

# **CenTCS Seminar Series 2025 – 2026**

## **Seminar Five: 8<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

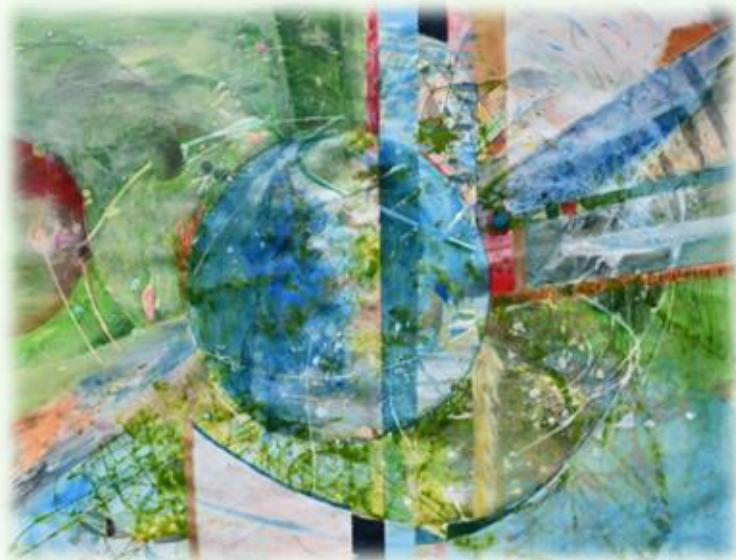
# **Disrupting Deficit Thinking and Dominant Logics: Preparing the Profession for Critical Leadership Praxis**



**Alison Mitchell**

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**Fellow: Centre for Transformative Change in Schools**

The world we  
lead in

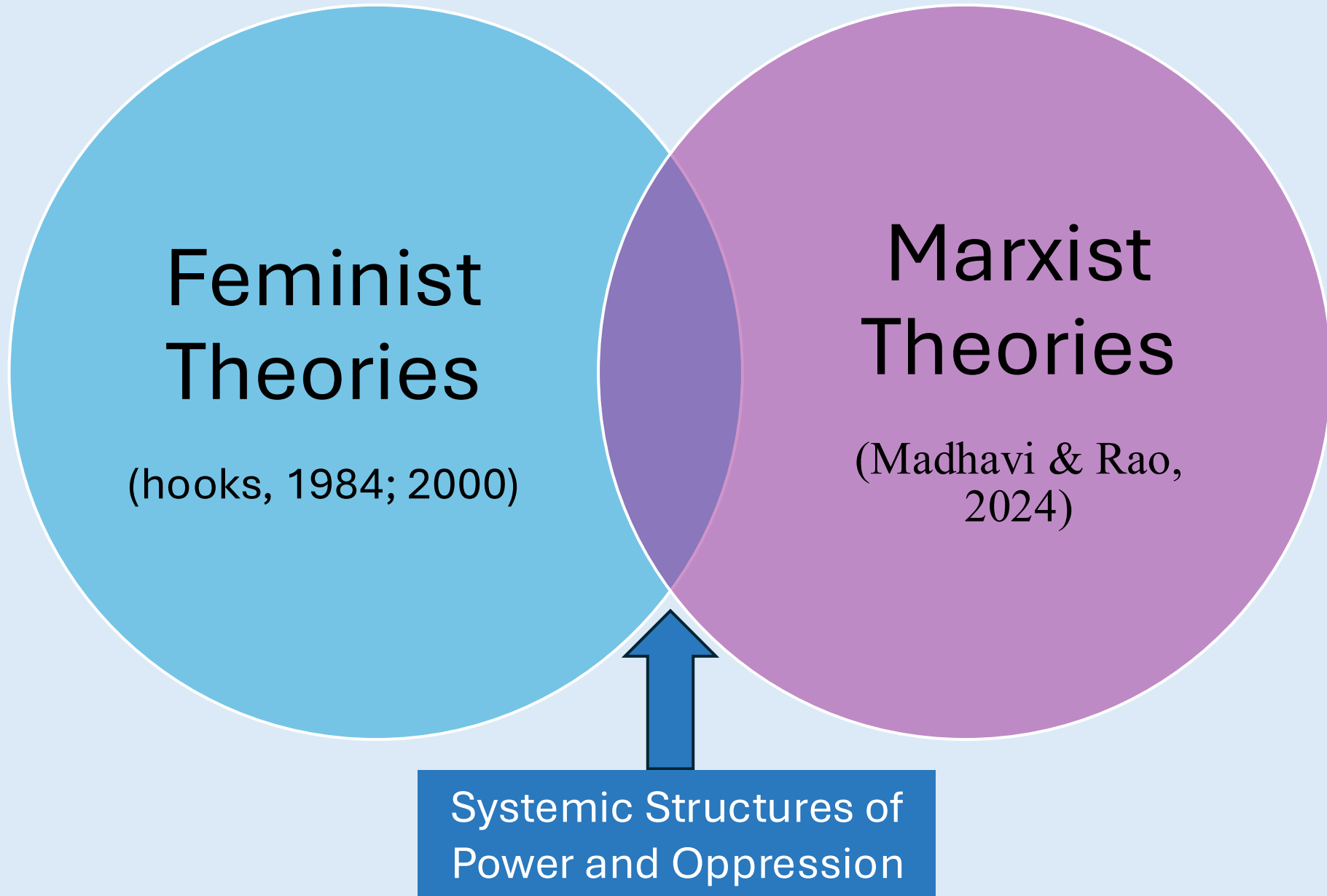


Developing  
critical  
consciousness



An alternative  
lens?





# My place and privilege in this world

White

Cisgender woman

She/her

Scottish (UK)

Able-bodied

English speaker

Educated

Irish (European)

A home

Access to resources

In employment

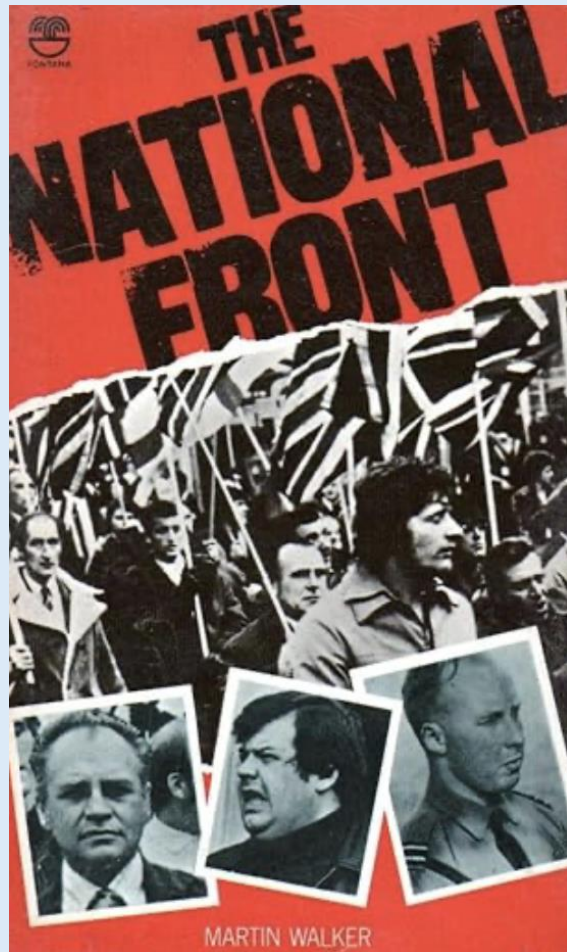
Rights / legal protection

Personal support



# Rewind 50+ years...

1967



1968

## ENOCH: STOP THIS FLOW OF COLOURED IMMIGRANTS



ENOCH POWELL

**T**ORY front-bencher Mr. Enoch Powell stoked up the race issue yesterday with an extraordinary and inflammatory speech on coloured immigration.

In a sustained outburst which came as a total surprise to his party leader, Mr. Edward Heath, the Shadow Defence spokesman said that to pass the new Race Relations Bill would be "to risk throwing a match on gunpowder."

He said that Britain "must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants."

"It was 'like watching a nation quiescent engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.'"

Mr. Powell, MP for Wolverhampton South West, told the West Midlands Conservative Political Centre that as he looked ahead he was filled with foreboding.

In a reference to the Roman poet Virgil's Aeneid, he said: "Like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood."

Mr. Powell's speech was based upon a carefully argued statement of Tory policy. But it was liberally garnished with references to such things as "charming, wide-grinning picaninies" chanting the one English word they knew — "racist."

At the end of it he received a three-minute ovation.

Mr. Powell went out of his way to attack Church leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey, who supports the Bill.

He spoke of newspaper leader-writers and of "Archbishops who live in palaces, faring delicately, with the bedclothes pulled right up over their heads."

Said Mr. Powell: "They have got it exactly and diametrically wrong."

Asked later if the speech was inflammatory, Mr. Powell said: "To see an evil and not to talk about it, to suppress the facts about people's opinions in one's own constituency cannot be right for a Member of Parliament with any responsibility for the future."

"I am conscious of speaking just as much in the interests of my constituents who are immigrants as of my constituents who are not."

### Chorus

At one point in his speech Mr. Powell quoted a constituent as saying: "In this country in fifteen or twenty years promote the maximum outflow of immigrants being helped to go back."

Mr. Powell's treatment of the race situation while not technically conflicting with official policy will cause the maximum embarrassment.

For a start, the speech was made in Birmingham, one of whose MPs is Sir Edward Boyle, a member of the Shadow Cabinet.

### Default

Sir Edward is known to have decided to abstain next Tuesday on the Tory "reasoned amendment" which opposes the Government's Race Relations Bill.

Mr. Powell said that while immigrants eagerly sought the opportunities and privileges of Britain the impact on the existing population was very different.

For reasons which they were never consulted and in pursuance of a decision by default, on which they were never consulted, they

### Join

It is also rejected by younger Tories such as the chairman of the Bow group Mr. Christopher Brockbank-Powell.

The decision of the Shadow Cabinet, however, has already split the Tory Party.

Before Mr. Powell's speech about twenty Tory MPs were expected to rebel. Now it is possible of the native-born worker.

They began to hear, as time went by, more and more voices which told them that they were now the unwanted. On top of this they now hear that a one-way privilege is to be established by Act of Parliament.

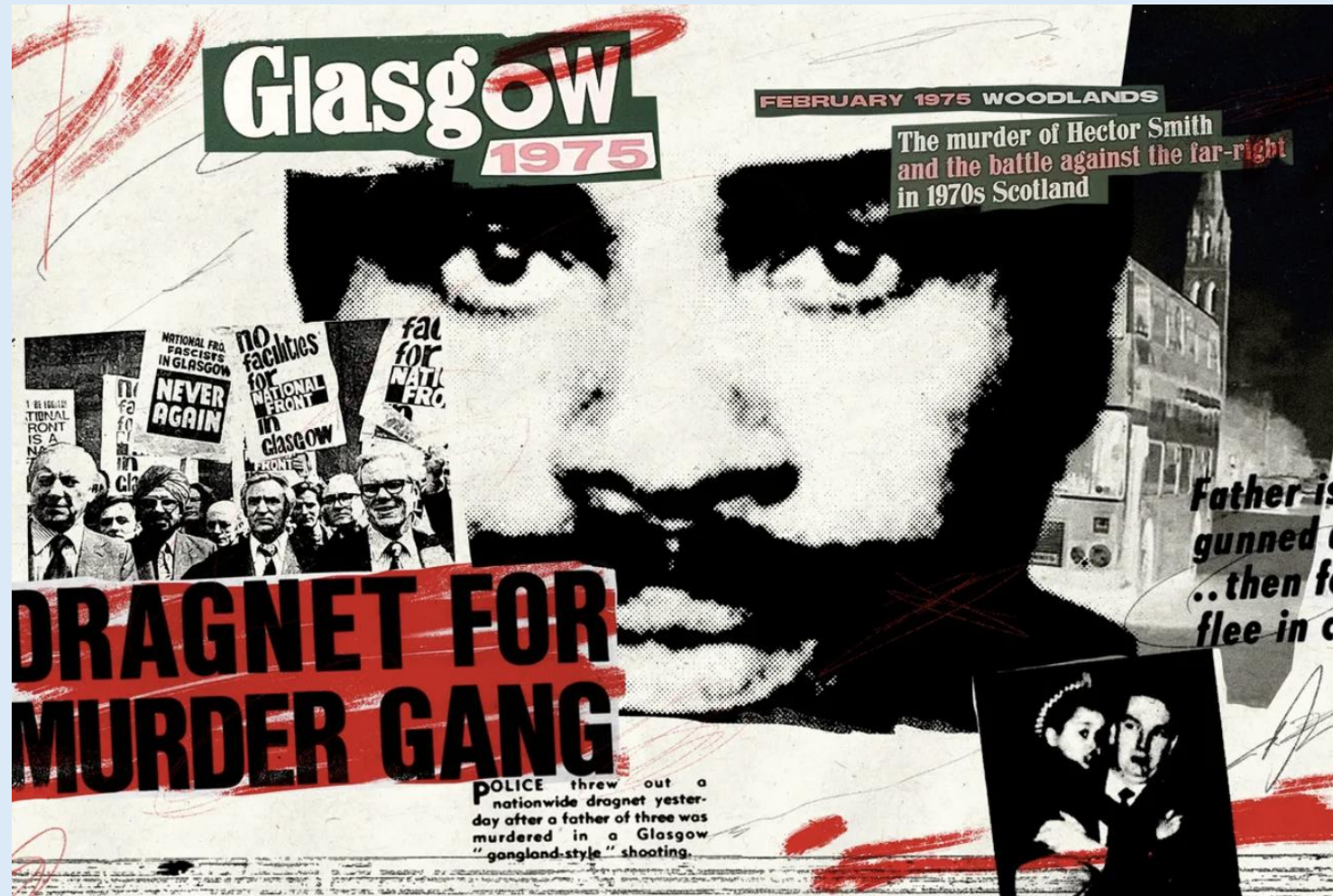
"A law which cannot, and is not intended to, operate to protect them or redress their grievances, is to be enacted to give the stranger, the disgruntled, and the agent provocateur, the power to pillory them for their private actions."

Mr. Powell's interpretation of the proposal to outlaw race discrimination in housing, jobs and insurance is regarded by Labour MPs as a total misstatement of the facts.

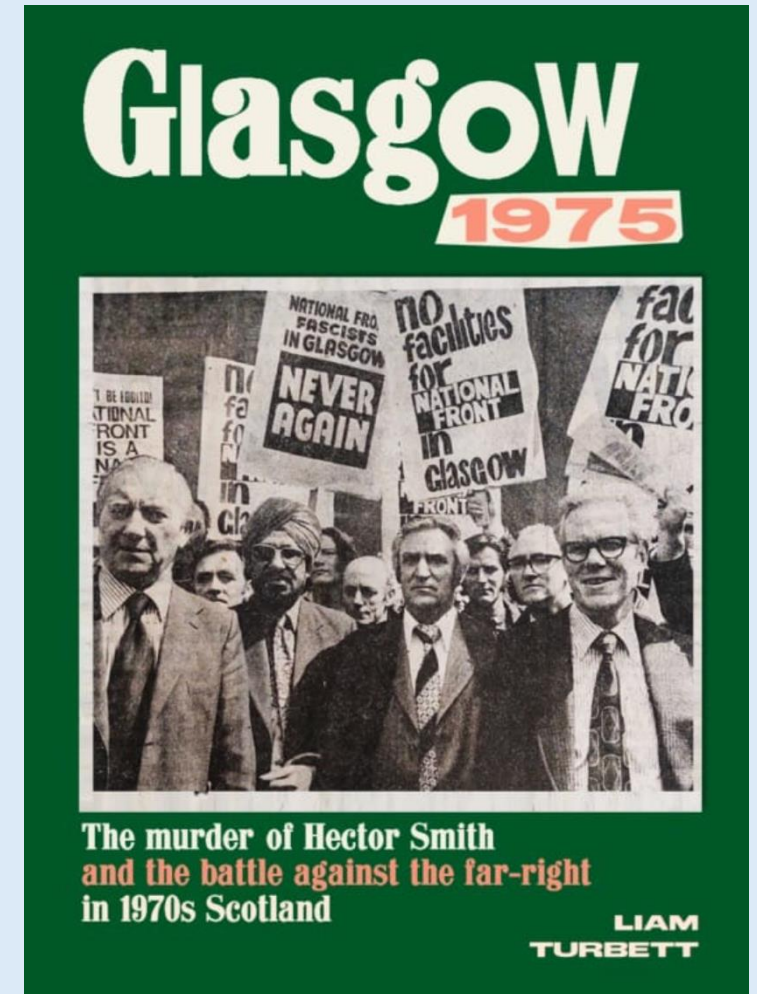


# Rewind 50+ years...

1975



2025



**Rewind 40+ years...**

**1979**



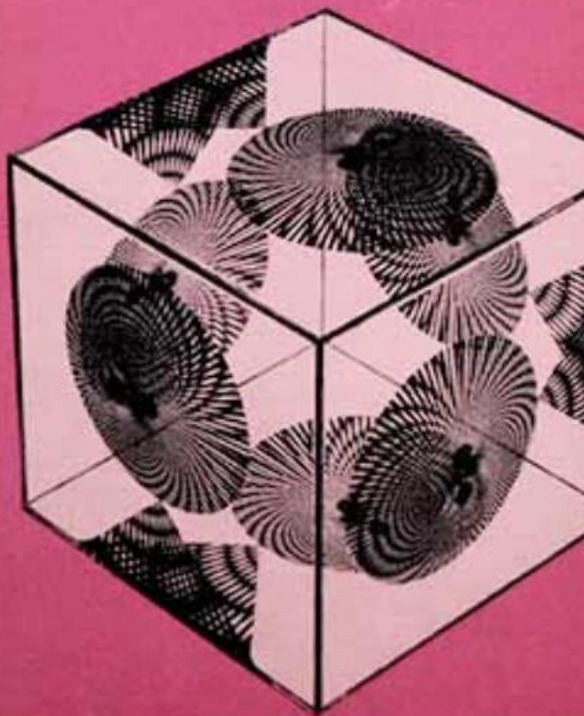


Teacher's Book

4

# Modern Mathematics for Schools

Second Edition  
Scottish Mathematics Group

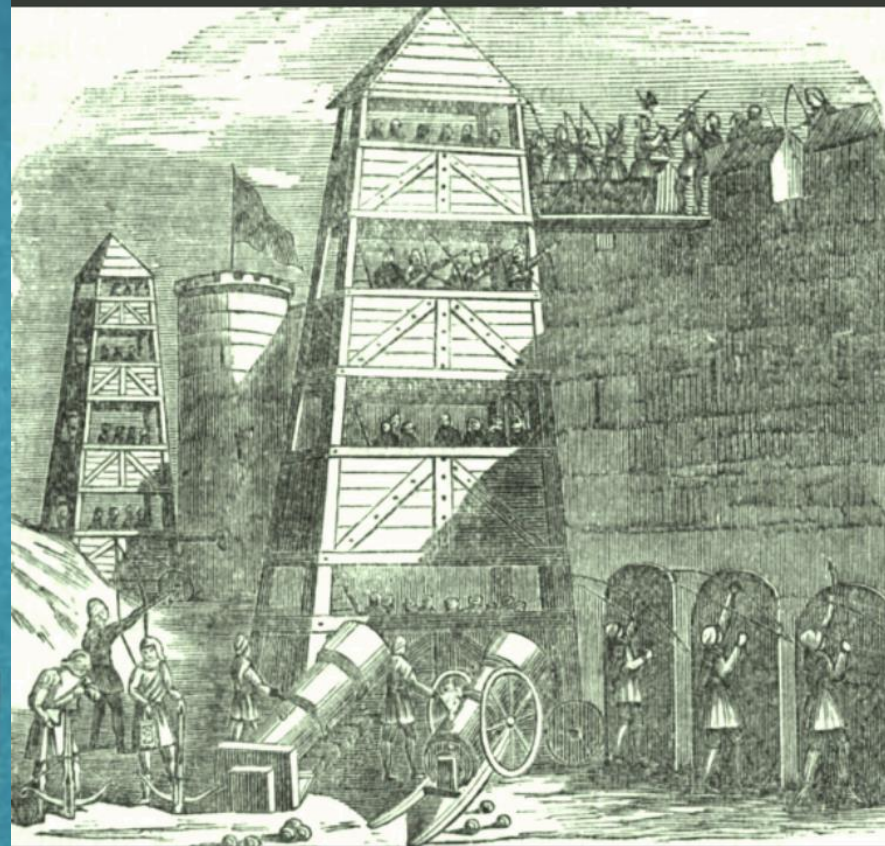
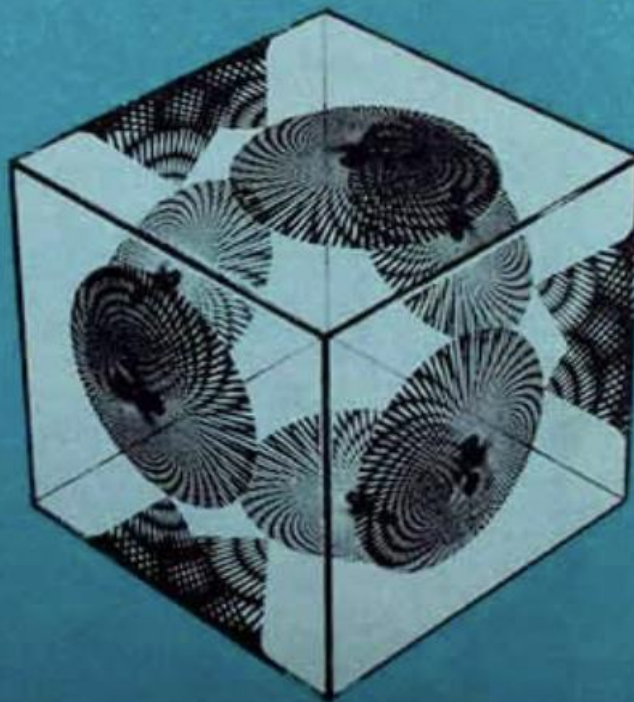


Teacher's Book

9

# Modern Mathematics for Schools

Second Edition  
Scottish Mathematics Group



*A school history of the  
British empire*

Scottish school-book assoc



# Teaching in 1991...

## Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988

### The Local Government Act, 1988

On 24 March 1988 the Local Government Act became law. It contained a number of changes for local authorities from housing to dog licences. But one small part – adding Section 2A to the Local Government Act 1986 – is now infamously known as [Section 28](#). It stated:

‘(1) The following section shall be inserted after section 2 of the [1986 c. 10.] Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition of political publicity)—

#### **Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material**

(1) A local authority shall not—

- (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.’

— Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988)

# Teaching in 1992...



ELECTION COMMUNICATION - SCOTLAND  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS JUNE 4th

**The NEW Battle  
for Britain**



**NO to EU Rule & the Euro**  
**NO to Immigration & Unemployment**  
**NO to High Taxes & Rip-Off Britain**

**YES to putting  
British People First**

**“Because it's not racist to oppose  
mass immigration and political  
correctness - it's common sense!”**

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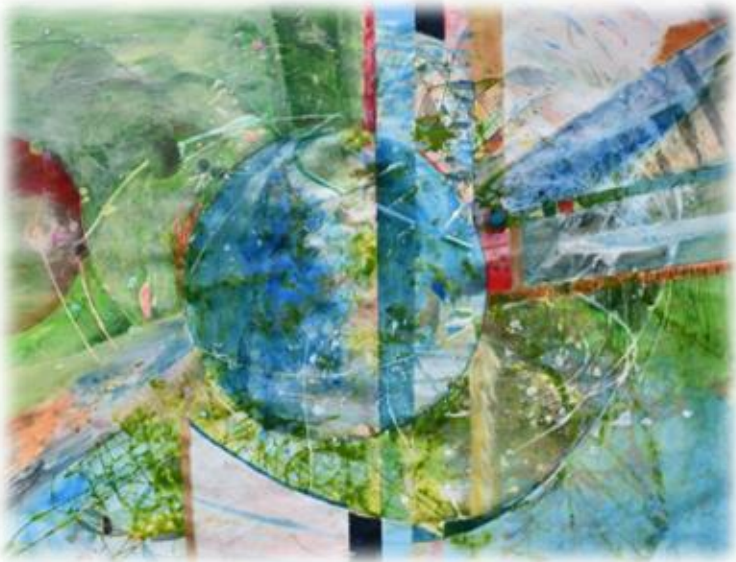


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Phone now for your  
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or TEXT 'BRITISH' and your FULL name and address to 81400



The world we  
lead in



Critical  
consciousness



An alternative  
lens?





# The world we lead in...

## Polycrises

*Polycrisis constitutes a set of interrelated, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing crises. Climate change, the pandemic health crisis, growing global inequality, misinformation, increased hunger, heightened nuclear danger, pollution of air, land, and seas, and threats to democracy interact and are mutually reinforcing.*

(Patton, 2024)





# **The world we lead in...**

## **Dominant and Competing Logics**

- Polarised political discourse, competing rights and the rise of right-wing populism challenge the conception and practice of the democratic school leader (Säfström & Månsson, 2022).
- Existential global threats; war, pandemics and climate change (Apple et al., 2023), require critical, political, ethical and anticipatory responses (Gencer & Batirlik, 2023; Söderström & Seiser, 2024).



# The world we lead in...

## Education as Activist?

- Education is always a political act, which can be used both to maintain the status quo and to promote social change (Freire, 1985).
- Education leadership as activist and political; leadership praxis for the advancement of social justice (MacDonald, 2024; Smyth, 2012).

Mitchell, Alison (2025) Political acuity in school principalship: implications for leadership preparation, development and praxis. In: Gurr, David and Liu, Peng (eds.) Educational Leadership Preparation and Development: An International and Future Focused Perspective. Series: Studies in educational leadership (27). Springer Cham, pp. 165-181. ISBN 9783031920646 (doi: [10.1007/978-3-031-92064-6\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-92064-6_10)) <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/349679/>



# Deficit Thinking?

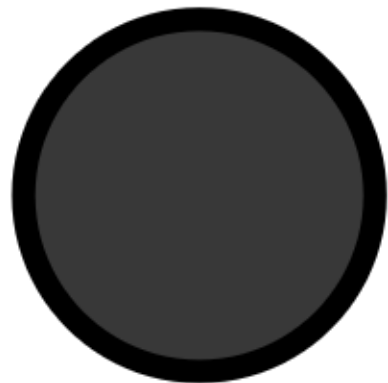
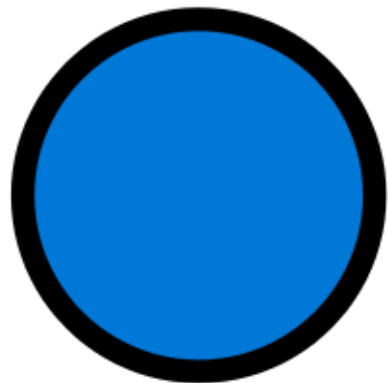
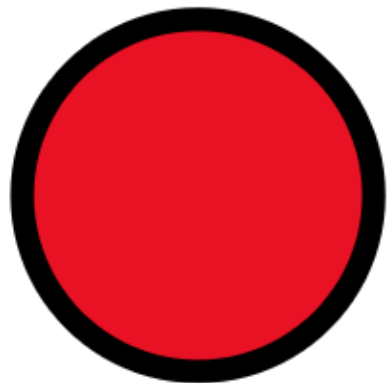
\_\_\_\_\_ gap

(Alford, 2024; Chaudhary, 2022; Cushing, 2023a;  
Cushing, 2023b; Department of Education,  
2025; Scottish Government, 2025)





everyone's  
invited



**100**





## Equality Act 2010



Publication - Advice and guidance

## Supporting transgender pupils in schools: guidance for education authorities and schools – revised

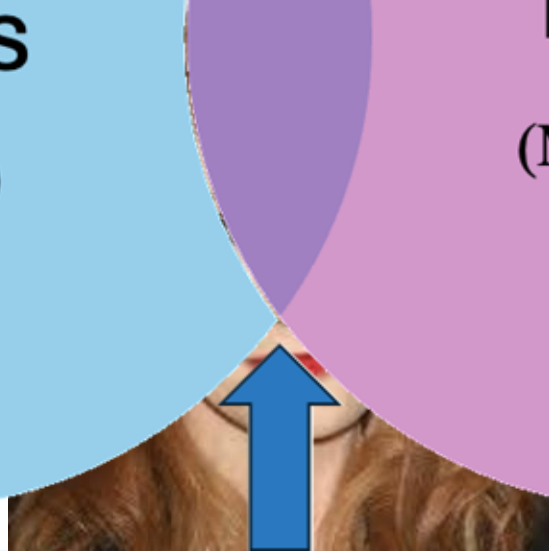
Published: 29 September 2025  
From: [Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, +1 more...](#)  
Directorate: [Learning Directorate](#)  
Topic: [Education, Equality and rights](#)  
ISBN: 9781806432097

Revised guidance for schools on supporting transgender pupils.



## How do school leaders navigate:

- Increased community tensions around immigration?
- Staff (or others) who feel that their personal/ religious views are being compromised?
- The rise of incel culture?
- Polarised views around the purpose of education?
- Requirement to make decisions that undermine your core personal/professional values?
- Conceptions of identity and gender?
- War and conflict?



# Feminist Theories

(hooks, 2000)

# Marxist Theories

(Madhavi & Rao, 2024)

Systemic Structures of Power and Oppression



The world we  
lead in



Developing  
Critical  
consciousness



An alternative  
lens?





# Critical Consciousness

*While humanity cannot predict how current threats to the future of democracy will unfold, we can learn, critique and unlearn [...] the paradigms through which humanity has created the polycrises threatening our world today.*

(Mitchell, 2025)

- 1) What is the impact of political turbulence and polycrises on educational vision and provision, now and in the future?
- 2) How does political and policy ambiguity impact on the school leadership role?
- 3) How do school leaders ensure equity and social justice remain central to your leadership?



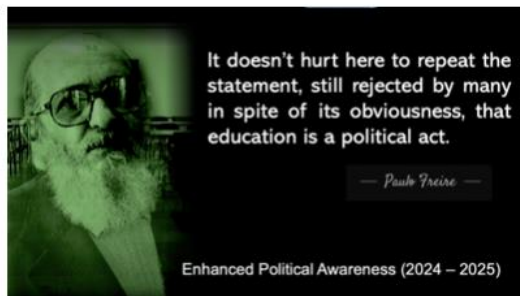
# The Enhanced Political Awareness Programme (Glasgow, Scotland)

College of Social Sciences Courses / School of Education Courses

## Enhanced Political Awareness for Leaders: Session 24/25

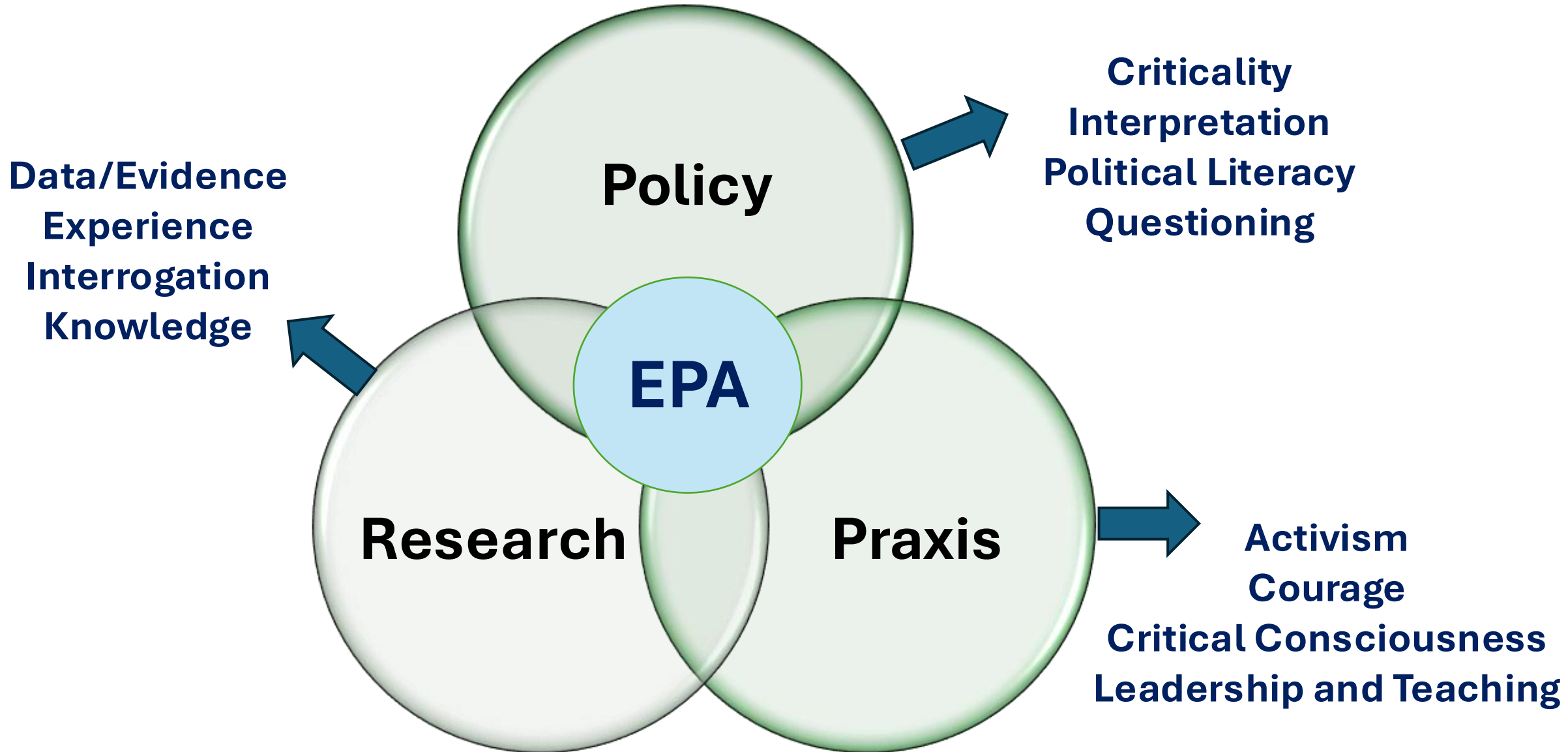
[Course](#) [Settings](#) [Participants](#) [Grades](#) [Reports](#) [More ▾](#)

Welcome to EPA 2024/25



“to strengthen leaders’ understanding and critique of the education policy and political context in Scotland. With a focus on research, theory and practice it will extend participants' political literacy and their skills and confidence in navigating the political context to support strategic, informed, critical leadership praxis in their school and local authority” [district] (Education District, 2024).

# The Enhanced Political Awareness (EPA) Programme (Glasgow, Scotland)







# Change is Possible

*Believing that change is possible is one thing; committing to making change is another. Critical action requires educators to make concrete commitments and take actionable steps to change school practices, policies, and their own behaviors.... to empower teachers and students as civic agents.... support teachers' development as transformative intellectuals and civic agents that connect teaching and learning to social transformation and community activism.*

(Lash & Sanchez, 2022, p.4).



# Conceptions of Critical Leadership Praxis

“[CLP] is action that involves critique, and, where necessary, transformation of the taken-for-granted discourses/ideologies, practices, structures, and relationships that shape and characterize educational practices” (Mahon et al., 2018, p. 467).

*A critical leadership disposition* that is “morally, socially and politically informed” (Francisco et al., 2023, p. 938) with *practice of leading* that is intentionally underpinned by “critical questioning related to the social, moral and political purpose of education” (p. 938), to advance democracy, social change and humanity.

Mitchell et al., forthcoming (*my emphasis*)



# The Enhanced Political Awareness (EPA) Programme

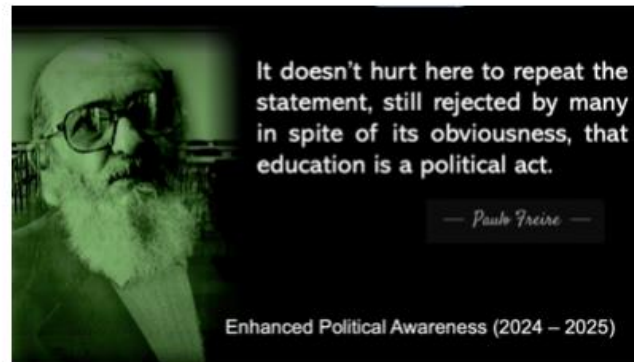
## The Research Study

College of Social Sciences Courses / School of Education Courses

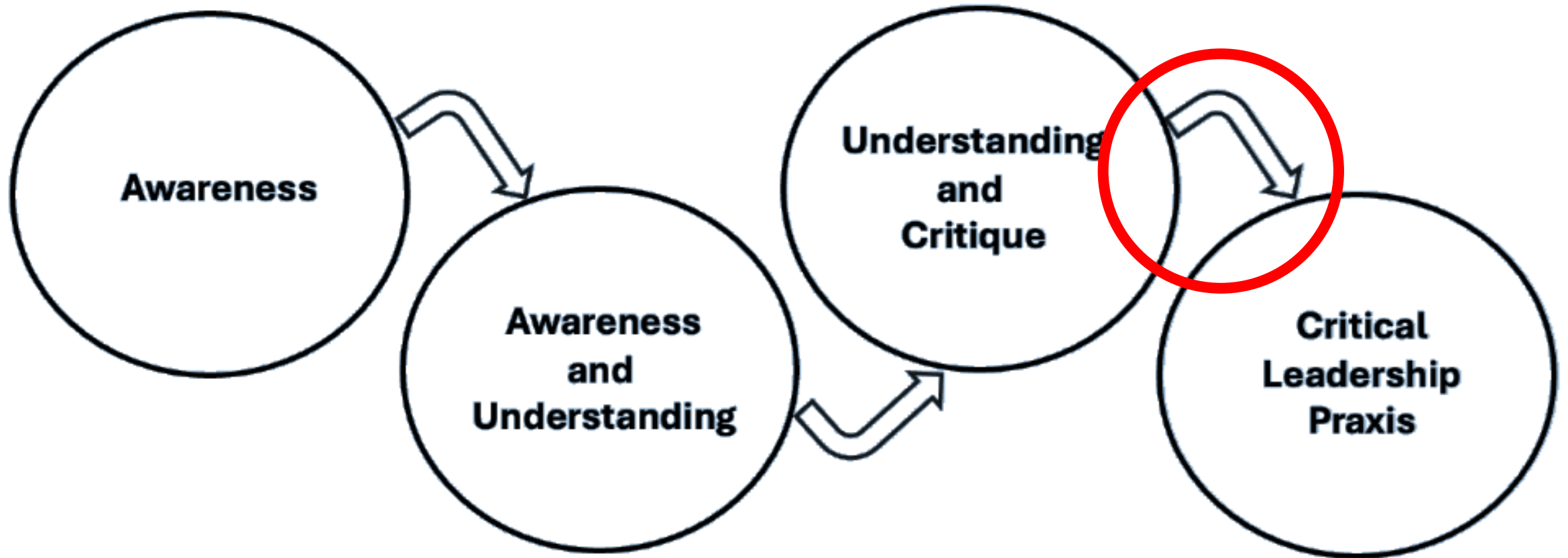
### Enhanced Political Awareness for Leaders: Session 24/25

[Course](#) [Settings](#) [Participants](#) [Grades](#) [Reports](#) [More ▾](#)

Welcome to EPA 2024/25



# The Challenges of Transfer



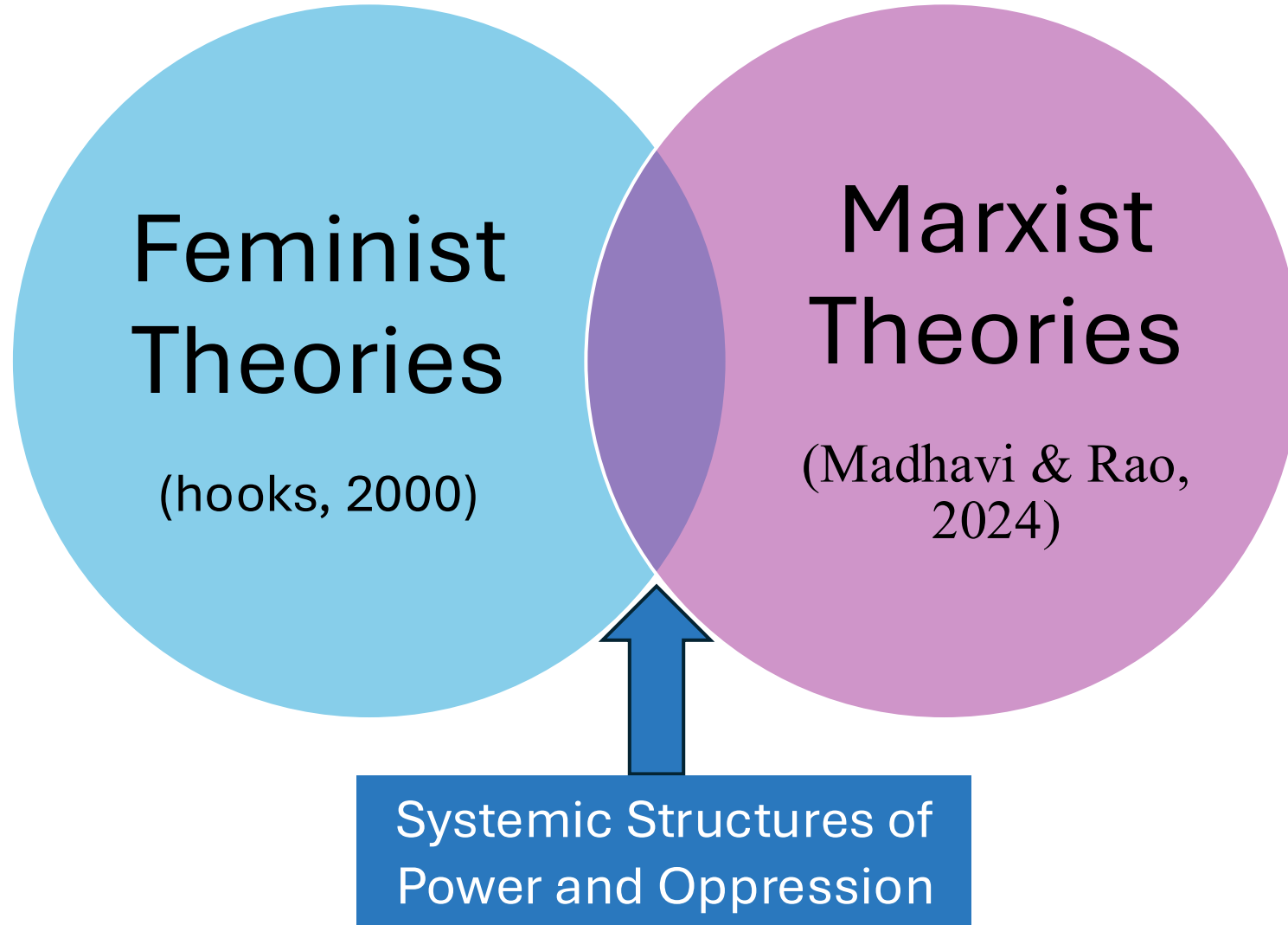


# The Study: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What factors support or undermine the application of participants' learning from the EPA programme in school and local authority (district) contexts?
2. How can the university provider and local authority support and enhance participants' critically conscious leadership practice, during and on completion of the EPA programme?



# The Study: Theoretical Framework





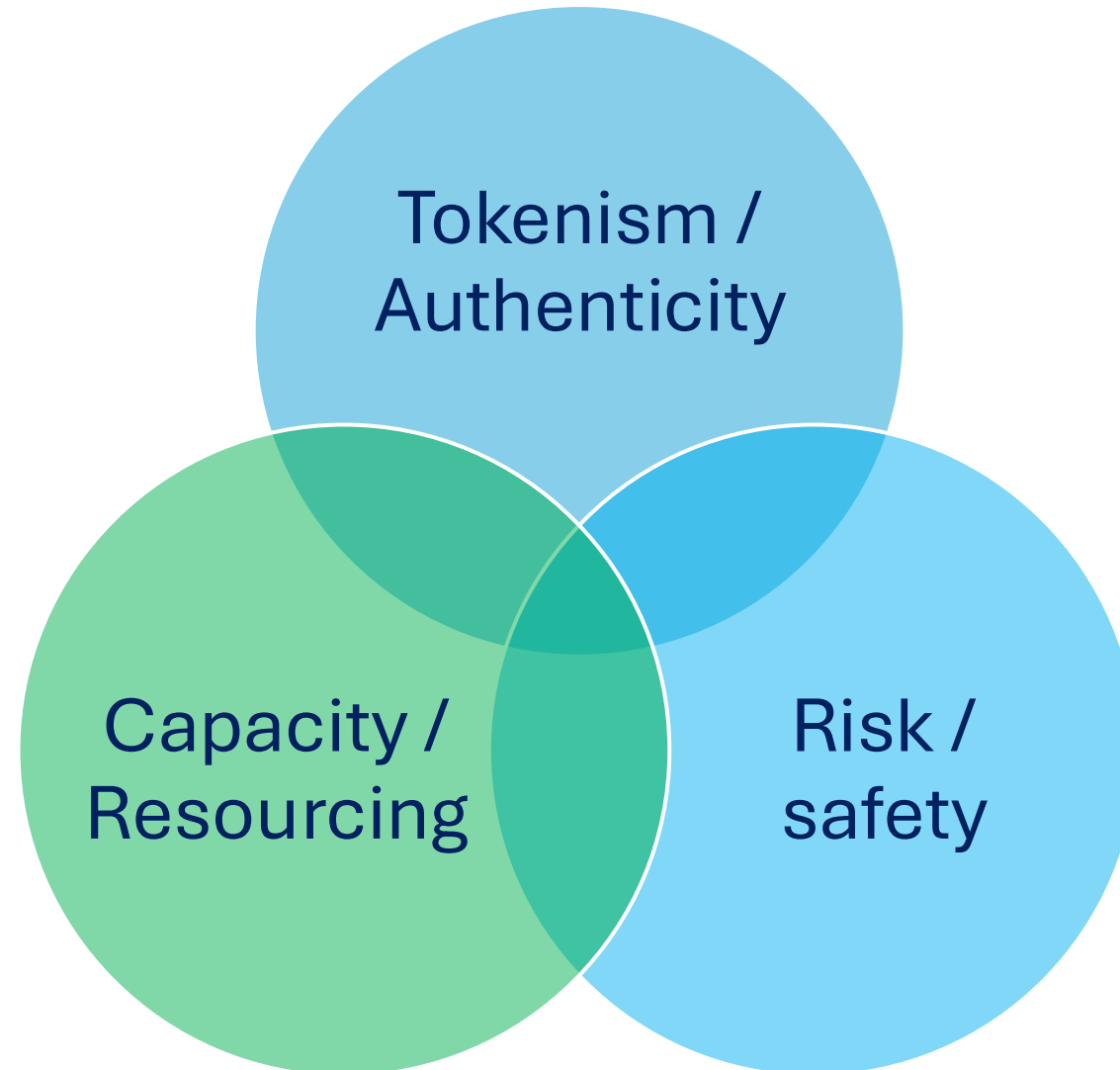
# Methods

- Semi-structured one-to-one interviews (Moenandar et al., 2024) with eight former EPA participants.
- Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013)





# Findings: Broad Themes







## Tokenism / Authenticity

- Experiences ranged from tokenistic *lip-service, box ticking* or *treading the safe line*, to authentic critical engagement in the *more risky leadership* that explicitly challenges oppressive discourses and practices.
- Challenge to authentic CLP: *we're looking at the authority [district] from a responsibility level of risk management, value for money basically... playing the politics around the different agencies.*
- The different dispositions within the participants' leadership teams were identified as key factors in the determining the level of authenticity of CLP in their contexts.
- Right-wing arguments about *not essentially wanting young people to be educated in social justice and equalities issues within schools.*



## Capacity / Resourcing

- Appreciation of investment from the district and the school, with participants *able to attend this* [EPA programme] *during school time*. However, there is a lack of capacity in the system.
- *Seeing what education needs to do to make things better...that can be sometimes overwhelming because you're in the business of running your school, running your establishment.*
- Support from principals ranged, from *my head* [principal] [...] *when I talk to him, he supports the work* [of anti-racism] *but then he says he can't give any time for it on the working time agreement*, to a more positive experience: *My headteacher has recently just kind of gone through a* [University Provider] *course as well, so I think that the understanding of time to get your reading done... I've been quite fortunate that the time's being provided for me.*

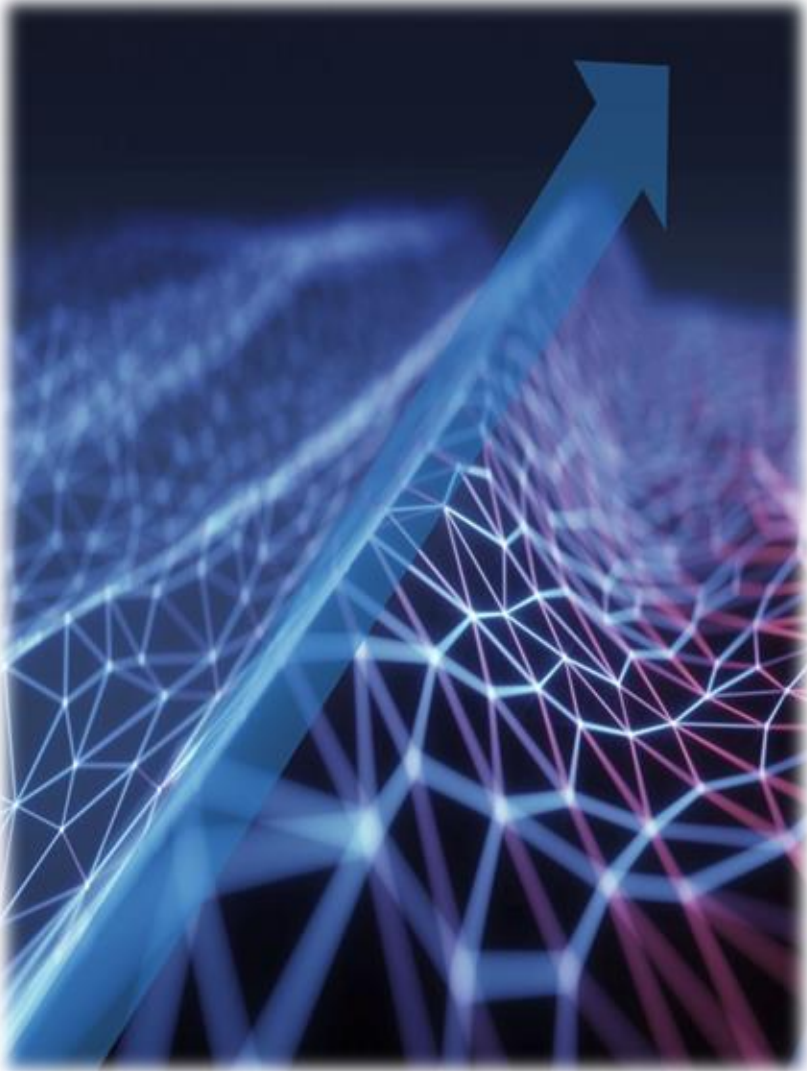




## Risk / safety

- Tensions between the moral and ethical purpose, and the politically mandated compliance anticipated of leaders: *There seems to be a kind of... a safe silence, I guess. It's like I certainly feel that headteachers are very loud in their schools and very quiet in their authority* [district].
- Constraint to participants' freedom or engagement with media to critique local or national policy: *A kind of cagey balance as a practitioner and getting involved [...] we're supposedly encouraged to be critical and enquiring, but they're* [Scottish Government] *not open to being challenged.*
- Contextually specific enablers and/or risks to agency and professional or psychological safety: *the challenge can be political. It can be financial, it can be about competing demands. It also comes from people with power.*
- Sense of isolation and risk to career progression.

# Implications for the profession



- Invite and value voice and critique from the profession in political and policy spaces; value placed on the role and experience of the leader in context.
- Political and educational actors in the ‘ecosystem’ should promote and articulate the merit of CLP as a leadership norm.
- Critical attention to factors that support or constrain participants’ application of CLP in their spaces of practice, as a fundamental characteristic of the learning, reflection and critique embedded in teacher and leadership development programmes.

The world we  
lead in



Critical  
consciousness



An alternative  
lens?





# Ditch the 'Andrew Tate assembly' and start having proper discussions

A former adviser to Tony Blair and Keir Starmer says schools can't just tell boys to avoid controversial content – instead, they need to give them the tools, time and space to discuss the world they inhabit

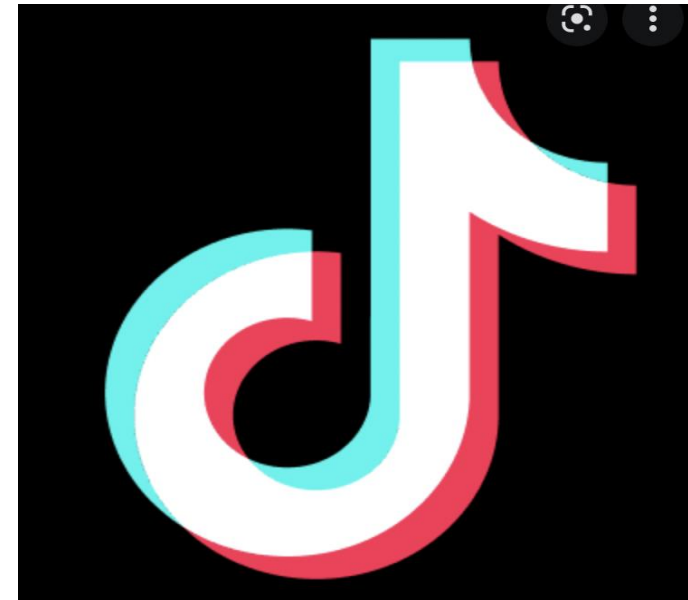
11th November 2025, 6:00am



**Gamot and Hyman, 2025**











# For discussion

1. What/whose ideas and voices do we value? How do we transfer ideas and words to practice?
2. What do we need to know and understand about how young people experience the world?
3. What processes and practices will foster school communities' critical consciousness, their heightened awareness of the world and the power structures that shape it?

Becoming teachers for social justice entails moving students through intentional processes and practices to foster critical consciousness.

(Styslinger et al., 2019)

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