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AUTONOMY IN EDUCATION

Teacher autonomy in the era of New Public Management

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This article examines how upper secondary school teachers perceive and respond to the consequences for their professional autonomy of recent school reforms and restructurings. Based on empirical material from interviews of 119 teachers in three studies conducted between 2002 and 2014, the findings indicate that teacher autonomy has been reduced by school reforms and restructurings since the late 1980s. Regardless of their individual aims, these reforms have collectively created a power structure that distributes power to the state, municipalities, principals and the school market, including 'customers', that is, students, at the expense of teacher autonomy. Teacher agency follows certain policies at the discourse level, such as decentralisation and management by objectives and results, but in practice seems to be based on individuals' and groups' capacities to exploit opportunities for agency in combination with more or less facilitative management and organisation cultures. This development is multifaceted and varies locally, but the overall trend can be described as a shift from occupational to organisational professionalism and from 'licensed' to 'regulated' autonomy but emphasising the influence of market logics.

Keywords: *teacher autonomy; school reform; New Public Management; upper secondary school*

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The last few decades of intensive school reform, including the 'inevitable' adoption of neo-liberal policies and New Public Management (NPM) in the 'global education policy space' (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 490), have affected and continue to affect teachers' work, teachers' working conditions and the construction of the teaching profession. This trend has challenged teacher autonomy as it has eroded trust and degraded teaching as a profession, backed by the claim that professionalism generates opportunism, sets self-serving standards and is prone to provider capture (Besley & Peters, 2006; Codd, 2005). Research into how autonomy and professionalism are affected by education policy in everyday school practice is scarce (Evetts, 2009a). Analyses of professions often focus on the macro or meso levels, implying that 'the complexities of micro levels are particularly interesting and worthy of further analysis' (Evetts, 2009b, p. 248). In the present study, the voices of those who actually make or enact education policy, that is, the teachers, are heard (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Lipsky, 1980).

Based on teachers' interviews, this article examines how upper secondary school teachers perceive and respond to the consequences for their professional autonomy of recent school reforms and restructurings. The analysis addresses what these reform policies are, how

they affect teacher autonomy and how they interact at the school level. The article is based on empirical material from interviews of 119 teachers in three studies from 2002–2004, 2008–2009, and 2013–2014.

In step with the emergence of NPM, a growing body of research is critically examining the consequences of NPM for education (Ball, 2003; Codd, 2005; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009; Green, 2011; Ravitch, 2010, 2013; Robertson, 2008). Apple (2009, p. xiv) writes that a 'new alliance' of neo-liberal, neo-conservative and audit cultures has led to major shifts in teacher professionalism involving deskilling, reskilling, intensification and 'what counts as legitimate knowledge and legitimate teaching'. Hoyle and Wallace (2009, p. 204) connect undermined classroom autonomy, professional ethics and status to the accountability movement that 'succeeded in its tacit intention to curtail the power of the public service professions', which Clarke and Newman (2009, p. 45) regard as a result of NPM. Evans (2008, p. 21) claims that autonomy has 'given way to accountability' and that the 'new professionalisms' imply a shift of power. This shift of power will be examined here, based on the concepts of occupational and organisational professionalism. Sachs (2001, p. 150) notes the dilemma facing the teaching profession, which 'is being exhorted to be autonomous while . . . under increasing pressure from politicians and

the community to be more accountable and to maintain standards’ – a dilemma that is topical today in the Swedish case.

Some researchers emphasise complexity and that there may still be latitude for teacher autonomy even within an overall trend towards reduced autonomy (Frostenson, 2012; Mausethagen, 2013). Lipman (2009, p. 67) claims that there are ‘possibilities for agency within an overall retrograde erosion of public education’. Another aspect of this multifaceted issue is the range of accountability regimes – such as bureaucratic, consumer, ethical, state, marketplace, professional and democratic accountability regimes – all with varying implications for school staff (Besley & Peters, 2006, p. 819; Moos, 2009, p. 401). Some researchers claim that privatisation promotes autonomy in contrast to the control and regulations of bureaucratic public schools (Chubb & Moe, 1988).

Trust is a key component in discussions of professions and autonomy (Codd, 2005; Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004, p. 187). Gewirtz et al. (2009) discusses the contract between professions and society that implies that the profession is trusted to do its job in exchange for providing expertise and high-quality outcomes. Trust improves collective decision-making, the realisation of school reform and school development (Bryk & Schneider, 2009). It is also well documented that the opposite, distrust, has profound negative consequences for teachers’ commitment and motivation, resulting in, for example ‘a pervasive sense of demoralisation and loss of autonomy’ (Peck, Gallucci, & Sloan, 2010, p. 452). Furthermore, trust is a prerequisite for discretion and the ability to make discretionary judgements (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Current Swedish research has examined various aspects of the issues treated here, such as the development of a standard-based curriculum (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012), the impact of marketisation on teachers’ work (Fredriksson, 2009; Lundström & Holm, 2011), marketisation policy (Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2013), teacher responsibility and ethics in light of NPM (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011), a model for comparing different forms of autonomy (Wermke & Höstfält, 2014) and the development of the quality discourse in state documents (Bergh, 2011). Frostenson (2012) reasons concerning three levels of autonomy and concludes that collective and individual autonomy can exist in spite of eroded professional (overall) autonomy. Stenlås’ (2011) analysis, based on policy documents, examines the consequences of educational reforms, concluding that they have reduced teacher autonomy and de-professionalised teachers. This article contributes by examining the actual consequences of relevant school reform policies for upper secondary school teacher autonomy, how these policies interact and how teachers perceive and respond to the development at the school level. These issues are examined and analysed in the

following sections. First, the background of the Swedish policy context is described, followed by the theoretical framework and methodology. The findings are then presented thematically, followed by a concluding discussion.

The policy context

The Swedish school system has been influenced by the international ‘policy epidemic’ (Levin, 1998, p. 138), though with specific national characteristics. It includes policies such as management by objectives and results (MBOR), decentralisation, devolution of funding and employer responsibility to municipalities, upper secondary school reforms including new grading systems, a new Education Act and national curriculum, and changed systems for allocating teachers’ time and salaries. An individual performance-related pay system was a result of an agreement between the teachers’ unions and the employers’ organisation in 1996. The introduction of school choice and marketisation in 1992 is especially notable in the Swedish case, in light of the long tradition of Social Democratic governance, and the school system has become more market-like than in most other countries (Lubienski, 2009). School choice is universal, independent schools are publicly funded via a voucher system and profits are allowed. Among all, the reforms constitute an ‘education reform “package”’ (Ball, 2003, p. 215).

The introduction of MBOR and decentralisation presupposed substantial teacher autonomy. Teachers were ascribed ‘a large measure of freedom in their teaching’ (Government Bill 1988/89:4, p. 15, *author’s translation*), and it was emphasised that the school provider would not intervene in methodological or pedagogic issues of a professional nature (p. 19). Teacher autonomy was referred to in several other policy documents of the time (e.g., SOU 1992:94). Evaluation was described as a prerequisite for the reforms, as ‘the cornerstone of future management by objectives ... an important prerequisite for school development’ (Government Bill 1989/90:41, p. 9, *author’s translation*).

Crucial to this ‘reform package’ was the application of the profession concept to teachers by the state (Lundström, 2007). However, the concept was used primarily in the contexts of steering and management by objectives, such as:

The professionalization of teaching entails higher expectations regarding curriculum formulation and better opportunities to realize aims and intentions. From this perspective, we could say that effective management by objectives presupposes a professional corps, professional in the sense of an occupational group that shares an ethical foundation and a particular area of vocational expertise group. (SOU 1992:94, 44, *author’s translation*)

The devolution of responsibility in these reforms was launched in a period when Sweden was facing its most

severe financial crisis in several decades and school funding was being retrenched, adding another dimension to the discussion of teacher autonomy and responsibility. Evetts (2009b) says that governments have long been trying to shrink their costs while satisfying demands for better and more professional services, and that NPM is one such attempt to do this.

These reforms contributed to the shift from governing to governance that influenced teachers' positions and tasks, not least characterised by 'governing at a distance' assuming self-monitoring and self-regulation (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, p. 137). Although this situation implies a potential for autonomy, Fournier (1999, p. 288) believes that the network of accountability constitutes a 'disciplinary logic' that influences the construction of the teaching profession. This change illustrates the complexities of the autonomy concept, especially in light of current recentralisation and increasing pressures for control, evaluation and quality reporting (Lundström, 2015).

Some years after the first reforms, the Swedish state noted that local evaluations were insufficient, so compulsory quality reports were requested. This intention was later strengthened by the Education Act (2010), in terms of strengthened demands for systematic quality work (National Agency for Education [NAE], 2012a) and of increased pressure from the Schools Inspectorate. However, evaluation is still regarded as problematic as it 'is one of the areas that has led to the most criticism in inspection reports' (Schools Inspectorate, 2012, p. 33, *authors' translation*).

The official documents preceding the second upper secondary school reform (2011) lack the explicit emphasis on teacher autonomy characteristic of the reforms from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Instead, the power of the 'receivers' of the students, that is, working life and higher education, is emphasised. The task of the education is to 'satisfy the skills supply needs of working life and the higher education sector' (SOU 2008:27, 59). It is also stated that the current situation implies 'very strong producer control' (SOU 2008:27, 59). Teachers are still called professionals but are given a more subordinate role, as competent deliverers of goal achievement: 'In a school, governed by goals, [the teachers] receive and perform the task by means of their professional competence' (SOU 2008:27, 330).

In 2011, the government decided to introduce teacher certification. The realisation of this reform has been protracted and was not fully implemented at the time of the last study. This reform likely has implications for teacher autonomy, but this is an issue for further research.

Theoretical perspectives

The teachers' interviews were analysed from a social constructive perspective focusing on aspects of profession theory. Schools are embedded in social and political

environments that affect teachers' work (Powell & Colyvas, 2007). However, teachers are also policy enactors, as 'policy is done by and done to teachers' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3) and teachers interpret and translate policies in action. This implies that both structure and agency matter in the analysis of autonomy. I assume, in line with Watson (2006, p. 510), that identity is constructed and expressed through narratives and that 'who we think we are influences what we do, that is there is a link between professional identity and professional action'. It cannot be claimed that the teachers' narratives are the 'truth', though they 'reveal "truths" about the way an individual interprets the events and choices in their lives' (Watson, 2006, p. 511). As teachers are key actors in realising education policy, their narratives make important contributions to our understanding of their responses to policy and what actually happens in everyday school work.

Autonomy is a crucial aspect of profession theory (Abbot & Wallace, 1990). In light of recent research literature, I found it relevant to analyse the empirical material from 'new professionalism' perspectives. Evetts (2009a, 2009b) uses the concept of 'occupational professionalism' to refer to an ideal type of traditional sociological definitions of professions. Occupational professionalism is characterised by collegial authority, competence, trust, professional ethics, discretion and occupational control of work. Occupational professionalism is challenged by a new ideal type of professionalism, 'organizational professionalism', constructed 'from above' by managers and employers to facilitate the implementation of change. It is characterised by managerialism, hierarchical authority and decision-making structures, standardisation, and external control and accountability (Evetts, 2009a, 2009b). In organisational professionalism, professionals are expected to be competent, self-disciplined deliverers of public services.

Apple's description of a shift from licensed to regulated autonomy corresponds to the shift from occupational to organisational professionalism. He claims that, under conditions of licensed autonomy, teachers 'are basically free – within limits – to act in their classrooms according to their judgement . . . based on trust in "professional discretion"' (Apple, 2007, p. 185). However, as a result of increased demands for control, accountability and standards, 'teachers' work is more standardised, rationalised and "policed", and teachers' actions 'are now subject to much greater scrutiny in terms of process and outcomes'.

Autonomy implies latitude for discretionary judgement and is exchanged for specialised expert knowledge that professional practitioners are assumed to use to promote client welfare. Autonomy is, therefore, intertwined with other aspects such as professional judgement, trust and ethics (Sachs, 2001). The research literature defines autonomy in various ways; for example, Abbot and Wallace

define it as ‘control over work’ (1990, p. 4). The concept ‘pedagogical autonomy’ as used by Eden (2001, p. 97) applies when ‘the system does not intervene in teachers’ acts and assumes they are fully competent in their work’. In this study, I use Evans’ and Fischer’s (1992, p. 1171) definition of autonomy as ‘the amount of freedom a worker has to schedule their work and to determine the procedures in carrying it out’. This includes the freedom to choose teaching methods and content, within limits defined by legislation and official steering documents, as well as the responsibility for professional development. I do not focus on the division between collective and individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2012). Although it may occasionally digress, my analysis mainly addresses collective autonomy.

This article contributes to the ‘identification of paradoxes and surprises’ (Hood & Peters, 2004, p. 268) of the ‘middle aging’ or the ‘transcending New Public Management’ (Christensen & Laegrid, 2007). It illustrates the complexity of NPM, but the debate about NPM and post-NPM-reforms (Christensen & Laegrid, 2007; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) is beyond the scope of this article. Broadly defined, NPM is ‘an approach in public administration that employs knowledge and experiences acquired in business management and other disciplines to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and general performance of public services in modern bureaucracies’ (Vigoda, 2003, p. 813). In this article, I use NPM as an umbrella concept to denote characteristics such as managerial power, decentralisation, MBOR, marketisation/privatisation, school choice, quality assessments and accountability that emphasise measurable indicators and output control (Goldspink, 2007; Hood, 1991; Lubienski, 2009).

Method

This study is a meta-analysis of upper secondary school teacher interviews from three studies conducted between 2002 and 2014; two of these are reanalysed and one is part of a current research project¹ (Table I). The first study examined teachers’ understanding and realization of their work and profession in light of recent education policy². The second study addressed the impact of school choice policies and marketization on teachers’ work and the teaching profession.³ The third study examines how teachers’ work and school cultures are changing and how teachers are responding to the new policy context,

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²This study was carried out by the present author alone.

³Part of the project “Upper secondary school as a market”, funded by the Swedish Research Council.

Table I. The interviewees

	Years	Municipalities	Schools	Teachers
Study 1	2002–2004	3	Birch School Fir Tree School Maple School Pine School	23, interviewed twice, one year apart; the five teachers from Maple School did not participate in the second round
Study 2	2009–2010	5	City Public City Independent North Public North Independent Regional Public Rural Public South Public South Independent	58
Study 3	2013–2014	4	Riverbank School Park School Heath School Ridge Public Oak Free Ash School Beech School Field School Cliff School Creek School	38
Total		12	22	119

primarily in relation to inclusive practices in the market context, but also in relation to other policies.

Although the foci of the studies varied to some extent, I still consider it possible to describe the teachers’ perceptions of autonomy and their responses to relevant policies at the time of the interviews. The interviews in all studies were semi-structured, allowing latitude for teachers to talk about the issues on the agenda that concerned them in their everyday work, as related to current reforms and organisational change. Explicit questions about autonomy were asked only in the first study, and the findings might have differed to some extent if autonomy had been an explicit focus in all three studies. However, the material is rich and the narratives capture what the teachers had in mind regarding their work and profession, which includes substantial material that is relevant to and telling about their perceived autonomy.

The need to represent various geographic locations and upper secondary school programmes (including both vocational and tertiary education preparatory programmes) was a criterion for selecting municipalities and schools in all three studies. In studies 2 and 3, various degrees of school competition and urbanity were also sought.

The analysis not only concentrated on direct expressions of autonomy in the narratives but also took account

of more implicit expressions concerning teachers' perceptions of their decision-making power and freedom to think and act in light of the education policies that appeared to be influential at the time of each study. I noted how the teachers described their latitude for discretionary judgement, what hampered discretion and expressions of power over and control of their work (these expressions are occasionally emotional). I sought patterns and divergent views, and selected quotations from the interviews to illustrate shared, typical, and especially telling perceptions. All quotations were translated by the author.

The emergence of the New Public Management teacher

This section, which presents the findings, is divided into subsections in accordance with themes that stand out in the empirical material as significant for teacher autonomy. The themes partly overlap as some issues are interrelated but the organisation of the text is an attempt to make the complex relation between reforms and their consequences as clear as possible. The themes also illustrate the shift towards regulated autonomy and occupational professionalism.

Pressures of external demands

As mentioned, teacher autonomy is emphasised in some of the crucial state documents from the period preceding Study 1. The interviewees' responses to these seemingly generous policies are ambiguous: Most teachers are conscious of considerable autonomy 'in principle', while feeling circumscribed by external pressure, work intensification, resource scarcity and organisational change. One teacher says:

I have practically as much freedom I want. It is up to me where the limits are ... Yes, the scope is very broad ... so it is just an issue of having the energy and being able to use it. (Birch School, Study 1)

Most teachers claim to have considerable freedom, but such claims are often followed by a 'but' referring to factors that restrict their actual freedom, for example:

The classes are very large, I wish I could have a small group lesson now and then, which would make it possible to do really good things ... I have lots of ideas of what I would like to do but that I cannot do. (Fir Tree School, Study 1)

The stream of continuous policy implementation has led to an increased workload that is described as an obstacle by several interviewees. Time is problematic for the teachers, including insufficient time for professional knowledge development, long-term planning and creative lesson planning. These time constraints reduce both individual and collective autonomy. The view that time and resources are scarce and that the increased workload

prevents teachers from realising what they would really like to do are pervasive themes in all three studies. One teacher at Fir Tree School describes herself as a frustrated 'Florence Nightingale': '[I cannot do] exactly what I would like to in order to help all students achieve their goals ... one has to work more than one is paid for ... means and objectives collide all the time'. A teacher at City Public (Study 2) talks about the conflict between means and goals:

We have between 32 and 35 students in each class. We cannot achieve the goals of the national curriculum even though I am educated to see the individual. But the municipal school administration wants to reduce costs

A teacher at Birch School (Study 1) describes the dilemma arising from the collision between external pressures and his professional beliefs. He says that he tries to work the way he perceives to be best, despite the 'desperate, new pedagogical fashion trends ... and the flood of top-down directives'. At the same time, he wants to comply with democratic decisions: 'I try to realise what is expected of me as this is not my school: It is the Swedish people's school'. A colleague signals injured professional pride:

The time allocated to each course is reduced all the time. The students who study in the electricity programme are expected to become electricians ... but now they can nothing when they finish school

New policies are usually not accompanied by the required funding, and teachers are expected to realise policy goals without extra time or support. An example is the introduction and development of a new diploma course that the teachers at Fir Tree School worked on: 'We beat our heads against the wall. We felt quite uncertain and received little in-service training. But together we managed to cook it up'. Others, such as a teacher at Ridge Public (Study 3), mention feeling exhausted:

We do not get more time for anything. New tasks are added all the time but there is no real thought behind them and we do not get time for them ... so I try to prioritize by myself because I cannot do everything

Another example is that no extra time has been allocated for the extra work of implementing the latest secondary school reform, especially for developing the new grading system (Study 3). The teachers think that it is very time consuming to interpret and apply new syllabuses and grading criteria.

The pressures seem to have resulted in a general scepticism regarding decision-makers and externally imposed change. A teacher at Ridge Public says that

the workload is increasing in a covert way. And now in the election campaign politicians are talking so much about school – I really get upset. They do not know what they are talking about, and I really want to phone and ask them to explain to me, who works in a school, whether they are basing their reasoning on their own school experience or whether they have visited a school or what they are talking about

Market influence

Independent schools expanded relatively slowly in the years immediately after the 1992 reform, but the establishment of independent schools gained momentum between 2000 and 2010⁴. The proportion of students in independent upper secondary schools increased from 6 to 24% and the proportion of students in independent schools as a whole increased from 21 to 48% over the decade. The expansion was especially marked in the largest cities; for example, the proportion of students attending independent schools increased from 14 to 48% in Stockholm (NAE, 2014). The consequences of school choice and marketisation were found to be striking in the second study.

Swedish teachers had never before needed to take account of market logics such as competition, marketing and the importance of disseminating results and satisfying ‘customers’, that is, students. The interviewees describe such new elements in their work and many are critical of the consequences of school choice and marketisation. Some have adapted to their more market-oriented role, while others feel relatively unaffected (mostly at schools where competition is insignificant) or think that marketisation has both advantages and disadvantages. The dissatisfaction is partly connected to perceived reduced autonomy. This is most obvious in the increased workload created by school marketing and profiling, new tasks that take time, energy and resources from teachers’ core tasks, that is, teaching and the development of teaching. Descriptions of this problem often indicate a clash between market logics and professional judgement:

At certain times, our teacher team needs a lot of time to arrange these things [i.e., marketing events, etc.]. (North Public, Study 2)

The quality of my teaching would be better if I did not have to do other tasks as well. (South Independent, Study 2)

Instead of discussing how we can improve the students’ knowledge, we discuss how we can attract more students. (North Rural, Study 2)

⁴Decision-makers who introduced the school choice reforms have explained that they envisioned small schools owned by parents and schools, providing alternative pedagogic ideas (Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2014). However, after some years business realised the opportunities for profit in the school sector, which led to the substantial expansion of independent schools.

The tension between professional judgement and the market demand to satisfy the ‘customer’ has affected several interviewees. The teachers often feel obliged to compromise with student wishes, even when they are convinced that something else is in the student’s best interest:

We have very good and knowledgeable teachers at this school and I think we expect a lot of the students. I think this is quality. Our knowledge goals are high. But that does not necessarily correspond to what a 15-year-old guy from X-borough [author’s anonymization] thinks is quality. (North Public, Study 2)

The pressure to satisfy the ‘customer’ may also explain grade inflation, which has increased since the turn of the century (Vlachos, 2011). A teacher at North Rural says that ‘grades are a means of competition’. A group of teachers at City Public (Study 2) are convinced that the independent schools award excessive grades and they also self-critically admit that they are influenced by this pressure, which is fuelled by mass media ranking based on grade statistics.

Marketisation has a different impact from that of many other policies. In many cases, teachers have latitude to interpret and translate reforms, or even resist their realisation. Whether teachers like it or not, however, they are obliged to become market oriented to some extent. As the funding follows the students, there is the risk that a school may not attract enough students, and few teachers would risk teacher redundancy or the closure of entire programmes or schools:

You have pressure to act like an advertisement. It’s hard to ignore. There are two aspects: the pressure from teachers and management to do a good job and recruit students, but also you put pressure on yourself. You like your job and you want to keep it. So, of course, this is a stress factor for teachers, and it increases when the number of students in the municipality is declining. (North Independent, Study 2)

This situation also implies that schools may accept students who change schools during the school year, although this entails difficulties constructing a complete study plan. The voucher sometimes becomes more important than the quality of the education: ‘Since we need the money, we allow students to come in February regardless of pedagogical and educational considerations’ (City Public, Study 2). In other cases, teachers strive to retain students who may be better served by a different school or programme, which seems to go against wise professional judgement.

Marketisation has organisational consequences as well. For example, independent schools often have a slimmer organisation than do public schools, with fewer nurses,

career guidance counsellors, and other support staff, making it possible to increase profits:

We do not have a student counsellor or nurse here – staff responsible for student-care tasks. This differs from public schools. . . . I think this is a bit too economically crass. (City Independent, Study 2)

This tendency is part of a new corporate culture and means that teachers are assigned other tasks than traditional teachers' tasks. At South Independent (Study 2), for example, teachers are expected to do some cleaning and caretaking duties as well. Another aspect of the corporate culture cited by some interviewees is that corporate legislation applies to private companies, which implies that the principles of freedom of speech and whistle blower protection do not apply to such independent schools. On the other hand, some independent school teachers claim that autonomy is farther-reaching in their schools: 'I feel that I, as a teacher, have more influence than I had when I worked in a public school' (Oak Free, Study 3). The teachers at North Independent say (Study 2) that their freedom of action is greater and one of them emphasises that the teachers have developed collective autonomy:

In contrast, we have a collective autonomy here that entails that the teachers work together. It is a kind of collective autonomy in which one can come up with an idea and the others join in and go for it

However, Oak Free and North Independent are new and small schools, making it difficult to conclude whether it is the perceived broader autonomy or the inflexible bureaucratic public school culture that explains the observed phenomena.

School choice policies and the consequences of competition are obvious in the third study as well, which largely confirms the findings of the second study. School choice means that students move from small places and suburbs to larger towns or cities, and students choose to associate with students of the same type, for example, academically motivated students. The teachers have little control over such trends as their association with teaching quality is insignificant (Lundström & Holm, 2011). Furthermore, the importance of school profiling and reputation is even more obvious in the third than in the second study. For example, a teacher at Ridge School (Study 3) who had been working at an independent school talked about how the teachers there sought strategies to attract academically motivated students, and connected this to the audit culture: 'Above all, we wanted better results. Everything is measured these days and academically motivated students definitely mean better results'.

Now that student cohorts have been decreasing for several years, competition in some local school markets has intensified. For example, teachers at Creek School (Study 3) claim that the situation has led to panic and

that the school has had to intensify its marketing efforts. One teacher says that 'lots of money is spent on marketing, but I would prefer investments in the work and quality'. Another teacher says that 'I have never before heard so many colleagues say that they are afraid of losing their jobs'. There is a budget deficit and the school cannot afford to repair the rundown school buildings, while the main competitor, the neighbouring municipality, has made substantial investments in building more attractive premises.

However, by the time of Study 3, some municipalities have regained 'market share', and the rapid expansion of independent schools has slowed. The 2013 bankruptcy of one of the biggest independent school companies, John Bauer, with more than 10,000 students was a sign that private school expansion is not a law of nature. One interviewee from Ridge Public who used to work at a John Bauer school now describes it as 'a traumatic experience'. The bankruptcy was unexpected by everyone, including the staff and students of these schools. It was publicly known that the company had been profitable; however, it was not known that the school had taken big loans to generate profits when it was sold to another provider or that the student vouchers would not cover the loans repayment in the long run. This bankruptcy implies the collective insight that schools can go bankrupt, denying their students school choice.

Reports of increased segregation as a result of school choice that were published at the time of Study 3 (NAE, 2012b; Östh, Andersson, & Malmberg, 2013) are confirmed by our findings. Segregation results in reduced teacher autonomy in low-status schools or municipalities, which lack the ability to influence school choice and are left with poorly motivated students, more social problems, and the risk of programmes and schools being closed down. Ash School is situated in a 'deprived' suburb and 85% of its students are of non-Swedish ethnicity. Its teachers make great efforts to maintain high-quality schooling but cannot compete in the rankings based on grades and test results. There are indications of resignation in the interviews. One teacher says that 'we have to counter an unfairly negative reputation all the time'. Another talks about 'white flight' and says that 'it is impossible to achieve high status for a school in this suburb . . . I think it is possible to have a fantastically good school, but it will not have high status'.

The audit culture

The combined school reform policies have led to a performance/audit culture in which test results, grades and school rankings tend to define quality and steer the focus of teaching. MBOR, the strengthened evaluation culture, school competition, the standard-based curriculum connected to the new grading system and performance-related pay have combined in driving educational

change, a salient matter in Study 3. A teacher at Field School (Study 3) says that such external pressures narrow the curriculum and broad educational goals, so that goals such as fostering democratic attitudes and critical thinking disappear. She says that, over the years, she has arranged many thematic days when themes such as drugs, politics and developing countries were treated. Most of these days, the aesthetic subjects and the previously compulsory field days have now been eliminated in favour of more subject lessons:

I have arranged so many of these really awesome thematic days, for example, the one about xenophobia. But now we have nothing, we have “nada”

The school principals' power has been enhanced by the evaluation trend of the last few years. Systematic quality work is at the top of the national policy agenda and school principals are ascribed the key role in managing it (NAE, 2012a). Furthermore, evaluations are connected with the individual performance–pay system. Analysis of this system, on which I have reported elsewhere (Lundström, 2011), indicates that none of the elements of the pay system is working as intended, that the system is at least partly counterproductive, and that it challenges a shared work culture. A teacher at Birch School (Study 1) describes a loss of control: ‘One wonders what actually generates a higher salary and, honestly speaking, I do not know. I feel that I do not understand that at all’. Others express feelings of injustice and resignation. One teacher at Fir Tree School exclaims: ‘I do not give a damn about the salary! My God, how unfair this system is!’ A teacher at Birch School exemplifies the tendency towards a growing culture of silence as a result of the new pay system. He has received considerably lower pay raises than his colleagues and is convinced that this is because he is sometimes critical:

I have just expressed my opinions and we have freedom of speech in this country . . . And now I am too old to change careers – I have got about two years left until retirement. So I think they are nasty, actually

These negative perceptions of how the pay system works, noted in the first study, persist in the third study. Field School uses a standardised student course evaluation for all courses. The teachers are convinced that this is used in setting salaries, implying that the salary-setting criteria have more or less been replaced. One teacher at Field School (Study 3) says that ‘students’ course evaluations are the only basis for salary setting’. Another says that school principals claim that the evaluations and test scores indicate

who are good teachers and who are bad teachers . . . I do not know how they use criteria at all, it is very mysterious . . . I think that how the teacher works in

the classroom is less important and that the most important factor is how much of a pal you are with the principal

A group of teachers at Ridge Public (Study 3) are also critical. One teacher says that ‘those who engage in projects of various kinds receive higher salary raises and the system creates jealousy’. Another claims that salary raises are linked to compliance with policy implementation and embody the formative assessment trend: ‘No one dares say anything about it as it may lower one’s salary’. Another teacher adds:

Precisely! Maybe you are a very good teacher and you love your job. But you do not love formative assessment, but then you do not dare to say anything

At the time of Study 3, the teachers had been working two years on implementing the latest upper secondary school reform. The power of the receivers of students mentioned in the reform report is not evident in the interviews, but stronger steering and performance measurement are. The reform implies stricter goals linked to a more differentiated grading scale, which is appreciated by some teachers. Some teachers think that this reduced discretion facilitates work while others think it has resulted in ‘a total focus on assessment and grading’.

Evaluation systems seem increasingly important at most of the schools examined in Study 3. Some teachers say that they have always used course evaluations and that they are useful in improving their teaching. However, the increased total audit pressure is problematic and teachers find certain systems counterproductive. For example, a teacher at Oak Free mentions a new ‘goal prognosis’ system in which teachers must grade in advance how well they think each student will perform. She thinks that ‘from a pedagogical point of view it is a kind of suicide’, as it may lead to lowered expectations for some students, which can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Changed power relations

The previous sections identified power shifts resulting from the marketisation and audit trends; other policies also imply a transfer of authority. There is still lingering discontent with the ‘municipalization’ reform of 1991, and many teachers do not trust the municipalities as providers and employers. A teacher at Field School (Study 3) says that the reform implied the ‘proletarianization of the teaching profession’ and that ‘the municipality does not give a damn about their teachers’. She also thinks that municipalities handle school funding in a way similar to that of independent schools, as they use resources for priorities other than schools. A teacher at Ash School (Study 3) says that ‘the organization is steered by politicians, we act according to political instructions, but they can also stab us in the back’.

Study 1 found that the vocational teachers were more affected by MBOR and decentralisation than were the academic teachers. In the previously state-regulated system, the equipment for courses was specified and linked to resources; now it is up to the municipalities to budget and allocate resources. This entails a potential for extended autonomy, but some of the teachers complain that the municipality does not allocate sufficient resources. A teacher at Pine School says:

Money rules. If I ask for something, there is no money ... I think it was better when it was state-governed, at least regarding resources. Now there are cutbacks – they cut through larger class size, fewer teachers, and we cannot buy new books as we did before but have to use ten-, fifteen-year-old books

The then new systems for allocating time and salaries were crucial elements in regulating the teachers' work. They allocate more power to the principals and teachers perceive the systems as unreliable and arbitrary, expressing discomfort, uncertainty and loss of control. The system for time allocation implies that the previously fixed number of lessons per year and teacher was replaced with a system incorporating a flexible number of lessons within a frame of 35 hours per week 'owned' by the employer, with lesson preparation and follow-up largely conducted outside that time. The interviewees find it difficult to understand how time is allocated in the new system.

One of the most controversial issues addressed in Study 1 was the top-down implementation of interdisciplinary teacher teams at the schools. Based on arguments about more holistic teaching and teacher cooperation, municipalities reorganised the teachers in interdisciplinary teams instead of the traditional teams organised around school departments/subjects (e.g., mathematics teacher teams and history teacher teams). This caused discontent and resistance among most interviewees and a severe clash between teachers and management at one school. Most teachers perceive the change as threatening their professional cultures and identities. A teacher at Fir Tree School (Study 1) says that this team system is

a ridiculous construction. We have no students in common, we have no courses in common. I feel that we meet just because the timetable says that we have to meet

Another at the same school calls this system a 'catastrophe' for cooperation and the work climate. She says that

I am against top-down composition of teams. It should be a natural process in which you find each other and share the same views of students and knowledge

A teacher at Maple School (Study 1) emphasises the value of informal cooperation, which is a part of the work culture he is afraid will be destroyed: 'The pedagogic discussions with colleagues who work on similar things are often very fruitful. We continuously discuss problems that we face'.

In Study 3, several teachers said that management had changed and become more top-down oriented and less sensitive to teachers' views and working conditions. One aspect of the dissatisfaction concerns the fact that non-teachers have been employed as principals for some years. Especially at Field School, teachers regard it as a municipal strategy to employ preschool teachers or directors as principals, because they are more compliant, for example, regarding budget cuts. This upsets them, especially as they think that the new principals do not really understand their work. One teacher claims that this municipal strategy has created principals who 'are very loyal to the municipality and ... do not know what I do in the classroom'.

A teacher at Oak Free (Study 3) thinks that management of the municipal schools is too bureaucratic: 'Unfortunately, I think that many public school principals are too administratively inclined, that is, their role is that of the administrator and they have a background as administrators'. In contrast, she is content with her principal and her background as a teacher: 'We have someone who understands us, which is comforting'. However, she thinks that 'it is difficult for the principal to steer when there is a management level above her', referring to the fact that the school is part of a corporation that owns many schools. One example is a new time allocation model, 'and regarding that, I do not think the company is fair'. The company wanted to schedule many more hours for the teachers:

but we work hard and it is impossible to stick to a 40-hour week when we are working with national tests. It is impossible and it is the same with grading – during that period we work here in the evenings until the alarm goes off

Notably, various policies interact and merge so that the outcomes add up to something other than the purpose of each policy. For example, the implementation of interdisciplinary teacher teams was a result of decentralisation and became part of the school development trend at the studied schools. This trend merged with the purpose of the new pay system to promote school development and this at least partly constructed the definition of 'the good teacher', namely, the interdisciplinarily inclined teacher, who was rewarded in the performance pay system.

Concluding discussion

The teachers' narratives illustrate how reforms and restructurings, based largely on NPM, affected teachers'

professional autonomy over a decade. The findings largely confirm earlier descriptions of the shift from occupational to organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2009a, 2009b), including the shift from licensed to regulated autonomy (Apple, 2007). The findings illuminate the consequences of various policies in practice and how they interact and combine as regards teacher autonomy. It is not a black-and-white situation, as schools are highly complex contexts with local, group and individual variations. This concerns my description of the emergence of an NPM teacher as well: The concept is an ideal type that does not exist as a pure professional identity but describes a trend evident throughout the decade.

Concerning autonomy, teaching as a profession has been under continuous pressure throughout the studied period. Opportunities to protect a 'zone of autonomy' for teachers do not inherently follow certain policies but instead seem to rely on individuals' and groups' capacities to take charge of possible latitude for discretion. These opportunities are facilitated or hampered by school organisation and culture, including the degree of managerialism.

The massive influence of the whole 'reform package' was a definite cause of reduced teacher autonomy throughout the examined period. The unending stream of externally imposed reforms and changes and the perceived discrepancy between goals and means are main threads in the narratives extending through all three studies. The intensification of teachers' work is not a new finding (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 118), but it is novel and relevant to illustrate how various policies work in practice over a long period. From a management perspective, the development can be interpreted as indicating that management at a distance (Dahler-Larsen, 2012) is effective as some teachers have adopted a more organisational professional role and become competent deliverers of subject teaching, tested, measured and ranked in a performance culture. The findings indicate resignation and compliance, however, and that this effectiveness comes at the expense of motivation, professional pride and creativity.

A combination of policies has diminished teachers' professional power, consequently reducing their autonomy, although this was not the aim of each individual policy. Power has shifted from teachers to principals and municipal administrations as well as to 'customers' (i.e., students) and other market actors. The state has strengthened its power as well, mainly through demands for stricter goal fulfilment, evaluations and systematic quality work. Both MBOR and decentralisation imply a potential for autonomy that is occasionally realised. There is always latitude for teacher autonomy and, for example, some strong teacher teams have the capacity to exploit it, while many teams are overloaded with demands over which they have little control. This is in line with Hargreaves' (1994, p. 195) concept of 'contrived

collegiality', which is more administratively regulated and implementation oriented than is a 'collaborative culture'. Decentralisation has distributed power mainly to the school providers and the principals.

MBOR is assumed to give employees latitude to interpret and translate objectives into practice (Nusche, Halász, Looney, Santiago, & Shewbridge, 2011, p. 36), and many teachers had been doing that in the years before the first study. The last study found that the teachers had been working on implementing the new upper secondary curriculum and grading system, but that the latitude for interpretation and translation was now smaller due to the standard-based orientation (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012). The increased demands for evaluation, testing and control also contributed to the decreased freedom. The situation also illustrates inherent contradictions in MBOR, which assumes 'precise, concrete, specific and hierarchically structured indicators' (Laegrid, Roness, & Rubecksen, 2006, p. 251). This emphasis is in conflict with the broad goals of the curriculum that are also part of professional values, goals such as the development of democratic citizens, equity, analytical and critical thinking, and creativity. The contradiction is reinforced by another basic assumption of MBOR, namely, the idea of rewarding good and punishing bad performance (Laegrid et al., 2006, p. 251), an idea that merges with the individual performance-related pay system. Consequently, a power structure has emerged consisting of MBOR, the more standard-based curriculum linked to the grading system, the audit culture and the pay system.

School competition and marketisation add to the above-described power structure and its reduction of teacher autonomy. As mentioned, market logics (Freidson, 2001) can hardly be negotiated or resisted as they are linked to the survival of the school, the programme and/or employment. Whether they like it or not, teachers become market oriented to some extent, which implies that they have to compromise their professional values concerning work tasks, professional judgement and the narrowing of the curriculum. The main concern in a market is satisfying the 'customer', which results in a shift of power from teachers to students, managers and various market actors (e.g., shareholders, assessment technology companies and advertising agencies). For example, the grade inflation occurring since the turn of the century (Vlachos, 2011) is likely a result of the perceived need to satisfy the 'customer'. The schools are ranked based on grades and test results, and this measure of 'school quality' is publicised and determines what are considered 'good' or 'bad' schools when students choose schools.

Apple and Evetts are aware of the market logics when they use the concepts regulated autonomy and organisational professionalism, though the logics of the bureaucracy are emphasised. For example, Evetts (2009a) emphasises control by managers, rational-legal forms of

authority and hierarchical structures of authority, and Apple (2007) underlines control, accountability and standardisation. My findings testify to the on-going emphasis on the significance of market logics and on how these work together with bureaucratic logics to devalue occupational professionalism and licensed autonomy. Such a conclusion is nuanced by some independent school teachers' views that their autonomy is now greater and that municipal bureaucracy is stiff and hampering. Although their criticism may be accurate in several municipalities, however, I still believe that the overall outcome of marketisation and school choice has been reduced teacher autonomy, due to changed power relationships, increased segregation and the diminished control of work content, professional judgement and values.

Hierarchy is strengthened as principals gain more power at the expense of teachers' professional judgement and autonomy, having acquired the right to define 'quality' and identify who is a good or bad teacher. Jarl, Fredriksson and Persson (2012) claim that NPM has enhanced the professionalisation of Swedish school principals, supported by the state but at the expense of teachers' power. For example, changes of time and pay regulations give managers priority of interpretation concerning salary setting and time distribution to an unprecedented extent. Because many teachers regard these basic administrative systems as arbitrary and untrustworthy, this adds to the uncertainty caused by the high pace of change. Several interviewees believe that control has increased while discretion has decreased, and others think that managers exercise power by rewarding compliant teachers. Accountability, target setting and performance review are traits of the pay-setting process that correspond to the organisational professionalism concept (Evetts, 2009a).

This analysis represents my interpretation of teachers' perceptions of autonomy in connection with significant education reform and restructuring policies. Perceived 'truths' about lived experience can be disputed, but they are still important for understanding policy enactment as well as professional action and development.

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