Title Page

Title: Understanding the Awakening Spirit of a Professional Teaching Force

The abbreviated version of the title: Understanding the Awakening Spirit

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Chapter 1

Understanding the Awakening Spirit of a Professional Teaching Force

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Abstract

Social, economic and technological changes on a global scale are challenging traditional forms of knowledge and educational practice. In response, educators worldwide are finding ways to forge new roles, identities and relationships. This paper recognises pressures on the teaching force in a global climate of educational reform. Drawing on data from experienced teachers, the paper elucidates that rich opportunities for professional learning are situated in collective review of challenges and critical incidents where teachers' guilt can be addressed with the choice for personal growth and professional learning. With a framework for tracking how teachers can be liberated from downward drift to negative sentiments, the paper concludes by highlighting the creative energy inside teachers who can rediscover deep values in the realities of their everyday professional lives in a journey of co-learning and reclaiming inner power.

Keywords

Professional teaching force, educational reform, scholarship of teaching and learning, community of practice

1. Educational Reform as a Global Issue for the Teaching Force

Worldwide, it appears, practically every education system is undergoing some sort of reform. This is partly the result of accelerated processes of social change that are shaped not only by local forces but also by wider forces of globalisation. Rare indeed are the societies which are content with their education systems. Indeed, it seems that almost everywhere both macro- and micro-level administrators are required to be constantly alert to ways in which their systems and institutions can be shaped to improve competitiveness, responsiveness and leadership in evolving social and economic circumstances.

The author of this paper has certainly witnessed these conditions in her own setting. The specific context in which she works is Hong Kong, which has long seen itself as at the forefront of international developments, especially in finance and trade, but which must also take account of domestic and regional changes. Domestic changes particularly arise from the reversion of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China in 1997. Regional changes particularly concern the development of

mainland China, but also other parts of East and Southeast Asia. Within Hong Kong, the

first Chief Executive of the post-1997 government, Mr Tung Chee-Hwa (1997), claimed

that education was one of his three major concerns. The Hong Kong public then embarked

on discourse about a series of official documents which outlined blueprints of educational

reforms to bring forth comprehensive change. These reform initiatives following change

of government had many parallels elsewhere (Mebrahtu et al., 2000; Bray & Lee, 2001).

In many respects, therefore, the specific contexts on which this paper is grounded had

features that would be widely recognised.

      With their frontline responsibility for students, teachers are always expected to

be a major hope for reform. In Hong Kong, amidst the externally initiated educational

reforms, teachers were expected to be change agents (see e.g. Education Department,

1999; ACTEQ, 2003). Policy makers observed that whether and how reform could

achieve its intended outcomes would critically hinge on how teachers responded to the

expectations implied in such documents. Underlying the expected changing roles for

the desired reforms was a question concerning teachers' capacity for professional

learning that may have been assumed but was not directly addressed in policy

documents.

      Effective design of reforms of course depends on many factors, including

understanding of teachers' lives. This paper is concerned with the synergy of different

forces in an educational reform movement. It draws on understanding of professional learning derived from data on teachers' everyday experiences, and recognises how critical experiences can be transformed into opportunities for renewal.

2. From Expectations of Teachers to Understanding Teachers' Lives

The concept of teachers as learners is widely recognised to be of crucial significance to any educational reform (see e.g. Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Asserting the need for a reskilling of the teaching profession, Caldwell (1997, p.72) suggested that "education of the profession is perhaps the highest priority in the further transformation of school education". In a similar vein, Young (1998) argued for 'postmodern professionalism', asserting that teachers should avoid blaming pupils and the system for challenges, and instead should equip themselves for inquiry in a collaborative culture. However, such aspirations are often accompanied by wishful thinking, as blame-defence cycles dominate as a recurrent feature in public discourse about teachers' roles and professional development (Kwo, 2000). Paradoxically, the well-intended elucidation of critical issues faced by teachers may achieve little more than reinforcing such blame-defence cycles.

Aspirations for collaborative inquiry have to be considered in the context of traditional school infrastructures in which teachers are assigned to work in isolation.

When teachers have to handle multiple dimensions of change, a major but subtle challenge is the expectation to initiate changes for the cultural environment. In observation of 'balkanised' cultures, where teachers work neither in isolation, nor with most of their colleagues as a whole school, but in smaller sub-groups within the school community, Hargreaves (1994, p.226) highlighted the myth of changelessness amongst teachers. He concluded with a challenge to the organisational structures of schools to meet the needs of both students and staff (p.239). When facing new challenges of educational reforms, it is indeed vital not to focus exclusively on teachers as change agents, but to address the broader educational environment, specifically with recognition of teachers' workplace cultures in which blames, isolated struggles and balkanisation are part of their lives.

When teachers are in the spotlight and expected to operate as change agents to haul the demands of educational reform, it is essential to understand their professional lives and inner worlds. As a university academic involved in professional development of teachers through formal programmes and project work, the author has come across many cohorts of experienced teachers, and is constantly intrigued by the range of energies exerted by individuals. Whilst returning to university for further education is a personal choice, some teachers seem to be open to embrace learning, and others seem to be exhausted and unmotivated. Endeavouring to identify the meaning of further education in

professional lives, the research that contributed to this paper asked what challenges

teachers face on a day-to-day basis; how teachers perceive these challenges; what they

learn from the experiences of handling these challenges; and how teachers may take

challenges as opportunities for learning.

3. Approaching the Inquiry from Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

This study moves against the tradition in which research and teaching are dichotomised

activities, and instead seeks synergies between them. As critiqued by Rowland (1996,

p.13), the distinction between teaching and research may owe more to the demands for

accountability than to logical or pedagogical differences between academic roles. Two

hypotheses emerged from Rowland's study, and presented research and teaching in a

different light (Rowland, 1996, p.16):

> First, an approach to teaching which emphasizes its interactive nature and
>
> applies to it the critical orientation of research can enhance the research by
>
> which it is formed. Secondly, such an approach to teaching is held to be the
>
> most effective. If both are true, then it follows that the most effective teaching
>
> is supportive of research.

In related vein, Shulman (2000, p.98-99) argued that the fundamental methods of

scholarship and of teaching were identical, since both domains require strategies to

marshal evidence in a systematic and persuasive manner. Research always begins with general questions that need to be refined, and does not end with data-collection. It demands long periods of analysis, reconceptualisation, writing and/or speaking, and dissemination of results. Similarly, such reflection and analysis are essential for scholarship of teaching. The distinction traditionally made between the methods of teaching and of research, Shulman argued, will gradually disappear. Each demands activities of design, action, assessment, analysis and reflection.

Data reported here are drawn from a study of four cohorts of experienced teachers over the period 2000 to 2003. The first pair of cohorts embraced experienced teachers who had been granted fellowships from the government's Quality Education Fund for a three-month period to join the University of Hong Kong. During this period, they conducted school-based projects and participated in a 15-hour course entitled 'Critical Incidents as Opportunities for Professional Learning'. The third cohort comprised experienced teachers who were participants in a part-time Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme and chose to take a 15-hour elective course entitled 'Managing Conflicts: The Teacher's Life in Challenging Times'. The fourth cohort comprised experienced teachers undergoing a Master of Education (MEd) programme who had chosen an 18-hour elective course entitled 'Teacher Empowerment Amidst Reform Initiatives'. In essence, the study was embedded in the courses, including class

seminars and workshops that led to assignments, and this paper reports on part of the coursework related to the study. Data drawn from each cohort of teachers followed a scholarly process of analysis and conceptualisation for dissemination of results to the subsequent cohort of experienced teachers and further collection of data.

4. Orientation to Development of Rapport as a Community

From the outset in the programmes, the pedagogical mode for the coursework was highlighted. In contrast to a transmission practice where knowledge is to be handed over from the teacher, the author took the initiative to assert learning as social and derived strongly from participants' experiences in daily life. Within the contact hours, the groups were entering a *community of practice*, as defined by Wenger (1998):

- What it is about – its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members;

- How it functions – *mutual engagement* that binds members together into a social entity;

- What capability it has produced – the *shared repertoire* of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

For initiation, participants were facilitated to conduct independent reflections. They

were encouraged to get involved in a joint enterprise of pursuing an understanding of their professional lives within a community in which trust was to be built in a class discourse of mutual engagement. As a lead-in activity, the teachers were given slips of paper to enter brief reviews of their school lives. Two questions were posed:

- What do you consider as the major delight in your current school life?

- What do you consider as the major threat in your current school life?

In a round-table format, participants shared their delights and threats. The process was lively with peer echoing, showing common perceptions. From an analysis of the slips of paper and notes taken during the sharing, patterns were identified as follows:

Delights –

- *positive relationship with students*

- *active class response, appreciation from students*

- *success in motivating students to learn*

- *observation of students' learning progress*

- *good results in public examination*

- *the impact on young lives under my care*

- *continuity of friendship with students beyond their graduation*

- *warm support from a few colleagues*

- *recognition of my competence from school principal, students and parents*

- *improvement of school culture.*

Threats –

- *high expectations from school principal, parents and policy-makers*

- *lack of shared vision with the school principal*

- *lack of ability to work with passive colleagues*

- *colleagues' negative attitudes and sentiments*

- *jealousy from colleagues*

- *injustice in sharing of duties*

- *failure in keeping promise to students*

- *poor results of public examination*

- *students with low morale and readiness to give up on learning*

- *gap between students' needs and the given curriculum*

- *discipline and emotional problems amongst students*

- *unrealistically high expectations of children from some parents*

- *problems rooted in students' family*

- *too much paper work, and inadequate time for teaching preparation and marking*

- *physical exhaustion.*

The teachers' delights mostly came from their students, which indicated the presence of positive rapport. In addition, the delights may be attributed to a dynamic climate in some schools. Yet, even among these committed teachers, the list of threats was conspicuously longer that of delights. Their threats could be associated with peer relationships, concern for students, and a sense of inadequacy.

5. Learning from Stories of Critical Incidents

Probing further into the teachers' delights and threats, workshops were organised for teachers to develop their rapport in groups and to reflect on critical incidents in their school lives. Each participant was asked to select a story of a critical incident for group sharing. The critical incident was defined as an encounter of challenges that had either opened or shut a learning opportunity for the students, depending in part on how the teacher had handled it.

The purpose of this exercise was to engage teachers in self-education, as they reached more deeply for self-awareness that was often not as clear as their rational decisions in certain situations. As put by Palmer (1998, 31):

> In classical understanding, education is the attempt to 'lead out' from within the self a core of wisdom that has the power to resist falsehood and live in the light of truth, not by external norms but by reasoned and reflective

self-determination. The inward teacher is the living core of our lives that is addressed and evoked by any education worthy of the name.

Indeed a teacher can become more aware of the inner core over critical moments. Such moments are often expressed in teachers' stories about their school lives. Teachers always have many stories to tell, for relieving tension, seeking support, and solving problems. Story-sharing is a prominent feature of staff-room conversation. It may be a vital tool for teachers to vent their disturbed feelings and keep going despite physical exhaustion. Behind the bubbly occurrences of critical incidents each day, how can a teacher maintain a clear mind and a passionate heart to serve the students?

The ways in which teachers address and resolve problems have important implications to everybody concerned. To the best, the teacher can take multiple perspectives and ask worthwhile questions in order to seek a better understanding of the situation before taking actions that have nurturing effects for all involved. To the worst, the teacher can reinforce prejudices, by staying with a narrow, simplistic and dichotomised view of what is right and what is wrong, and taking routine actions that kill opportunities for learning. The most alarming feature in some situations is a self-righteous attitude that can block the vision of the reality and waste energy in blame. The workshops addressed the question how story-telling can be harnessed as an everyday activity for self-renewal and recharging of energy when multiple perspectives

are considered. Participants also asked how teachers can empower themselves with enlightened understanding of the nature of the situation, reaching the roots of problems.

The workshops focused on enhanced understanding of the nature of the problems, as the sharing was not intended to reach immediate solutions. Instead, teachers' queries were in focus. In presentation of a critical incident, each participant began with an objective account of salient facts, alongside recognition of a mixture of emotions. The group then moved beyond the facts, as other participants raised questions or shared similar experiences.

Progressing from the private recounting of the critical experiences to the collective sharing of stories, the teachers came to a better *understanding* of the nature of their personal encounters and an *awakening* of their inner values. The extent of such understanding and awakening varied, but the teachers were ready to tackle writing-up of the stories. This writing became a means for conceptualisation from relevant literature and consolidation of their inner values.

With the four cohorts of experienced teachers, numerous stories were collected. Some teachers were able to demonstrate deep and insightful articulation of personal journeys in making value choices amidst struggles with multiple and conflicting external demands. The most poignant accounts often came from situations beyond control but in which the teachers were able to generate power from within, transcend

the situation, and assert leadership in a process of self-renewal. Such a self-renewal

process was well articulated by one teacher:

> *When I first heard the term "a critical incident", I was overwhelmed with*
>
> *anxiety. A critical incident? I have had enough in my school, and don't think*
>
> *those incidents (or in my mind I used the word "problems") can be easily*
>
> *resolved after this three-month course. Anxiety was accompanying me*
>
> *throughout the 10 sessions, as I was challenged with questions that*
>
> *demanded my courage to face. To my surprise, I did not miss any session, and*
>
> *I was able to share my innermost feelings with my group-mates.…*
>
> *Unexpectedly, my anxiety turned out to be a starting point for me to think in a*
>
> *more critical and comprehensive way, beyond my limited personal*
>
> *perspective. The encounter of a critical incident became a precious chance*
>
> *for me to learn.… By writing my story, I have discovered that magic moment*
>
> *that I made a critical choice, and stopped blaming my students! I can now*
>
> *appreciate my integrity as a teacher and as a person!*

Indeed many of the stories told and written up were notable. They recorded daily

experiences, but also highlighted the teachers' choices of responses. For some teachers,

the experience of revisiting difficult experiences was painful, especially when they

dwelled on the descriptive details without moving to interpretation and understanding

of the experience. The sense of injustice and other associated sentiments sometimes diverted attention from professional focus on the issues. Nevertheless, the stories provided a rich picture of teachers' various degrees of learning amidst change processes.

As a community of practice, each cohort of teacher participants benefited over a short time span from the groups which shared experiences, developed analytical tools, and mutually reinforced inner values. The following selection of shared stories illustrates the themes and the personal conclusions of the teachers involved.

- *How a student became my teacher*: I became responsive and supportive, instead of being directive. My curiosity took me to a discovery of new pedagogy!

- *A nightmare no more*: I rejoiced at a difficult student's change from a new experience of being able to fulfil a set promise.

- *A student's stress from difficult relationship between parents*: How far can I go as a sympathetic companion?

- *From maladjustment to the school to attachment to the teacher*: I could see the student's yearning for guidance that the home environment did not provide.

- *A student's destruction of a toilet door as one moment of relief*: I realised from his violence that he had overflowing hurt feelings and was making a plea for support and guidance!

- *My misplaced anger at a case of a student's cheating*: The student did not cheat, and I learned anew about the student's diligence in ineffective learning!

- *Every student has some gifts of learning*: I learned that he is gifted in cooking, and he does not need to wait till the end of schooling to gain his sense of self-worth!

- *A long journey of struggles and my awakening from a dream to be a superstar-teacher*: Have I given too much to my students? Have I refused to receive from my students?

- *My first apology to my students*: I failed to reach them in one sense, but succeeded in another sense, as we re-established our rapport to face the difficult learning tasks. Learning is not only about reaching the intended outcome; it is about sustaining curiosity!

In such communities of practice, the open and non-judgemental sharing led to a rich agenda of questions. The problems were no longer about personal relationships with

students; nor were any problems personally owned. The collective focus turned to students' needs, their learning obstacles, and the constraints.

- *Have I taken critical incidents as a curse or a blessing?*

- *What is the significance of care for extreme students? Is it worth spending so much time on them at the cost of attention to the mainstream majority?*

- *How do I interact with parents whose values are contradictory to those asserted by our school? How do I help my students to handle the conflicting values?*

- *To what extent can I help the students who are suffering from family problems?*

- *What can I do without intrusion to their family? Under what circumstances would intervention be needed?*

- *When we look into all the symptoms from an outbreak of a critical incident, it is disturbing to see many problems and their entanglement! Do we have any power to resolve the problems?*

These questions generated a collective sense of commitment to students that seemed to prompt a general feeling of inadequacy, when issues were identified with no immediate solutions.

6. Awakening the Authority from Within

Answers to these questions would demand a teacher's life to be linked to students closely in caring, accepting and supportive roles, demanding the qualities beyond the intellectual domain. Nodding (1992) emphasised such close relationship as reciprocal between teacher and student. However, the communal dialogues revealed the struggles among teachers who felt unable to reach their students deeply due to competing agendas that tended to constrain their caring intention. Further questions were raised from teachers' critical review of the dilemmas. Can teaching be reduced to a routine of running the chores according to some rules? In what ways might opportunities for professional learning simply be swept aside in surrender to school routines? Do teachers have power over their choices? Where and how does *education* actually take place? How much do our students need us in different contexts? Can we enlarge our capacity to give?

These questions beg for the fundamental belief in the source of authority; and authority must be distinguished from power. Quoting Palmer again (1998, 32-33):

> Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out. We are mistaken when we seek authority outside ourselves.… External tools of power have occasional utility in teaching, but they are no substitute for authority, the authority that comes from the teacher's inner life.

Instead of feeling constrained and inadequate, teachers can choose to be connected to students, and learn valuable lessons from reflecting on critical incidents. Deep reflections often challenge a teacher's system of values. This authority can be vividly revealed in a teacher's recollection of a life saved:

The class had started for about 15 minutes. As I was demonstrating how to use the equipment, Peter suddenly threw a set of instruments on the floor and screamed. I was upset about his unruly behaviour. The class was frozen in silence. I recovered very quickly, and did not send him out, but resumed teaching. As soon as the class was engaged in their individual assignments, I asked Peter to go to the preparatory room for a personal conversation. Away from his classmates, he broke down in tears, and poured out on the disasters in his family... I found that his left hand sleeve was blood stained as he had attempted to cut himself to commit suicide. He said that he would have jumped off the building if I had sent him out of the class for suspension.

The teacher concluded his narration with an assertion: it can kill when teachers lose heart! Any response to a critical situation is not so much a technical decision about how to put things right, but rather a moral endeavour of doing the right things that call upon the internalised values. By revisiting these values in different contexts while handling

problems, a teacher can strengthen understanding of the developing values. The nature

of reflective practice was well articulated by van Manen (1995, 48):

> The curricular thoughtfulness that good teachers learn to display towards
>
> children may depend precisely upon the internalized values, embodied
>
> qualities, and thoughtful habits that constitute virtues of teaching.

In other words, the virtues of teaching have to be earned, time and time again, through

values-laden reflections, and collective reflections facilitate re-visioning. During and

after the workshops, the teachers reviewed their stories with emerging questions and

reached a deeper awareness of the nature of the problems. Some even learned to

understand themselves anew from recollecting past experiences in their secondary

school days.

Reaching their inner selves while reviewing the critical incidents, they came to

realise the unexpected roles and new possibilities: a dreamed-up superstar, a transmitter

of instruction, a salesman, a caring listener, a learner in teaching. They recognised that

the ways they perceived the problems formulated the frames of actions taken. Yet it was

disquieting to see that individual problems can be perceived quite differently, as guided

by different values, which will lead to different actions and impacts on teachers' own

lives, as well as those of the students. For instance, a student who is behaving off the

norm can be taken as a trouble-maker, but can also be taken as a case for connecting

teachers and students, and reinforcing the desired school culture, if educational values can be integrated in every step of action. Apart from reaching for the authority and values from within, the challenge calls for a liberation of space for reflections from which personal care can give way to moral and social responsibilities. As put by Hargreaves (1994, 144):

> In the context of teaching, doing or failing to do what is right is more than a matter of personal moral choice…. It also involves the context of caring and the extent to which that context enables or restricts the exercise of such choice. Teachers may, for instance, be prevented from doing what is right or caring as they wish by insoluble dilemmas or impossible constraints.

Many of the sources of teachers' senses of limitation and guilt arise from such dilemmas and constraints, as carried in a metaphor of firework show by a teacher having taught for 12 years:

> *I started my teaching career with great enthusiasm just as the first time I was taken for a firework show. I felt excited every moment I spent in the school and in the class. But my enthusiasm has dropped over the years. Yet I do not regard myself as being off-task and inefficient. Teaching materials could be well prepared and transmitted to the class, and administrative duties could be well completed. Frankly, I see myself as a director of fireworks display. As more and*

more displays have been put up, I find myself more and more bored, just as much

as I find my colleagues and students. For two years, my school has set up a

campaign for "pleasurable teaching and learning", yet the slogan just stands

along from practice, and my heart is in chaos...

This teacher's unsettled sense of puzzlement has been ongoing, yet not being identified.

Has the teacher lost touch with the authority from within? How did that happen? The

professional learning journey needs to be considered in a broader map where the

subtlety of guilt can be brought to the light, and addressed in the public domain as

professional discourse on moral and social responsibilities.

7. Opportunities for Development of a Spirit in Professional Learning

In this paper thus far, critical incidents have been presented as opportunities for

teachers to reclaim the authority from within, when they are drawn to professional

learning which in essence comes from and leads to reinforcement of the inner values. It

becomes evident that the teachers' perceptions of challenges are muddled when they

lose sight of their inner values. The paper now turns to conceptualisation of the

dynamics of professional learning. Strategic questions about educational reform are

raised here:

- When and where does professional learning take place?

- What is the essential nature of a professional spirit for the teaching force amidst reform initiatives?

Indeed it is crucial to identify the pivotal point of learning. To explore this, it is necessary to recognise the subtle and vibrant struggles in teachers' lives. These questions are addressed in Figure 1 that illuminates the choice between a downward drift and an upward shift.

[Figure 1 to be placed here]

This discussion begins with the consideration of those teachers who enter the teaching profession with a commitment to young lives. However, a teacher's everyday duties can be entangled with guilt traps that can lead them on guilt trips. According to Hargreaves (1994), guilt trips are the different strategies that teachers adopt to deal with or deny the guilt which is not a consequence of their own faults.

Davies (1989) highlighted two forms of guilt: persecutory guilt and depressive guilt. In research on teachers' work and culture, Hargreaves (1994, 142-152) elucidated the relationship between these two forms. Persecutory guilt arises from doing something that is forbidden or from failing to do something that is expected by external authorities. This kind of guilt leads many teachers to concentrate on covering the required content, rather than ignoring it or subverting it to develop *professional* approaches of their own. Persecutory guilt encourages overt yet superficial compliance

with innovations that are expected but not accepted. Depressive guilt has much of its origin in early childhood in the learned attempt to 'repair' from having made mistakes. In adulthood, this guilt emerges from having to admit the failure to reach a desired state. In this paper, the stories shared by teachers carry a sense of their limitation that may well illustrate the subtlety of their depressive guilt, which can make the situation more difficult when feelings of external pressures take away the learning space. Teachers' guilt and its resolution are as much matters of occupational constraint and expectation as of individual responsibility and choice. These patterns of constraint and expectation constitute the guilt traps of teaching that naturally lead to a downward drift.

The downward drift may be prompted by a critical incident not appropriately resolved, which may then lead to a long process of accumulated negative emotions. To steer themselves away from guilt traps, teachers can exercise choices for upward shift, though such choices may not readily come to their awareness. By default, many teachers experience a downward drift from guilt trips, exposing symptoms of disappointment, cynicism, blame, denial, defence and burnout as they suffer from a state of helplessness and a sense of powerlessness. Without adequate attention to curb the drift, these teachers may accelerate in accumulation of negative sentiments, or leave the profession. To stay on with loaded negative feelings, these teachers are not only entangled in recurrent problems, but also generate further problems.

Amidst reform initiatives, teachers are more frequently exposed to situations where critical incidents are encountered, unsettling decisions are made, and inner values are tested. While such situations can naturally be disquieting and disturbing, they can also be perceived as opportunities for personal growth, an indispensable part of professional development. In this paper, data from the teachers has clearly indicated the upward shift. The reported stories show signs of persecutory guilt as well as depressive guilt, yet in each case the teacher could reach beyond isolation in order to understand the challenges at hand from different perspectives. From creating space for enlightened understanding, each case showed a broadening of possibilities for responding decisions. As liberated from a personal attachment to the experience, the teachers became aware of their moral and social responsibilities in handling situations. Through such liberation, the teachers not only unloaded responsibilities but also acquired space to reinforce inner values. They reclaimed authority from within to confront what was crucially needed, and gained intrinsic reward from the learning experience. In essence, a track in developing a professional spirit could be identified from the teachers' choices for an upward shift. Such a professional spirit comprised a commitment to personal growth and active learning. Under difficult circumstances, each individual is tested on the potential to turn a downward drift to an upward shift.

The critical choice between downward drift and upward shift can be a habit that a teacher can cultivate. An illustration from a teacher can be quoted here:

Even when I come across depressive guilt again with students' discipline problems, I know I have the power to choose to take each challenge as opportunity to understand more about my students. In fact, there is still a lot more to learn, such as seeking to understand more about my principals and other teachers how they view and tackle these challenges. I feel empowered when I can liberate myself from frustration or blames, and instead pose with positive thoughts and actions.

8. Conclusion: A Journey for the Professional Teaching Force

This chapter began with recognition of the pressures from the broader climate of educational reform. The focus turned to teachers' professional learning, with an awareness that rich opportunities for professional learning are situated in challenges and critical incidents of teachers' everyday lives. Instead of adopting the conventional approach to data-collection in school sites, this study has been carried out with the author's dual roles as a university-based teacher educator and as a participant researcher, with attention to the impact on community-building amongst teachers of a similar cohort who went through the experience of story-sharing and joint reflections.

Calls for educational reform are heard almost universally in a very wide range of settings. This study has emerged from the Hong Kong context, reaching a conceptual framework for identifying the location of inner power of teachers' lives amidst their critical choices for personal growth and professional learning. Each teacher who is willing to engage in professional learning can play multiple roles at different stages of educational reform, such as a catalyst, a reviewer, a critical friend, and a writer. Teachers can team up as networks of learners, sharing deeply the minds and the hearts, and rediscovering universal principles in realities of everyday life.

To conclude, the powerful but subtle vantage points for learning are evident amongst all teachers, but how they respond to them can bring about or shut down learning opportunities. This chapter presents findings that shed light for understanding the awakening spirit for making critical choices, when decision-making is often simplistically taken as coming from ready-made rule books or personal traits. Findings from teachers' reported stories and reflective discourse in groups would invite consideration in other cultural contexts. When this awakening spirit for making critical choices is not an outcome of lonely struggles of teachers as individuals, the move towards a learning profession can begin. This chapter suggests that educators need to move beyond institutional boundaries, as a broadening teaching force of school / university educators and policy-makers, and engage collectively in learning about

changing identities with reinforced focus on the younger lives. It is the synergy and

collaboration of educators from across sectors that can create a culture of inquiry for the

teaching force, in which a professional spirit amongst teachers can be nurtured,

discerned and respected in an ongoing journey.

Acknowledgement

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Upward Shift
- perception of critical incidents as learning opportunities
- break from isolation
- creation of space for understanding dilemmas
- liberation from personal care to moral and social responsibilities
- reinforcement of authority and values from within
- claim of intrinsic reward

Teaching as commitment:
'make a difference to young lives!'

Guilt Traps

Guilt Trips

Persecutory Guilt

Depressive Guilt

Downward Drift

- open-endedness of teaching
- accountability & intensification

- commitment to care
- perfectionism

- disappointment
- cynicism / blames
- denial / defence
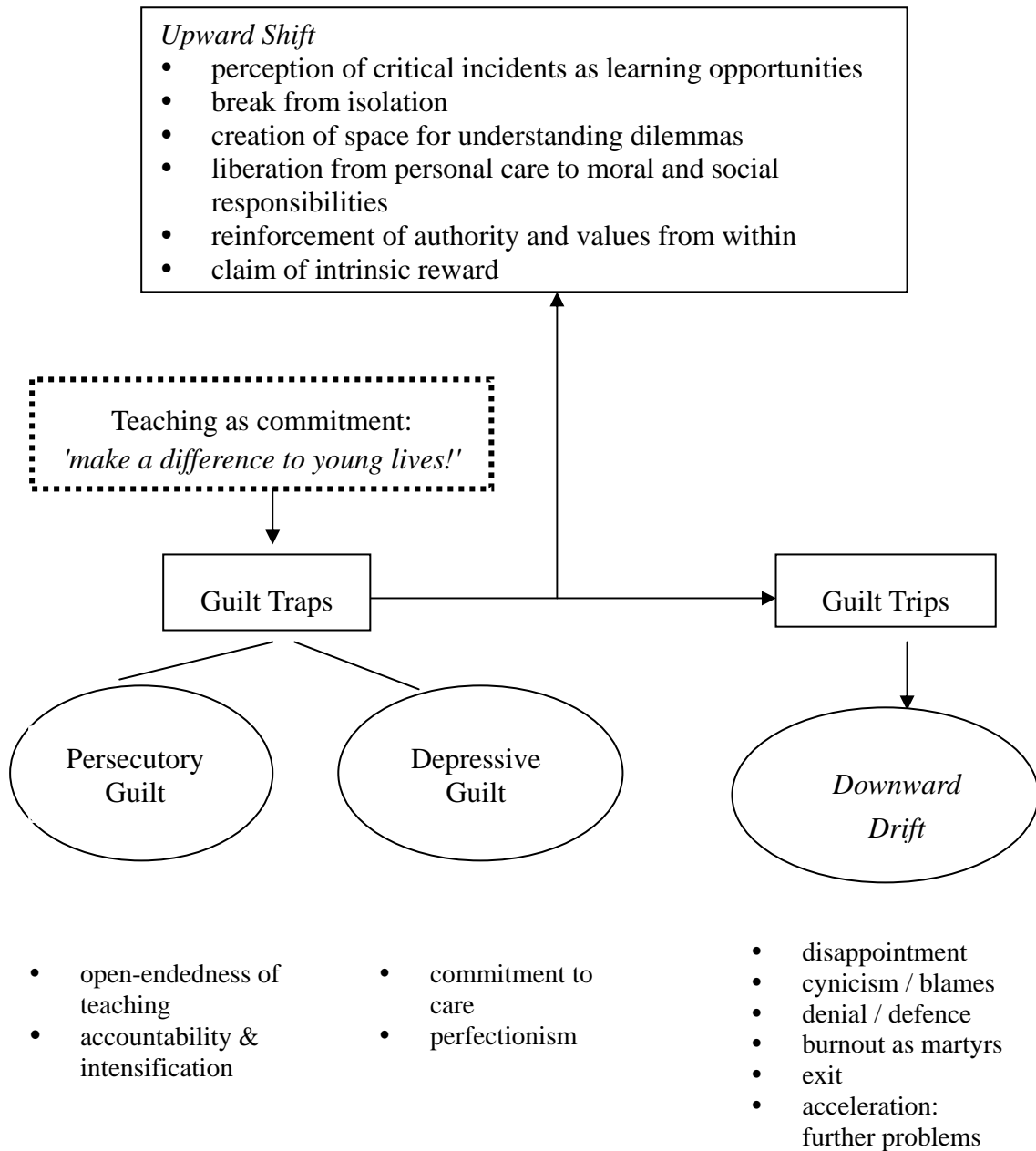- burnout as martyrs
- exit
- acceleration: further problems

Figure 1. The Choice for Personal Growth and Professional Learning