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Opening up the narrow: Possibilities for professional learning and development in Aotearoa

Philippa Nicoll Antipas

University of Otago

It is vital to engage with professional learning and development (PLD) to be a teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the way it has been enacted due to education policy, PLD has essentially become synonymous with teacher inquiry: to engage with PLD is to follow an inquiry cycle. Literature into what constitutes effective teacher PLD similarly endorses an inquiry approach. But teacher inquiry as interpreted by Ministry of Education neoliberal-influenced policy and procedures risks becoming a linear process abstracted away from the context and complexity of schools and teaching. Neoliberal influences on education policy have similarly supported input-output assumptions of PLD and have led to a narrowing effect. However, it is possible to open PLD up to be creative and subversive. If policy and procedure were to be decoupled, introducing greater flexibility, and refocused on the principles that underpin effective teacher PLD, then this creativity and transformation could be realised.

Keywords: teacher professional learning and development, policy, teaching as inquiry, neoliberalism

The professional learning and development (PLD) of teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand (henceforth Aotearoa) is an essential component in both nurturing the professional growth of teachers as well as ensuring quality teaching practice for students in schools. This article argues that current neoliberal-informed education policies with regards to teacher PLD creates a narrowing effect to the detriment of teacher learning and thus classroom practice. If policy and process were to be decoupled, there might exist greater transformative possibilities for PLD in both its design and enactment. Thus, I begin with an overview of these neoliberal influences on education policy in Aotearoa, before offering a more specific reading of PLD within education policy: namely that PLD has become largely equated with two frameworks for supporting teacher inquiry. The process for securing Ministry of Education funding for PLD is outlined, and this is used to argue that in combination with neoliberal influences on education policy, there has been a consequent narrowing effect on PLD practice and procedure. There is a brief literature review which explores what may constitute effective PLD for teachers, and considers whether teacher inquiry can be one such effective practice. Next I describe my doctoral research project, *Plan D*, which is a collective, board game-like activity whereby teachers design a PLD experience (a d.conference) for themselves. This is offered as an example for what may result when PLD is framed as open and playful. The emerging findings from this research have implications for how PLD might be offered, and thus in turn implications for opening up the narrowness of neoliberal-informed policy.

Neoliberalist influences on education policy in Aotearoa

In Aotearoa, the fourth Labour Government of the late 1980s ushered in a series of neoliberal shifts in economic policies. Some of the tenets of neoliberalism are "privatisation, marketisation, individualism, accountability and productivity" (Ovington et al., forthcoming, p. 2). Thus neoliberalism views citizens as consumers who can exercise their democratic rights through their purchasing power. This view leads to shifts towards privatisation, deregulation, and competition (Thrupp et al., 2021).

A standout example of neoliberalism at work in education policy in Aotearoa is the adoption of the Tomorrow's Schools programme (1989), on the back of the Picot Report (1988). This programme of reform saw the demise of the Department of Education and regional Education Boards, and in their place the creation of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and locally-elected governing Boards of Trustees for each school in the compulsory education sector.

In their respective works, John O'Neill (2011) and Martin Thrupp et al. (2021) have charted further ways in which neoliberalism has influenced government education policy over time. They include examples of the MoE contracting out teacher PLD, and curriculum development and resourcing. As the MoE increasingly out-sourced PLD services and disestablished university-based teacher advisors (circa 2006), in turn Aotearoa saw the rise of private PLD providers, such as Tātai Aho Rau CORE Education and Cognition – amongst others.Specifically honing in on this increasing privatisation of teacher PLD, this article views the current position or state of play of PLD in Aotearoa education as being emblematic of these wider, governmental neoliberal-influenced reforms.

In education more broadly, but also in the provision of PLD services within Aotearoa, neoliberalistic perspectives can be seen in, for example, a focus on the linear logic of framing processes as input-output or as process and product, and their ensuing emphasis on assessment and monitoring through external accountability (Fullan et al., 2015). Neoliberalism also places emphasis on human-centredness and exceptionalism: "knowledge-production is tied to capital investment" (Ovington et al., forthcoming, p. 2), and is understood as a strictly human-only, individualistic endeavour. Thus, as Julie Ovington and colleagues go on to explicate, "knowledge-production is reified as something that can be neatly boxed and commodified, creating a divide between theory and practice feeding the neoliberal discourse" (p. 5).

Education policy and teacher PLD

Once registered, teachers must gain and retain a current practising certificate through the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023). Holding a practising certificate means that a teacher has recent and relevant teaching experience, has undertaken PLD, and is of good character. Thus, engaging with PLD is foundational for and essential to being a teacher in Aotearoa. More than this though, policy, including the requirements for having a current practising teacher certificate, has clear expectations for the kinds of professional learning activities with which teachers should engage. For example, one of the six Standards for the Teaching Profession is Professional Learning. This standard specifies that teachers will "*use inquiry*, collaborative problem-solving and professional learning to improve professional capability to impact on the learning and achievement of all learners" (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017, p. 18, emphasis is mine). Thus, education policy in Aotearoa is heavily weighted towards teacher inquiry as the basis for PLD.

This emphasis on inquiry can also be seen across other policy and MoE artefacts. For example, not only does the Teaching Council endorse an inquiry approach to teacher PLD, so too does the Education Review Office (ERO) (Education Review Office, 2017), Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) – the MoE's key website for storing all relevant curriculum resources – and the MoE's Best Evidence Synthesis research into teacher PLD (Timperley et al., 2007). The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (Ministry of Education, 2020) not only promotes inquiry as a model for teacher PLD, but the online support material available through TKI highlights two specific frameworks: Teaching as Inquiry (TAI) (Ministry of Education, 2020), and the Spiral of Inquiry (Timperley et al., 2014). When taken in combination with the requirement of the Teaching Council for teachers to "use inquiry" to frame their ongoing professional learning, along with the overview of the education sector through ERO which likewise endorses teacher inquiry practices, TAI and the Spiral of Inquiry essentially become government-mandated frameworks for the compulsory education sector (Smardon & Charteris, 2017). Therefore, it does not seem to be going too far to suggest that teacher PLD has become almost synonymous with teacher inquiry in Aotearoa.

The results of these teacher inquiries as conducted for PLD purposes are expected to be improved student outcomes and achievement. There is a wide range of possibilities for what might constitute improved student outcomes and achievement. The notion of improved outcomes may well be understood as equating to improved academic achievement, for example higher results when measured against National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) standards. However, improved outcomes could also be about addressing structural and historical inequities present in the Aotearoa education system (Ministry of Education, 2023). It does seem reasonable though to assume that parents and caregivers of school-aged children and young adults would expect schools to focus largely on improved academic attainment. Nevertheless, while there is seemingly an appreciation from the MoE that inquiry could lead to a broad range of outcomes for students, there is, at the same time, a linear, neoliberalistic assumption that teacher PLD as inquiry will lead directly to improved outcomes for students, as shall be seen.

Ministry of Education process for securing PLD funding

One of the key ways in which school and Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) leaders can secure MoE-funded PLD for their teaching staff is through the process of applying for regionally-allocated PLD. Through the application process, schools or Kāhui Ako must identify how one or more of the MoE, nationally-set, PLD priorities will be a focus for the proposed PLD (Ministry of Education, 2023). For example, at the time of writing, the national PLD priorities for English-medium schools are:

- Cultural capability;
- Local curriculum design;
- Assessment for learning;
- Digital fluency (Ministry of Education, 2023)

Further, the application must outline not only how the proposed PLD will align with one or more of the national PLD priorities, but also what the school or Kāhui Ako seeks to achieve through the PLD; what evidence will be used to monitor the success of the PLD; and how the PLD will improve outcomes for students. In other words, the application requires an outline of a collective or collaborative inquiry process. If funding is secured,

the MoE website prompts leaders to choose an accredited external PLD facilitator. Facilitators can be found directly through the MoE PLD website. The website includes a search tool which allows leaders to find a facilitator based on a known name, by PLD provider, or by entering keywords. The MoE-funded PLD process then, is predicated on a number of assumptions: what the PLD is to achieve (one or more of the national PLD priorities); how the PLD will unfold (through an inquiry process); and that the PLD will be facilitated by an external (human) expert. There is strong suggestion here of a linear learning progression with pre-determined outcomes for students and teachers alike.

In summary then, the combination of policy, documentation, and process regarding teacher PLD in the compulsory education sector in Aotearoa:

- Subsumes teacher PLD into teacher inquiry;
- Mandates, in essence, two particular inquiry frameworks (TAI, and the Spiral of Inquiry);
- Assumes engaging with external (human) facilitators if schools or Kāhui Ako secure PLD funding from the MoE;
- Pre-determines student outcomes against the MoE, nationally-set PLD priorities.

In these ways we see that PLD is indeed one of the levers, alongside curriculum and assessment, that "policy makers use to regulate and control activity in schools" (Smardon & Charteris, 2017, p. 178).

The narrowing effect of neoliberalistic policy on PLD

Drilling down further in how MoE-funded PLD currently operates, as outlined above**,** we can see how the neoliberal themes of privatisation, accountability, and marketisation have continued to influence the state of play of PLD in Aotearoa. The MoE resourcing model for regionally-allocated PLD funds is one such example. Firstly, there is the setting of national priorities. The national priorities become, in essence, pre-determined results with an emphasis on student improvement, and therefore a source of external accountability measures for the use of the secured funding (Fullan et al., 2015). Further, there is the application process for regionally-funded PLD itself. The process adopts the language of neoliberalism, for example, through the 'contracting' of external (human) facilitator(s) to 'deliver' PLD, and the agreed 'Statement of Work' (known in the PLD provider sector as the SOW) which determines the hours of work and the measurable outcomes to be achieved through the PLD.

Additionally, we can see that the MoE-funded model of PLD is predicated on the assumption of linearity: that input equates to output. This represents a gross over-simplification of (teacher) learning and the literature on teacher PLD. Helen Timperley expresses this succinctly when she says, "There is no straight line between professional learning opportunities, changes to practice and changes to student outcomes" (Timperley, 2011, p. 71).

The MoE-funding model is also predicated on the assumption of human-centredness and exceptionalism (Ovington et al., forthcoming; Taylor, 2016). This echoes the neoliberal understanding of the human as being at the centre of knowledge-production; that knowledge-production is something solely in the realm of the individual person; and that agency is an independent human-only activity. The framing of knowledge-*creation* as knowledge-*production* within the knowledge-economy is based on

the same tenets of extractionism, capitalism, and consumerism as neoliberalism. One of the problematic, flow-on effects of all of this is the narrowing of PLD, rather than the opening of PLD to the nuances of context, complexity, and the possibilities of transformation (Parsons & Higgins, 2011; Rautio & Winston, 2015; Strom & Martin, 2022).

Even something conceivably open, such as teacher professional growth and learning through undertaking an inquiry cycle, under the influence of neoliberalism, becomes narrowed once particular frameworks become mandated; then tied to national priorities; and once secured, requiring that MoE funding can only be used in specific ways, to wit: the contracting of external facilitator(s) from accredited, privatised PLD providers. As Dianne Smardon and Jennifer Charteris (2017) argue: "'Teaching as Inquiry' risks becoming layered with schooling mandates, led exclusively by lead teachers and senior leaders who identify the direction of funding and therefore what is possible. Teacher agency, practitioner capacity to act and determine the direction of practice, becomes diminished" (p. 181). As an illustration of this narrowing argument, see Figure 1 below:

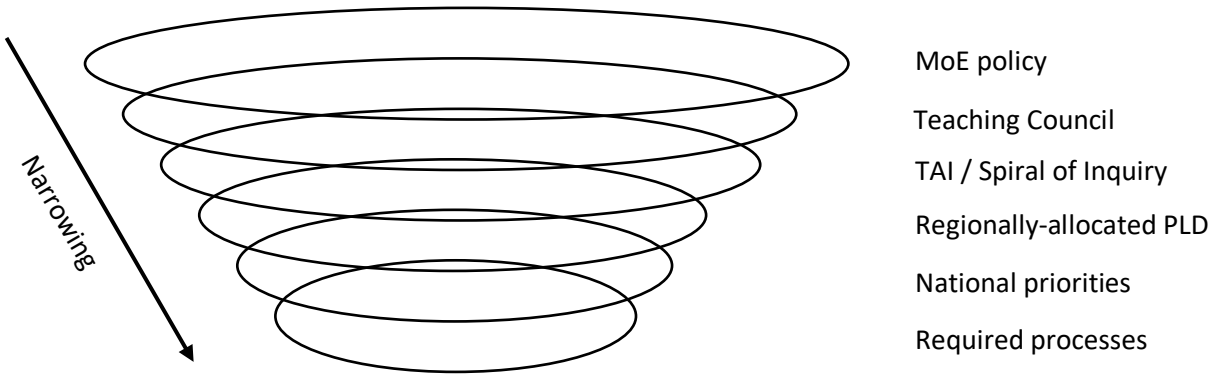

Figure 1. The narrowing effect of policy

Here we can see illustrated the narrowing effect neoliberal-influenced current education policy has over PLD in Aotearoa (M. Haggerty, personal communication, June 20, 2023). Figure 1 starts with the top-most circle suggesting the broad policy requiring that teachers engage with PLD. Then the subsequent circles funnel down as they suggest a tightening focus: on teachers specifically engaging with inquiry for their PLD; to effectively mandating two particular inquiry frameworks for the compulsory education sector (TAI, Spiral of Inquiry); then to secure funding PLD from the MoE means tagging the teaching inquiry to the national priorities. The application process for gaining MoE-funding for PLD is predicated on achieving at least one of the national priorities through the contracting of an external (human) facilitator. The more layers that are added, the narrower the overlapping circles become. Further, the funnelling effect of the narrowing circles suggests the more linear the assumptions are that underpin the connection between teacher PLD and student outcomes, thus the less nuanced the view of teacher knowledge-creation and teacher learning becomes.

What literature suggests about effective teacher PLD

Having considered the neoliberal influences on education policy in Aotearoa and their impact on the provision of PLD services, and the ways in which policy effectively mandates teacher inquiry for the purposes of professional learning and growth; as well

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as outlining the process by which schools and Kāhui Ako might secure MoE funding for PLD, we now turn to thinking more broadly about what might constitute effective PLD. Does teacher inquiry as a framework or process stack up?

The short answer is: yes. While much has been written about ways to design PLD that makes an impact on teacher practice and consequently student outcomes (for example: Birman et al., 2000; Borko et al., 2010; Garet et al., 1999; Timperley, 2011) for the purposes of this article, we particularly look at the work of Laura Desimone (2009), and Timperley and colleagues (2007). In her work, Desimone argues for a "core theory of action" for PLD (2009, p. 184), which would follow these steps:

1. Teachers experience effective professional development;
2. The professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills and/or changes their attitudes and beliefs;
3. Teachers use their new knowledge and skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instructions or their approach to pedagogy, or both;
4. The instructional changes foster increased student learning.

The (linear) assumption here is that teachers experience PLD which increases their professional knowledge and in turn improves their teaching practice and thus student outcomes. Drawing on a wide variety of previous literature on teacher PLD, Desimone claims that there are five key characteristics of effective PLD: content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; and collective participation (2009, p. 183).

Drawing on Desimone's work as outlined above (2009), and Timperley et al. (2007), as well other literature such as: Ball and Cohen (2005); Bull and Gilbert (2012); Hattie (2012); Koellner and Jacobs (2015); Muijs et al. (2014); and Shulman (1987), the key principles of effective PLD can be summarised as being encompassed by three Cs: Connected, Collaborative and Cyclical. These three Cs are unpacked in Table 1 below (Nicoll Antipas, forthcoming):

Table 1

Key principles of effective PLD

Key principle	Underpinning practices
Connected	Teachers use identified student needs as the basis for their professional learning.
	PLD makes connections between theory and practice and is based on research into what makes a difference to student outcomes.
	PLD is deeply connected to a teacher's own classroom practice.
	PLD is connected to whole-school change initiatives: there is coherence.
Collaborative	PLD supports both individual teacher learning, as well as offering opportunities for teachers to learn together.
	PLD builds a professional learning community.

Cyclical	PLD is ongoing, long-term, and sustainable. PLD may be inquiry-based (individual and / or collaborative inquiry), including cycles of learning and implementation. Teachers are engaged in active learning in their PLD: they identify their learning needs, build knowledge, trial, reflect, iterate, and evaluate.

Table 1 suggests that PLD should be strongly *connected* to teacher practice. Additionally, PLD should be connected to education theory and practice; to the school's vision for teaching and learning; as well as to the change initiatives with which the school is currently involved. Secondly, PLD should be *collaborative*: empowering teachers to learn alone, to learn with their colleagues, and / or to be part of a professional learning community. Finally, PLD should be *cyclical*: teachers actively testing, trialling, reflecting, evaluating over a sustained period of time. These three Cs are then indicative of an inquiry-like process such as that of TAI or the Spiral of Inquiry.

The foundations for the TAI framework are to be found in Graeme Aitken and Claire Sinnema's contribution to the MoE *Best Evidence Synthesis* (BES) on "Effective pedagogy in Social Sciences / Tikanga ā iwi" (2008), and in the BES on "Teacher professional learning and development" (Timperley et al., 2007). This second BES is a meta-analysis of 97 studies associated with teacher PLD and its impact on student outcomes. Ultimately, the BES on PLD recommends a "teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xliii). This cycle includes three key questions:

- What are our students' learning needs?
- What are our own [professional] learning needs?
- What has been the impact of our changed actions?

The cycle also incorporates the design of PLD tasks and experiences, and the teaching actions implemented from the PLD.

Published in the same year, the NZC also promotes TAI in its section on effective pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35). Drawing directly on the Social Sciences BES (Sinnema & Aitken, 2011), TAI is framed as an "inquiry into the teaching-learning relationship," and highlights three key questions:

- What is important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where my students are at? This question forms the basis of what TAI calls the "focusing inquiry"
- What strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help my students learn this? This is the "teaching inquiry"
- What happened as a result of the teaching, and what are the implications for future teaching? This is the "learning inquiry" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35)

Running in parallel with these three inquiries are the ongoing tasks of teaching and learning. These tasks lie between the teaching inquiry and the learning inquiry and focus on the professional learning of the teacher in order to implement evidence-based teaching opportunities. There are two further questions in the TAI cycle, and these are

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designed to prompt teacher reflection on teacher learning: "Is there something I need to change?" and "What are the next steps for learning?" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 35).

We can perhaps observe a shift in emphasis from the BES teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to the NZC TAI. This shift is pertinent to the differing purposes of the two documents. The BES is focused on how PLD might contribute to improved student outcomes. The driver for this document is to consider the design and content of teacher PLD. The NZC is focused on how teachers might change their practice in order to improve student outcomes. The driver for this part of the curriculum document is on what teachers can do in their own classrooms with effective pedagogical practices to improve student learning.

One of the strong advantages of framing teacher PLD as an inquiry cycle is that it moves away from the linear progression that models such as Desimone's (2009) core conceptual framework implies. In fact, Desimone acknowledges the "positivist viewpoint" (p. 187) that underpins her work's linearity, but, somewhat ironically, still concurs that "we need more work that links professional development and changes in teaching practice to student achievement" (p. 192). The process-product thinking of PLD as leading directly to improved student outcomes is highly problematic. It is argued in the BES: "Little is known about how teachers interpret the understandings and utilise the particular skills made available through professional learning opportunities, and about the consequent impact on teaching practice, except that the relationship is far from simple" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 7). Further, a neoliberalistic, linear logic leaves little scope for the context within which teachers and students alike learn; nor for the complexity that is teaching.

In order to continue to move away from a linear assumption of teacher PLD leading directly to improved student outcomes, in addition to the three Cs (see Table 1), I would argue that two further Cs are needed: *context* and *complexity* (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Sherman & Teemant, 2021; Strom & Viesca, 2021). These notions may support a move towards better appreciating the context and complexity of lived experiences within schools: the "nonlinear flux of teacher realities" (Sherman & Teemant, 2021, p. 366).

Teacher inquiry, both in the TAI and the Spiral of Inquiry (Timperley et al., 2014) framework, does encompass the potential for teachers to contextualise their chosen focus for professional learning, and thus to acknowledge the complexity – in everyday parlance – of their classroom(s) and students. As can be seen by the similarities between teacher inquiry with the 3Cs in Table 1, TAI fits well with what we know constitutes effective teacher PLD. Further, Sinnema and Aitken (2011) also highlight the potential of TAI to bridge the gap between theory and practice, while also acknowledging teachers' lack of robust engagement with research literature.

Nevertheless, we simply cannot assume that because teachers have engaged with PLD, student outcomes will improve. So when education policy in Aotearoa essentially mandates a teaching as inquiry process as PLD; specifies particular inquiry frameworks to be used; assumes the linear improvement of student outcomes; and embeds all of this within MoE funding application procedures, this significantly narrows what constitutes teacher PLD within Aotearoa (see Figure 1).

Introducing *Plan D*

Neoliberal influence on education policy constrains and limits PLD and the process of its effective implementation (see Figure 1). One attempt to open up PLD, while still drawing on the known fundamentals of effective PLD, such as the 3Cs (see Table 1), with the

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added additions of context and complexity (and creativity), has been made through my doctoral research project, *Plan D*.

Plan D is a collective, board-game-like activity whereby teachers design themselves a PLD experience: a d.conference. As teachers play as a collective, they work through four layers of activities which prompt them to consider:

1. What they expect from good PLD;
2. Their own professional learning needs and the learning needs of their students – and thus identify the purpose for their d.conference;
3. How they would like their d.conference to run;
4. What they have designed as their d.conference, and how they will endeavour to sustain their professional learning.

Through a design-based research methodology, and influenced by both complexity thinking and feminist new materialist, posthuman, postqualitative (FNMPHPQ) approaches, *Plan D* was also partly a response to the diminishing of teacher agency through the impact of neoliberalism as recognised by the likes of Smardon and Charteris (2017). The response of *Plan D* is twofold: firstly, the re-centring of teachers as knowledgeable experts without the need for an external (human) facilitator to 'deliver' PLD, and secondly, de-centring a human facilitator altogether. In the context of a board-game, the physical, material presence of *Plan D* itself becomes a PLD facilitator for the teacher-players. Further, while treating the 3Cs outlined in Table 1 as design principles that underpin *Plan D*, while also considering the called-for explicit additions of context and complexity, *Plan D* is borne of a desire to honour the distinct and specific contexts teachers inhabit, as well as the inherent complexity of their craft.

The prototype of *Plan D* was trialled with two primary schools in two separate cycles of testing, evaluating, and refining, in keeping with a design-based methodology (Barab et al., 2001; Cobb et al., 2003; Edelson, 2002). I was interested in teacher feedback on *Plan D* as a game-like activity itself, as well as what happened as teachers played *Plan D*. To this end, there were multiple forms of data collection. Teachers were filmed as they played. Straight after playing *Plan D*, there was a focus group discussion, also recorded, which sought to capture the teachers' initial impressions of both the game itself as well as the emergent d.conference plan which they had designed through their play. Finally, a few weeks after the experience of playing *Plan D*, each teacher was interviewed individually about what stood out for them from the experience. These interviews were also filmed.

During my doctoral studies, I became disenchanted with more conventional qualitative approaches to research. Instead, I came to embrace FMNPHPQ perspectives. In brief, FNMPHPQ approaches de-centre the individual, subjective human agent in favour of an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of the human and the more-than-human (Bennett, 2010). Further, FNMPHPQ approaches understand the world to be entangled, relational, and mutually co-constituting. Proponents of FNMPHPQ practices or approaches speak of ethico-onto-epistemology: the intricate interwining of ethics, being, and knowing (Barad, 2007).

When thinking about and thinking with the data that arose from my doctoral work, I came to understand *Plan D* as a more-than-human agent that intra-acted dynamically with the teachers as they played (Barad, 2007; Rautio, 2014; Taylor, 2013). *Intra*-action (in contrast to *inter*action) is a neologism coined by Karen Barad (2007) who extrapolates from Niels Bohr's physics-philosophy to argue that there is no singular, subjective, agential

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'I' who pre-exists independently from another singular agential entity. Rather, there are only inseparable, mutually co-constituting agencies that emerge through intra-action. In suggesting that the teachers intra-acted with *Plan D* (and vice versa), I claim that the d.conference design that emerged from their play was a mutal, co-constitutive act of knowledge-creation (Rautio, 2014; Taylor, 2021). Furthermore, I claim that *Plan D* shows the power of play for questioning the accepted norms of PLD, and thus the power of play for opening up the transformative possibilities of PLD.

Katie Salen (2007) likewise sees play as creative and subversive. There exists a source of tension when one plays a game: playing with and against the parameters of the game as created by the rules; playing with and against one's opponents; playing with strategies and short-term versus long-term gains. Playing a collective activity such as *Plan D* is little different. The teachers know they have come to design themselves and their colleagues a PLD experience (a d.conference). They may have competing visions for what this d.conference could be. They certainly have assumptions about what PLD is and perhaps should be. Playing with and against these tensions and assumptions can bring forth creativity and subversion.

Creativity and subversion could indeed be seen at work when the teachers played *Plan D*. With both groups from the two schools, the teachers talked about what they thought they would create for their d.conference prior to playing *Plan D*. Their assumptions were centred around a traditional 'sit and listen' model of PLD whereby the (human) facilitator stands at the front of the room and speaks to a slide presentation. They called this model "business as usual" (BAU). They then actively sought *not* to design BAU. Georgia from Merino Primary School[1] commented that, "whereas we might have [previously] delivered and then done an activity, and then done more delivering, it [*Plan D*] just kind of opened up the possibility of designing a more effective day of learning." Similarly, from the second school, Shyla from Valley Intermediate School said, "I think what this model [*Plan D*] provides is actually a way to challenge that [BAU] and go, 'If we talk about in our classroom being the guide on the side instead of that person at the front, well why aren't we also doing that for our PD [professional development]?" In summary, and in the words of Fern from Valley Intermediate School, playing *Plan D* gives teachers "permission to try something a little bit different."

By and large, the teachers realised that they were *playing*. They were playing with the materials of *Plan D*; they were playing with the questions and provocations offered by *Plan D*; they were playing with ideas; they were playing with their colleagues. Sarah, of Merino Primary School, observed that seeing *Plan D* spread out on the table "looked like an invitation to play." The joyful, playful, curious nature of play is one that, I would argue, is under-explored in the realm of teacher PLD. Other scholars too have called for play to be more widely explored out of early childhood and junior primary school contexts (Kanhadilok & Watts, 2014; Rautio & Winston, 2015; Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). In the context of this research, *Plan D* becomes a more-than-human facilitator: playfully prompting and provoking creative and subversive ideas in the teachers. With one school I was present in the room, but said nothing. With the other school, due to Covid-19 restrictions, I was only present on Zoom, but again saying nothing. The external human facilitator's influence was minimised. It was *Plan D* that (who) was the focus. As Victoria from Valley Intermediate School observed: "you shifted something by taking a different approach and it meant something, it mattered, and it was actionable."

[1] All teachers' names and the names of their respective schools are pseudonyms.

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Implications for policy

So, what does this research about-with *Plan D* suggest for policy? When we consider the narrowing effect of current neoliberal-influenced education policy around PLD (as illustrated by Figure 1) alongside the rich opening potentialities an agentic artefact like *Plan D* can have, there can be lessons learned about how to open up to transformative possibilities. Firstly, there could be a decoupling of the two embedded inquiry frameworks (TAI, the Spiral of Inquiry) from the nationally-set PLD priorities, and the MoE-mandated bureaucratic processes. Some of these procedures, for example the SOW or the PLD journey plan, could be retained but exist rather as exemplars of how schools or Kāhui Ako *might* plan and structure their learning through regionally-allocated PLD funds. They would be suggestions rather than givens as the current coupling of these policies and processes ultimately leads to a narrowed, expected, linear outcome.

Instead, the emphasis could (re)turn to the principles which underpin inquiry cycles, such as the 3Cs outlined in Table 1, but with the crucial additions of context and complexity. As noted above, TAI already holds within its framework the potential to lead to effective PLD. Effective PLD must be able to be attuned to the specific context of the school, and the nuances and complexities of teachers' – and students' – everyday lives in their schools. The two schools who trialled *Plan D* both designed bespoke d.conferences specific to and for their contexts and needs. Further, the experiences of the teachers who played *Plan D* strongly suggest that the current focus solely on the human external facilitator is unnecessary and potentially even misplaced, particularly when read alongside feminist new materialist, posthuman, postqualitative (FNMPHPQ) understandings of knowledge-creation. Policy then should rather open up to the possibilities of artefacts as well as humans as facilitators, alongside tuning into the internal expertise of the current teaching staff of a school. This is to call for greater flexibility in how funding can be used by schools or Kāhui Ako. Again, this is about decoupling the MoE requirement that funding is to be used to purchase the time of external (human) PLD facilitators. Perhaps funding might be used instead for a subscription, for example to a pertinent scholarly journal, or to a nearby University library. This might also support Sinnema and Aitken's call to support teachers to more robustly engage with research literature (2011).

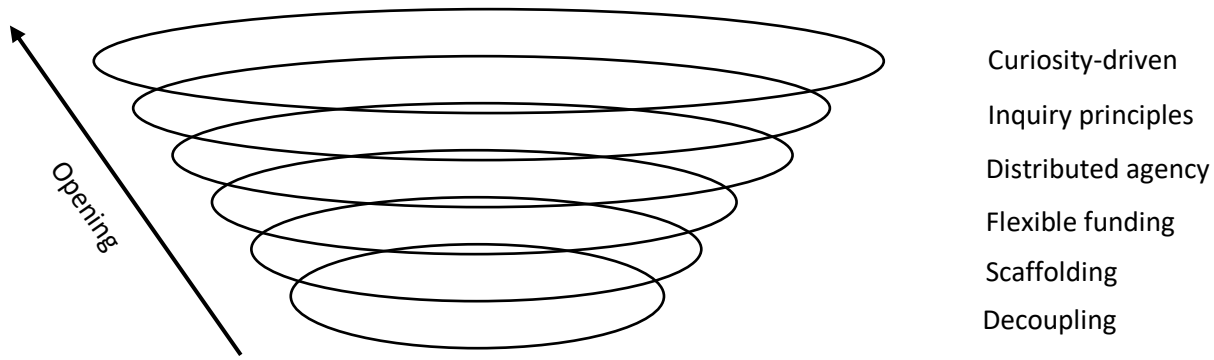

Figure 2. Opening up to possibilities

In essence, what this paper calls for is an opening up to possibilities currently narrowed by neoliberal-influenced education policy in the realm of teacher PLD (see Figure 2). What the findings generated through research with the teachers who played *Plan D* suggest is not only a new and fresh way to design PLD, but also the possibilities for moving beyond the contraints and limitations of PLD under neoliberal-influenced policy. When playing *Plan D*, teachers question their own expected norms of PLD. What else might they come to question if policy and process were to be decoupled? Perhaps these questions are nothing short of timely as the current government undergoes a programme of work to refresh the curriculum. It is indeed appropriate and possibly even urgent to (re)turn and (re)view the underlying principles of teacher inquiry with a specific view on explicitly incorporating complexity and contextuality (and creativity?).

Thus, rather than the funnelling effect of MoE policy – Teaching Council requirements – mandated inquiry frameworks – regionally-allocated PLD funds – national priorities – requisite bureaucratic processes, what might be possible if we decoupled these policies and processes and procedures from one another (Table 2)? The current forms could be used as suggestive scaffolds rather than hoops to jump through. Funding could be more flexible in how it is utilised. We could understand agency as not just being within the realms of human subjectivity, but as a distributed force encompassing the more-than-human as facilitator. A (re)focus on the principles of inquiry cycles might then just lead to PLD which is curiosity-driven and therefore more open to possibilities of creative, subversive transformation.

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Philippa Nicoll Antipas is a Lecturer / Education Advisor at The University of Otago, Pōneke. She is awaiting her doctoral graduation from Victoria, University of Wellington | Te Herenga Waka. Philippa's thesis explored what happens when teachers design their own conference as | for professional learning and development. She was supervised by Dr. Joanna Higgins and Dr. Sandi Tait-McCutcheon.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8589-7587