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The Professionalism, Accountability, and Work of Teachers in Different Regulatory Regimes

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, much has been written about how New Public Management (NPM) reforms have transformed welfare sector professions, and in particular, the teaching profession (Parding et al., [2012](#)). NPM reforms in the public sector have transformed the roles, practices and identities of teachers, and have generated a new understanding about what it means to be a teacher (Apple, [2001](#)). This includes substantial organisational and managerial changes being made to teachers' work, but also the transformation of societal expectations, norms, and professional

values associated with the teaching profession (Ball, 2016). Thus, NPM reforms are shaping the teaching profession from the inside as well as from the outside (Evetts, 2009).

Shaping the teaching profession from the outside implies the use of specific policy instruments, such as the devolution of responsibilities to schools, the definition of core learning standards, outcomes-based management, and new forms of accountability, usually linked to students' performance in national large-scale assessments (NLSAs). NLSAs have become a pivotal data-intensive policy tool that enables multiple and complementary education policies to be articulated. Namely, the definition of learning standards, the articulation of school autonomy, and the activation of accountability mechanisms (Verger et al., 2019b). Together, these policies crystallise in performance-based accountability (PBA) systems that alter fundamental aspects of the teaching profession and teachers' work all around the world.

PBA tends to focus on core learning areas (such as numeracy and literacy), implementing a standardisation that enables schools and teachers to be directly compared and monitored, and thus becoming a tool for external control and regulation. Despite PBA instruments having been adopted in most educational systems, this does not mean that they have been used in the same way everywhere. On the contrary, the intensity of the accountability (high stakes or low stakes), the direction of the accountability relationship (vertical or horizontal), and the nature of the consequences (e.g. reputational or material incentives and sanctions) attached to test results vary between countries (Verger & Parcerisa, 2017; Högberg & Lindgren, 2021). These different policy options can strongly condition the enactment and effects of PBA policies on teachers' work.

The education literature usually distinguishes between high-stakes and low-stakes accountability systems (see Hamilton et al., 2002). In

high-stakes systems, students' test results are often tied to rewards and sanctions for the school, but also for individual teachers (e.g. teacher promotion or performance-based pay) (Verger et al., 2019b), whereas in low-stakes systems, there are no official or formal administrative consequences; instead, evaluation results merely offer descriptive information (Thiel et al., 2017). Nonetheless, low-stakes accountability may still result in significant reputational impacts for both schools and teachers (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016).

PBA instruments are being adopted in countries that regulate the teaching profession in different ways, and that have accountability arrangements in place of different natures (bureaucratic, market, professional, and so on). Previous accountability arrangements do not always fit well with the emerging PBA approach, and they sometimes interact with PBA in ways that generate new forms of hybrid accountabilities with unexpected outcomes for the teaching profession. With this in mind, the chapter is guided by the following questions: how do different regulatory models for the teaching profession mediate the enactment of PBA policies? And how do these regulatory models generate, exacerbate, or constrain inequalities and differences between professionals (teachers) in different settings?

Methodologically, the research is based on a systematic literature review (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) that focuses on recent literature (2017–2020) about PBA and teacher professionalism. To carry out this review, we used two scientific databases: SCOPUS and the Web of Science (WoS). The search strategy followed an iterative process that helped develop the search syntax. In total, 566 articles were obtained. After reading the title and the abstract of each article, we selected papers according to their thematic fit with the objectives of the research. After applying the first screening, 197 articles were selected. In a second stage, two researchers reviewed the articles separately and identified those that had empirical evidence about the subject studied. A total of 101 pieces that focussed on PBA and teacher professionalism were included in the final sample. Data were collected using a review form for each of the papers that included the following main sections: theoretical framework, methods, main characteristics of the policy, and findings (mediating factors and effects on teachers' identities, work, and professionalism).

Subsequently, we organised and analysed the findings of the papers based on how the countries fit into different regulatory models for teachers.

2 Teacher Professionalism: Trends and Regulatory Regimes

2.1 Managerial Reforms and New Forms of Teacher Professionalism

The concept of teachers' professionalism should be understood not as something static or universal, but as an ideological construct that can be adapted according to particular interests (see Ozga & Lawn, 1981). The "classical" discourse of professionalism emphasises the attributes and components of specific occupations which share a specialised knowledge base, strong service ethics, and altruistic orientations, as well as a strong collegial control of professional work (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996).

However, external performance pressures that have come with NPM reforms have reshaped what it means to be a teaching professional, and have contributed to the emergence of new forms of "managerial professionalism". According to Evetts (2009), NPM reforms have promoted a shift from occupational towards organisational professionalism. While occupational professionalism is based on collegial authority and professional autonomy, organisational professionalism emphasises managerial control, external regulation of work, accountability, standardisation, and rational-legal forms of authority (Evetts, 2009). This emergent professionalism is shaped by agendas of efficiency, accountability, performativity, and competition. To strive in this environment, teachers are increasingly required to become more like "technicians" than autonomous "professionals", which is an occurrence that challenges their professional identities (Day, 2002).

While these general analyses provide a useful way of understanding the broad changes that are taking place within the teaching profession, we do not assume that these transformations have the same weight everywhere. We are interested in better understanding what teachers in different

policy contexts do, and how they feel about their work in an era in which PBA has become ever more central in the governance of educational systems. That is, we aim to analyse the “differentiation between” professionals who belong to the same professional group but to different professional systems (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018, p. 8).

According to Evans (2008), professionalism and teacher professionalism could be operationalised according to three distinct dimensions. Namely: a behavioural component, which relates to “what professionals do in their working lives”, an attitudinal dimension which refers to “how and why they do it”, and the cognitive or intellectual sphere, involving everything concerning “what they know and understand” about their professional practice (Evans, 2008, p. 855). Beyond these separate analytical dimensions, we should also consider divergent expressions of teachers’ professionalism, distinguishing between the professionalism required of them that is born of particular reform agendas, prescribed professionalism related to normative assumptions, and enacted professionalism that is based on actual teaching practices (Evans, 2008). In this chapter, we adapt Evans’ operationalisation and use enactment theory (Ball et al., 2011) to understand how teachers’ professionalism crystallises into different administrative traditions and professional regulatory systems. Combining Evans’ dimensions and the enactment approach, we define teachers’ professionalism as the interpretation of the prescriptions concerning what a teacher should know, be, and do, and how this all translates into their actual professional practices.

2.2 Regulatory Models of the Teaching Profession

This chapter is based on the premise that the design, calibration, and enactment of accountability instruments, as well as the effects of these instruments on teachers’ professionalism, are contingent to the regulatory regimes for teachers that prevail in each context. Based on Voisin and Dumay’s (2020) work, we distinguish between models based on the market (1), training (2), rules (3), and professional skills (4).

1. To a significant extent, the PBA approach fits quite clearly within a *market regulatory model*, where performance-oriented forms of accountability emerged in the 1980s to favour school competition and school choice. The market model includes early-adopter countries of NPM (such as the United Kingdom, Chile, and the US) that conceive high-stakes accountability as a means of promoting competition and pressure to perform among schools. The market model is oriented by the principles of labour flexibility and mobility. This model favours different pathways for entering the profession, but also contemplates differences in salaries and workloads according to productivity and other criteria (Voisin & Dumay, 2020). The regulation of teachers' work and its quality relies on centrally defined standards, and individual teachers' autonomy tends to be much more restricted than in other regulatory contexts.
2. Beyond the market model, PBA instruments were subsequently taken up in other countries, generally following a quality assurance rationale where other regulatory models predominate, such as the so-called *training model*. According to Voisin and Dumay (2020), the training model, "puts occupational control, expertise, and professional autonomy at its center" (p. 2). This model predominates in the Nordic countries in Europe and is characterised by having a very demanding and selective training system that provides future professionals with the necessary skills to perform complex tasks that require the exercise of discretion. In these contexts, teachers have a high level of professional autonomy, and educational authorities and users tend to trust their professional expertise. This high level of autonomy and professional space is rooted in a long-standing governance tradition and has been intentionally favoured by public authorities. PBA policies would apparently contradict this emphasis on professional autonomy and the long-established policy of professional accountability.
3. The *rules model* includes countries that have a bureaucratic tradition of teachers' governance and softer and input-oriented forms of accountability. The rules model is predominant in southern European countries, including Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy, where the implementation of accountability policy instruments in the education sector has often been framed under the rhetoric of quality assurance

and modernisation. However, its implementation has been uneven, has often been resisted by school actors and teachers' unions, and has experienced administrative and political obstacles (Verger et al., 2019a). Indeed, the PBA approach clashes with the bureaucratic accountability tradition, where there is more focus on compliance with rules than on assessing performance outcomes.

4. Finally, the *professional skills model* is a regulative approach to the teaching profession, and is typical in East Asia, including countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. According to Voisin and Dumay (2020), this model is formally characterised by a combination of bureaucratic rules, professional standards, and practical expertise. Under this model, various forms of accountability are combined, including managerial, hierarchical, and professional accountability. The professional skills model may appear quite similar to the training model, although some important particularities need to be highlighted, for instance “its emphasis on practical knowledge and on-the-job training” (p. 8). Moreover, while the training model is characterised by a “low regulation of the [teaching] labour market”, aligned with a tradition of professional autonomy and trust, the professional skills model implies “both a strong bureaucratic regulation of the teaching workforce and professional (accountability and careers) schemes emphasising continuous development linked to career ladders” (p. 9). In the next section, we organise the findings of the chapter following the four regulatory models mentioned.

3 Findings: PBA in Different Professional Contexts

3.1 Market Model: Constrained Professional Autonomy and Tensions in Contexts of Accountability Pressures

Within the market model, PBA policies have acquired an incremental dynamic. The uses and consequences of the policies have expanded over time, as well as the metrics and school grades directly impacted by

accountability. In many of the countries that are part of the market regulatory model (e.g. England, USA, Australia, and Chile), PBA instruments are increasingly used to evaluate and assess teachers' work and to decide on whether they are promoted.

In the context of the market-based regulatory model, accountability pressures have strongly shaped instructional practices and curricular decisions (Avalos et al., 2020), and are seen as undermining both teachers' creativity (Appel, 2020) and their agency in educational planning (Farvis & Hay, 2020). Ingersoll and Collins (2017), using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) established by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), show that teachers in the US have less influence over key decisions than the OECD average. Other studies indicate a deterioration of this situation over time. Berkovich (2019) conducted a longitudinal study with PISA data, concluding that, over the years, teachers are experiencing less control over the content of curricula. A recent study conducted in the US Midwest confirms these trends, finding that PBA instruments decreased teachers' professional satisfaction and diminished their sense of control over classroom activities (Kaynak, 2020).

Performance pressures also impact the attention that teachers give to specific groups of students. Diagnostic practices are widely reported in high-stakes accountability systems. Teachers use test data to identify students that underperform, and provide them with additional assistance in an effort to boost their performance (Hardy, 2019; Hardy et al., 2019). Testing thus becomes a core instrument to categorise students and develop ability-grouping practices.

Nonetheless, teachers tend to be aware of the tensions that PBA generates in their everyday work and approach to teaching. Numerous studies report that teachers feel that the way in which the curriculum is covered for the purpose of test preparation conflicts with deep learning and richer ways of working with the subject matter (Thompson & Cook, 2017; Bradford & Braaten, 2018; Simpson, 2017). Not surprisingly, different forms of resistance to PBA are frequently documented. Warren and Ward (2021) see teachers' activism as an act of re-professionalisation and an attempt to open the possibility of balancing teacher autonomy with external demands made by the accountability system (Ben-Peretz, 2012;

cited in Warren & Ward, 2021, p. 12). Falabella (2020), in the Chilean context, identifies a group of teachers “who refuse to be assessed depending on their students’ results in trial tests” (p. 16).

However, PBA has also generated logics of consent. Decades of datafication and accountability in education have favoured the emergence of new “teacher subjectivities thoroughly responsive and reactive to data” (Lewis & Hardy, 2017, p. 231). Similarly, Holloway (2019) points out that, over time, there is less space for dissension due to “the increasing alignment between teacher training, evaluation, professional development, and discipline” (p. 1986). In this sense, Paufler et al. (2020) observe that a majority of the teachers they approached reported that standardised testing had a positive impact on their practices, and that it encouraged them to be more reflective and innovative. Holloway (2019) considers that, over time, the possibility of resistance to PBA is diminishing.

The effects of PBA described are especially well documented in relation to socially disadvantaged school settings. Teachers in schools with privileged student populations do not need to adapt their educational and organisational practices to PBA demands so strictly (Fujishiro et al., 2017). Wronowski (2020) shows that teachers in urban public schools in the US with higher percentages of disadvantaged students “are more likely to perceive a sense of de-professionalization and demoralization”, which is something he attributes to the “increased accountability pressure” these schools experience (p. 20; see also Keddie, 2018).

3.2 Training Model: Enacting Agentic Professional Autonomy and Accommodating PBA Demands

The training model is dominant in most Nordic European countries; here, standardised testing has been adopted in recent years for quality assurance and teacher-training purposes and to facilitate data use among schools and teachers (Kelly et al., 2018). In the Nordic countries, PBA is characterised as having soft consequences for both teachers and schools, and it usually adopts a quality assurance logic (Verger et al., 2019a). In these countries, both public authorities and society put considerable trust in teachers, who generally enjoy higher levels of collective and individual

professional autonomy, and experience fewer constraints in their professional practice (Voisin & Dumay, 2020).

However, despite the initial predominance of soft accountability designs in these countries, in recent years, the reputational stakes associated with PBA have been raised due to the adoption of new policy tools, such as the publication of performance results and league tables. An emerging body of literature has analysed the effects of PBA on teachers' sense of professionalism, as well as on their professional practice. In contrast to the market model, teachers who work in Nordic countries seem to have higher levels of professional autonomy to accommodate external demands from the PBA system within their own ethical and pedagogical beliefs, both at the individual and collegial levels. The literature reviewed finds a predominance of mixed perceptions about PBA and performance metrics in these countries. Recent investigations show that teachers tend to experience higher levels of professional autonomy in such contexts, which allow them to appropriate and re-contextualise external metrics in meaningful ways, using them to serve their students' interests (Camphuijsen, 2021; Da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Gunnulfsen & Roe, 2018; Kelly et al., 2018; Mausethagen et al., 2020; Werler & Færevaag, 2017).

Existing research in Nordic countries shows that teachers can adopt various responses to cope with external controls and performance pressures derived from PBA (Gunnulfsen & Roe, 2018; Kelly et al., 2018). It is in Norway that PBA reforms have perhaps generated the most controversy and tension. Norwegian teachers tend to show mixed feelings and perceptions about their professional autonomy: they perceive high levels of decision-making power regarding "their classroom practices", but at the same time, they experience constraints in their pedagogical autonomy (Da Silva & Mølstad, p. 125). Another study finds that teachers perceive PBA instruments as constraining their professional autonomy, forcing them to spend time on test preparation activities and reducing the time they have available to support vulnerable students (Werler & Færevaag, 2017). Sometimes, teachers perceive the use of external data to orient teachers' practices as de-professionalising. In this sense, Da Silva and Mølstad (2020) note that to overcome these external constraints, Norwegian teachers deploy covert forms of resistance towards external

metrics, continuing to rely on their own professional judgment to plan their teaching activities.

The strong welfare state tradition is one of the keys to understanding the re-contextualisation of PBA policies in Nordic countries. This tradition predisposes governments to put more emphasis on equity than on market competition and, crucially, attenuates the social and professional side-effects of PBA. In this regard, Kelly et al. (2018) find that in Nordic countries such as Denmark, the publication of results obtained by schools has a less severe pedagogical and curricular effect than in England. Nevertheless, this same research also identified that PBA increased reputational pressure among Danish school principals and triggered effects that governed teachers' work.

3.3 Rules Model: Erratic Policy Trajectory, Uneven Professional Impacts

In southern European countries, where the rules model predominates, the transformation of teacher professionalism through new metrics of performance and accountability appears to be contentious. Some studies found that in these contexts, the accountability system is more contested and hence has a weaker capacity for changing the nature of the teaching profession. Other researchers highlight how, despite significant obstacles, PBA is already part of the policy discourse and practices in the education sector, and therefore the teaching profession is experimenting with other regulatory models.

In France, the literature suggests that accountability policy instruments have had only a modest impact on the teaching profession due to the weak legitimacy of the performance-based accountability approach (Maroy et al., 2021). In fact, some researchers suggest that changes in accountability have only been implemented rhetorically, with most teachers resisting the use of external accountability tools in their daily professional practice (Maroy & Pons, 2019). The impact of accountability policies in France appears to be mediated by local and contextual factors and to have limited effects on teachers' everyday lives, although they seem more salient for principals and school leaders (Buisson-Fenet & Pons, 2019; Maroy et al., 2021).

Following a similar dynamic, the so-called “Good School” reform in Italy introduced new accountability policy instruments and a more managerial logic into the education system (Capano & Terenzi, 2019). This new education evaluation agency and its assessment tools encountered strong opposition and resistance from teachers and their unions (Mincu, 2018). Beyond the reactions of open rejection and political contestation, schools and teachers adhered to the new accountability system unevenly and with diverging responses, according to different “professional cultures” (Landri, 2021). Other authors highlight the key role of principals and school leaders in limiting the potential bureaucracy associated with accountability systems, instead providing the opportunity for “enhancing the school organisation as a professional learning community” (Paletta, 2019, p. 392) as well as promoting “meaningful change in professional practices and teaching in schools” (Paletta et al., 2020, p. 157). In addition, Bronzini and Spina (2018) notes that in the Italian case, “neither of the proposed models of professionalism seems dominant and the current phase appears to be blurred” (p. 96).

In Portugal, a new teacher evaluation model was implemented in 2008, following important public controversies and policy changes. According to Flores (2018), the model that was generated increased bureaucracy and workloads, and the principals interpreted that this system generated “increased individualism amongst teachers, decrease in teacher motivation, and the deterioration of the school climate and of professional relationships in general” (Flores, 2018, p. 240). With similar results, Flores and Ferreira (2019) outline that, as a result of these reforms, “principals and teachers deal simultaneously with bureaucratic intensification and control of their work and increasing demands of accountability and performativity” (p. 146).

In Spain, new accountability mechanisms that could potentially affect the regulation of the teaching profession have been adopted in different regions. In Catalonia, “teaching has been slightly but continuously changing in the last decade in the context of educational reforms focusing on accountability and school autonomy measures”, shifting teachers’ professionalism from an occupational to an organisational model, at least at the regulatory level (Verger & Pagès, 2018, p. 132). In Andalusia, some researchers suggest that recent endo-privatisation reforms,

including external accountability mechanisms, are generating an emerging “performative experience based on quantification, classification and datafication”, (Molina-Pérez & Lunego, 2020, p. 66). Accordingly, these policy changes are transforming teaching work into an increasingly technical profession, generating “discomfort and weariness” among teachers (p. 71). In a survey conducted in different Spanish regions, 78 per cent of teachers in the Madrid area suggested that external tests have some negative effects for teachers, students or the school in general. However, their direct impact on teaching work appears to be more modest. Madrid is the region that has suffered the greatest impact in this regard, with 22 per cent of the respondents there stating that the external tests altered their teaching work, and 19 per cent stating that the tests affect the classroom environment (Monarca & Fernández-Agüero, 2018, pp. 262–263).

Overall, the impacts of PBA in the teaching profession within the bureaucratic model appear to be uneven. Similar impacts to other models are reported in some research, while other studies suggest that the administrative bureaucratic legacy strongly mediates and mitigates the impact of PBA on the teaching profession.

3.4 Professional Skills Model: Enhancing Performance Through a Culture of Testing?

Over the last decades, accountability mechanisms have gained importance in the professional skills model. This has implied an increasing use of standardised and external tests to make teaching professionals more accountable to various actors. However, the use of metrics and other data-driven devices to regulate the teaching profession is not—solely—the result of the neoliberal reform approach. Instead, it should be understood as a particular configuration of a global education policy that is re-contextualised within a Confucian culture. Tan (2018) has labelled this particular policy translation as the “East Asian Educational Model (EAEM), [...] grounded in and governed by Confucian habitus, and [relying] on educational harmonisation to achieve high performance” (Tan, 2018, n.p.).

Performance-based policy instruments have generated notable impacts on the teaching profession in this context, eroding teachers' autonomy and control over their work, and promoting instructional practices driven by testing cultures based on datafication and performance. In Hong Kong, for instance, accountability pressures have resulted in a transformation of teaching tasks and priorities, giving more importance to administrative-oriented objectives, generating lack of control for teachers over their work, increasing workloads, and limiting instructional time (Tsang & Kwong, 2017, p. 851). Similar impacts are reported by other authors in the same context, suggesting that the accountability regime has resulted in increased workloads and stress, but also in the reconfiguration of the teaching profession, as accountability policy instruments tend to "define and redefine the ways teachers define themselves and what they expect about their own and others' work" (Lee et al., 2020, p. 646). In Singapore, Ro (2020) has analysed the policy discourse of teacher professionalism, characterised by a combination of managerial and professional approaches that neglect a transformative view of teacher professionalism. This form of policy discourse limits the work of teachers to merely implementing a prescribed curriculum. Similar results are found in South Korea, where in a policy context of high-stakes testing and test-based accountability, a model of managerial professionalism has been consolidated, "emphasizing bureaucratic control over teachers' work to maximise their efficiency and performance" by means of focusing on teaching to the test and other instructional activities that do not require "in-depth knowledge or creative teaching strategies" (Ro, 2019, p. 144).

4 Conclusions

Our investigation shows that the effects of PBA on teachers' professionalism and teaching practices are not linear, but are contingent on teachers' regulatory regimes. Administrative traditions associated with specific models of regulating the teaching profession strategically mediate the re-contextualisation and formulation of PBA policy, and facilitate the emergence of differentiation processes between different professional systems. More specifically, the chapter notes the key role of the regulatory models

that teachers work under in order to understand PBA effects on the teaching profession and its reconfiguration. The analytic lens of teachers' regulatory regimes allows us to gain a better understanding of the changes experienced by teachers and the teaching profession in different settings. The very nature of teachers' work is being challenged by new modes of "organisational professionalism", which enhance external forms of work control through standardisation and accountability mechanisms. However, teachers' regulatory contexts modulate the depth, trajectory, and impact of these transformations. In countries where the market model is prevalent, the professionalism of teachers is experiencing a more drastic shift towards organisational professional models. Meanwhile, the training model that predominates in Nordic countries seems to mitigate such transformations—thus preserving important professional space and institutional autonomy for teachers. For their part, countries where teachers' professionalism is configured under the rules model report uneven impacts, given the erratic policy trajectory of accountability reforms in these countries. And lastly, countries that follow the professional skills model appear to be experiencing important changes for teachers' professionalism due to a combination of accountability policy models and cultural educational values that place great importance on academic excellence and performance in exams.

The effects of PBA on teachers' professionalism can be identified at different levels: the knowledge base of teachers' work (e.g. the definition of the curriculum, learning standards, and evaluation), professional commitment (beliefs and practices regarding how students' needs should be addressed), autonomy (effects on the power of decision-making and discretion), and individual and collective identities. The effects on each of these dimensions are frequently reported in the context of the high-stakes accountability systems that prevail within the market model. An abundant educational literature published in countries such as Chile, the US, England, and Australia reports that PBA has effects on teachers' practices, such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and grouping by ability. Nonetheless, this literature does not always make explicit the connection between the effects of accountability and changes in the teaching profession. Interestingly, our review shows that undesired effects and pressures on teachers' work similar to those reported within the market

model are increasingly being identified in countries with soft and low-stakes accountability policies.

Finally, we consider it important to underline the limitations of this study and suggest some further lines of research to address them. First, due to an explosion in the publication of academic literature on this topic in recent years, we were forced to limit the temporal scope of the systematic literature review. Unfortunately, this has meant that we had to exclude relevant pieces of research published earlier. Second, despite the numerous advantages of this methodological approach, it tends to reproduce the over-representation of some countries (mainly English-speaking countries) in the academic literature, to the detriment of literature focusing on countries in the Global South. Despite these limitations, the chapter also opens up new avenues of research on the relationship between teachers' professionalism and educational reform, and encourages the production of literature in under-researched contexts.

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