire Survey

The on-line questionnaire included five sections covering:
1) teachers' perceptions of their professional role as agents and role implementers (2x6 items);[2]
2) teachers' beliefs about their own and external influences on addressing barriers for all students learning and participation (14 items);
3) self-reported practices (18 items);

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[2] Twenty items had been initially generated using the continuum of views of teachers as technicians to those of teachers as agent of change (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, p. 54). Teachers in the case study school were then asked to position the items on the continuum. Only those items that teachers unambiguously placed on one or the other end of the continuum have been retained.

4) perceptions of school environments including relationships with colleagues, management, other professionals and parents (27 items), and
5) demographic characteristics, including gender, experience and socio-economic background (see section 3.2 above)

Items from existing instruments, such as or levels of trust among parents, teachers, and management (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) were adapted to focus on issues of social justice and complemented by the new items generated in the focus group with teachers. All items were further validated during the cognitive interviews with 10 teachers asking them to 'think aloud' while filling out the questionnaire to verify whether the respondents interpreted the items as had been intended (Beatty & Willis, 2007; Collins 2003; Desimone & Floch, 2004). The items have been revised after each cognitive interview. Likert scales ranging 1-7 were used alongside the requests to rank the items in order of priority (see Table 1 for examples).

3.3.2 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews focused on: teachers' perception of their professional role; understanding of 'social justice; teachers' beliefs about their own and external influences; self-reported practices; and perceived environment. For question examples, see table 1. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

3.3.3 Observations

Observation of three staff meetings, three meetings of groups of teachers (for planning homework; working group on behaviour; meeting with a line manager) and one interagency meeting, focused on teachers' interactions and ways of working with each other and with other professionals, e.g. levels of trust and collegiality, or processes of joint lesson planning and discussions of students, teaching and learning, and identifying related issues and problems (Muijs et al., 2004).

3.4 Data analysis

The theoretical model of teacher agency was used as an analytical lens for initial deductive coding. The data were organised by the aspects of agency (see table 1) rather than by method per se (Greene & Caracelli, 2003). In addition, open coding of interview data was used to identify any additional themes and categories, any patterns in content or any new discoveries about aspects of agency that might not have been picked by the draft tools. Data analysis consisted in both stipulating patterns and continual pattern-matching with the collected evidence (Yin, 2006). The transcripts were first read in order to identify and code the main findings. The categories were linked to the aspects of agency including categories that could be regarded as manifestations of 'agentic' and 'role-implementing' attitudes and behaviours, or as inclusive in the light of previous research (Pantić & Florian, 2015; Florian & Spratt, 2013). These initial categories were further refined after independent coding of about 10 % of interview data by two raters and comparing the results to check for inter-rater reliability. Kappa measure of inter-rater agreement of .84 was reached after three meetings in which the use of codes by the two raters was discussed to adjust the coding scheme. Finally, all data was re-coded by the author using N-Vivo software.

The interview responses in each category were systematically compared with the results obtained via questionnaire survey and observations checking the levels of congruence. The use of multiple tools allowed triangulation among sources to address a particular aspect of agency. We examined the consistency of findings and nature of data obtained by the different tools with a view towards optimising the burden on teachers' time in the future, e.g. by covering as many questions as can be meaningfully covered by the questionnaire (Desimone & Floch, 2004). The incongruences between the data collected by different tools were highlighted rather than suppressed (Macpherson et al., 2000) with the view to establishing aspects of agency that require complementary qualitative data analysis. The methodological implications are discussed in relation to the subtopics in which the findings are presented below and for future research at the end of the paper.

4 Results and discussion

The results are presented by aspects of agency combining the respective sources of data, illustrating and discussing congruence and incongruence between interview data and data collected by the complementary tools for each subtopic (see Table 1).

4.1 Sense of purpose

4.1.1 Perceptions of professional roles

Both interview and questionnaire data suggest that teachers' sense of purpose as agents is underlined by beliefs about attending to children's wellbeing and holistic development as an essential part of teachers' professional roles (see Table 2 for examples of coded statements and their frequencies). When the interviewees talked about the importance of implementing the curriculum and building pupils' knowledge and skills, these utterances were always accompanied by the statements about other equally important purposes, such as care for pupils:

> 'Very much my job is obviously developing them academically and supporting their learning…But also developing them as much as I can as young people…just being there for them and being somebody that they can talk to, if they need to…I think you have that pastoral role as well'.

Some teachers also suggested that the emphasis might be different depending on the socio-economic background of the students served by different schools:

> '…your teaching and learning might not be the top of your list if you're in a school that's in a more deprived area. Or, you know, the children have come in and they've maybe had a horrendous weekend and we need to help their emotional [wellbeing]. It might be a different type of teaching and learning.'

However, interview data also revealed instances of teachers' belief in the implementation of curriculum and policies as a way of exercising their agency when they agreed with these policies:

'I think the *Curriculum for Excellence*3 was possibly the government's attempt to reach out to education to fulfil its idea of social justice. But I don't think that that is necessarily how it's being used…I don't know, as time goes on and we use it more and more, will the themes of health and wellbeing and whatever come through more strongly and change our practice.'

The questionnaire data was compatible with the overarching categories derived from the interview data aligned to the perceptions of roles as agents of change and those aligned to the role-implementation (see Table 2). The three top rated priority roles in the questionnaire were 'Supporting the child's wellbeing', 'Building all pupils' confidence' and 'Seeing a child holistically'. The three lowest ranking items were 'Raising the school's rating' (not mentioned in the interviews), 'Implementing education policies' and 'Implementing school rules and procedures'.

Table 2. Teachers' perceptions of their professional role – questionnaire items and examples of equivalently coded interview data

Role-implementation		Agents of change for social justice	
Questionnaire item/code	Examples of interview utterances with frequency (source/utterance)	Questionnaire item/code	Examples of interview utterances with frequency (source/utterance)
Implementing education policies	'…at the moment in Scottish educational policy this desire for equity is coming through really strongly…but then I suppose that has to be taken on by everybody to be effective' (3/3)	Supporting child's wellbeing	'I think it is very important that the children are in a place where they can learn. Because if they're not – emotionally or… You know, they're not in the right frame of mind, they're not going to get the best… So it's important that they're ready to… You know, that you support them' (6/14)
implementing school rules and procedures	'We are really pushing the golden rules, and the head teacher is coming in every day, checking the children that have broken the rules, and there's consequences for the children. And at the same time, children who are abiding to the rules are getting extra treats' (3/3)	Understanding the influence of pupils' home situation	'Teaching them, you get a good insight into their home life and the parenting as well.' (6/9)
imparting knowledge and skills	'Very much my job is obviously developing them academically and supporting their learning…' (3/3)	Seeing a child holistically	'…also their all-round development, as well, as people. And doing what I can to bring that out in different ways' (6/12)
implementing curriculum	'The academic is obviously very important in the curriculum…'(2/2)	Modelling a disposition to fairness	'And they are then seeing that that child is being treated completely differently. Where's the fairness in that?' (3/8)

3 In 2004 the Scottish government introduced the 'Curriculum for Excellence' with the aim of diversifying educational outcomes and helping all learners achieve key curricula objectives, strongly underpinned by promotion of health wellbeing.

applying agreed standards	'…with the new standards changing and things, that's come trickling down from the top. And I think there has to be that emphasis from the top…' (2/2)	Promoting social justice	'…making sure children are included' (2/2)

Views about the importance of implementing policies sometimes referred to the implementation of the national 'wellbeing indicators'[4] as the head teacher commented:

> 'As the head teacher, the work that I'm doing day-to-day is at that high level where you're looking at the wellbeing indicators. Class teachers maybe don't see their role…I think they're doing it subconsciously, but they don't really see it in terms of [wellbeing indicators] – or they didn't. But we've just had a session with a lady from the Scottish government to help us to understand that we all have that responsibility. So whenever we are planning for children we should be looking at wellbeing indicators and then planning for that.'

In this context where curricula is perceived to imply the nurturing as well as instructing roles, it can be misleading to interpret the scores on questionnaire items referring to policy and curricula implementation as belonging to the 'technician' role of 'change agents' continuum suggested by Villegas & Lucas (2002) (see section 2.1). Moreover, different statements by the same teachers coded as aligned to the views of teachers as 'agents of change' and 'role-implementers' indicate that teachers can simultaneously see both as part of their role, raising questions about the justification for thinking of these views as ends of a continuum. Rather, these findings corroborate the suggestions about the dynamic and temporal nature of teacher agency made in recent studies (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Vähäsantanen, 2015), as well as suggestions that agency may be in agreement as well as at some level of tension with current policies (Lasky, 2005; Moore et al., 2002; Sannino, 2010; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). While perceptions of roles could be adequately captured by the questionnaire, additional items are needed to gage the levels of agreement with current policies.

4.1.2 Perceptions of social justice

Like in other studies (see e.g. Biesta et al., 2015) social justice issues were conspicuous by their absence from teachers' discourses. Some teachers felt uncomfortable with the use of term 'social justice' as remote from their immediate experiences:

> 'I hadn't really heard it in terms of social justice before. But the way that I, sort of, see it's trying to make sure that the children are included in the class. Like, they have a role within the class. They're not excluded from any, sort of, learning and teaching that you're doing, or any social aspects of the classroom or the school and the community…I think it's important to, sort of, look at inclusion and...I guess, social justice. I don't know.'

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[4] Scottish 'Getting it Right For Every Child' policy foresees the use of eight indicators (Safe, Active, Healthy, Respected, Achieving, Responsible, Nurtured and Included) by professionals and practitioners to assess a child or young person's overall wellbeing and identify any concerns.

Interpretation of interview data through the lenses of Nancy Fraser's conceptualisations of social justice (Keddie, 2012) provided some insights into the varying principles that could be seen to underlie teachers' understanding. They predominantly include the principles of re-distribution and recognition of the diverse students' needs based on their perceived belonging to a specific group, such as socio-economically disadvantaged, or disabled students. Statements that resonate with the re-distribution principle usually refer to the lack of access to resources by some families:

> 'The ones that are the best are not always the ones that make the biggest progress. And I think a lot of that is to do with not having access to certain things. I think…social justice is about communicating and about making sure that people who need these…extra input are able to understand what's there... But, do you know, a lot of the time we have families and they don't know how to access things... I mean, it may be that there are things out there, but they're just not clear on how they access them. And if they're not going to access them, then they're not having the same opportunities.

The predominant belief about teachers role in relation to promoting social justice is that they can help pupils identified as vulnerable and their families to meet the required standards and norms, for example by providing adequate shoes for Physical Education lesson, or information about funding schemes that can facilitate access to higher levels of education. Most teachers saw their role in removing the barriers that prevent some students' participation in education on par with their peers, while the origins of such barriers were rarely discussed in light of the institutional set-up or broader social or economic inequality. Exceptions could be found in the statements of teachers who had themselves experienced similar barriers in their own schooling:

> 'My background is not a pleasant background. As a child I was from a working class home, a lot of alcohol abuse, physical abuse…And then ended being cared for. So my own background isn't your standard, middle class… So when a child arrives and they're filthy dirty and they don't have their PE kit and they haven't done their homework, I can sort of understand that. And I could never give a child trouble for that because I remember what it was like. And I'm very aware that schools can be quite middle class, judgemental places.'

The same teacher saw her identity as a defining influence on her practice above that of a given curricular framework:

> 'I don't really care what document they give me to work with…What I do on paper isn't going to change who I am as a teacher.'

Four utterances were coded with an InVivo code of 'who I am as a teacher', following this teachers' statement. These examples align to the findings of studies of teacher agency as part of 'teacher identity' shaped by personal characteristics and previous experiences (Eteläpelto at al., 2015; Heijden et al., 2015) as well as current policy discourses (Biesta, et al., 2015; Sachs, 2001).

In summary, teachers' beliefs about their role reflect a sense of agency that focuses on children's wellbeing and full participation in educational activity. Their believes about

social justice seem to confine such a role to helping vulnerable individuals adapt to the existing schooling structures rather than addressing the injustices embedded in those structures. This could be interpreted as technicians' view of schools as neutral settings that provide equal opportunities (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, statements of teachers who perceive existing policy frameworks as vehicles for promoting social justice suggest that a more nuanced understanding of role-perceptions within particular contexts is warranted in cross-national studies.

4.2 Competence

Questionnaire data suggest that teachers in our case school see themselves, in general, as influential in addressing the barriers for learning and participation, with the three top ranked items reflecting beliefs about the importance of 'Building positive relationships', 'Promoting inclusion and social justice in their classrooms' and 'Working with families and communities', followed by 'Working with other school staff', and 'Working with other professionals such as health and social services'.

The interview data corroborates teachers' dominant beliefs (8 sources (S)/30 utterances (U)) about the importance of building positive relationships with students, families and others:

> '…all you can do is hope that your interactions with the child and building a positive relationship are going to make a difference to that child's experience…But I also think the relationship you have with the children in your class is very powerful…'

The interview data also shows a subtler distinction between working together with other professionals, and giving away the responsibility:

> '[A pupil in my class] had some assistance from a behaviour support teacher, which…didn't go so well, I think because they didn't have the relationship – that was somebody that was coming in to the school, taking him out of class and doing some exercises and it didn't really work because I think it was a chore, rather than, you know, it wasn't built in to his day-to-day…I think, as a class teacher, there's a…can be a reliance on having somebody else coming in to solve these problems when, actually, I think the class teacher has, you know, the biggest impact…'

Teachers' beliefs about prevalent external influences on students' achievement sometimes refer to the primary responsibility of families and the child's (perceived[5]) intellectual ability or behaviour (3S/3U), sometimes implying deficit views of children and families:

> 'I had a child in my class whose behaviour was really poor. He was really disruptive. He was very difficult to be in the class environment… because he found things in class very, very difficult academically…But then it was also about, sort of, other aspects of his learning and of his, sort of, behaviour…We

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[5] Item 'Child's intellectual ability' was reformulated to 'Child's perception of their ability' in the cognitive interviews.

had his parents in quite a few times. But it was very difficult to, sort of, work with them on any...sort of beneficial basis'.

Other studies have reported competing discourses of 'creating caring learning environment for everyone' and deficit views of children's 'fixed ability' (Biesta et al., 2015). In our study, the interview data was essential for capturing an important distinction between an understanding of inclusion as providing something 'additional' for 'some' and bringing different kinds of expertise to bear while creating conditions for everybody's meaningful participation and learning (Spratt & Florian, 2015).

Teachers (6S/7U) also reported the critical external influences such as availability of resources. Some suggested that this might be different in different schools as this teacher pointed out: 'I would say this school is better resourced than the other school, and I think it should be the other way round' (see section 3.2). Statements about the availability of resources resonate with similar findings of other studies reporting lack of technical support as limiting teacher agency (Priestley at al., 2012a).

Like in other studies that found that teachers' sense of agency is generally situated at classroom level with the exception of professional development activities (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015), teachers in our study most often referred to classroom practices. When prompted to report practices beyond the classroom in the questionnaire and interviews, teachers most often pointed to the conversations with and about pupils, whole-school and professional development activities. Again, interview data illustrates the nature of these practices. For example this teachers elaborated on the different kinds of professional development activities:

> 'On reflection in the last few years we've done it as quite a formal thing and I think that's where it fell down because being...I suppose being told what you're going to come along and discuss, it seems a bit pointless. It has to come from you. And there is definitely a change with that. We can now bring stuff to the table, rather than it being fed down, kind of, from senior management, which is much more valuable.'

Other practices frequently reported in the questionnaire include 'Help or get help from a colleague to progress learning of a vulnerable pupil' 'Work collaboratively towards joint aims/targets in this school', 'Work collaboratively with other staff to address risks of exclusion/underachievement', 'Communicate with families of vulnerable pupils' (all on a monthly basis). Working with others and participation in decision making are also some of the collaborative practices most frequently mentioned in the interviews (see Table 3), while observation of meetings shed further light on *how* teachers engage in these practices in contexts. A great deal of overlap in the coding of answers about the actual practices and the perceptions of structures and cultures that teachers perceive as enabling or constraining their agency made it clear that these are two sides of the same coin. For this reason these results are presented jointly in the section below.

Table 3. Teachers' perception of barriers or opportunities for exercising agency for social justice

Barriers – examples of utterances with frequency (source/utterance)	Codes	Opportunities – examples of utterances with frequency (source/utterance)
(lack of…) 'As a class teacher, you probably wouldn't be involved in that [analysis of risks of underachievement at school level]. You would do tracking. So we do tracking twice a year, and we hand that…at the end of each term. And that goes in to the senior management team. And they have an overview of the whole school. And then they decide where the needs are, and they'll timetable people into that…'(8/20)	Participation in decision making	(opportunity for…) '…it's starting to be, like, school improvement is not just given down to us. It should come from us…But I don't think we're at where we need to be with that yet. It's still a wee bit top down. But I think already more there's a culture of asking why. Whereas I think for quite a few years it was just, "Okay. Just do it." And we weren't thinking critically…' (5/10)
'[Management] attending meetings about children in your class, and then not passing on any information about that - that used to really annoy me. So you would have a child in your class for 6 hours a day, but yet you weren't…at the meeting, and management were at the meeting, and they would sit and talk about your child but then not actually come back and say, "Well, this is what we've come up with. These are the next steps." You wouldn't get that, sometimes, a lot of the time, actually. And that used to really annoy me. Because I always felt that it was important to be involved in the meetings. But it is difficult, with covering classes and things like that. But if you're not part of the meeting, it's really important to actually make sure that the teaching staff and the support staff do get some sort of feedback as to what went on in that meeting. I think that's so important.' (6/25)	Effective communication	'A child in the past I've had that's a looked-after child. And there was good communication between the school, his carer and the social worker that was involved with him. And... Basically the... The carer for this child was quite keen to get him in lots of activities at the school. And the social worker knows about this, and they feed back into the school, so we can recognise when that happens. The social worker is good at letting us know if something has happened...' (8/15)
'It is safer to talk to your peers than to the management' (2/4)	Valuing teachers views and work	'I always feel in these [inter-agency] meetings that my opinion is valued. I don't ever feel that what I say is going to be…"Oh, that doesn't matter." So I do feel that the teacher's opinion is, you know, always valued and…I think the teacher does play quite a big role. And it's also really useful to have the experts in that field to be able to give you ideas of how to deal with it.' (3/4)
'…because of a number of issues the morale was very low. And I... Got sucked into that as well. Because when you have people around you who are constantly moaning, who are constantly	Collegial support and trust	'Lots of us have the same attitude to our job – that it's more than just a 9 to 5…I mean, there's maybe groups. But as a whole I would say it's, you know, quite a warm place within the teaching staff.' (8/18)

making comments, you do – you get sucked into it' (1/4)		
'…you feel safer, you feel more comfortable [talking to your peers than to the management]. I think, obviously, management are really important and they're really knowledgeable. But they're not actually in class anymore…Your peers are probably going through a very similar thing. They've maybe had the same situation just last week…whereas management aren't as aware of that, maybe, because they don't have a class anymore.' (3/16)	Management support, leadership, trust, openness	'We have a good learning support system and the head teacher is very open and very good with the staff. But it's…I suppose it's then her role, that she's got to be thinking about all these children that have got additional needs or, you know, we're watching out for. But I do think it has to be one, kind of, person taking control of that from each agency. You know, you can't have ten teachers working with ten different social workers.' (7/17)
'You can try and build a positive relationship with a parent,… that's the best that you can do. You can't change a home situation for a child…I was communicating with the parents. They were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, and then, you know... Then doing whatever.' (2/4)	Support/trust openness with parents	'I think it was just the little things that really made the biggest difference and just showing that I was quite approachable and, you know, we all have – I'm not judging her because she's struggling to manage his behaviour.' (4/7)
'I just had a meeting with an occupational therapist about a child in my class who's got a lot of fine motor issues. But she evaluated, or she did her little survey on the child in my class before having ever met me. So he went outwith the school, with his mum, and she observed him and she wrote up her conclusion. What she wanted. And then came to me to tell me what the results were. And I completely disagreed with that, but the case was shut by occupational therapy…I think there needs to be more of a communication between all of the agencies….it does seem really disjointed. We're very much, at the moment, or that's how I feel is that teachers are teachers, and education psychologists are here and occupational therapists are here...' (5/13)	Cooperation with other agencies	'I think it's moving with GIRFEC and everything to be much more open and much less bureaucracy. And I know head teachers are able to access things that… You know, like social work and things. That they weren't necessarily able to access before. So it's becoming more open.' (9/22)

4.3 Autonomy

4.3.1 Participation in decision-making

Both management and teachers suggested that more meaningful teacher participation in decision-making was needed for improvement of their school culture. Examples of teachers' response (see Table 3) resonate with this utterance by the head teacher:

'I'm trying to change the culture because when I came in the culture wasn't as I wanted it and so what I've been doing is trying to give staff more of a voice, so there's open staff meetings where we share who's chairing. People add things to the board. It's not a management-driven agenda…and to try and encourage them to be brave, to speak out, and to make sure that their opinion is listened to'.

The corresponding questionnaire item 'Teachers here have opportunities to participate in decisions' has been reformulated as 'teachers here participate in decision making' after the cognitive interviews. Interview data provided essential information about the actual content of these practices. For example, teachers tended to report instances of participation in decisions about the children in their class more often that other kinds of decisions at the school level:

'There had also been issues last year with plans – forward planning…But it wasn't having an impact on the children… Some people made a big noise about that, but that didn't bother me as much because I thought, well, you know, if it means I've got to do a little bit more typing or a bit evaluation, then I'm not bothered…If it was to do with the children, the impact on the children…I was quite vocal about it.'

Some teachers also mentioned the processes that they do not participate in, such as analysis of risks of underachievement at school level (see 'barriers' in Table 3).

One of the most frequently suggested features of the school structures that enable agency were opportunities for communication. This teacher described communication issues in a school where she had previously worked in which teachers were only partially involved in the decisions about the children for whom they identified concerns: '…as a teacher, once you sort of raise [a concern], then it's over to other people to, sort of, decide this is the route we're going down' (See also 'barriers' in table 3).

Observation of school meetings provided further insights into both the ways in which teachers participated in decision making and possible barriers to such participation. Observation of staff meetings was an opportunity to see how procedural and pressed for time these short weekly meetings were. They mainly involved the head teacher giving information on a number of agenda items, although teachers as well had put some items on the agenda, but there was no time for any extensive discussion. Rather it was a chance to exchange information about the policies and plans that should be followed by all school staff, rarely challenged by teachers even though some reported disapproval in individual interviews.

In summary, opportunities and barriers for teachers' participation in decisions related to agency for social justice are similar to those reported in other studies, such as lack of time and direct influence, especially in relation to dealing with 'challenging' pupils (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015), tensions between top-down mandates and authentic opportunities for meaningful participation (Stillman & Anderson, 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015), or between 'collegiality' and so-called 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994), i.e. collegial activities that are spontaneous and those administratively regulated and implementation-oriented.

4.3.2 Ways of working with others

Collaboration and trust among staff, with parents, between teachers and management, and with other professionals came forth strongly as a critical feature of an environment supportive of agency.

Both interview and questionnaire data revealed that teachers viewed collegial support and trust as particularly high (see Table 3). The corresponding questionnaire items were 'Teachers in this school typically look out for each other' and 'Even in difficult situations teachers in this school can depend on each other'. This kind of collegiality was also evident in the observation of the team meetings, e.g. for collaborative planning of homework between teachers at the same stage, and in the meeting of the working group which analysed parents' feedback about the behaviour strategies. The observation revealed a procedural approach to recording and counting answers rather than discussing their meaning and implications for school practices. At the same time it was an opportunity to witness a very collegial atmosphere in which teachers talked respectfully of their colleagues and seemed to feel safe with the criticism when it referred to themselves.

The situation seemed to be rather different with regard to the relationships between the management and the teaching staff. Interviewees, including the head teacher, repeatedly pointed that there was an *us and them* culture often linking this situation to the history of the previous management style, as well as to some inconsistency in the approaches of the current management team members (see Table 3).

The observation of a meeting of two teachers with their line manager was an opportunity to witness an approach to planning by one of the deputy managers. The manager was going through a list of items asking the teachers how they covered aspects of curriculum in their teaching and occasionally offering advice on what the teachers could do. The two teachers seemed less than impressed by the procedure and advice on offer. In the follow-up conversation with the researcher, one of the teachers explained that she would have preferred a more substantial conversation with her line manager about the ways in which prescribed standards translate into teaching practices.

As expected, questionnaire data alone would have provided a less accurate picture of the school culture and ways of working with others. For example, the corresponding questionnaire items such as 'There is an *us and them* culture between teachers and management' was not among the top ranked items although it was coming forth strongly from the interviews and observations. Inspection of interview sources pointed to three participants who voiced the related statements although their statements were more frequent (see Table 3).

Similarly, responses to the questionnaire items such as 'Teachers can believe what parents tell them' and 'Teachers mostly can count on parental support' might refer to some but not all parents as the interview data provides examples that illustrate both presence and lack of trust between teachers and parents:

> 'some parents are brilliant that telling you that something's happened and it may affect them. And others, I don't know if it's they're worried that may be judged or they... They don't want us to know.'

Other studies have established critical influences of relationships with pupils (Biesta et al., 2015); parental involvement and positive attitudes towards all parents (Allen, 2015; Muijs at al., 2004) and collaboration with colleagues and others as one of the core characteristics of 'agentic' teachers both at classroom and school levels (Heijden et al., 2015; Lukacs, 2009; Toom et al., 2015). Questionnaire data is clearly insufficient for understanding the differences in teachers' perceptions of relationships with particular parents. Interview data indicate deficit views of some families, possibly those of lower socio-economic status (Belfi et al., 2015).

When it comes to working with other professionals teachers often (see Table 3) referred to the opportunities afforded by the Scottish *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) Policy as framework for such cooperation:

> 'With the GIRFEC regulations or system that's in place here, there is a sort of, keeping the child at the centre. All the various professions that need to be involved are committed to keeping that dialogue between each other so that the child's needs are best met – whatever the need is. But also that parents should be part of that as well.'

Similarly to the role perceptions (see section 4.1.1) teachers saw their collaboration with others as supported by the current policy. Some respondents also pointed out the weaknesses in collaboration with other agencies (see also 'barriers' in Table 3):

> 'sometimes the communication with the outside agencies are not always good. They're not always fast. So social work can be quite difficult if… If you're needing to contact social work for different things, they can be quite slow.'

Observation of an inter-agency meeting provided an opportunity to see *how* different professionals interacted around a plan to move a boy diagnosed with ADHD to a 'shared placement' with a special school. The head teacher explained that a number of specialists have worked with the pupil one-to-one trying to make him 'follow the rules of the mainstream classroom' because 'he is not accessing the curriculum' and risks harming himself, and the mainstream school does not have resources to support him adequately.

In summary, teachers' beliefs about their roles and social justice largely reflected in their reported practices, which focused predominantly on the interactions with children and classroom practices. The responses to questions about practices beyond classrooms focused on participation in decision-making and working with others to address concerns about children. In both cases, qualitative data was essential for understanding the content and nature of these practices in terms of their alignment to the principles of inclusion. While our case confirmed that trust and respect have been essential for teachers' relational agency, it also showed that they might not be sufficient for teachers' exercising actual influence on school policies and practices.

Triangulation of data from different sources enabled a fuller understanding of the relationships between the different components of agency. For example, the above

observation data from the inter-agency meeting revealed assumptions underlying the use of 'wellbeing indicators' provided by GERFIC commended in the interview statements (see section 4.1.1) – namely, that the adjustments are to be borne by the individual students and families rather than by the institutions. In other words, although teachers, by and large, expressed beliefs in the importance of children's wellbeing as part of their professional purposes, their sense of agency seemed to be diminished in relation to the way decisions about children were made within the existing set-up. The decision about 'shared placement' described above seems to imply views of the mainstream school as an institution with predominantly academic purposes in which rules are to be followed with the view towards progressing through the curriculum, while special school setting is seen as more appropriately resourced for addressing wellbeing and safety concerns. This is an instance of a contradiction in the same actor's belief about the importance of wellbeing and acting in a given situation that involves other actors within a given institutional set-up, which could be revealed through data triangulation. These findings support and illustrate the theoretical views of agency as shaped by the opportunities afforded by given institutional structures and routines.

4.4 Implications for teacher education and development

Teacher agency is shaped by various mezzo and macro level factors as well as by, importantly, teachers' own ability to actively construct their professional identity using tools available to them, such as those from their teacher preparation programmes, current policies and school cultures (Buchanan, 2015; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Roberts & Graham, 2008). Some authors argued that teacher identity might be less open to revision than the actual behaviour (Korthagen, 2004). Others suggest that teachers' identities may be transformed and maintained through practices (Buchanan, 2015), arguably more than by sociocultural norms, policies or resources (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Tam, 2015). Our study showed that most of the barriers teachers perceive as opportunities or barriers for exercising their agency are relational, mezzo level factors, rather than the macro level structures. This is important because relational structures are malleable through teachers' own practices and collaboration with others, which were seen both as a function of agency beyond classroom and as structural conditions. High levels of congruence between the finding about collective practices and perceived environments suggest that relational structures might be changed through teacher collaboration in contrast to other institutional structures that are seen to be beyond teachers' sphere of influence, such as allocation of resources.

These findings have important implications for teacher education and development. Teachers could be supported to recognise how their own practices are shaped by and help shape the very relational patterns that enable or constrain their agency. Such support might include opportunities to discuss real school settings (Cochran-Smith, 1991) or scenario-based situations which require collective responses and reaching out to other agents. Considering systemic as well as individual responses to issues of social justice could help student teachers expand their sense of professional identity, and overcome isolation in their future workplaces.

Although participants' reflections on their practices and contexts largely reveal mechanistic views (7S/18U) about what is possible determined by the established institutional routines and policy language, they also offer some ideas about the ways in which practices and environments in which they work can be transformed. Mechanistic

views of possible practice (e.g. 'I guess I could have put more case… Causes for concern forms in') resonate with other findings about teachers lacking a systematic set of discourses over and above those provided by the language of the policy (Biesta et al., 2015). However, statements (5S/10U) reflecting a recognition of potential to transform current practices and imagine different working contexts illustrate critical engagement with, rather than 'implementation of' the given institutional frameworks and procedures:

> '...we try to use those standards to reflect... it's a dialogue, rather than a checklist of have you got this, this and this? And it's more like, "You tell us how you're incorporating this standard or this...'

The study, thus provided some support for previous calls to consider the dynamic aspects of identity construction in teacher education for social justice, and how student teachers might be helped to position themselves as agents in relation to the varying landscapes and policy contexts (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). This teacher offered her idea of an alternative way of preparing teachers for dealing with issue of social justice:

> '…like they should send every doctor or surgeon to work on the battlefield, and then they'll be better in the hospital. Well I think it's almost the same with teaching. If you were all sent to deal with the battlefield of education, if you like, then it wouldn't matter where you went afterwards. You would have a broader understanding of what your role might be.'

5 Conclusions

In their thinking of themselves and acting as agents for social justice, teachers in our case study tended to prioritise children's wellbeing and learning needs over other demands, which may be in agreement as well as in dissonance with given policies. Their predominant understanding of social justice seems to be based on the principles of facilitating access to equal opportunities for learning for all pupils within a given institutional set-up. Building relationships with students is seen as the most powerful way of exercising teacher agency, mostly within the classroom setting, while engagement in school-level practices or broader educational system corresponded to the perceived opportunities and barriers to agency. Participation in decision-making and working with other agents including families, school colleagues and other professionals were perceived by teachers as enabling and/or constraining their agency for social justice, depending on the nature of these practices. Collaborative practices were seen both as ways of exercising agency beyond classrooms, and as features of structural environments that can support or hamper agency. For example, engaging in discussions with colleagues is part of the process of building relationships that can become more stable features of the environment supportive of future agency.

5.1 Implications for future research

Triangulation of data from different sources enabled us to consider appropriate tools and methodological implications for future research. Mixed-methods proved essential for understanding the multifaceted and context-contingent agency. A few questionnaire

items adequately reflected teachers' beliefs about their role, and partly their collaborative practices and perceptions of the structural environments. However, complementary qualitative data was essential for understanding the content and nature of these practices in light of their alignment to the underlying principles of inclusion and social justice, and the complex ways in which teachers exercise their relational agency. The study also identified the limitations of the current methods for capturing the full complexity of the interplay between agency and relational structures (e.g. some colleagues or parents might have higher levels of trust and influence than others). Finally, the self-selection of the school and participants in this study could be seen to diminish the representativeness of the case in terms of the insights gained about teacher agency for social justice.

In future research, replication across diverse sites could help us understand how agency is influenced by external, as well as in-school environments. Considering that agency can be exercised to implement, adapt or resist given policies, cross-context studies will need to gage levels of teachers' agreement with the current policies. The incongruences between questionnaire and interview data (e.g. about aspects of collective practice within given autonomy) suggest a need to differentiate between the relationships among particular agents (e.g. using social network analysis), and to capture the content as well as structures and frequencies of interactions through which relationships are built. Quantitative methods could help explore the patterns of interdependences between different components of agency over time (e.g. whether changes in beliefs precede or follow from change in practices), while qualitative methods will be required for exploring the nature of context-embedded inclusive practices (e.g. with a smaller subsample of teachers in each context). Considering the dynamic nature of teacher agency, longitudinal designs will be needed to explore the conditions in which teachers are likely to act as agents and as role-implementers, or those that influence the development of teacher agency across career stages. Treating collaborative practices as both 'agentic' and structural variables at different points of the longitudinal data collection could help us understand how collective agency evolves, shaped by and shaping the structural conditions.

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