

Research Project

Citizenship in the Curriculum: Spaces for Agency in a 'neglected' subject

This information sheet invites you to take part in a study into teacher agency among citizenship teachers in English secondary schools. It investigates the ways teachers engage with citizenship policy and the factors that can promote, constrain, or act as resources for agency. Below you will find information on what the study is, what participation would entail, the benefits of taking part, and how to get into contact if you are interested in learning more.



What is it about?

The study draws on recent work on teacher agency (Priestley et al, 2017; Alvunger, 2018), to consider the unique position in which citizenship teachers find themselves. It hypothesises that the relative lack of official state policies on citizenship (when compared to EBacc courses for example) offers potentially unique opportunities for teacher involvement in the or the selection and arrangement of both the aims and organisation of the curriculum.



What does it involve?

This study will be conducted in cooperation with both you and your school. For you as a teacher, it would involve half a term of ethnographic participant observation of teacher practice as well as two 40-minute interviews (at the beginning and the end of the observation period).

In addition, there would be a document analysis of lesson plans and school citizenship policy and very short ethnographic interviews (15-minute) with key stakeholders subject to individual consent.



An ethnographic study into teacher agency in a subject that is less well defined by central government.

How is this beneficial for me?

For you, this study offers an opportunity for a reflection on your understanding of agency. The approach to agency taken here sees it as an emergent phenomenon deeply connected to our past experiences, future goals, and present conditions. This is different from the common view of agency as something a person possesses. The latter view risks anxiety and blame as a lack of agency can be put down to individual failings. Meanwhile, this approach can help you to better understand the conditions in which professional agency might flourish and the factors that might constrain it. The interviews will encourage you to think about how your 'individual efforts' (Priestley, 2015:130) interact with the structures that surround you. This can help you to identify actions that can lead to greater room for agency.

In drawing on the ideas of policy recontextualization and translation, you will develop a practical understanding of how policy is made and remade at different levels. Such an appreciation will give you tools to understand how you and your school make conscious (and sometimes implicit) policy decisions.

How is this beneficial for my school?

This study involves looking at agency from three perspectives that are referred to as the 'collective' (school-level), 'individual' (planning-level) and 'interactive' (classroom-level) (Alvunger, 2018). Such an approach in conjunction with the model of agency suggested offers not just an opportunity for attention to agency arising from the individual and their environment, but also the *collective* and *their* environment. Like with the teacher, the study provides some tools to consider how agency emerges in the interaction between policy and classroom practice. Policy is more effective when it is produced with the consent and input of those impacted by it and so such an investigation will provide room for the school to consider the voices that are present in policy and those that might be absent.

This approach can help uncover the practices in the school that are done particularly well and those that might need amelioration. Each school will receive a summary of findings, and be invited to contribute to discussions of the final research project. The school benefits when teachers can use their professional agency to respond to problems in a reflexive and knowledgeable way with this study helping to draw their attention to the ways this can be encouraged.

If you are interested in learning more about this project, please feel free to contact me at the email below. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Alvunger, D., 2018. Teachers' curriculum agency in teaching a standards-based curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*, 29(4), pp.479-498.

Bernstein, B., 2000. *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Priestley M, Biesta G and Robinson S (2015) *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.



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