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Does autonomy exist? Comparing the autonomy of teachers and senior leaders in England and Turkey

Abstract

Countries regarded as holding high levels of educational autonomy face a different set of constraints to that of countries with low levels of autonomy, these constraints being linked to the marketisation of schools. As schools become decentralised and given greater autonomy, school leaders are steered by a responsabilising framework that includes bureaucratic regulation, the discourses and practices of competitive enterprise, and external public accountability measures (Gobby, Keddie, & Blackmore, 2018; Wermke & Forsberg, 2017). This paper contrasts data gathered from school teachers and senior leaders from one high autonomy, high accountability context, England, with one low autonomy, low accountability context, Turkey. Through a process of semi-structured interviews with teachers and senior leaders, we investigated approaches to managing change. Responses revealed differences between countries with very different systems of accountability and the degree of autonomy available to staff. We also found that there were significant similarities in terms of the attitudes and pressures experienced by teachers and senior leaders that raise questions for our understandings and application of notions of teacher autonomy and accountability.

Introduction

In order to be accepted as autonomous, teachers need to be “allowed to work with their students, free from the pressures of strict standards, external national tests, public league tables, or inspection systems” (Ropo & Välijärvi, 2010, p. 214). Teacher autonomy can be characterised as “the perception that teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and their work environment” (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p.42). Autonomy can be cast as important because teaching goes beyond technical expertise and includes professional wisdom centred around how students learn and what might be the best ways to facilitate such learning (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007). This includes dimensions such as work in the classroom, curriculum implementation, participation in decision-making at school level and professional development (Evers, Verboon, & Klæijesen, 2017), where teachers can act upon their own theories of practice (Genc, 2010). For Salokangas & Wermke (2020), teachers’ perceived autonomy is positively correlated with their self-efficacy, work satisfaction, empowerment and positive work climate, creating conditions for creativity and experimentation. The PISA 2015 results indicated that school leaders in Macao-China, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and in the United Kingdom, reported the highest level of autonomy in their schools. In contrast, autonomy was considered to be limited in Greece, Jordan, Tunisia and Turkey (OECD, 2016). This would seem to indicate that high government regulation can be associated with low school autonomy (Agasisti, Catalano, & Sibiano, 2013; Greany & Waterhouse, 2016).

In an effort to secure the delivery of high-quality education in schools, many countries have implemented systems of educational regulation (Eurydice, 2004). Whether such control mechanisms are efficient, effective, or even practicable, has been the subject of debate over the past two decades (De Wolf & Janssens, 2007). Indeed, professional accountability in education is arguably in crisis, overwritten by managerial hierarchy and the market.

Teachers are central actors in an increasingly complex web of accountability relationships based on external controls and professional autonomy...(Mattei, 2012, p. 249)

De Wolf & Janssens (2007) point out the many disadvantages in using accountability mechanisms, such as, misrepresentation, proceduralisation, teaching to the test, performing for inspection, myopia, ossification and stress. Therefore, the process of holding schools and their teachers to account can impose high costs without securing substantial benefits (O'Neill, 2013).

We do not subscribe to simplistic notions where autonomy is good and control is bad. Indeed, it is a notion plagued with confusion and complexity. For example, some constraints may be argued to be necessary to protect students, to ensure equal access for those who subscribe to notions of social justice, for those who believe in consistent provision across schools, and to provide a framework for decision-making (Cribb & Gewirtz). This paper, contributes to the debate about how and to what extent teachers should be held accountable for their work (Ingersoll, 2003). We focus on issues of teacher autonomy and accountability in two different contexts. Through exploring teacher attitudes towards meeting policy changes in both England and Turkey, we argue that there are differences and also similarities between the two apparently different contexts, which raise questions about the extent to which teachers in England are indeed autonomous and also question the apparent lack of autonomy that teachers in Turkey can exercise. We begin the paper with a discussion of educational autonomy and accountability and consider the extent to which a responsabilising educational framework undermines levels of autonomy. We moreover explore the educational context of England and Turkey. Next, we discuss the considerations underpinning our data collection and detail our approach and the ethical challenges involved. We then outline some of the paradoxes and debates raised, through the use of quotations from teachers and senior leaders in both settings. Finally, we present the similarities and differences between both settings raising challenges related to our understandings of teacher autonomy and thinking around, what are appropriate levels of accountability.

Autonomy and its relationship to Accountability

Cribb & Gewirtz (2007) argued that autonomy can be distinguished in three ways. First, around loci and modes of autonomy which considers who are the agents, whether they are individual or collective agents and how they exercise agency. Second, are the domains of autonomy-control where the agents' spheres of control are identified and delineated. Third, are the loci and modes of control where agents are both subject to and can exercise control (whether consciously or unconsciously). Cribb & Gewirtz argue that these already complex elements, work together in different ways to form a more complex picture of autonomy and agency. Frostenson (2015) outlines three aspects of educator autonomy which include professional autonomy (teachers as a professional/institutional group), staff autonomy (the practice of autonomy by staff as a school unit) and individual autonomy (that held by the individual teacher), thus falling into Cribb & Gewirtz's first category. Each of these aspects of autonomy may be affected differently by different policy initiatives, Cribb and Gewirtz's third category. The accountability of schools as institutions is restricted when other external professionals decide on what is appropriate knowledge and how such knowledge will be evaluated (Wermke & Forsberg 2017; Ingersoll, 2003). Individuals have autonomy only in relation to deciding how best to meet imposed targets. In other words, their sphere of control is delineated, as in Cribb and Gewirtz's second category. So, whilst agency may seem to sit with the teacher, this is

impacted upon by multiple others including headteachers and government regulation (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020).

Teachers are compelled to mediate or manoeuvre around these constraints (Benson, 2000; Lamb, 2000). This contrasts with systems where teachers as a profession define the standards to be met and teachers are constrained and regulated through collegial relations and decisions amongst their fellow professionals (Wermke & Forsberg, 2017). It is not unreasonable to ask teachers to be professionally accountable for their work and they should be expected to keep pace with policy change and innovation (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014). However, this notion of autonomy does little more than support teachers implementing pre-received curricula and is closely aligned with a neo-liberal conception of autonomy (Salokangas & Ainscow, 2018). Here, whilst autonomy is claimed to provide freedom from demands or pressures from other teachers or administrators (Brunetti, 2001), teachers must adhere to federal, state and district procedures and accountability measures (Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Wermke & Höstfält, 2014). Indeed,

...policies that encourage teacher autonomy do not tend to favour absence of control. The control is merely transformed from that of being exercised through external authorities, to that operated by the school, teaching profession and/or each individual teacher. In the worst case, autonomy remains just a rhetorical device whereas teachers are forced to take up new responsibilities which are controlled by increased accountability mechanisms. (Erss, 2018, p. 242).

Power is thus distributed towards markets at the expense of individual teacher autonomy thereby eroding trust and degrading the autonomy of teaching as a profession (Lundström, 2015; MacBeath, 2012; Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter, 2010). Thus,

school leaders with increased autonomy find themselves differently positioned and their responses to competitive and performative demands and expectations range from acquiescence and strategic compliance to outright resistance (Gobby et al., 2018, p.160).

Whilst we would not wish to argue that control and autonomy are always in a direct adversarial relationship, what Crocco & Costigan (2006) call ‘high stakes teaching’ has led to “a performance/audit culture in which test results, grades and school rankings tend to define quality and steer the focus of teaching” (Lundström, 2015, p. 79). In addition, who holds autonomy in schools, be they principals, teachers or indeed students, is further complicated in different schooling arrangements and in relation to different national policies. Consequently, international comparisons of schools should take account of national and local contexts (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015).

High Autonomy, High Accountability in context: the case of England

Education in England has been based on a liberal tradition associated with local control where educational power resided both in central government and in the school itself (Osborn et al., 2003). However, since the Educational Reform Act of 1988, the role of local government was steadily eroded and English schools became more directly controlled by the central government, resulting in increased central regulation over curricula and assessment, whilst at the same time giving greater autonomy to schools in terms of budgetary decision-making. This, for Osborn et al., (2003) not only overturned a tradition of professional autonomy over content

and pedagogy, but it also established a quasi-market, redefining education as a consumer service. Indeed, Ozga, Grek & Lawn (2009: p.354) stated that,

England has a governing system that has been discursively constructed around adherence to neo-liberal principles of competition, de- and re-regulation and private sector involvement to build competitive advantage in the knowledge economy.

This resulted in a move away from previous governing practices (centralised and vertical hierarchical forms of regulation) to a more complex and combined form of governing (decentralised, horizontal, networked, and collaborative). Such governance promoted control through performance management around the principles of decentralisation, devolution and deregulation and through transparency and accountability in public services (Ozga, Grek & Lawn, 2009). Increased competition, autonomy and choice also narrowed learning, demoralising teachers, increased student drop-out and loosened integrity among school staff (McNeil et al., 2008; Sahlberg, 2010). In England, schools are judged and graded on key areas related to student outcomes (e.g. attainment, progress and behaviour), effectiveness of provision (e.g. the quality of teaching), and leadership and management of schools (Jones & Tymms, 2014). If a school does not meet the 'floor standards', measures are taken, ranging from intensive supervision trajectories to the closing of schools (DfE, 2013). As Grieg and Holloway (2016, p. 408) noted, levels of "institutional and state surveillance" continue to intensify alongside the growing development of self-regulation.

Higham and Earley (2013, p. 704) stated,

School leaders may talk the language of vision but the space in which they can lead may be narrow and in many cases be, as Hartley (2007) argues, tactical interpretation rather than actual strategizing.

Policy encourages those working in schools towards compliance and managerialism in the chase to survive. Carusi, Rawlins & Ashton (2018) agree that teachers are often subject to, rather than engaged with, the formation of policy. Teachers are "continuously balancing among multiple and conflicting goals and ideals, some self-imposed and some imposed from outside" (Kennedy, 2016, p. 946-947). Thus, school teachers and leaders self-regulate to meet performance indicators, or targets for success, representing a reduction of the human to the measurable (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 2017).

The landscape for schools in England is additionally confused as multiple models of schooling exist. Ball and Youdell (2007) have characterised such market shifts in education as 'endogenous privatisation', where business practices and approaches are adopted in the public sector to make it more profitable. They add to this the notion of 'exogenous privatisation', a more recent form, where public education is opened up to allow for profit making private providers to bid for work traditionally undertaken within public education. Thus, many schools are no longer entirely in the hands of the state (including academies, multi-academy trusts and free schools). Teacher autonomy in England may be something advanced in political rhetoric, but the reality appears to be far more constrained and complex.

Low Autonomy, Low Accountability in context: the case of Turkey

Turkey's education system is a highly centralised bureaucratic governance structure and is among the most centralised of middle-income countries. Education policy is steered by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) where almost all public expenditure is centrally sourced and educational decisions made at the central level. This system has limited the capacity of schools to address their immediate challenges (OECD, 2013a; 2013b). Turkey is one of the countries where teachers have the least voice in deciding content of the course, and the autonomy of teachers has further decreased from 2006 to 2015 (UNESCO, 2017). Public schools do not have autonomy over resources, textbook selection, allocation of instruction time, staff deployment and selection of offered programs (Alacacı & Erbaş, 2010; Öztürk, 2011).

In Turkey low teacher autonomy has led to a policy context where there is no accountability mechanism independent of government and the lack of substantial oversight of educational work, reduces the transparency, integrity and accountability of Turkish public administration (Genckaya, et al., 2019). Moreover, governance principles are not supported by performance-indicators. Checks and controls are orientated to paper records alone (ERG, 2017). Therefore, gaps exist between the claims made in the paperwork and the reality of everyday practice. Arguments are made that public institutions are not adequately transparent in making audit reports and statistical information publicly available (Bulbul, 2011; Bulbul & Ottekin Demirbolat, 2014). Schools receive both public funding and private contributions but have little autonomy over school financial management (OECD, 2013a). School principals make decisions and perform tasks primarily related to budget allocation, together with the school family association and within the framework of related laws and bureaucratic regulations. One study revealed that school principals and teachers did not feel accountable for the learning environment, whilst at the same time, feeling a high degree of accountability in relation to paperwork (Erdag, 2013). Furthermore, teachers believed that their national curriculum, strict legal regulations and intensive course content were barriers to teacher autonomy (Uğurlu & Qahramanova, 2016). Genc (2010) argued, that where teachers were supported to develop their reflective skills, they became more autonomous, reflective and moved beyond conventional limitations of learning and teaching approaches.

Whilst the Ministry of National Education aimed at improving education quality through improving the quality of teacher training, identifying schools as learning organisations, creating more democratic school cultures and modernising all levels of education (Yilmaz & Kilicoglu, 2014), schools in Turkey need greater autonomy and accountability to achieve these aims. School principals have argued for a need to define the rules, responsibilities and standards clearly to ensure accountability (Himmetoğlu, Ayduğ, & Bayrak, 2017). Principals also believed in the necessity of a performance evaluation system and in the establishment of impartial supervisory boards which involve experts.

Research Approach

Making an international comparison between schools in England and Turkey in ways that facilitate deeper thinking around both systems allows us to begin to unravel aspects of dominant agendas around teacher autonomy and its links with accountability that are as yet, under-reported in academic literature. As Cribb & Gewirtz (2007) posited, there is a need for thoughtful data and analysis in order to facilitate arguments around the consequences of regulation. In Turkey, educational policy direction is based on a belief that greater accountability and teachers taking more responsibility, will necessarily lead to an improvement in Turkish educational performance and standing. Given experiences in England where such

agendas have long been a part of the educational landscape, we could perceive potential issues arising that would benefit from exploration. This paper is thus orientated around research designed to consider the extent to which teachers at all levels perceived that they could operate with autonomy, together with examining the ways in which these teachers perceived power relations working across the various educational hierarchies within the two countries. A beneficial way to investigate these issues was through asking teachers, through semi-structured interviews across school hierarchies, to reflect on their perceptions of and contribution to, processes of meaningful change (both internally and externally driven). Work on these issues began in England and was mirrored, six months later, in Turkey.

Engaging with change revealed teacher levels of responsibility, how empowered our respondents felt and to what degree they played a strategic role. Whilst we recognised that roles across countries are not directly comparable, we focused on those with administrative and strategic responsibility, in England, headteachers and their deputies (deputies also holding classroom responsibility) and in Turkey principals; and on those with classroom and curriculum delivery responsibility, teachers in both countries (see table 1 research participants). Interviews were translated from English to Turkish where we arrived at a consensus on a final format that captured the meanings of the original language version, understanding that meanings and intentions needed to be captured accurately (Choi et al., 2012; Suh, Kagan & Strumpf, 2009).. Another issue of high importance was that of the ethical considerations involved. This seemed particularly pertinent where we wanted to engage critically with data where central control of education is strong. We needed to be sure that no participants were being placed at risk as a result of our work. Data were gathered in both countries in the academic year 2016-17.

Table 1 to be placed here

Semi-structured interviews “directly solicit the perspectives of the people we wish to study” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 75) and allowed for the description, explanation, understanding, interpretation and rich critique to be garnered as part of the data gathering process (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were voice recorded and lasted between 29 and 54 minutes. In conducting the analysis we worked both separately and then together to draw out thematic categories from these data focussing on those of responsibility, resistance and power for this paper. Texts were read and re-read to facilitate participants voices whilst targeting “specific problems in specific substantive areas” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 250). We debated the emerging themes and understandings critically, comparing our interpretations of the data gathered by the other. We selected quotations on the basis of those that represented the majority of views expressed and those that offered an alternative perspective.

In England ethical consent was given by the university, the school trust and school alliance. In Turkey ethical consent was provided by the University and legal permissions were given by the Provincial Directorate of National Education. In Turkey however, these consent processes allow for the questions to be modified by either group to avoid questions being asked that are sensitive. In this case no changes were made. All schools and participants gave informed consent to be interviewed (Creswell, 2013). We took account of BERA (2018) ethical guidelines. Anonymity was assured and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point prior to publication of the data. Participant names will be followed by role and

country signifiers (SL for Head/Deputy - England; P for Principal - Turkey; TE for teacher – England; and TT for teacher - Turkey).

The data presented from England represents 21 schools and 42 educators including both primary (pupils aged 4-11) and high schools (pupils aged 11-16). Schools included were either part of a medium 12 school Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or from a nine school Teaching School Alliance (TSA) covering schools from the south to the north of the country and representing a range of inspection outcomes. Whilst the MAT schools were all academies, the TSA represented two schools who were academies the rest being state schools. The Turkish team focussed on lower (aged 10-13) and upper (aged 14-17) secondary school settings drawing data from 12 schools and 36 educators. Schools were identified from the Anatolian region and were selected to represent diversity in relation to student scores in their Transition to High School Exams (THSE) tests and a range of socio-economic backgrounds based on information obtained from Eskisehir Provincial Directorate of National Education.

Issues of Autonomy and Accountability

Data are presented through separating the two data sets in order to gain an overview of the issues arising from each country, looking at teacher autonomy and accountability through a narrative of change.

The case for Turkey

Data collected from the Turkish schools initially painted a picture of teachers having little room to take responsibility and act on their own initiative as suggested by Erdag (2013) and Genc (2010). There were signs that teachers felt powerless and frustrated with their inability to make a difference to the activities of the school. Turkish teachers argued that power resided with school principals whilst at the same time the school principals emphasised that their budgets and powers were controlled by the Ministry. Moreover, as UNESCO (2017) reported, schools were controlled and governed by a framework of regulations.

Emre (P) There is no such thing as power over change. Schools are governed by regulations. We cannot get out of them no matter how much we are in relationships with the authorities and how much money we have ...

Rather than there being no power over change, the quotation places power with school regulatory authorities. Veli, talked about teachers as implementers of government and then principals' dictates, as Carusi et al. (2018) argued.

Veli (TT) You are certainly an implementer. The work is given to you. Teachers actually don't engage with anything at this point. Decisions taken by the school principal, Ministry of National Education, Provincial Directorate of National Education, and District Directorate of National Education must be implemented. Sometimes we think these decisions are irrational but there is nothing we can do.

There is a sense of helplessness and of being undervalued in this statement and Veli expresses a sense that the teachers' role is simply to do as they are told, expressing a position of compliance rather than one of autonomy. Another teacher stated,

Cevdet (TT) ... it is meaningless to say that I have the power. The ministry of national education has the power at first... The school principal is the person who is assigned to use this authority within the school.

Therefore, national bodies hold power over teachers work and over the work of the principal. One teacher argued that without the approval of school and national education leaders,

Iffet (TT) ...we cannot do anything. When you offer a change, you cannot do anything without their approval.

Expressions of powerlessness were very prevalent in these data, another Turkish teacher expressing her frustration that a school principal can block ideas for changing practice.

Yelda (TT) I offer the idea of change to the school administration, I want to do these things, but I cannot do it unless the administration gives me support... I can only offer ideas. As long as the administration does not approve, I cannot make that change.

The use of 'cannot' and 'only offer' convey a sense of defeat around the notion of instigating change. The statement also implies a desire to take responsibility if given the opportunity. In England teachers are given leadership responsibilities early in their career. In Turkey some teachers indicated that teaching was part of a routine, and roles so circumscribed, that the school could continue without key players, and little difference would be noticed.

Adnan (TT) This school has a functioning system. In the past, our teachers used to say that there is no need for a school principal in this school. Because the same routine goes on so that everybody knows his work...

Erdag (2013) agreed that Turkish teachers followed rules where education could be aligned with a production system, each teacher performing their part. Nurdan (TT) stated that "teachers already know their limits, they know what they should do and what not to do". There were however, some indications that where teachers were engaged in change initiatives, their enthusiasm for teaching was enlivened as Genc (2010) posited. Kadir (TT) explained that if you worked in an area where the principal wanted to develop practice, you were afforded more importance because of your expertise and enthusiasm for work then rises.

However, a tension within this picture arose highlighting some difficulties in getting Turkish teachers to engage with change positively.

Suna (P) The most important thing that I have faced in this process is teacher resistance. In this school, it is something I want to break, but I cannot... Before me, it was the same. There are some teachers who have seen 3-4 administrators [*principals*] and have worked here for a long time who resist change ... They do not want to disturb their comfort ... they do not want to contribute something from themselves or perhaps they do not see themselves as adequate enough.

Suna characterised long serving teachers as a problem. This quotation could indicate that Turkish teachers were able to exercise some form of autonomy through resistance (Gobby et al., 2018). However, Suna does not appear to be interrogating the validity of her position on this and statements like 'it is something I want to break' are a dramatic characterisation of the principal's intent. Moreover, Suna felt that it was not anything around her own performance as

‘it has always been the same’. Teachers also raised this issue. Melike (TT), stated, “this is a terrible resistance. Resistance is not just in our school. In general, it is among all teachers”. Thus, Turkish teachers were clearly able to exercise ‘power’ through non-compliant behaviours.

Neva (P) I am mostly faced with resistance from people. The school staff are very conservative in their attitudes to change... if I cannot break the resistance after a certain date, I leave this issue to one side to look at it in the future.

Neva was also talking about aiming to ‘break the resistance’ but acknowledged that some people may need time to adjust and that staff need to be convinced of the value of the change for themselves and the school, a point raised by Van Droogenbroeck et al., (2014). Another principal agreed that it was important to convince people but also pointed to the power of teachers and in some cases ‘the cleaner’ to resist change.

Burhan (P) The first thing is to convince teachers and the people of the need for change. Due to unionism, political forces or networks, such as the relations with provincial and district directorates, they can resist changing. For example, a cleaner may oppose the school principal if change does not suit his ideas.

These quotations point to a significant sense of distance between teaching staff and their principal and to the power that teachers can exercise.

Some potential reasons for Turkish staff resisting change were highlighted in the following quotation.

Iffet (TT) ...we have to carry out our work outside the school and there is no time... teachers’ working hours, for example from 09:00 to 15:00, is criticised. But, we have to work outside of the school in order to achieve changes and developments... Sometimes we have to pay out of our own pockets in order to finish and achieve what is needed.

Thus, some resistance may be associated with having to work out of hours, off the school premises and might require teachers to finance aspects of change initiatives. The idea that teachers pay to complete change projects is not something experienced by the staff from England. Also, teachers in England see long hours as a ‘taken for granted’ aspect of their role.

The Turkish data thus presented us with some complex issues. On one hand, centrally driven change was resented, teachers wishing to develop their autonomy to build their own educational initiatives. At the same time the data also indicated that teachers resist changes and prefer to continue with current practices. Data also indicated that in some cases principals had the power to ignore the teachers who resisted and could continue to impose change. They did this through either convincing the teacher to engage with it, or through using their regulatory power.

The Case for England

Data from the schools in England reflected similarities as well as differences to Turkey. Like Turkey, external power was seen in the quotations from England, but this was directed differently and orientated around headteachers’ responsibility in having to ensure that their schools met achievement targets,

Ruth (SL)... in any school they always look at the outcomes, you know your outcomes in the pupils' attainment at the end of the whatever academic year it is. We turned our results around massively last year. We doubled what they were previously ... so I know that we were in the right direction ...

Ruth was validating a results-orientated direction because that was what is inspected. To be considered a 'good headteacher' she must produce 'good results', an issue raised by Higham and Earley (2013). Another teacher from England illustrated the extent to which many of the teachers interviewed felt the need to be viewed as successful.

Katy (TE) I don't like uncertainty, I like knowing what I should be doing because I like to get it right. I hate not getting things right and I hate not completing things, and I hate failing.

This response indicated not only a desire to comply to external criteria for success but also implied a sense of self-blame for any non-compliance, illustrating the responsabilisation agenda referred to by Gobby et al. (2018). One senior leader in England talked about persuading staff of the need for change based on presenting a school vision that staff should contribute towards achieving. Whilst the endpoint was clearly pre-determined, teachers were positioned individually as having a responsibility to self-regulate their contribution toward this goal.

Guy (SL) it's this is the direction we are going and this is the endpoint or this is the vision and what do you have to contribute to that ...

Moreover, teachers expressed their sense of contributing to school development even if at times they needed to recognise the bigger picture at the expense of some of their own ideas.

Tony (SL) Our approach is understanding the school and needs, but be true to the longer-term vision which means that you can step outside of what you would prefer to be doing to lay the foundations for what comes next...

In other words individual autonomy was subject to the needs of the school. This was also expressed by the following headteacher.

Jess (SL) one of the things we do is make them [*staff*] understand that as issues arise in the school to keep the momentum moving forward, they will need to be flexible and change their roles, so there are certain priorities they have that will drop down [*in importance*] because of the greater good...

Jess also explained that she expected teachers to work together and flexibly to meet goals. The quotation not only illustrates teacher responsibility for the wider goals of the school, but also demonstrated some directiveness in how to achieve this. Jess moreover distanced herself from teachers stating that we will "make *them* understand". As with the Turkish principals Jess is distancing herself from the teachers over which she has authority, whilst simultaneously recognising the importance of teacher contributions to achieving the school strategy.

Another headteacher expressed her power explaining,

Kim (SL) I told staff in the very beginning you know everything that I do will be for the good of the children and they've got to trust me on that...

This head was arguing to put students first, a laudable aim one might argue, but what then is the message conveyed to staff – I know best, and you must let me get on with it and support me? This appeared to be a discourse demanding compliance rather than questioning (Wermke & Forsberg, 2017). Indeed, one of the teachers argued that power was centralised, and that change was a delicate process of exercising appropriate pressure without going too far.

Benny (TE) ...we're all wary to be honest because change scares people...the power's at the top, I don't think we're empowered down the organisation it's quite centralised... I think people are feeling pressured a little bit more and that's had positives and negatives. You can't go through coasting, but at the same time there's a point where it goes too far...

Benny's comment raised important considerations about the tension between the lack of accountability "you can't go through coasting" and too much accountability "there's a point where it goes too far" raised by Cribb & Gewirtz (2007). This tension ran throughout the data gathered in both Turkey and England. In England, professionalisation was realised in the light of successful compliance and thus could not be considered truly autonomous (Frostenson, 2015). This was a very effective form of control that appeared to celebrate autonomy whilst restricting what could be undertaken (Wermke & Forsberg 2017).

One headteacher was anxious to express how important relationships between staff were.

Ruth (SL) ... the real important thing is knowing people and how they will react so that you can really mitigate any anxiety... we talk a lot, we research our view a lot... nothing is taken personally, we know we can argue and we can fight...

The point here was that staff needed to understand why change should happen and how it contributed to the school (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). In this way you could "tap into people's moral purpose" (Ruth, SL). In other words, where accountability measures were tied into teachers' ethical values and their sense of responsibility, they were more likely to support change (Wermke & Forberg, 2017). The dangers of such practice is that they can become coercive (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2014). Jamie (TE) revealed that teachers were not always fooled into believing that they had autonomy saying, "... you've definitely got the responsibility but don't necessarily always have the power...".

Lucy (TE) explained that staff could exercise autonomy through suggesting ideas in regular meetings within subject teams and that they shared good practice to support delivery of lessons. Jamie (TE) added to this explaining that they often worked in teams to undertake new initiatives,

... I like the fact that you can bring everybody in and it's more of a melting pot working together to make things move forward...

A further teacher explained that they had potential for developing some real autonomy albeit within a particular initiative,

Len (TE) we've had a discussion this year about moving this kind of topic [initiating a change] from the ground up and not from the top down, and getting everyone on side... your idea will be listened to ...

Teachers clearly valued their ability to contribute ideas around school development and did appear to see this as a form of autonomy (albeit with caveats). This aligns with Cribb & Gewirtz (2007) argument that some levels of control can provide a degree of autonomy. The focus on working as teams to consider change was not something that was expressed in the Turkish interviews.

In England, staff were able to assume support from senior leaders should they suggest initiatives of their own, and in some cases this was actively encouraged, albeit within a framework of testing and inspection. Senior leaders did however distance themselves from staff through the language they used, but recognised a need to garner staff support. However, there appeared to be little resistance to, or questioning of, educational initiatives. This perhaps indicates that accountability regimes have done their work in constraining autonomy.

Discussion

De Lissovoy (2015, p. 36) described “belief itself is not really a matter of inner disposition so much as a compulsive repetition of the ideological ritual”. Teachers adopt solutions that are repeatedly offered to them and these become part of their unthinking behaviours, customs and practices. Teachers are both subject to and exercise control in ways that are “multidimensional and context specific” (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020:6). However, this is within margins not set by themselves. Apparent in both sets of data there were some expressions of powerlessness, which could be construed as a lack of autonomy. In both cases the content and expectations of the teaching role were under government control. However, in each country teachers had some ability to modify or resist policy implications. In Turkey teachers might exercising collective control and simply refuse to engage with change, leaving principals and some teachers frustrated. In England teachers were likely to comply with change seeing themselves as individually responsible, but were able to have some influence on how change was applied and engaged with, giving them some sense of autonomy. In both countries, teachers could offer initiatives of their own design for consideration. However, these were more likely to meet with school leader approval in England. In both countries there was a distancing between senior leaders and teaching staff but in Turkey the differentials in power appeared strong as principals were more embedded in the administration aspects of the role where in England there was a greater emphasis on monitoring, persuasion, discussion and responsabilisation (Gobby et al., 2018). This was also perhaps a result of more layers of individual leadership responsibility throughout the teacher workforce in England. In Turkey accountability was mainly focussed on getting the paperwork right and teachers roles were clearly delineated leaving some teachers frustrated. For the seemingly more autonomous teachers in England, there was some cynicism about the reality of their ability to influence school and policy direction.

Whilst it is necessary for schools to be professionally accountable given their remit to educate our children (Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014), it seems important to recognise that teachers will always need freedoms to educate in a flexible way and through a lively and enriched curriculum that stimulates both the children and the staff in schools. The data here indicates that neither high nor low accountability seems capable of delivering such an agenda because both impact negatively on teacher autonomy. This tension makes calculations between autonomy and control complex, as Cribb & Gewirtz (2007) argued. There appear to be problems with both the rigidity of the accountability system in England, which makes notions of autonomy a rhetorical ‘slight of hand’, and the loose yet strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic system of Turkey where converting policy into practice is not investigated, or assessed. Stloz (2016) argued, that it is only at points where we recognise the crisis of opposing discourses that we are able to make progress.

The common factor between England and Turkey seems to be top-down approaches to educational policy design and decision-making, where teachers are not involved, and therefore experience detachment and meaninglessness in connection to external policies. More intelligent accountability involves all stakeholders, including students and parents, in discussing and determining the extent that jointly set goals have been attained (O'Neill, 2013; Sahlberg, 2010). 'Professional accountability' is characterised by the adherence to professional norms, local management, state regulations related to teacher training and working conditions, and accountability with peers (Falabella & de la Vega, 2016). A professional accountability approach based on expertise and the collaborative work of teachers who are accountable to their local school community (Carrasco et al., 2015; Falabella, 2019; Sahlberg, 2010), or an accountability approach focused on schools' "opportunities to learn", instead of schools' outcomes (Gagnon & Schneider, 2017) might prove a more fruitful approach in both countries and enhance teacher autonomy. Finding more constructive ways of holding teachers accountable whilst giving them the autonomy to be creative, is an essential ingredient in building a more deeply conceptualised form of education where both teachers and pupils are engaged with and enjoy their experience of and contribution to education.

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