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Author(s)	Tan Liang See and Letchmi Devi Ponnusamy
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# **The Role of Teacher Agency in Fostering 21st Century Dispositions and Competencies through Curriculum Innovation**

TAN Liang See, OER/ NIE  
Letchmi Devi Ponnusamy, ECSE/ NIE  
[OER44/12 TLS]

# Presentation Outline

- Justification for the Study
- The Context
- Gaps in the Literature
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- Findings
- Implications & Conclusion

# Justification for the Study

- Classroom practice is a significant contributing factor that makes a difference in student academic achievement (Hattie, 2003, 2009; Marzano, 2001; Sanders, 1998; Schwerdt et. al., 2008; Wenglinsky, 2002).
- Berliner (1992) points out that teacher expertise is contingent on the teacher's capacity to reframe classroom practices.
- Lieberman & Mace (2009) point out that teacher learning is the key to educational reform.

# Why CI?

- One of the desired learner outcomes- to prepare learners for the knowledge economy by promoting innovation and creativity (Teo, 2000).
- Teach Less Learn More (TLLM)- 2004
  - “white space”
  - curriculum customisation
- Despite the multiple educational innovations, education in Singapore is persistently driven by a system of high-stakes exam.
- However, as a system, we also aspire to nurture 21<sup>st</sup> century dispositions in our students

# Gaps in the Literature

- The level of complexity needed to bring about changes in classroom practices require concerted effort **on the part of the teacher.**
- It is important to apprehend/ capture teacher's agentic behaviour in research.
  - Teacher's agentic behaviour refers to the proactive, assertive and reflexive quality of teacher's actions.

# Why not teacher belief?

- 4 features of beliefs (Nespor, 1987)
  - 1) Existential presumption
    - Incontrovertible (the personal truth)
    - Deeply personal rather than universal
    - Unaffected by persuasion
    - Created by chance, an intense experience, or a succession of events
  - 2) Alternativity
    - An attempt to create an ideal, or alternative, situation that may differ from reality
  - 3) Affective and evaluative loading
    - Operates independently of the cognition associated with knowledge
    - The affective evaluative loading determine the energy that teachers will expend on an activity and how they will expend it.
  - 4) Episodic structure
    - Beliefs reside in the episodic memory with material drawn from experience or cultural sources of knowledge transmission, e.g. critical episodes and images build belief structure

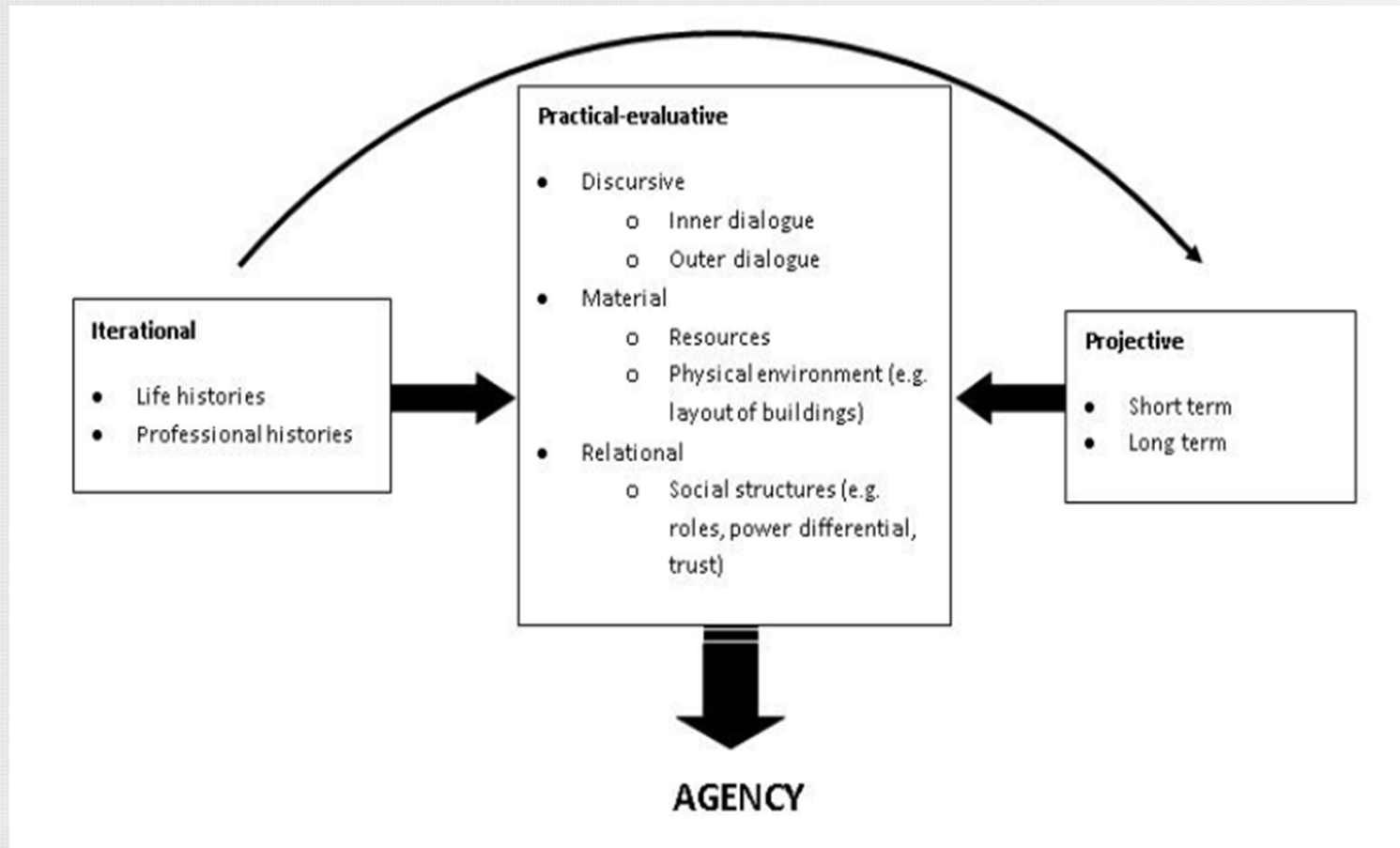
**Beliefs are basically unchanging, and when they change , it is not argument or reason that alters them but rather a “conversion or gestalt shift”**



**Enculturation and social construction**



# Ecological Perspective of Teacher Agency



Priestley, Biesta & Robinson (2012)

# Gap in the Literature

**How the context can be reframed or redesigned to challenge teacher belief?**

CI

TA

Quality curriculum, teaching, & assessment

21<sup>st</sup> CC learning

**What we want**

**What we hope to do better**

**How do we get there?**

# Research Questions

**How do teachers deal with curriculum innovation (that foster 21st century competencies)?**

- How does teacher agency play a part in CI?

# Methodology

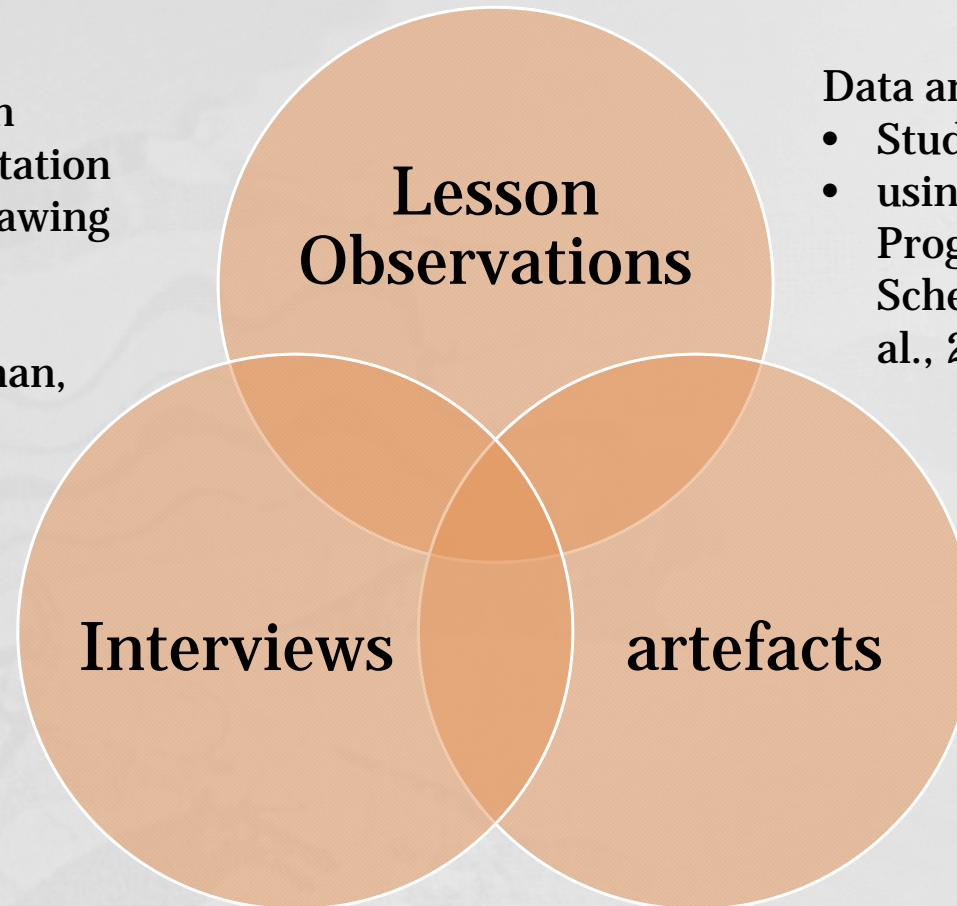
- In-depth analysis of a case
- Classroom observations of video recorded lessons
- Teacher interview after the completion of a unit of instruction
- Artefacts- curriculum documents, e.g., unit plan, assessment rubrics, handouts, slides, etc.

# Triangulation of Data

## Data analysis :

- Data reduction
- Data representation
- Conclusion drawing and verifying

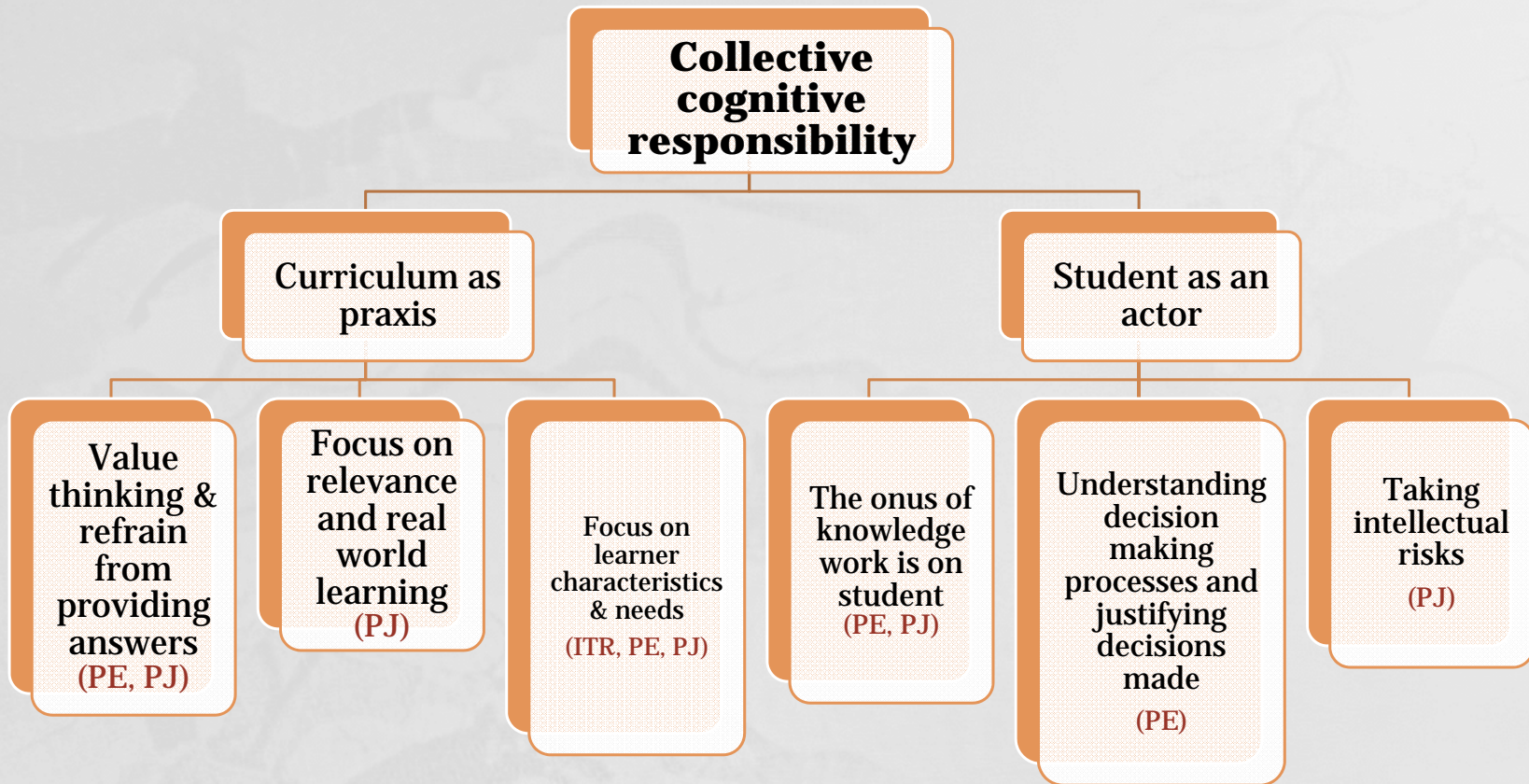
(Miles & Huberman, 1992)



## Data analysis :

- StudioCode
- using Raffles Programme Coding Scheme (Kwek et. al., 2010)

## Finding 1: Relates to how the classroom look like



# Teacher views curriculum as praxis

- Value thinking and refrain from providing answers:
  - “No, they wouldn’t. Trisha Marshall is blind to them. We deliberately didn’t want to give it (the answers) to them.”
  - “(students) are not supposed to be too comfortable with the stand (they) are taking. (They) are supposed to be questioning, (they) are supposed to be reflecting and thinking about what it is.”
  - “... with the (class that) is not academically ... strong, so the level where I can probe doesn’t get to the level I get to with (better classes). But (it) is fine, because that’s what they can handle, let them handle at that level.”

# Teacher views curriculum as praxis

- Focus on the relevance as well as real world learning:
  - “Extrinsically, they need to learn the writing skills, and no other subject teach (these skills) explicitly. And in terms of content, it is ... (about the) real world, ... the(se) real world issues which will form the basis for other subjects. Things like the community development, cares, (and) so (on).”



# Teacher views curriculum as praxis

- Focus on learner characteristics and needs:
  - “ ... ARC is actually okay. Because the content wise is very GP like, just that the learning curve comes in how do I bring it down to 13, 14, 15 year old level. (It was difficult) because I was teaching 17, 18-year-olds for 10 over years. ... I have to switch, (e.g.) Language use. Oral communication. I have to be slower. I realize I use, I write a lot more on the board.”
  - “That’s right. That’s what you have to do, isn’t it? ... The end objectives won’t change, but how you get them there has got to change according to who the recipients are. “

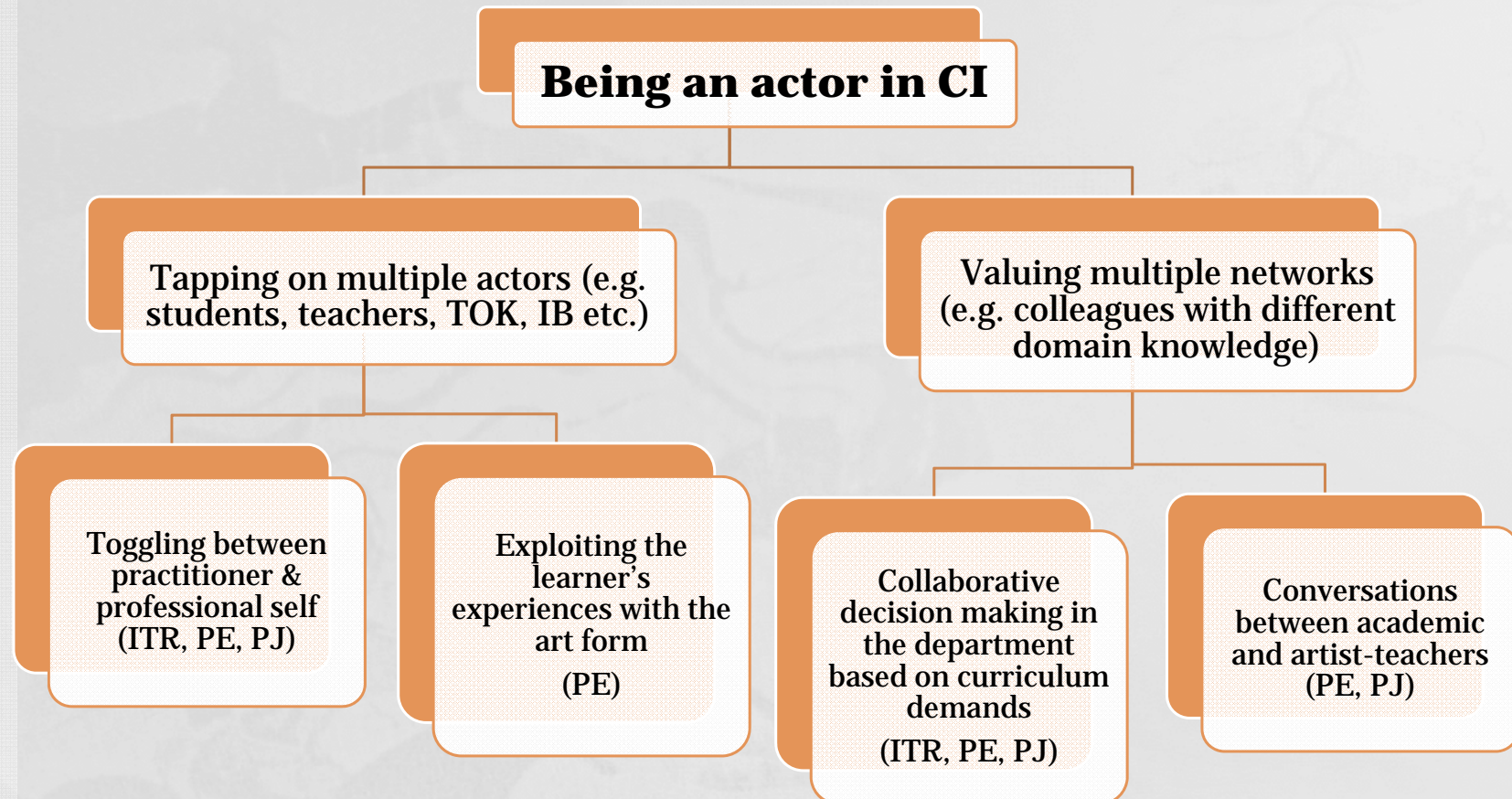
# Student as an Actor

- The onus of knowledge work is on student
  - “I just want them to talk. ... To draw on that individual, so that I can put up a variety of ideas and opinions.”
  - “... an objective for me personally, it was that the students be challenged to think ... to re-evaluate what their ethical stand is ... I always found (the) kids are more articulate .... And they take opinions very firmly ... “

# Student as an Actor

- Understanding decision making processes and justifying decisions made
  - “I think generally when it comes to asking them to make moral decision; they would jump at something very quickly. ... I hope that ... they would not just make an ethical decision, but be able to defend why they make the ethical decision and be empathetic about why other people make a different decision from them. “
- Taking intellectual risks
  - “I want them to know that it is okay to feel that way. So to me, it was just to address them that this is how we are supposed to get, this is what I was trying to get you to feel.”
  - “... the notion was that it is not quantifiable. I wanted to say how difficult it is to quantify and it goes back to the TOK ways of knowing. And if you can't quantify, you cannot, it is very hard to reason.”

## Finding 2: Relates to how teachers navigate in CI



# Tapping on multiple actors

- Toggling between practitioner & professional self
  - “I just got to try and if it works the previous year for this particular material, I would use that again. But there is no guarantee that it would work. So I still need to be assessing the students’ response to it. And if it is still works, I will still carry it on until it eventually comes to a point when it doesn’t, then I will have to change. And also because my understanding of the (classes under my charge). ... they are quite different classes. ... what might work in one class would fall into total chaos in another class.”
- Exploiting the learner’s experiences with the art form
  - “I also think it is the nature of their art form. I am always very impressed what their art form teaches them to do. The VA kids. They just can’t produce an artwork. They always have to explain the rationale behind it. They have to justify what they are doing.”

# Valuing multiple networks

- Collaborative decision making in the department based on curriculum demands
  - “... (the) department has decided and they lead up to them. ... the understanding is that the skills run through. We reinforce the skills in terms of oral presentation and writing every year, response writing and essay writing every year. ... the content, we try to expose them to a variety in the lead up. ... year 2, maybe knowing about the self and from there, where the self is placed in the society and after that we go into more specific things like arts, censorship by government first, then the arts. And then from there into more personal ethical decision making. “

# Valuing multiple networks

- Conversations between academic and artist-teachers
  - “(I was) very uncomfortable. A lot of reading I have to do before going in to class. A lot of learning I have to bridge when talking to my colleagues.”
  - “Firstly, gauging their response during lessons, how, what keeps them engaged. Secondly of course, talking to my colleagues, listening to how the Arts teachers conducting their lessons. “

# Gap in the Literature

1. CI activates TA;
2. It liberates teacher from routine ways of teaching and learning
3. It fosters teacher learning & thus professionalized teacher (in Singapore context)

CI

TA

Quality  
curriculum,  
teaching, &  
assessment

21<sup>st</sup> CC  
learning

**What we want**

**What we hope to do**

**How do we get there?**



# Have we answered our questions?

1. How do teachers deal with curriculum innovation (that foster 21st century competencies)?
  - Findings 1 & 2- elements of TA are evident
2. How does teacher agency play a part in CI?
  - Data shows that CI consistently activated different aspects of TA; thus our findings point to TA as an essential feature of curriculum innovation
3. What are the implications of our findings?
  - TA is valuable in crafting 21<sup>st</sup> CC because
    - TA creates better linking between knowledge and skills in the curriculum
    - TA increases teacher's awareness and application of different types of expertise
    - TA expands the use of assessments

# Implications & Conclusions

1. Lessons should not be scripted, i.e. moving away from the culture of compliance
2. CI is a result of reframing curriculum
3. CI created the conditions to engage teachers in **problem finding** (adaptive expertise) rather than problem solving (routine expertise) only
4. TA being activated in the problem finding process



**Thank you**