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Enhancing professional empathy to mitigate for marginalisation and the critical gaze in teacher development: a phenomenological framework

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is a form of perception in which individuals access the perspectives of others about the world in order to build knowledge about it. It is also a source of self-knowledge because, as a consequence of learning how others see us, we can regulate and refine how we see ourselves. Empathy is, therefore, an important capacity through which social cohesion is created. The aim of this paper is to consider the role of professional empathy between teachers when they engage in collective professional development activities, recognising that fear of the critical gaze and the potential for shame can inhibit participation. In order to do this, phenomenological ideas in relation to the formation of social bonds and empathy are explored. Ideas of professional visibility as a form of vulnerability are also examined. This paper explores the importance of professional empathy then posits the need for it to promote effective collective teacher development. A framework for enabling a culture of professional empathy in support of teacher professional growth is offered that highlights the need for three simultaneous forms of engagement; the collective, the interpersonal and the individual.

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Introduction

The professional development of teachers, particularly in relation to educational reform, has received extensive attention (Grimmett 2014), with the effectiveness of different strategies being examined in terms of changes to teachers' practice and the impact of these changes on learners' attainment (Schleicher 2011). In an increasingly performative educational culture, such measurements and evaluations are considered to be core to ensuring the quality of teachers' practice (Creemers, Kyriakides, and Antoniou 2013). However, the role of peer attitudes and perceptions on the professional development of teachers has not been so thoroughly explored.

There are numerous studies exploring facets of mentoring relationships and co-teaching relationships in schools (Ambrosetti 2014; Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury 2016). There are also studies investigating teachers' peer relationships within management hierarchies (Papatraianou and Cornu 2014) and in relation to peer collaboration for improvement in schools (Admiraal et al. 2021; Jao and McDougall 2015; Vangrieken

et al. 2015). However, at the time of writing, literature searches relating to the role of teachers' peer perception or empathy during times of professional development produced no directly relevant results.

Empathy is a focus of considerable interdisciplinary interest across the social and biological sciences, generating a range of conceptualisations and interpretations (Hall and Schwartz 2019). Empathy has been argued to offer opportunities for better understanding of human behaviour and social engagement in its many forms (Segal 2018), as well as enhancing social justice orientations (Decety and Cowell 2015). As a means of drawing together the disparate strands of psychology, neurobiology and social theory, phenomenology offers a useful starting point for exploring empathy in the context of teacher development.

Phenomenology endeavours to 'specify the structures that characterize consciousness and the world as we experience it' (Gallagher 2012, 7) highlighting the subjective point of view. It is part philosophy, part psychology, and is recognised as a useful method for examining the experiences which are produced through individual perceptions (Gallagher 2012). Phenomenological ideas relating to empathy foreground the ways in which empathy is experienced, for example as collective emotions and/or actions, within diverse contexts. This body of ideas also provides conceptual links to social, psychological and neurobiological phenomena, as will be shown. In this sense, phenomenology offers the basis for understanding empathy in an inherently interdisciplinary way (Embree 2010).

Through the lens of phenomenology, this paper posits the importance of professional empathy as a requirement of effective collective teacher development and suggests empathy's importance in the light of ideas of the critical gaze and the potential for shame that can arise through sharing practice. It goes on to offer a framework for supporting a culture of empathy to encourage teachers' participation in collective professional development. To do this, it explores the work of Husserl (2006) and Stein (1989), situating the subsequent discussion in relation to the ideas of these key thinkers.

Professional empathy as phenomenon

Phenomenology proposes the 'lived body' as the primary means through which individuals filter their cognition of the world around them (Husserl 2006). Everything beyond the lived body is regarded in relation to it. The spatial dimensions of this relationship are the source of an ongoing orientation of the self 'of which the I is constantly conscious ...' (Husserl 2006, 4). The primacy of physical and sensory engagement with the world beyond the self places the individual in a state of continual experimentation with the rest of existence. This creates a situation where, by means of trial and error in engaging with the world, the individual forms knowledge of various kinds. Some of this knowledge is personally significant or useful, some is contingent on circumstances and some has the potential to lead to the development of deeply-held values (Husserl 2006). What unites these varieties of knowledge is their reliance on the individual's judgements – a core concern for discussion here.

As a key aspect of the world beyond the lived body, other people, i.e. individuals living within their own bodies, form a core part of the constant consciousness that characterises the 'I' living in the world. Husserl says the individual (the 'I') 'posits' other people;

in the manner of “empathy,” hence other lived experiences and other character dispositions are “found” too; but they are not given or had in the sense of ones’ own (Husserl 2006, 5).

‘Posits’ reinforces the spatial dimension of this empathic relation. The individual creates a correspondence between self and other by transferring their own experiences, knowledge or understandings onto the other through recognition of the bodily similarity between self and other (Luo 2017; Zahavi 2010). This enables a sense of connection and familiarity that, when mutual, helps to generate the assumed intersubjectivities that mediate the development of social organisation.

However, there can be points of divergence that arise in the empathic process. In a situation where the individual looks at the other with a view to seeing correspondence and finds instead significant discrepancies from this expectation, the individual registers these unexpected phenomena ‘under the title of illness and the like’ (Husserl 2006, 7/8) choosing to regard such nonconformities as exceptional. To look at the other and see similarity can be regarded as normal. To look at the other and see difference can be regarded as aberration. In Husserl’s thinking, empathy is a projection of the self – in the form of appearance, thinking, actions, expressions – onto the other. This is the process by which localised norms of social behaviour and thinking come into being.

Husserl later extends this idea beyond a projection of the self in a particular moment and place, drawing on culture and history as aspects of being that are inextricably connected to experiences, both individual and shared. In this sense, the individual does not exist in isolation but is, instead, part of an ontological field with interconnections that are separate from itself but necessarily engaged with itself (Donohoe 2016; Husserl 1960). Not everything in the world is constituted by the individual. Rather, the individual’s perception of everything in the world is, at least in part, constituted by the world. For example, we do not see the world around us as a sequence of distinct, separate entities but rather as a continuum of things in a context. This helps us to develop an awareness of the significance or meaning of what we perceive (Donohoe 2016). For our purposes here, the professional context of the workplace (a school) provides the matrix onto which teachers project their perceptions.

In her work on empathy, Stein (1989) develops Husserl’s idea of empathy to explore the nature and foundations of intersubjectivity. She offers three related areas of concern for investigation, namely the problem of social perception, the problem of self-awareness and the role of the emotions. Empathy is presented as a form of perception, in which the individual is able to access a range of points of view about the world in order to build knowledge about it. It is also a source of self-knowledge because, as a consequence of learning how others see us, we can regulate and refine how we see ourselves (Ferran 2015). Empathy is, therefore, an important capacity through which social cohesion is created. It permits the individual to access information about what is good, bad, expected or unacceptable within a social group. Empathy is therefore a means of sharing values. It may also hold the key to the development of moral agency (Aaltola, 2014), insofar as this involves thinking and action that is essentially directed at others and requires awareness of, and engagement with, others.

This requirement for direct engagement allies empathy with the more generic idea of perception, though perception lacks the affective dimension that provides empathy with its socially cohesive power (Dullstein 2013). In a situation where teacher development is

a key objective, the engagement of individual teachers with shared aims in a common context should, in theory, provide a solid basis for professional empathy and a mutually supportive collective. However, this is contingent on a number of contextual variables that may not always be congruent with teacher development aspirations.

Problematising professional empathy

Stein suggests the phenomenology of empathy within a group or collective can be seen in two distinct lights. 1) the self has an experience and projects this experience onto the group through apperception, filling in gaps in perception with the knowledge of previous experiences. Here, the self remains isolated, insofar as the perception of the group remains separate to the individual's identity. 2) the self sees itself as part of a 'we' and thereby engages in the experience as part of a shared subject/self (Stein 1989; Szanto 2015; Thonhauser 2018), reshaping the experience in the light of others' responses or behaviours. In this way, social cohesion develops through 'a shared emotion-regulative pattern, providing the individuals with situational cues but also normative rules for how to express and regulate their respective emotions' (Szanto 2015, 512). The plural subject can be seen as distinct from the singular subject, such that if the plural subject begins to lose coherence (for instance through the development of disharmonies of perspective with other members of the collective) this will affect the plural subject but not the singular one (Szanto 2015). The two maintain separate experiential identities.

The purpose, then, of empathy is to create normative social situations, to engender fellow feeling and to connect and pluralise individuals. The process of creating normativity is directly linked to recurring empathic acts, which serve to identify belonging or exclusion. In situations where an individual is targeted as a possible member of a social or cultural group, it is assumed that there is congruity between that individual's experiences, values or emotional responses to phenomena and those of the group. Over time, where divergence becomes apparent, the group will revisit their initial assumptions and rectify their 'misidentification' of the individual (Szanto 2015, 522). Through this process, membership of the group is revoked. Alternatively, the individual may register that through these recurrent examples of mismatch with the normative standards of the collective, the pursuit of participation in a particular group or plural subject is not a good fit, and make the choice to disengage (Szanto 2015). In the context of school-wide teacher development, this means that if the experience of engaging with the collective does not meet the requirements of an individual teacher, or if the collective perceives difference in an individual teacher's approach or ideas, the likelihood of continued engagement between the individual and the group is reduced.

Phenomenological analyses have foregrounded the role of normativity in the creation of shame (Zahavi 2015), affirming the role of standards and rules as essential aspects of the development of values. These values help to establish and underpin normative behaviours or practice. Shame can arise when a new or current situation clashes with prior commitments to standards and values. Arguably, it is this discrepancy between previous and current (or new) that creates the sense of shame. To be behind the curve, to be challenged by change, to struggle to assimilate the unfamiliar is potentially a source of professional humiliation. Awareness of the potential for this situation to arise can result in shame anxiety, i.e. the dread of situations that may lead to shame. Such anxiety has

a significant function: it 'might be considered a guardian of dignity' (Zahavi 2015, 215). Put simply, the avoidance of situations that could result in loss of face can be regarded as fortifying a desire to maintain the status quo, which allows for the possibility of presenting an image of professional competence or effectiveness. The avoidance of participation in collective teacher development activities may have this anxiety at its root.

If shame exists in the deficiencies of self as seen through the eyes of the other, it must require a social relation to be present for its formation (Sartre 2003). Bodily visibility to others renders the individual vulnerable (Dolezal 2017; Hoff 2016) because this visibility makes the individual open to the assessment, verbal critique or even physical abuse of others (Boublil 2018). Awareness of this makes the individual recursively conscious of their status as an object in others' eyes (Zahavi 2015). This objectification has the capacity to be productive or reductive, to contribute to self-esteem (pride) or to undermine it (shame), ensuing from the responses of others to what they see. In the context of collective teacher development, this makes being seen a powerful nexus of affect. Engagement can be the source of a host of valuable and positive professional experiences but it can equally open the door to difficult and demeaning ones.

Exploration of the role of observation in the development of empathy in social cognition has been helpfully related to neurobiological phenomenology, specifically mirror neurons (Zahavi 2015). Mirror neurons help to guide sensorimotor functions, and present significant parallels with phenomenological ideas. Mirror neurons are stimulated when an individual makes an action or perceives another person making the same action. For the individual to have an understanding of the significance of an action, congruity between observer and observed is required. However, the availability of the observed to be seen is not sufficient on its own for mirror neurons to fire. It is a requirement that the observer's motor system be engaged through this interaction too if the individual is to connect their own experience to the experience of another. Thus, in a social situation, when the individual observes another person, they do more than simply see them. A host of other information is triggered at the same time. These are 'internal representations of the body states associated with the other's actions, emotions, and sensations [that] are evoked in us' (Zahavi 2015, 155). This internal representation may be seen as an imaginative engagement with the other (Summa 2017). In forming empathic 'bridges' with others, we not only observe them, we feel them too, in the sense of having physical and emotional responses that happen as a result of, or in tandem with, the other's experiences. The understanding we have and the meaning we make of the other is, in this way, literally embodied. This form of empathy can only take place in a shared perceptual field. As a consideration for collective teacher development, it is important, then, to enable individuals to develop empathic engagement with other individuals within the group through opportunities to observe and share experiences of one another's practice.

Willingness to exclude individuals from continued social involvement may come from an underestimation of the distress that such exclusion can cause. Lack of awareness of the possibility of inflicting pain may be stalling the disposition towards positive empathic relations. Empirical research has shown that responses to social exclusion are very much like the consequences of bodily pain, creating reactions such as numbness or raised aggression (Nordgren, Banas, and MacDonald 2011). Examples of such exclusion may be seen in the form of marginalisation on the basis of different cultural heritage, race, class,

gender, sexuality or disability. In professional settings, this may also be exclusion on the basis of different ethos, disciplinary grounding or other forms of professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012).

The inability (or perception thereof) to function effectively in social or cultural situations is associated with a range of emotionally painful consequences, including frustration, alienation and a sense of abandonment (Hoff 2016). Pain, in the sense of suffering, can be seen as a function of consciousness, while pain, as a physical sensation, is a symptom of bodily existence (Geniusas 2014; Theodorou 2014). Each of these forms of pain may be associated with not merely parallel but rather overlapping outcomes; a claim supported not only by phenomenology but also by neuroscience (Eisenberger 2012a, 2012b).

Consequently, disharmonic and unresolved social relations present not just a conceptual disturbance to individuals but the very real possibility of significant harm. The repercussions of social rejection and exclusion have been associated with high emotional risk (Dolezal 2015). In teaching communities, stable professional collectives, where positive empathic relations are supported are, therefore, crucial to individuals' wellbeing.

Affect in the shared perceptual field

It is the linkage of empathy with emotion that makes it a valuable concept in terms of how to understand what happens when gaps develop in empathic relations and social groups begin to lose their structural integrity.

There is a sense that teachers have a professional obligation to develop their practice in compliant ways and that it is in the interests of pupils and society at large for them to do so. The pleasure that teachers may take in their individualistic approaches to their work, the value they may add to an educational system that has no other teacher with quite the same knowledge, experience or personality as them, is a lesser consideration in neoliberal educational contexts (Ball 2016). The over-riding concern is with evidence of teachers adapting to meet policy demands (Ball 2003), or at least with being seen to attempt this, in an environment where surveillance by teacher peers or leaders is a pervasive characteristic.

Through this preparedness to be visible to peers, teachers demonstrate their pedagogical identity along with their complicity in and support for the dominant discourse promoted by school leaders. The visibility of compliant participation in change may be a means of disseminating this discourse, as part of a journey to framing a new reality within the school context. The visible subject constructs her/his professional identity through the process of participation, internalising and then projecting this (Stein 1989), though both practice and articulation.

For those who choose not to visibly participate in change, this may be due to a fear of being seen as lacking competence. When existing practice is effective, familiar and comfortable, change is likely to be unsettling, resulting in a form of risk aversion. However, the desire to be seen as competent may be read in a contrary way by those who take the role of observer. The irony here stems from a clash of perceptions. While teachers who are unwilling to be seen to embrace changes to their practice may make this choice because of fear of what may transpire due to their perceived lack of the necessary

professional skills, other teachers may choose to read this unwillingness as a sign either of professional *in*competence (ironically) or delinquency. This situation is a zero-sum game. The only positive outcomes come from visible participation. Non-participation is equated with resistance, though it may not be intended to indicate this.

In addition to providing evidence of social and professional compliance, visible participation carries with it the danger of public exposure of vulnerabilities (Dolezal 2015; Hoff 2016). Shame, and the fear of shame (Zahavi 2015), may be a contributing factor in non-participating (and therefore professionally excluded) teachers' choices.

The notion of being shamed or embarrassed in front of an audience is an acknowledged vulnerability for teachers (Lasky 2005), suggesting that this is a key problem facing those considering making changes to their practice in a shared context. The impact of the shame conferred by the observation of others can be a trap from which there is no escape, since this shame is the product of a moment that can be rendered factual and inescapable by others' judgements (Zahavi 2015). Once the judgment has been passed, it can take on a permanency that is self-perpetuating and damaging.

The unwillingness of some teachers to share their practice with peers is, by default, a source of misperception and, consequently, contributes to a lack of understanding between individual and peer because they are not sharing the same perceptual field (Summa 2017). Participating teachers are not seeing non-participating teachers, but the reverse is also true, compounding the problem. Inhabiting a shared social (professional) space has the potential to trigger shame (Sartre 2003), but it is impossible for peer teachers to build a positive empathic relation without this. In the context of teaching, 'seeing' may include direct observation or verbally mediated sharing of other kinds, since these constitute many of the ways in which it is possible to generate opportunities to develop empathic relations between members of the group.

However, it must be acknowledged that the potential for negative outcomes from honest sharing can be powerfully demotivating. Feelings of rejection and the socio-emotional pain that can be caused by these suggest a lack of choice or control on the part of the recipient. They are on the receiving end of the judgements of others. Yet it has been argued that the experience of socio-emotional pain may also be formative, since such experience has the capacity to bring about change. Pain can be diagnostic as well as a source of suffering (Geniusas 2014; Hoff 2016). As others who share the individual's social environment inflict their strictures and judgements, this creates an opportunity for the individual to make choices, to assert their agency through the responses and reactions to that which is seemingly in conflict with the status quo of their existence (Mladenov 2012). This has the capacity to confer radical change, since '[t]he transgressive actions of others, and our capacity to be transgressed by them, are essential conditions for the development of meaningful human life' (Hoff 2016, 216). This may be seen as symptomatic of a desire, perhaps misplaced, to incite constructive action. Taking on the role of more knowledgeable other, those who take this stance may see themselves as provocateurs, asserting their privileged and powerful positions as already active participants in their own professional development. This has the, perhaps unintended, result that they start to become oppressive and intimidating (Dolezal 2015) in their rhetoric. In the context of teacher development, it is arguable that more positive strategies are likely to produce the desired development outcomes, given the many demands of the teacher's role.

Contextual factors relating to workplace culture and attitudes to professional agency (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2016; Robinson 2012) prior to a period of teacher development or whole-school change may offer another explanation for situations which arise, where teachers disengage from professional development participation. Where teachers feel disempowered from following their own professional interests and judgment, depth of engagement with enacting policy may result in a culture of spectacle (Ball 2003; Thwaites 2015). In a situation like this, being seen or perceived to comply takes priority over genuinely engaged action. A more inclusive and less prescriptive environment for professional learning has the capacity to produce a more open and empathic development culture. Indeed, there is a significant body of evidence to support the benefits of teacher-led professional development (Donaldson 2014; Vescio, Ross, and Adams 2008).

A framework for promoting empathy for collective teacher development

Distilling the key points from the discussion above, the following considerations are offered as a framework to assist in promoting professional empathy to enhance collective teacher development cultures. A visual summary is provided in Figure 1.

1) Support for Coherent Group Formation (Collective Engagement)

The experience of teaching in schools is often characterised by teachers working in cognitively and spatially separate ways (A'vila de Lima 2003), undertaking their work in relative isolation from colleagues. This can be a cause of 'misidentification' (Szanto 2015, 255), which can undermine group formation. To maximise opportunities for forming

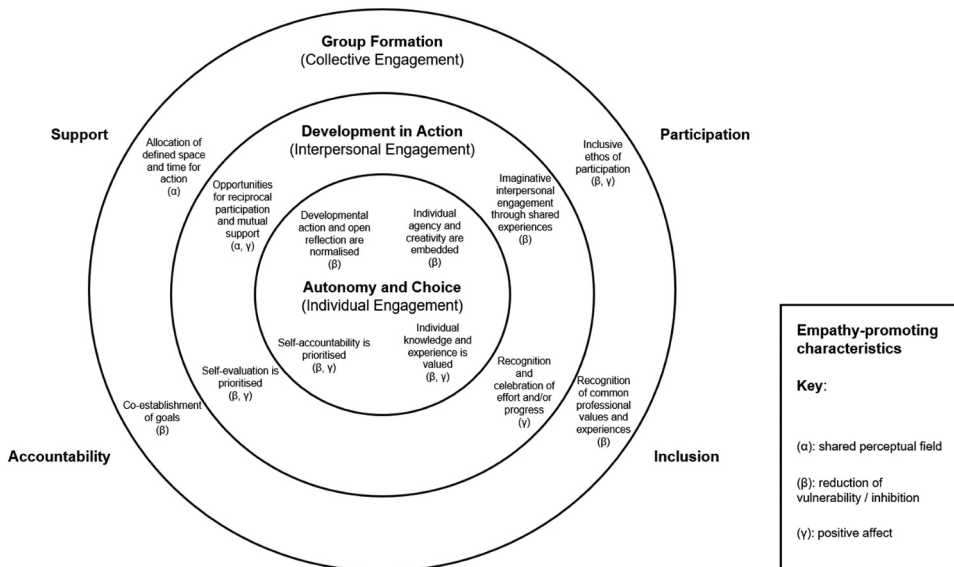


Figure 1. Elements of engagement for professional empathy in teacher development.

empathic connections, a defined space and time for interaction and engagement provides a shared perceptual field (Summa 2017) within which teachers can begin to find points of commonality as a collective.

Regular reinforcement of the ethos and shared purpose of the group provides scope for recurring empathic acts which enable stronger empathic bonds to form (Stein 1989; Szanto 2015). Planned occasions for the collective to reconnect and re-establish their bonds can enhance engagement and promote ongoing cohesion, with associated benefits for engagement with teacher development. This generates a form of social interdependence that supports co-operative professional development (Johnson and Johnson 2017).

International comparative studies have identified that democratic, self-governing teacher professional learning contexts have the capacity to catalyse adaptive professional competencies that enhance expertise and innovative practice (Eisenschmidt et al. 2021; Ostinelli and Crescentini 2021). While formal teaching environments can be hierarchical, with levels of seniority and specialisms affecting teachers' sense of their place and purpose, an inclusive and supportive ethos of participation can encourage members of the group to see one another as peers despite any differences imposed by organisational configurations. The shared purpose of professional development acts as a leveller.

2) Support to Create a Shared Perceptual Field for Development in Practice (Interpersonal Engagement)

Separate from the shared perceptual field generated with the wider participating group, which focuses on shared purposes and values, this is a shared perceptual field for development in action. Teacher collaboration is a familiar trope (Hargreaves, 2019) but how collaboration is planned and organised matters.

As a part of the process of teachers undertaking development activities, creating opportunities for having a shared perceptual field, for example through coteaching (Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury 2016), reciprocal coaching (Bai, Song, and Zhang 2019) or dialogical reflection (Sulzer and Dunn 2019), offers scope for reducing the fear of vulnerability that can arise when performance is one-sided (Dolezal 2017; Hoff 2016). Collaborative practitioner research (Christie and Menter 2009; Shen and Bai 2019) also suggests the potential for powerful shared professional growth.

Partnership and reciprocity generate equitable relationships that have the capacity to enhance empathic bonds by generating embodied and imaginative co-engagement (Summa 2017; Zahavi 2015). Through open and interpersonal professional activities and reflective discussions, teachers can share their experiences in ways that engage emotional and moral dimensions (Aaltola, 2014), as well as cognitive and practical ones (Vangrieken et al. 2015).

The critical gaze of peers and high stakes accountability for action are associated with negative affect (tension, fear, shame) for some (Dolezal 2017; Sartre 2003). Therefore, generation of positive affect is a key consideration (Dullstein 2013). Where self-accountability is prioritised over group accountability, where practitioner-led forms of inquiry are allowed to flourish and create innovative reflexive practices (Wilson, Dutton, and Hitches 2021), these approaches may go some way to reducing negative affect because they reduce the risk of external judgment (Zahavi 2015). Sharing, recognising and celebrating progress in enjoyable ways can also support positive affect and, therefore, positive empathic connections.

3) Support for Autonomous Participation (Individual Engagement)

While collective forms of teacher development imply a degree of shared learning and homogeneous professional activity, this need not mean that teachers must engage in identical ways. In any professional group, a range of experience and knowledge is the norm (Keller-Schneider, Zhong, and Yeung 2020). New learning is built on prior learning. Therefore, foregrounding the connections between individuals' existing schemas of knowledge and their desired development outcomes within the remit of the group's shared purpose offers scope for autonomous engagement from within the collective. Numerous international studies support this approach (for example Grant et al. 2020; Power and Goodnough 2019; Valckx, Vanderlinde, and Devos 2020) and it has been suggested that this is a valuable route to sustainable teacher development (Power and Goodnough 2019) because it empowers individuals.

The individual's singular identity need not exclude them from engagement with the plural identity of the group, since each is experienced separately (Stein 1989; Szanto 2015). It is the variety of knowledge and experience within the group that should make collective teacher development inherently supportive while offering scope for individual forms of participation.

Encouraging a variety of creative engagements with development helps to empower individuals to pursue their interests (Keller-Schneider, Zhong, and Yeung 2020), generates the likelihood of more authentic forms of engagement (Mockler 2022) and reduces direct comparison and the negative judgements that can ensue from this (Hoff 2016; Zahavi 2015). Where teachers have choices about what they will do and how they will do it, the likelihood of engagement increases (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2016). Where choice is a factor, engagement becomes intrinsically rewarding and offers scope for further growth.

Implications

This largely theoretical discussion and framework offers insights for the development of local and national policy relating to in-service teacher education, insofar that it explicates considerations that may be germane to how such policies are planned. For teacher leaders and those managing the process of policy implementation in schools, the matter of how to maximise engagement is key. An empathy-enhancing approach to considering the demands of engagement with teachers' collective professional development may be a useful way forward for strategic thinking about policy implementation in schools. These are also issues that have a direct impact on ideas of teacher professionalism since they are focused on enabling and supporting teachers to learn from and with one another in ways that are constructive for their knowledge and skills.

The implications for teachers' practice in relation to professional development are also marked. In educational environments where a culture of positive peer support is recognised as being desirable for professional growth, the nature of support, the means by which support is offered and the ethos underpinning support require careful deliberation, if teachers' engagement with professional development is to be optimised. Professional empathy has a direct bearing on the effectiveness of teachers' collaborative activity and also for their sense of autonomy and agency in relation to their work.

In terms of future research, the framework proposed here offers scope for empirical investigation into implementation of empathy-conscious teacher development interventions. Combined with examination of the phenomena of professional empathy and peer perception in educational settings, this is an area of investigation that could offer fruitful opportunities for enriched understanding of teachers' professional relationships and development, as well as for better understanding of teacher resilience and retention.

This is a field of research that also offers opportunities for exploring how marginalised groups or identities, such as those associated with cultural heritage, race, class, gender, sexuality or disability, experience teacher professional development initiatives in schools. While the framework offered here suggests the possibility of enhanced inclusion, evidence to support this from practice would be valuable.

The complexities of teachers' professional lives and the factors that dominate professional discourse in formal educational settings can mean that the problematic micropolitical and interpersonal dimensions of collective engagement with teacher development are overlooked. The discussion and framework presented here move towards redressing some of these issues by foregrounding empathy-promoting actions to better support collective engagement.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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