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Understanding teacher agency in universities: why and how lecturers shape and navigate university teaching practices

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Propositions
accompanying the dissertation

Understanding Teacher Agency in Universities

Max Kusters, 3 July 2025

1. Because teacher agency is non-normative and non-hierarchical, attempts to rank, standardize, or evaluate it by universal criteria fundamentally misrepresent its nature (*this dissertation*).
2. The ecological approach to teacher agency challenges dominant paradigms by rejecting the agency–structure binary. Instead, it asserts that agency is not exercised in spite of structure, but through it, making it the best-suited model for understanding the complexity of lecturers’ professional practice (*this dissertation*).
3. In an academic discourse dominated by measurability, output, and efficiency, teacher agency provides a necessary counterbalance: it re-establishes the lecturer as a reflective, ethical decision-maker at the heart of teaching practices (*this dissertation*).
4. Since teacher agency is defined by purposeful, contextually grounded decision-making in light of the wider purposes within which lecturers act, teacher agency is always a positive outcome (*this dissertation*).
5. The only meaningful conversation about teaching quality is the conversation about teacher agency.
6. There can be no difference in the quality of teacher agency. It is like an ace in tennis: the result is undeniable; an ace is an ace. Exploring “better agency” is meaningless. What matters is examining “why and how to exercise agency.”
7. Because teacher agency is not limited to ad hoc decisions but involves recognizing and cultivating spaces for deliberate professional action, it should have a central place in lecturers’ professional development programs.
8. Educational reforms that leave no room for teacher agency are like architecture without a foundation: impressive on paper, but fragile in reality.
9. Policymakers must critically rethink how lecturers’ multifaceted teaching contributions are rewarded and supported.
10. Academic freedom without academic agency is incomplete.
11. If self-regulation is the steering wheel of a ship, then agency is the capacity to set sail and determine course; therefore, agency, not self-regulation, should be the guiding learning principle in the ICLON Knowledge Base.