Secondary school arts teachers' perceptions of their practice autonomy in New Zealand and England.

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New Zealand has its educational roots in 19th and 20th century British educational systems with close similarities between English and New Zealand secondary school education structures. In the last two decades, however, secondary school education in both countries has experienced multiple and sometimes radical reforms. Educational policy has diverged markedly at times. In this article, we present the findings of research into the professional autonomy of 15 secondary school music, art and drama teachers from England and New Zealand. The aim was to explore whether educational policy impacts arts teaching practice, and to what extent teachers in both countries believe themselves to be professionally autonomous. Findings suggest despite similarities between jurisdictions, England teachers report a highly performative regime that restricts, governs and isolates them and the subject in school. This contrasts a progressive, even permissive, professional environment where the New Zealand teachers believe their students' needs come first and feel primarily accountable to their local and disciplinary communities.

Keywords: arts, teaching, professionalism, performativity, assessment, autonomy

Introduction

Teacher practice is complex and context dependent. It is situated, active, in a state of flux and closely linked to teacher biography and professional identity (Atkinson, 2011; Sinnema, Meyer & Aitken, 2017)**.** During periods of increased teacher accountability and regulation certain discourses of professionalism circulate and take on external legitimacy (Sachs, 2016). In turn this may influence how teacher practice is required to be enacted by regulatory/evaluative bodies such as Ofsted (England) or the Education Review Office (New Zealand).

This study arose from a discussion between Vicki (from New Zealand) and Victoria (from England) about our shared belief that arts teachers require autonomy and agency to be pedagogically creative (Abramo & Reynolds, 2015; Burnard & White, 2008). We were curious about secondary school arts teachers beliefs about their professional autonomy in each country. Our context is the degree of practice standardisation required within each jurisdiction.

When teachers are required to teach in state-sanctioned ways 'the emergence of centralised pedagogy (or "one best way" approach to lesson delivery) potentially diminishes the creative space in which teachers exercise professional judgement" (Burnard & White, 2008, p. 669). These 'best ways' may not align with the values of individual teachers nor those of their school community. Practice standardisation, while being attractive to regulatory education bodies for offering equality, often overlooks the importance of situated pedagogical content knowledge that is specific to the local context, along with the pedagogies and practices best suited for student development (Ball, 2003a). Furthermore, the aims and values of a curriculum, and performativity of external assessment structures such as external examinations, teacher registration and school inspection are likely to conflict, leading to 'examination back-wash' and curriculum constraint (Fautley & Cowell, 2007; McPhail, 2012). Professional autonomy and pedagogical creativity are also constrained when the external moderation of teachers' assessment judgements is linked to their professional appraisal (Service,

2016). On the other hand, it is possible that diverse forms of teaching and learning that occur outside more mainstream curricula (such as Mathematics or English) are more likely to be overlooked by established frameworks and norms (Atkinson, 2017). As will be explained, in both countries the secondary school curricula for arts subjects are quite loose and open to interpretation. We therefore wondered if some arts teachers believed themselves able to fly under the performative radar.

English and New Zealand histories and contexts

In the past, there were very close similarities in curriculum and qualification systems for secondary arts education in England and New Zealand. This was because New Zealand, as a former British colony, has its education roots in 20th century British educational systems (Braatvedt, 2002; Thwaites, 2018). Even now, secondary music education bears a much closer structural similarity to British systems than to that of North American high school music education. However, in the past 20 years, secondary education in both countries has undergone multiple and sometimes radical reforms. Educational policy and reform in England and New Zealand have diverged markedly, leading to different professional contexts for English and New Zealand arts teachers.

In the late 1980s, New Zealand music teachers were highly influenced by radical reforms in secondary school music education in England, leading to the inclusion of performing, composing and studying popular musics in its secondary school qualifications that remain to this day (McPhail, Thorpe & Wise, 2018). At the same time however, New Zealand "fell under the sway of neoliberal thought" and a strange bi-polarity has ensued where pedagogical and curricular progressivism has continued amid what has been, until the recent election of a centre-left coalition government, a national climate of radical neo-liberal performativity (Thwaites, 2018, p.13). In New Zealand, secondary arts teachers currently experience a very high level of curriculum autonomy and are free to select content (McPhail, 2018). The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) states: 'It is a framework rather than a detailed plan. This means that while every school curriculum must be clearly aligned with the intent of this document, schools have considerable flexibility when determining detail' (p.37). At the same time, as in many countries, the national secondary school qualification (the National Certificates of Educational Achievement, NCEA) can act as a highly defined, modularised, proxy curriculum for senior programmes (Hipkins, Sheehan, & Johnson, 2016).

New Zealand secondary teachers are professionally accountable for their NCEA assessments in several ways. Firstly, to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) through the judgements of a national moderator, secondly to school management through their annual appraisal against the New Zealand Teaching Council's Standards for the Teaching Profession (2019), and thirdly, by participating in school-wide evaluations by the Education Review Office (ERO). However, in recent years, ERO has devolved much of the responsibility for school improvement and reform to the schools themselves, holding school management and the school governing board publicly accountable for meeting targets set in previous inspections, rather than individual teachers or departments. New professional standards for teachers developed by the Teaching Council (formerly the NZ Education Council) are more holistic and less atomised than previously, requiring teachers, school management and teacher educating bodies to engage in deeper and broader professional reflection and review (Education Council, 2017). Indeed, recently, the council cautioned school management, asking them to 'have another look at your organisation's appraisal process to see if it has become overly compliance focused.' (Teaching Council, 2019). While teachers are

required to annually submit their NCEA internal assessments to NZQA for national moderation, only a small sample is moderated each year and large numbers of assessments can go unmoderated and the teacher may not be accountable to anyone for certain assessment judgements for years at a time. Given this environment of high trust in teaching as professional practice, we wanted to find out if New Zealand secondary school arts teachers believed themselves to be as autonomous as the current policy, curriculum and professional environment appears to allow.

Meanwhile in England, performativity measures have been shaping education discourse and practice for over 20 years and are now ubiquitous. This includes modes of regulation that employ judgments, comparisons, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (Ball, 2003a). These can take the form of school league tables constructed variously from pupil test scores; performance management; performance related pay and threshold assessment. The purposes of these policy measures were to improve levels of achievement and increase international economic competitiveness. Neoliberal technologies of governmentality have refashioned education policy. Challenges posed by assessment, accountability and performativity measures are 'indicative of discrimination against creative and cultural forms of knowledge' (Kinsella, 2014), which marginalises students, offers little teacher and student agency and disrupts real, innovative teaching. Performative and accountability regimes such as these according to Levin (1998) are 'a policy epidemic' where there is increased obsession with evidence of children's learning and teacher professionalism.

With the aim of raising standards and increasing teacher accountability, the English government established benchmarks of operational forms of practice (Ball, 2003b). These benchmarks are policed by Ofsted, which 'governs teacher pedagogy and learner experience' (Turner & Bisset, 2007, p.194) and a teacher's personalised pedagogy is therefore challenged by the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003a, p. 1). The amount of time spent preparing for inspection or testing often causes teachers to focus on playing it safe by transmitting examination knowledge to students. This diverts the educational focus away from creativity and from those parts of learning which cannot be tested, towards sanctioned teacher practice. A further policy driver impacting school music and art and design education is the way in which assessment backwash influences and impacts teaching and learning. Teaching to the test at KS4 (the examination years 14-16) has a downstream effect, consequently driving what is taught and learned at KS3 (11-14). As Fautley and Colwell (2012, p. 488) note: 'This can result in a narrowing of the curriculum, and of learning opportunities, as teaching becomes focused solely on final assessment.'

As we have shown, secondary teachers in England and New Zealand are professionally accountable to multiple external bodies but in very different ways. In this paper we suggest that teachers in any country are primarily accountable to their students and require a degree of professional autonomy to respond effectively to their students' needs. We frame our discussion with Halstead's (1994) delineation of educator accountability: contractual and responsive. Contractual accountability is generated in highly regulated environments, and is concerned with the measurement of teacher standards, outcomes and results in relation to external bodies and criteria such as those discussed above. It focuses upon predetermined outcomes, where evaluation usually takes place as external scrutiny. Responsive accountability is process-driven, student-focused and relies upon teachers' decision-making. When teachers are responsively accountable to their profession, as opposed to an external body governed by policy, they are obliged to 'make use of the collective wisdom of the profession to self-regulate practice' (Sachs, 2016, p. 416).

Our research position

The data consists of teachers' reporting on their subjective perceptions and therefore we chose to view the study through a social constructivist lens. This meant that we needed to work inductively, extracting themes from the data, rather than interrogating them through the research questions. Our ontological position is that "people construct their own subjectivities, but not in the conditions of their own choosing" (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002, p. 706). We assumed that just because many aspects of the teachers' reported experiences were their own constructions, that does not mean that they all were (Harre, 2002). Our approach was also quite pragmatic in that we are reporting on work in the real world, for example when reporting on external structures such as Progress 8 or the NCEA. (Robson, 2011). At the same time, as former secondary school teachers, we were mindful that we viewed the data through our own subjective practice lenses and thus wary of adopting a romantic but methodologically invalid stance as a 'big sister' mouthpiece of an "oppressed profession" (Elliot, 1994, p.136). We strove to 'pay attention to the underlying context of commonalities and differences, and to their causal relevance to the educational phenomenon being examined' (Manzon, 2007).

Method

Our research questions were:

- What are the differences and similarities between New Zealand and English systems of professional accountability for secondary teachers?
- In what ways do external bodies impact professional autonomy?
- What are the differences or similarities between New Zealand and England secondary school arts teacher's experiences of professional autonomy?

Fifteen teachers, (nine from England and six from New Zealand) were asked to take part in one in-depth interview that was audio recorded for analysis. As educational researchers and teacher educators we are very familiar with the secondary schools in our respective regions. The sampling was purposive and reputational, and to some extent, convenient. We deliberately selected teachers whom we knew by reputation as being confident, established practitioners. While this is arguably a limitation, there were reasons for doing this. We did not interview beginning teachers who are subject to registration, whose practice is still forming and who have had minimal experience of professional accountability. For ethical reasons, we avoided interviewing teachers who might have weak or failing practice and might be subject to different forms of professional accountability. Selection criteria were therefore that participants were experienced secondary school teachers, had been teaching for at least five years, and recognised in their local communities as confident and able teachers of the arts. For example, teachers who have won teaching awards, led assessment moderation teams, or whose students were recognised for high achievement. School context differed greatly between the schools, from urban locations to the rural, from religious, state funded and independent schools in both countries. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Teacher	Subject	Position	Type Of School	Years Teaching
New Zealand Teachers				

Kate	Visual Art	Head Of Arts Faculty	Semi-Rural, Co-Ed State School	28 Years
Shelly	Visual Art	Head Of Arts Faculty	Urban Catholic Boys' School	7 Years
Samuel	Drama	Head Of Arts Faculty	Suburban, Co-Ed State School	10 Years
Peter	Music	Head Of Music	Urban Catholic Boys' School	27 Years
Zane	Music	Head Of Music	Semi-Rural, Co-Ed State School	13 Years
Dave	Music	Teacher	Suburban, Co-Ed State School	8 Years
England Teachers				
Karen	Visual Art	Head Of Arts Faculty	Urban Technical College	20 Years
Laura	Visual Art	Teacher	Urban Technical College Teaching	8 Years
Sian	Visual Art	Teacher	Urban Secondary Academy Teaching	7 Years
Richard	Music	Head Of Music	Semi-Rural State Secondary Teaching	10 Years
Paul	Music	Head Of Music	Urban Academy Teaching	10 Years
Sarah	Music	Head Of Music	Urban Academy Secondary School Teaching	12 Years
Ellie	Music	Teacher	Urban Catholic State School Teaching	11 Years
Louise	Music	Teacher	Urban Academy Secondary School Teaching	5 Years
Alison	Music	Teacher	Urban Academy Secondary School Teaching	6 Years

Participants were asked the same questions in the same order where the aim was to encourage the teachers to explain and elaborate. The interviews, between 30 and 60 minutes in length, were audio recorded and carried out in a place of the teachers' convenience, usually at school. Two teachers in two New Zealand schools, Kate and Zane, Samuel and Dave, chose to be interviewed together.

1. Do you have free reign in what and how you decide to teach?
2. Could you describe your personalised pedagogy?
3. Do you ever take risks?
4. Do you feel trusted by your school and community?
5. *Teacher's personalised pedagogy can be challenged by the 'terrors of performativity'.* What are your views on this statement?
6. Jeffery and Woods (1998) have stated that the amount of time teachers spend on preparing for inspection (such as ERO/OfSTED visits) disrupts real innovative teaching. In your experience, does this happen for you when, for example, ERO/OfSTED reviews/inspects your school?

7. Have you ever changed what you are teaching, or how you are teaching in response to an external evaluation? In your view, did this lead to improved student achievement or engagement?
8. To what extent are you influenced by education policies when planning your programmes of teaching and learning?
9. Thinking about your practice as a secondary arts teacher, what is your interpretation of the words *effectiveness, improvement, evaluation*?

We recognised that teaching is embedded within the complexity of socio-cultural-political structures, where different identities, modes of learning and pedagogical processes need to be considered and accounted for. Teachers were therefore encouraged to elaborate and explain.

Data analysis

The English and New Zealand data were first analysed and thematically analysed as discrete data sets through an inductive process of selecting, processing and sifting, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Then the corpus was subjected to comparative analysis. We compared common themes, looking for similarities, trends and differences. For example, *fake practice* was something some of the New Zealand teachers reported they were obliged to do as beginning teachers when seeking full teacher registration, but that they did not do so now. In contrast, all of the England teachers reported currently faking practice, particularly in relation to junior assessment, in order to meet the demands of external bodies or structures. Similarly, *meaningless box ticking,* was reported by all the New Zealand teachers as an irritating but not particularly relevant fact of teaching life; whereas the England teachers all reported that they were either obliged or compelled to tick boxes in order to meet external demands.

Cross case analysis revealed strong philosophical and pedagogical alignments within arts disciplines for both countries. The New Zealand and England Music teachers espoused similar pedagogical approaches and philosophies, as did the New Zealand and England Visual Art teachers. For example, Visual Art teachers tended to focus on art media (for example drawing as opposed to sculpting) and Music teachers on content selection, access to resources and authentic music practices. We found a strong alignment for questions 1-3, for example *passion for the subject*; *selecting student-centred, authentic curriculum content;* and *summative assessment of creative work.* All participants expressed frustration with a 'one size fits all attitude' from school management reflecting a lack of understanding of the embodied, subjective and creative nature of arts learning and associated pedagogies (Burnard & White, 2008). For questions 4- 9, the England data set revealed the teachers' largely negative preoccupation with summative assessment measures, in particular the miss-match between arts practices and so-called mainstream subjects such as Mathematics, History and English. Themes such as *reporting linear progress*; *teacher as gladiator*; *standing up for the subject*; *conflict with management*; *assessment driving curriculum;* and *personal despair* contrasted strongly with the New Zealand themes of *freedom, professional connection, disciplinary community,* and *defiance*. Subject discipline was

not a significant variable with regard to teachers' perceived professional autonomy in either case.

Findings

Curriculum autonomy

There was a strong alignment within sets for the question 'Do you ever take risks?' in terms of selecting content and shaping curriculum. However, between sets there were striking contrasts.

As might be expected in a highly 'devolved' school environment (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 17), all the New Zealand participants believed that they had a lot of freedom when selecting curriculum content, particularly when teaching junior students (pre-examination years).

> **Peter:** My conscience is clear. I'm always taking risks because I really want the kids to enjoy what they are doing, for their music learning to be enriched. I've got complete freedom to do that. Love it!

There is a strong alignment with responsive accountability. All seem to regard the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) as a flexible guide, open to interpretation.

> **Kate:** I use the curriculum as my guide. I think it's a great document, fantastic. It helps me balance what I am planning, it makes me conscious of moving kids on and up, progression, so I can see, and they can see. I try as much as I can to involve kids in assessment decisions. I would hate for any kid to think that my assessment decisions are a shock to them.

While all New Zealand teachers expressed satisfaction at being free to choose curriculum content for their junior students, it seemed that the NCEA acted broadly as the proxy curriculum when teaching senior courses. Shelley commented 'NCEA massively drives what we are doing'. Even so, the NCEA, a modular, standards-based qualification, contains very little actual content (there are no syllabi) and teachers are, to some extent, free to select what they teach (Hipkins, Johnson, & Sheehan, 2016). Students are often free to select which achievement standards they will be assessed by, often prompting teachers to design individual courses for senior students (Thorpe, McPhail & Wise, 2018).

> **Shelley:** We have to work to what NZQA obviously sets out in their [NCEA assessment] standards but the standards are quite open so we can interpret them in any kind of theme we want to.

When teaching at examination level, the New Zealand teachers believed they selected and shaped curriculum content with the students in mind.

> **Kate:** My content choices are not about what I'm interested in. It's entirely about what I think will motivate and engage them and make them develop their potential as much as possible.

Similarly, the England curriculum for both music, and art and design gives little guidance to teachers on specific curriculum content or knowledge. On appearance, it is open, offering freedom to design curricula best suited to students. However, the pressure of accountability and the consequential outcomes of these causes problems, especially as teachers need to continually consider progression. Teachers reported that, in order to skill-up students in preparation, they often design curricula based on examination processes.

> **Laura:** How I would like to teach is very different. I would like to give lots of space and to be very creative and not be too prescriptive.

Because of these formulaic practices, creative teaching and learning processes can often get lost, in favour of prescriptive outcomes:

> **Paul:** There is now more of a focus on academic results you find that the scope of what you can do and the time given is reduced, meaning that creative work versus getting results that are desired by heads is more of the focus, you are curtailed.

Creative teaching involves making learning relevant to learners (Best, Craft, & Jeffrey, 2004). The passing back of control to students is important in this process to encourage innovatory action. Unlike the New Zealand curriculum which allows teachers to be highly responsive to local context, England curriculum design offers little agency to students. Although the centrality of the learner in the development of creativity is crucial to the creative process, teachers reported that the emphasis is often placed on output rather than creative process.

Performative demands related to the requirements of a national curriculum weighed much more heavily on the England teachers, leading to a greater level of contractual responsibility when selecting curriculum content.

> **Laura**: I used to take risks. When you first start, especially out of the Post-Graduate Certificate of Education, you share ideas and that's great. But when you join a school and a department with existing schemes of work you try to tweak it but you end up fitting in with the school.

Sian clearly exposes the backward facing effect of examination criteria on teaching and learning and the impact of contractual responsibility.

> **Sian:** I now have a better understanding of GCSE specifications and know what is required so there is certain element of that because you know what's expected of the exam board you play towards that. But when I first started I was much more let's do this because let's explore what your gut response is, whilst that was good for the student and I believe more rounded, it didn't necessarily pay off in terms of what would look like typical progression.

Interestingly, Shelley (NZ) had the opposite experience as a beginning teacher. While she now feels no need to adapt her practice to meet performance targets, she felt pedagogically constrained when being appraised prior to achieving full teacher registration. She said that she felt obliged to 'fake' practice and teach in conventional ways that aligned with more mainstream subjects.

> **Shelley:** I would completely disregard everything I was doing for curriculum and assessment and just do a lesson that would tick the box for that observation. The 'go-to' one was always 'workshop on learning different painting techniques'. *[Adopts a loud, authoritative tone]* You'd split the class up into six groups and they'd work round the workshops, stop the class, talk to them as a whole, move around some more, stop the class. [*Back to normal voice]* That was always "Perfect! Big tick!" for the observation, but nothing to do with what I was actually doing.

The England teachers believed they work in an increasingly regulated system driven by performativity measures. They report that this has significantly influenced how classroom music, and art and design teachers conceptualise and operationalise their day-to-day practices. This troubled the teachers, as it shifted accountability from making content to generating assessment grades.

> **Sarah:** We try and get the best data from our pupils. It should be about looking at the sketchbook and portfolio over time and seeing the improvement but often we work towards specific outcomes, which appears to show progress.
> The composition aspect of the exam specifications could be so creative, but they're not. When you read it, what they're asking you to do and it looks like you've got totally loads of freedom, but when you think about how it's going to be marked, you realise that it's not that free – in order to meet the criteria you have to do more prescriptive things and that can be frustrating. That sounds great, but maybe let's do it differently, so it meets the criteria.

Creativity is further constrained by assessment backwash. This is where teaching to the test at KS4 (the examination years 14-16) has a backward-facing effect on what is taught and learned at KS3 (11-14).

> **Louise:** We try to give them the best possible start, this means we consider what they do at GCSE and try to build up the skills in preparation.
> We recently re-jigged our curriculum for KS3 as we start GCSEs in Year 9 we have changed it to fit the GCSE framework.

Assessment autonomy

In England, the centralisation of assessment and tight performative controls weigh heavily on teachers and many of the teachers described a loss of pedagogical autonomy.

> **Ellie:** I feel like I'm constantly assessing the children for no reason, just so that I can put something into a box.

The pressure of accountability measures has premediated educational discourse so that pedagogy has become subsidiary to curriculum content. Content based on examination criteria and the supply of examination evidence are then centralised. Teachers reported that there was little understanding on the part of evaluators of the nature of arts learning and the creative process.

> **Sian:** Ofsted focus on marking and double marking and that heavily influenced school policy. Senior leaders would say to me well I can't see evidence of your comment on their [art] work and I said well am not going to write all over it, you just have to trust that it's happening and they said yes but we need evidence that it is happening. And I said yes but if you look at their work you can see that it is improving. I was constantly questioned.

Teachers reported that their pedagogy is reduced to tick box processes and a narrowing of measurements, where assessment has become meaningless.

> **Richard:** I don't want it to, but often the role of assessment is to tick some boxes and provide some data, and that really winds me up and is very annoying. Our argument has always been who are we doing this assessment for? It's not for the students because I have just sat down with them and talked to them about their work. What is progress for them and what does it mean to them?

Even more concerning is that these measures, often driven by assessment mechanisms linked to student test scores, extend to official standards of what it means to be an 'outstanding teacher'.

> **Richard**: I know that like the students, I am also judged by their test scores and will be questioned if the test scores appear to be low, even though it may be the best grade the student could have achieved.

It is also a key measure by which schools are judged during inspection. Schools can only be graded as outstanding if progress fits an approved level of progression; this is regardless of how high quality the teaching has been. Moreover, since 2012 performance related pay has aimed to raise teaching standards and support professional development furthering this pressure on both teacher and student for achievement grades. These performative and mechanistic outcomes marginalise teacher agency, creating low-trust environments.

In contrast, all the New Zealand teachers reported that, when checking their NCEA assessment judgements, they consulted and derived support from the local disciplinary community of teachers from nearby schools, rather than external bodies. As Kate, an experienced national moderator, notes, 'I've been doing this for a while now and I know where [NCEA] grades sit. I consult with the [visual art teaching] community.' Teachers seem to regard their disciplinary community as the legitimate authority for their NCEA assessment judgements. They all reported that they derive professional confidence and gain good standing as teachers from being members of this community of arts teachers, including the national moderators who either are or were arts teachers themselves.

> **Samuel:** It's really nerve-wracking [to do NCEA assessment] as a solo teacher which is why I need moderation from teachers in other schools.

Some teachers seemed to view NZQA moderation of their internal assessment judgements as a firm guide, one that they might follow if they deem it important to student learning or their own professional learning, but not necessarily if it impedes student learning.

> **Shelley:** This is my seventh year of teaching and every year it's the same, the [local teacher] consensus is to send it as the higher mark, always the higher mark. I guess that is a little risk, but you always do it, just hoping that it will stay there after national moderation. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't.

The implication is that the teachers feel responsively accountable to their students and not particularly contractually accountable to NZQA, even though officially, they are.

> **Zane:** I might get slapped on the wrist a little bit, but in terms of the way I assess things, I'm not going to allow assessment to limit creativity and passion. I might overlook things that are technically not exactly what's written in the [NCEA] standard. I might get a grumpy moderation letter, but I'd hate that to crush some kid's enthusiasm by saying 'you didn't achieve because you didn't tick this box' when they've clearly done something creative and interesting that they believed in. I think that is much more important than ticking the box.

National standards for maths and english literacy at primary and junior secondary level were abolished by the incoming Labour coalition government in 2017. There are no nationally mandated forms of assessment or data aggregation for pre-examination students in the arts. New Zealand teachers explained that they struggle to meaningfully report student progress at junior (pre-examination) level because they have very few guidelines on how to do it. There seemed to be no compulsion to aggregate student data.

> **Shelley:** I'm pretty sure it's national thing, not just this school. Different schools have different ways of tracking their juniors. Here every department has a different way of tracking them. The school's aware of it and working on fixing it, but I don't know what the solution is yet.

While no longer the case, Samuel and Dave reported that in previous years they had been required to aggregate their local pre-examination student data across curricula.

> **Samuel:** It was so quantitative and soulless. I felt bound up by the process. They were comparing science with maths, maths with arts, trying to analyse across disciplines and it's pretty hard to match those up. What we consider to be a successful arts student might not be about how many Merits and Excellences they get. It might be about students wanting to be artists for the rest of their lives.

This aligns with the reported experiences of the England teachers, although theirs is one of national and not local context. Dave, recently returned from a year's teaching in England, provides an interesting comparison.

> **Dave**: I gather my own data from the junior students using Google forms. No one makes me do that. It's so much more effective that when I was teaching in London last year and had to put down every few weeks where each student was. The more you weigh the pig won't fatten it. People would just whisper to me 'just bump them up a level'. It was meaningless box ticking for Ofsted, nothing to do with improving my practice or the kids' learning.

Professional accountability

England: individually, locally and nationally accountable

Not only are teachers under consistent scrutiny from senior leadership teams, but the arts have been demised as academic subjects. This not only impacts individual teachers but also collaborative teaching and learning between subjects, where subjects deemed more academic are given precedence over the arts. The exclusion of the arts from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), has had a major impact. The EBacc, quantifies whether a learner has secured good GCSE passes, in english, mathematics, the sciences, a modern foreign language and a humanities subject such as history or geography. It places greater focus on attainment in core subjects and has, since its introduction, already reduced and in some cases removed opportunities for students to study arts subjects.

> **Paul:** It is not okay what's happening to music education. It is not okay for it to be considered as an inferior subject to this, that and the other and it is openly happening. People have been pulled out of my subject to do maths intervention, because maths is more important. This has always been the case, but when did it become okay to openly say to that music teacher and to that student, that my subject is more important than yours?

Progress 8, another governmental accountability measure, also heavily impacts educational outcomes. Progress 8, introduced in 2016, aims to capture student progress from the end of primary school to the end of key stage 4. It is a value-added measure that compares pupils' results locally to the progress of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment. With every increase in grade a pupil achieves, the school will gain credit in performance tables for improving progress, undoubtedly leading to the decline of music, and art and design (Daubney & Mackrill, 2018, Savage & Barnard, 2019). Teachers lament the demise of their subjects and their professional status.

> **Richard:** Progress 8 is the death of music. I cannot put into words the detrimental effect it has had on music.

> **Louise:** We're at the point now, where I don't know if they trust my judgement, they're turning a blind eye, or they're completely unaware. All the focus is on other subjects… no one cares.

Collaboration is an important aspect of professional practice in schools. Most schools would regard themselves as professional communities grounded in the notion that educational work in schools is collaborative and inclusive. Nevertheless, due to reduced timetables, one teacher believes that the competitive nature of subject choice in schools has created divided communities.

> **Sian:** I feel like we're working competitively with other subjects, there is no chance for collaboration like there previously was because of this.

This leads to isolation and less time being afforded to interdisciplinary working.

> **Sian:** I plan in isolation and this is not always a good thing. I like sharing ideas but workload is hefty.
> Cross department discussions are important, they help if you're finding something difficult. But time has to given for this…everyone is just so busy.

Moreover, England teachers noted a lack of understanding of the arts from senior leadership teams and policy makers, making a direct link back to their contractual responsibility.

> **Karen:** Where I feel the trust was lacking was senior leadership teams because there was a lack of understanding of the subjects. Arts based subjects are less respected compared to other lessons.

> **Laura:** The only training I have been allowed to go on is exam board training.

The educational policy climate therefore not only negatively impacts the quality of professional relationships but also the teaching and learning that takes place. With time afforded to arts subjects decreasing on school timetables, and the lack of collaborative planning, arts teachers report that they are often isolated, lone workers, deprived of interdisciplinary discourse. There are also decreasing amount of arts teachers in schools, often only one-person departments, with little colleague support.

> **Alison:** I am fatigued, I feel that I am repeating cycles of pedagogical ideas and jumping on the band wagon.

New Zealand: local accountability to national bodies

None of the New Zealand participants believes that ERO's evaluations of their schools or their professional appraisals are relevant to their practice. Most explained that this was because the arts were not viewed as an ERO priority, leading some teachers to feel that they were able to fly under the evaluative radar. Peter: 'No one tells me what to do, I have complete freedom. Hardly anyone knows what I'm doing anyway!' Appraisal or professional teaching observation by someone outside the disciplinary community seems to be regarded with suspicion, even contempt.

> **Kate:** I've never ever had an ERO visit from anybody that has any background in visual arts and I think that it's just a joke. I get frustrated that the people who come and watch me teach have absolutely no idea about what I'm teaching, why I'm teaching it, who I am.

Although irritated by these contractual responsibilities, the New Zealand teachers reported that they felt accountable to their students and local community, rather than to the national, evaluative bodies. Granted school management is ultimately accountable to ERO and NZQA, but the teachers as individuals believed that they were not.

> **Kate:** The professional pressure is on myself. I like to get the best possible results for my students because I feel that they only go past me once. I have lots of years to practice but they only have the once, so I really do value them doing as well as they possibly can to meet their potential.

Teachers without management roles seem unaffected. Shelley: 'I wasn't Head of Department then, I was just a teacher.'

Kate, Zane, Shelley, Dave and Peter never alluded to the possibility of job insecurity or negative professional consequences following an ERO visit or NZQA moderation. However, Samuel reported being highly accountable to school management. His school is a 'low decile' school where large proportion of its students come from low socio-economic households and has a high proportion of Māori and Pasifika students, who are also identified by the Ministry of Education (and by association ERO) as being priority learners because they are underserved by the educational system (Ministry of Education, 2017). Principals of schools in poorer areas are under greater pressure to be contractually accountable to ERO because they generally have a higher proportion of 'priority students'. While this is a small study, we wonder if this might be why Samuel, as Head of Faculty, seems to have experienced a much higher degree of contractual accountability to school management, and thus to ERO, than Kate and Shelley who teach in wealthier communities.

> **Samuel:** The freedom we feel has a measuring stick behind it. I feel trusted by school management, but that trust takes years to earn, and they still crunch the numbers. They say 'You've got to do something about [NZQA moderation of NCEA assessment] and we're watching you. We're going to scrutinise you until we see that this approach you say you are going to try is in play'. It does kind of crush your passion. It's bruising.

Discussion

Findings present two very different scenarios of teacher autonomy: one where a national performative regime requires arts teachers to be strongly contractually accountable to external bodies, thereby constraining their practice, and another where teachers are for the most part, responsively accountable to their local context in a very high trust, devolved professional environment.

The New Zealand teachers' discourse strongly references local teacher practice. They claim professional expertise and the right to determine the rules for realising classroom practices. Peter: 'If it's not relevant or I don't agree with it, it quietly goes down stream somewhere.' The England teachers' practice is not strongly emphasised in the data, and there is a consistent emphasis placed upon national educational polices and rules. 'I don't do what I'd like to do as a music teacher.' Their discourse reflects not only that of 'teacher' but also 'employees of the nation state', redefining what is meant by 'good teacher' and even 'good student'.

> **Richard:** Often the grade at the end does not reflect what or where I feel they are as a musician, and that can be frustrating, or it can be surprising. It is not necessarily the ones that you think of as the best musicians who get the best grades. It's the ones that can follow what you need them to – can follow the rules, sometimes.

Teachers across all arts disciplines and both jurisdictions speak with passion about the subject that they teach, revealing a desire to work with their students as artists.

> Art is not just about what they produce, it is about developing them, their interests and confidence and exploring new ways for them to express themselves. (Karen, ENG)

> It's important that the kids are inspired by what they know and what they love. I like to take that further, deeper. (Zane, NZ)

Thwaites and McPhail's (2018) notion of the politics of desire where arts teachers are torn between the desire to freely share their artistry with students and the compliance required by educational policy aligns with that of responsive and contractual accountability. A phrase common to both data sets was 'box ticking' where all the teachers interviewed expressed frustration at the amount of time spent completing administrative tasks that did not seem to be related to students learning, or even, their actual practice. In the case of the New Zealand teachers this seemed to be regarded as a meaningless intrusion that interrupts their work. For example, Dave joked 'the week before ERO comes is film festival time for my juniors!', aligning with research into the workloads of New Zealand secondary school music teachers (Donaldson, 2012; Thwaites & McPhail, 2018). It may be argued, however, that education policy rhetoric and the pervasiveness of the NCEA have become so ingrained and normalised in the New Zealand teachers' practice that they are unaware their influence (Alcorn & Thrupp, 2012). Even so, in this small sample, their discourse strongly references practice identities, such as 'teacher' and 'artist', but rarely 'employee'.

For the England teachers, box ticking takes on a much more serious import. Turner and Bisset (2007) have noted that '[England] teachers compromise on the kinds of teaching in which they believe in, and the kinds of teaching demanded by performativity' (p.195). This is deeply embedded in the teacher interviews and findings presented here. Teachers' thinking has shifted from democratic to neoliberal orientations, resulting in practices and discourse dominated by governance concerns. This increase on performative and accountability pressures have not only negatively affected their own teaching but their students' learning.

Across both data sets teachers expressed their frustration that the specific nature of disciplinary pedagogies of the arts remain unacknowledged by their leaders who are uninformed at best, dismissive and undermining at worst. The England teachers signal serious destabilisation of the arts as curriculum subjects that is systemic, and it seems, the outcome of deliberate, national education policy. Some teachers felt obliged to fake their practice in order to meet performative demands. While this was not a significant aspect of the New Zealand teachers' discourse, in the case of the England teachers, there is considerable cause for concern. Where teachers work is carried out in a highly performative environment, requiring a high degree of contractual accountability, then teaching becomes de-professionalised (Robertson, 2012; Sachs, 2015). Burnard and White (2008) highlight the importance of pedagogical creativity for teaching the arts, particularly when constrained by performative measures. In her critique of the neo-liberal globalisation of teacher practice, Robertson (2012) asserts that in such an environment, over time the practice of skilled and experienced teachers becomes degraded, leading to moribund or timid curriculum design and the death of pedagogic creativity and teacher and student agency. In the present study we see evidence that this may be so for teaching the arts in England secondary schools.

Our study has revealed that the New Zealand participants have a much higher degree of curriculum and assessment autonomy than that of their English counterparts. They believe that they can use their skills and knowledge to meet the needs of their student in creative and responsive ways. Their discourse is highly student-focussed. However, we concur with McPhail who (2018) warns the devolved and permissive nature of the New Zealand secondary school curriculum and an increasing emphasis

upon student-centred learning is no guarantee of epistemic access (Rata, 2012). The New Zealand teachers were selected for this study because they were confident, experienced teachers, recognised in their communities as having secure, informed practice. The national environment in which they work, while subject to a degree of contractual accountability, nevertheless affords teachers many opportunities to work autonomously, even subversively and 'under the radar'. Contractual accountability is largely in relation to the local context, notably their disciplinary community and school leaders but, as teachers in subjects not deemed 'priority' by external bodies such as ERO, they can also fly under the radar and work as they see fit. However, a high trust, locally devolved professional model assumes that all teachers are knowledgeable and skilful, and that national structures such as assessment moderation ensure reliability and validity across diverse school contexts (McPhail, 2018). If the teachers in this study believe that they are largely autonomous in terms of curriculum and assessment, then presumably less skilled and knowledgeable teachers working in schools that are not well led, do too. Teachers who have weak or failing practice may also fly under the radar.

Conclusion

In this article we have presented a small study that reveals teachers working an extreme ends of a professional autonomy continuum. By exploring the New Zealand and English systems, we have drawn two opposing conceptualisations of professional autonomy that may be helpful for other jurisdictions. Most notably, it is clear from the comparison that there are deep contrasts in how secondary school education operates in each country.

In England, teachers work in an increasingly performative environment, isolating and disempowering them. They paint a very bleak picture indeed, reporting that their practice is heavily defined by contractual accountabilities. Teachers' discourse is dominated by notions of 'playing the game' of assessment and 'ticking box' exercises that have little meaning for knowledge development. There is a strong sense of agreement from the England teachers that a paradox exists; they want to be creative and autonomous teachers, but the apparatus of scrutiny via high stakes systems outweigh these personal pedagogic aspirations.

Unlike those teaching in the English system, the New Zealand teachers' views on their professional autonomy reflect an educational system that does not focus on labelling or defining students or teachers by an examination or testing regime. It seems that the New Zealand teachers feel that they are largely accountable within their local context, where disciplinary communities appear to hold as much sway as national moderators when it comes to making assessment judgements. At the same time, the very high trust, devolved nature of this domain does have attendant risks if contractual accountability is weak. We wonder if similar conditions exist for less experienced or confident teachers.

What is common to all participants is a belief that in order to work effectively and do their best for their students, they need professional and pedagogic autonomy, supported by leaders who understand the embodied, creative and subjective nature of arts learning.

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