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# Empowerment and Agency: A Critical Framework

Dr Lucy Maynard and Dr Kaz Stuart

Promoting Young People's  
Wellbeing Through  
**EMPOWERMENT  
AND AGENCY**

— A Critical Framework For Practice —

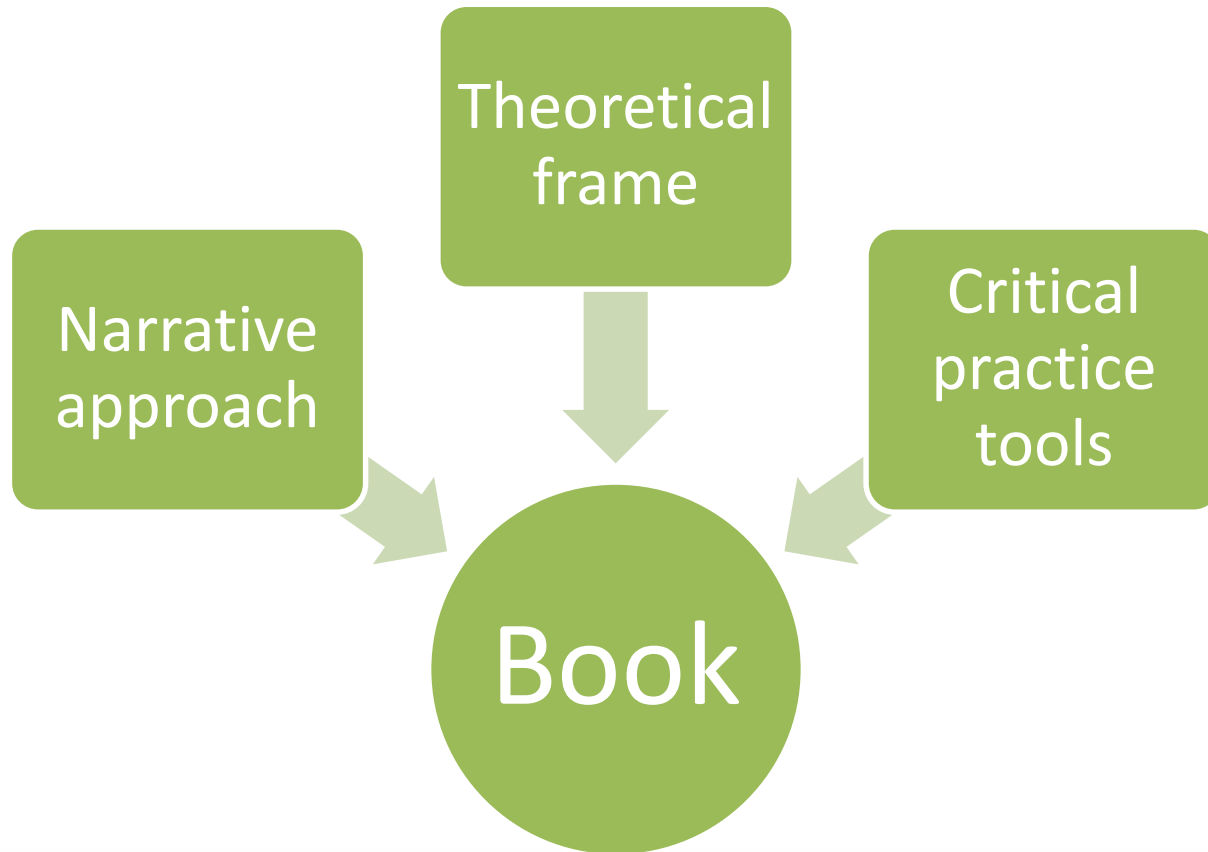


LUCY MAYNARD *and*  
KAZ STUART



**TEN**  
*years*  
2007-2017

# Overview



# The development

Three stories:

- A young man 'ASB'
- A young woman 'CSE'
- An inter-professional team 'dysfunctional'

# A Young Man 'ASB'

- *Me upbringing; I had a bad-un. I think it was just what I was used to, so as I got older I didn't know different. I knew now't else and then when you start, like I knew I was in the wrong at 13 and stuff, but that was the lifestyle I was in.*
- *Like from a young age, I used to tick school at like five! And my Dad wasn't a very good role model, because you always wanna be like your Dad. But my Dad was in and out of jail, till I was about 11. So from a young age I was taking all that in. Like I'd be in a room with like me Mam, me Dad and all their friends and they were drinking and taking drugs, so that was what I was used to.*
- *I was 12 [when I first got in trouble with the police] I set a bin on fire in the middle of the street. But I can remember as young as six being took home by the police, when I lived with my Mam and Dad, so... But [Grandad] went awol; give us a couple of slaps. He was strict but I didn't listen to him.*

# A Young Woman 'CSE'

- *Gemma was 13 years old and at risk of being exploited as a consequence of her Mum being a sex worker and associated class A drug habit.*
- *Gemma rarely attended school, drank alcohol regularly, and ran away from home and her grandparents' care.*
- *Gemma cared greatly about her Mum, so much so that sometimes she would pick her up off of the floor when she had used (drugs), laying her on the couch and staying with her in case she overdosed. Gemma was at risk of being exploited by her Mother to have sex with men, to fuel her habit.*

# An inter-professional team 'dysfunctional'

- *Team newly mandated to work together, significant barriers, professional biases, and a very rapid implementation of change.*
- *Team was co-located and given joint control of children's services without team building or clear protocols.*
- *Unable to work well together, unclear communication, unclear boundaries, collaborative disadvantage.*



# The Theoretical Frame

- Wellbeing
- Social Justice
- Structure and Agency
- Empowerment
- ACA

# Wellbeing

“Feeling good and functioning well”  
(Aked, 2008:1)

# Dimensions of Wellbeing

	Objective wellbeing	Objective and subjective wellbeing
<b>Personal wellbeing</b>	Focus on measurable observable wellbeing outcomes at the individual level.	Focus on a holistic range of wellbeing outcomes at the individual level.
<b>Personal and social wellbeing</b>	Focus on measurable observable wellbeing outcomes at the individual level with social and environmental factors.	Focus on a holistic range of wellbeing outcomes at the individual level with social and environmental factors.

# From wellbeing to social justice

“When people have control over what is happening in their lives, their health and well-being improves” (Ledwith, 2011)



# Social what?!?

- The 'just' distribution of resources
  - Equal right to justice
  - Equal freedom from discrimination
  - Equal access of opportunity
  - A moral obligation
- 
- 'functional social justice'.

# Social What?!?

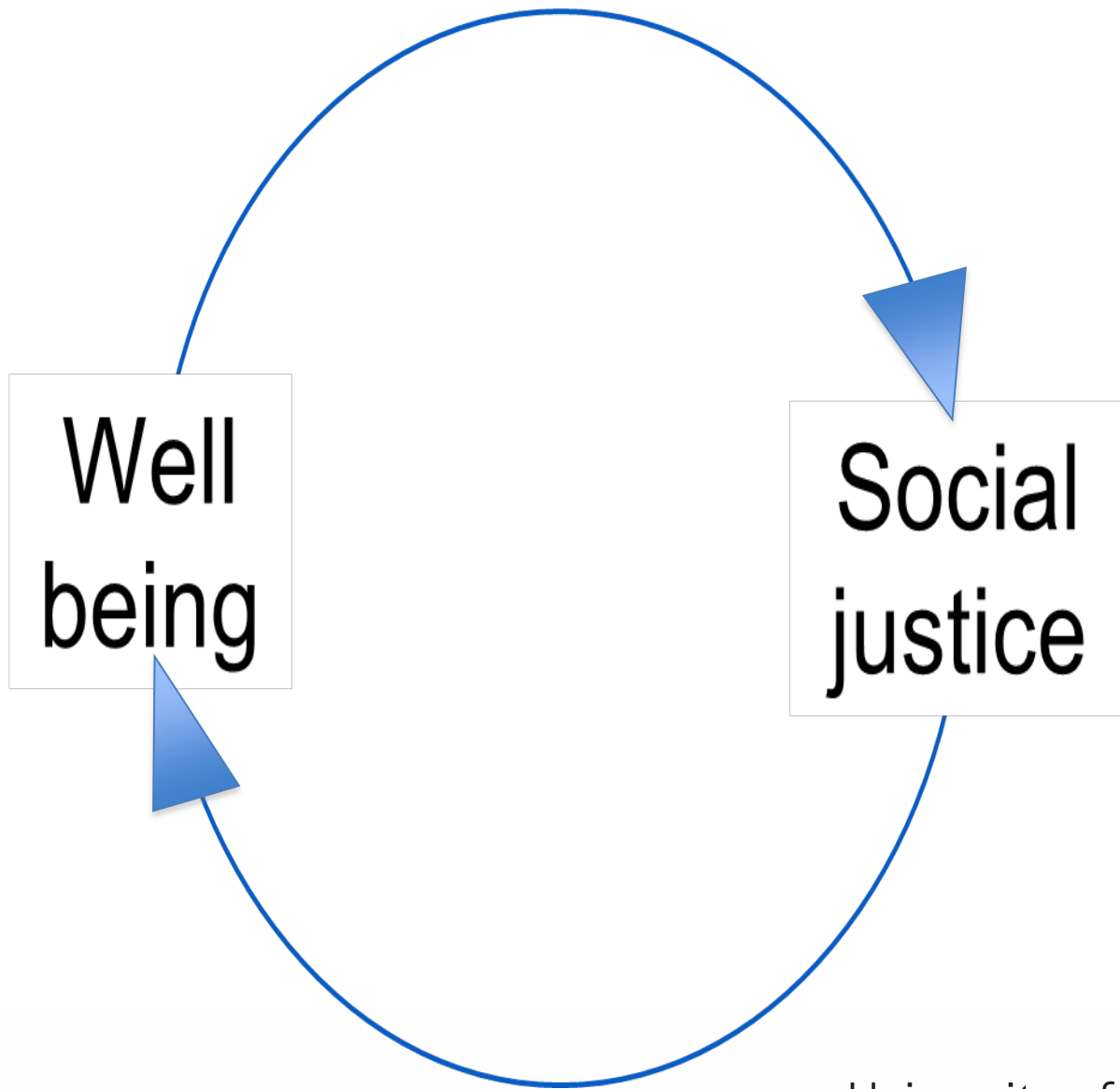
**Equality:** every human being has an absolute and equal right to common dignity and parity of esteem and entitlement to access the benefits of society on equal terms.

**Equity:** every human being has a right to benefit from the outcomes of society on the basis of fairness and according to need.

**Social justice** requires deliberate and specific intervention to secure equality and equity.

(Chapman and West-Burnham, 2010:28).





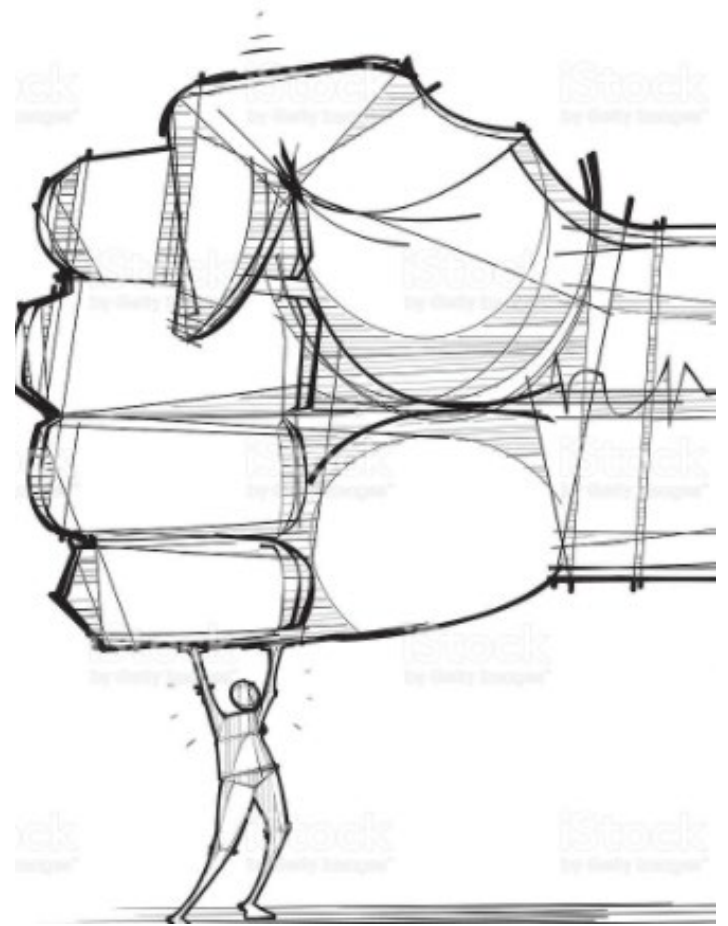
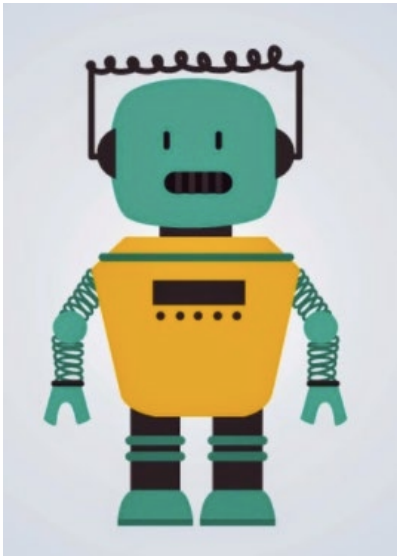
# Wellbeing and social justice in the narratives

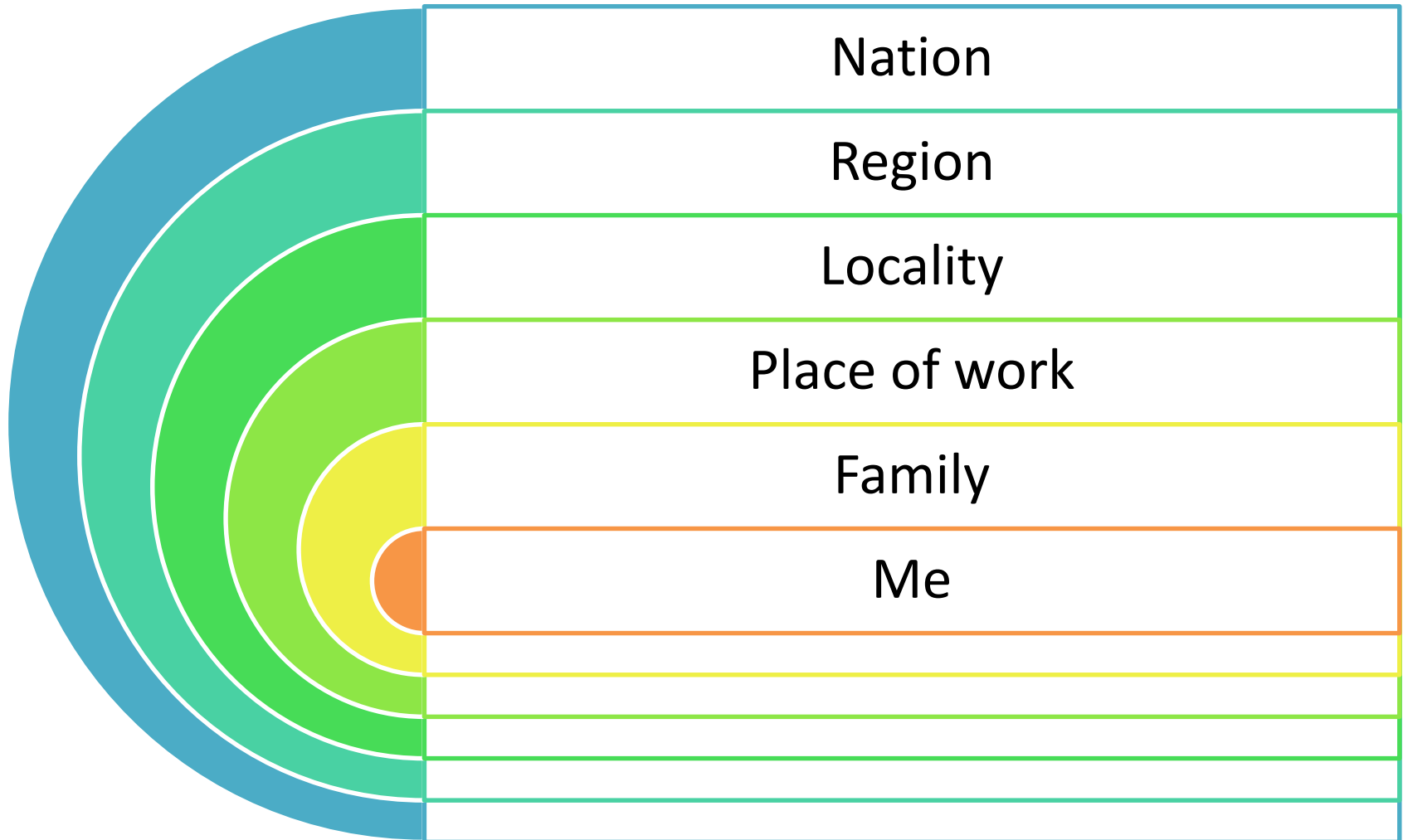
- *ASB – lacking care, lacking food, lacking a home, no legitimate way to earn money, in trouble with the police unable.*
- *CSE - exploited, not in education, not cared for, surrounded by drugs and sexualised behaviour.*
- *Dysfunctional team – brought together too quickly without any investment in development or team working, labeled as ‘dysfunctional’ globally through a few instances of poor working practices.*



# Structuralism

- Structuralist view that people are controlled and created by society – they merely occupy roles (Durkheim, 1982)





# VERSUS

# Agency

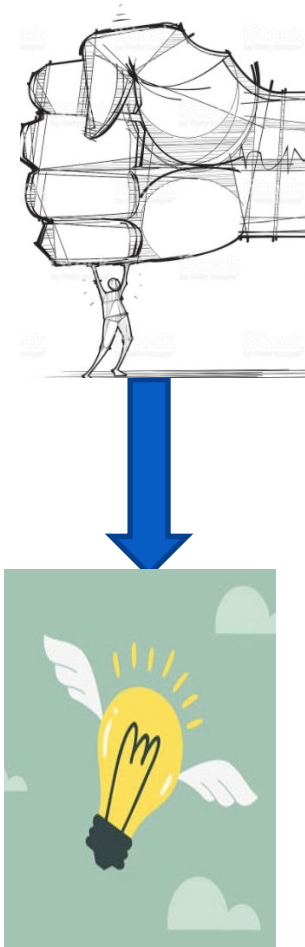


To intentionally make things happen by one's actions.

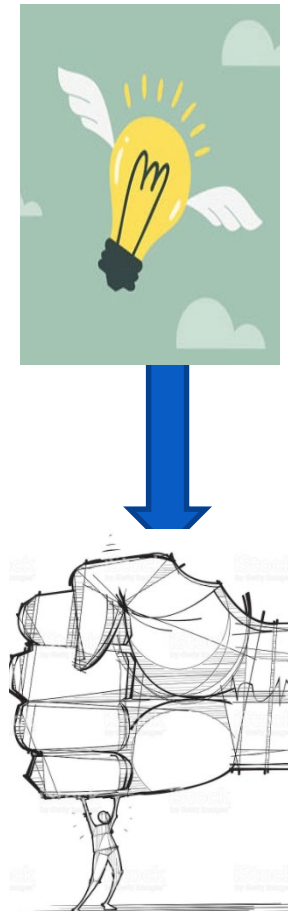
“To make their way successfully through a complex world full of challenges and hazards, people have to make good judgments about their capabilities, anticipate probable effects of different events and courses of action, size up sociocultural opportunities and constraints, and regulate behaviour accordingly... Enabling them to achieve desired outcomes and avoid unwanted ones” (Bandura, 2001:3)



# The Structure and Agency Duality



Or...

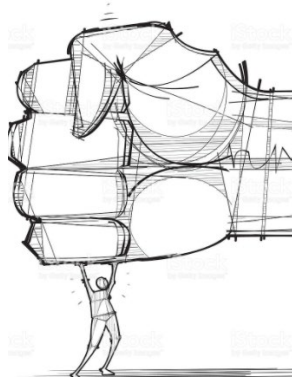


# The Structure and Agency Dualism

People are 'acted on' by society, structures and rules shape who they are and what they can do.

Society and structures and rules are created by people who say what the structures are and what they do.

Structure and agency are therefore interdependent, a dualism rather than a duality.

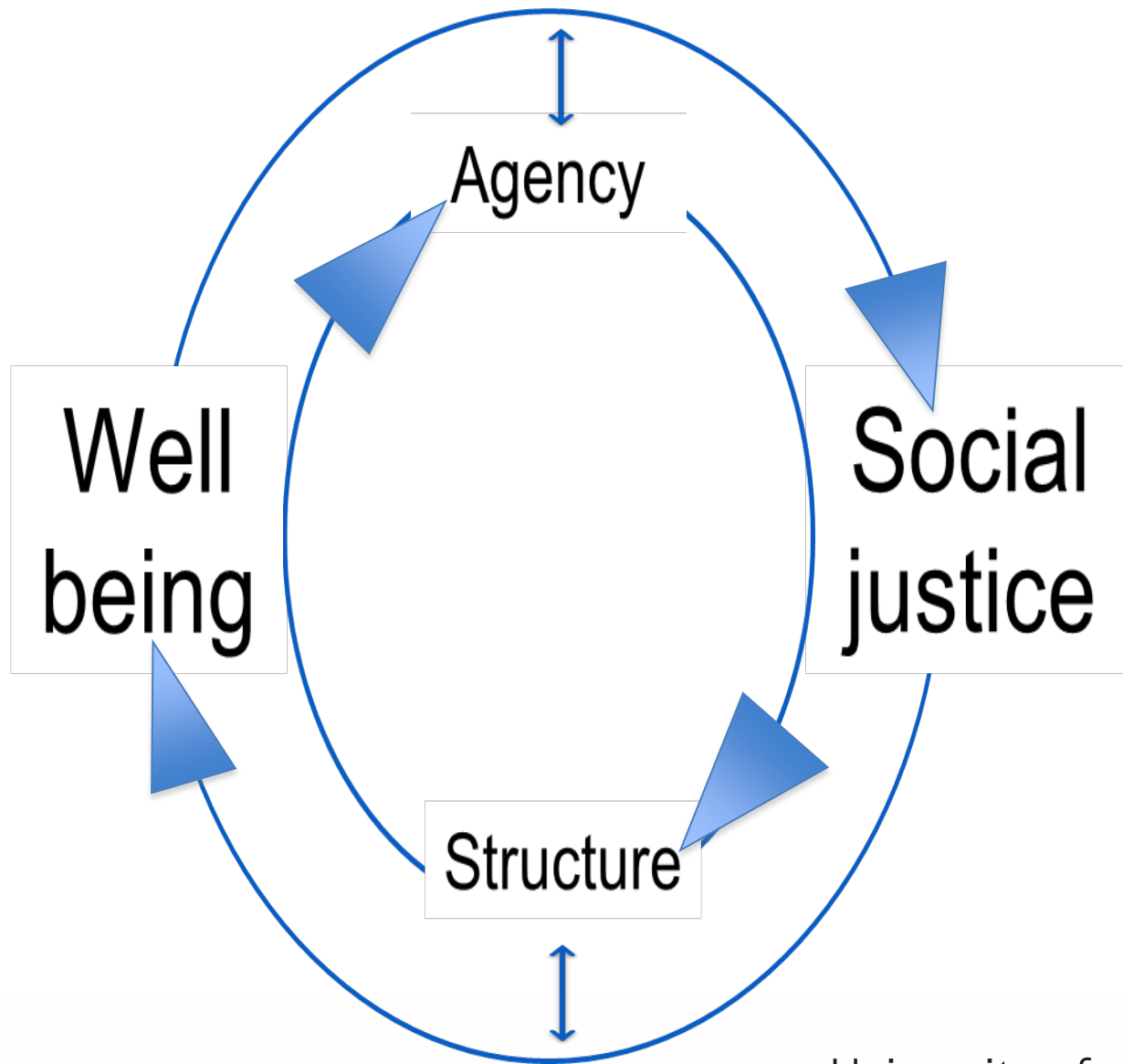


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# Structure and agency in the narratives

- *ASB – limiting circumstances, labeled anti-social behaviour, doing what he can, stealing to make ends meet.*
- *CSE – limited circumstances, labeled as a whore and ‘prossy’, doing what she can to look after herself and stay attached to her mum.*
- *Dysfunctional team – no choice to work together, no lead time, little control, however, able to decide how to relate, how to work together.*

# Empowerment

“The capacity of individuals, groups and communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives” (Adams, 2008:17)

# Sparking

- Interruptions (Coleman, 2007)
- Critical moments (Henderson et al., 2007)
- Epiphanies (Denzin, 1989)
- Turning points (Mandlebaum, 1973)
- Breaks (Humphrey, 1993)
- Fateful moments (Giddens, 1991)

# Critical Consciousness

- People are naïve about their oppression
- At this stage, people lack insight into the way in which their social conditions undermine their well-being and so do not see their own actions as capable of changing their conditions (Campbell and MacPhail, 2002)
- Need to develop critically consciousness (Freire, 1973)

**AWARENESS**

# Developing awareness in the narratives

- *ASB - You're just going with the flow [reactive]. You have a light bulb moment; what am I doing, I need to change, I'm going nowhere.*
- *I thought I'd had enough and was being good for quite a while and then the [programme] came along and I done it and got stuck in and then after that I got locked up!*
- *I was doing the programme and then this time last year, [laugh] it was [festival], I had a bit too much to drink and I got locked up, for fighting, but luckily,*
- *I didn't get prosecuted or 'owt. So I thought right, I'm gonna have to change. I'm gonna have to use everything I've learnt from the programme and put it into action here and just go for it.*
- *I thought I don't want any more of this. And that turned into another one [light bulb moments]*

- CSE - *“Coz you know what, I thought, I don’t need you [Groomer] anymore. I took a hard look in the mirror at myself and then I looked at him ...and I thought, I don’t want that.*
- *I was like no he’s going to love me forever and all this lot. And I just thought I’ve lost so much, and I thought he never gave me anything back, and I thought [f\*\*k] you I don’t need you any more”.*

- *Dysfunctional team –*
- *I don't want to keep on like this*
- *This is no way to work*
- *I can't carry on like this*
- *We have to change*
- *I want it to work, I have great faith.*



# Wanting and committing

- An intrinsic desire for difference (push / pull)
- Tipping point (Gladwell, 2000)
- Finding an internal locus of control

# Choice in the narratives

ASB:

Wanting:

- *The people on the course, I think there was only me that really wanted to change on the course. But the other guys, they were probably in that stage in their life where they didn't want to change. So if they wanted to change the help was there. Just take the help, but they obviously didn't want it and it wasn't the right time for them.*

Commitment:

- *I think I committed to changing, all together. But growing up as well, that was a big change. I know now I am in control, but there is always this little thing in the back of my head saying I could always go back and do something silly and make a stupid mistake. So that's why I wanted to get away as well. I was just a teenage boy who thought life will sort itself out. But, you have to sort it out yourself. You have to go out and get what you want. So I learnt that. The hard way, but in a good way.*

Choice:

- *So it's options, but people will only do it if they want to do it. You can advise them, so they've got everything for when they decide to go for it. I'd had a realisation and I wanted to change and I wanted to make the most of the programme. They know what they're doing, so I might as well use what they know to help me.*

- CSE: *“I’ve changed the way I act, my personality, I’m more mature! I know this because of some of the decisions I’ve had to make, like foster care and leaving my Mum, my Nan, and my family to go and live with someone I don’t know.*
- *“And everyone [back home] was like ‘I told you so’ and I was like, yeah, but I needed to find out for myself. And I didn’t need these people telling me what’s right for me and what’s wrong and what I should and shouldn’t do, because at the end of the day I’m going to find out for myself, I need to find out for myself sort of thing. And learn from me own mistakes”.*
- *I mean looking back I would of thought I’d never be in a place where I am today, never. At least I thought I would still be hung up on him, and then moved out of county somewhere... so ... I’d never thought I’d come this far, but we have and looking back I hate that old person, I don’t like that old person, no. And this is the new me! I’m more confident, I think more of me self, I’m bubbly...*

- *Dysfunctional team –*
- *Re-organised themselves*
- *Spent time on team building*
- *Brave challenge of professional biases*
- *Time spent developing information sharing protocols*
- *Improved work and some collaborative advantage.*

# Supporting the change

- Support for skills, knowledge, understanding
- Support for self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem
- Motivation and determination
- Support to recycle if the change cannot be sustained
- Learning to learn, learning empowerment

# Action in the narratives

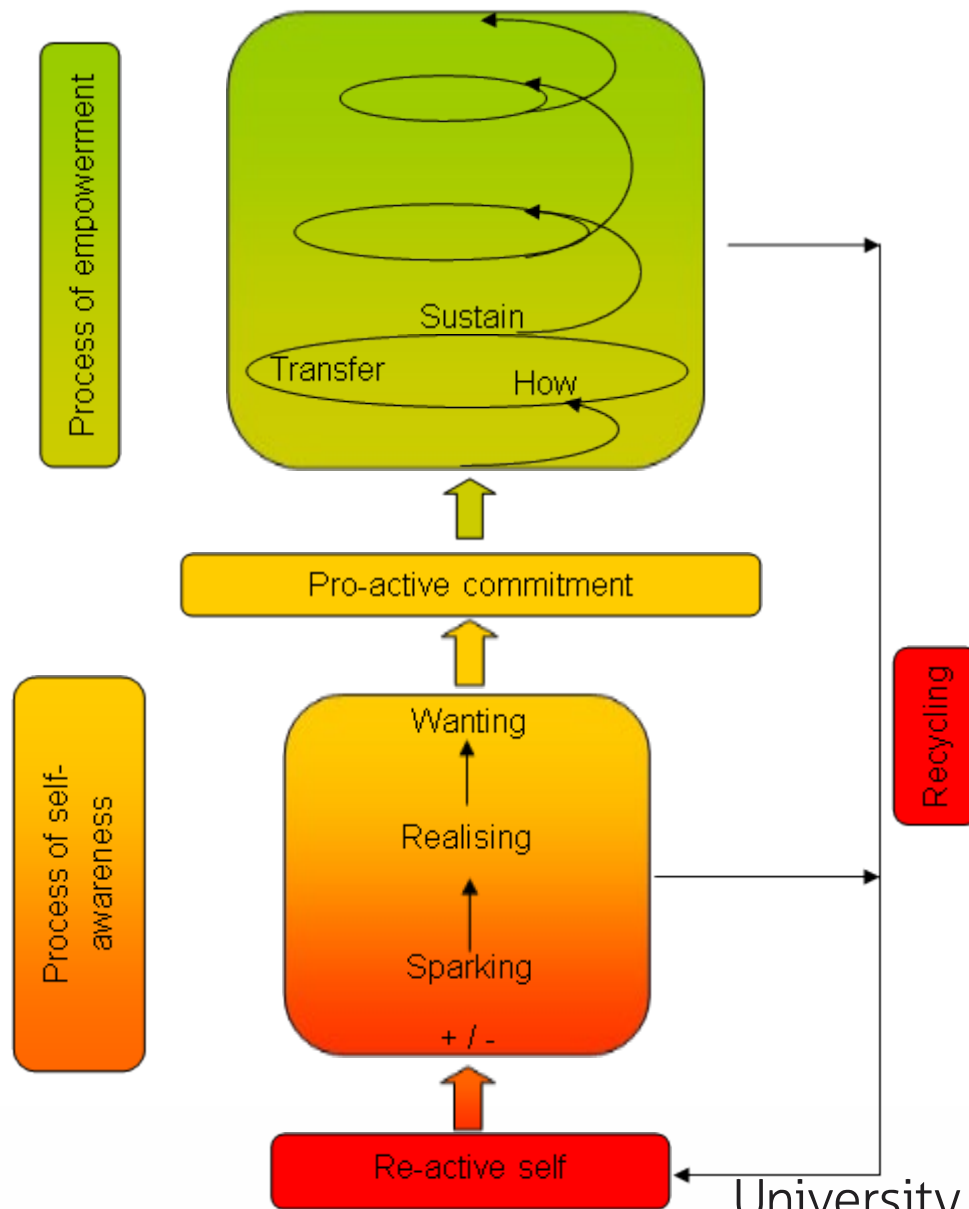
- ASB:

Transfer:

- *Like I was on my last week of probation and I thought probation was keeping me on track and I thought I'm just going to go back to my old ways and I thought NO! No, come on, I can do this. It means I've got no more tags and I can go out and do it for myself. And as I walked through the door she [probation officer] said 'I've got some good news for you. I've got a job application for ya'. And I thought you're winding me up! [laugh] After all that hard work and keeping myself on track and today could be the day. It's like I know I can do it and I just need to get the chance.*

Sustain:

- *It's the positive attitude, the job, a good lifestyle, a healthy lifestyle. I have a couple of drinks now and again, but I'm entitled. Back then it was every day like carrying on, now maybe once a week a drink. But when I go home, I've prepared for it so, it's alright. So I'm sustaining a lifestyle that I've wanted though for a while.*
- *I need to give myself a few kicks up the butt. I'm not as scared to ask for help. I know there's people out there willing to help. Why push them away when they want to help.*

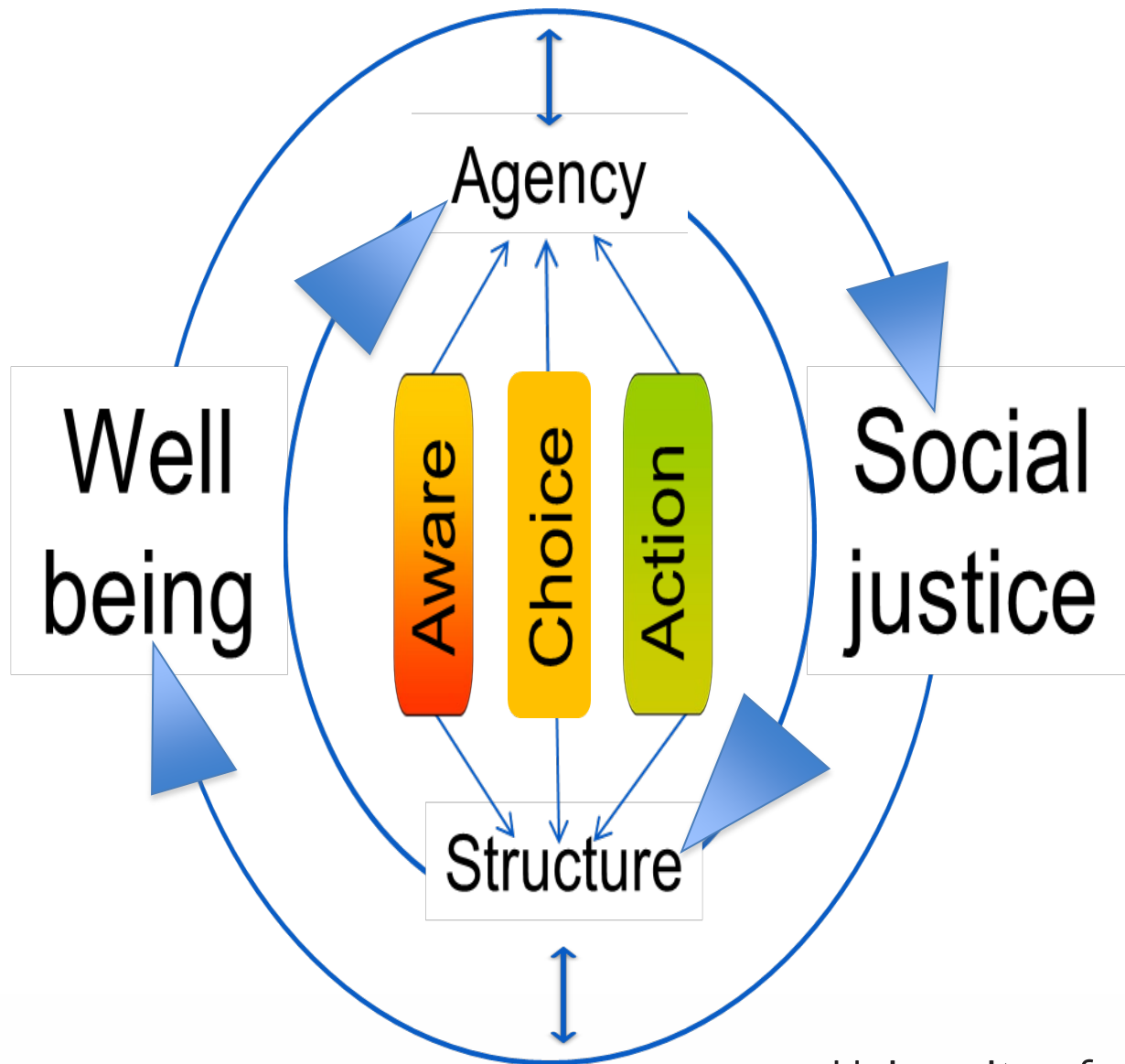


Action

Choice

Aware



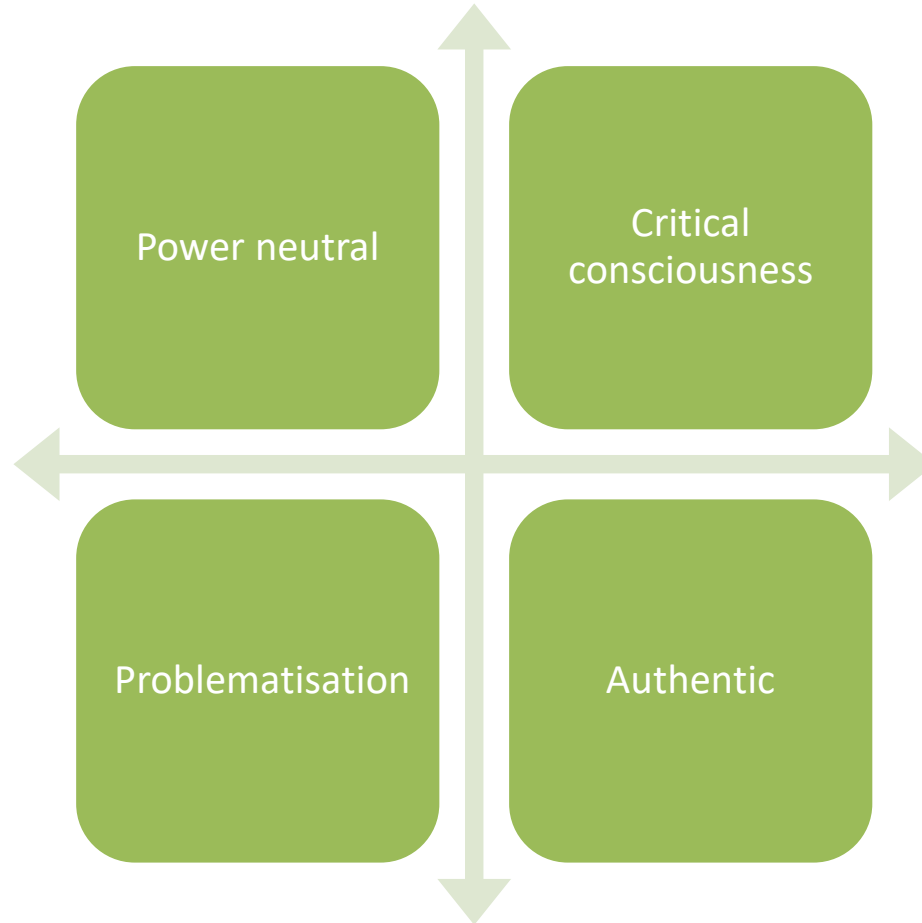


So what???

# Critical pedagogy

- A philosophy of education and social movement
- Developed and applied concepts from critical theory
- Teaching as an inherently political act
- Reject the neutrality of knowledge
- Issues of social justice and democracy itself are not distinct from acts of teaching and learning
- The goal is emancipation from oppression
- Encourages individuals to affect change in their world through social critique and political action.

# Critical practices



# Self assessment

	Assessment	Examples
Third spaces		
Dialogue		
Narratives		
Media critique		
Creative arts		
Authentic learning		
P4C		
Mindfulness		

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