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Summary

To make meaningful comparisons of the consequences of new modes of regulation in education for local autonomy in different national settings we need to a) be clear about what is meant by local autonomy and state control, b) be clear about why the balance between local autonomy and state control matters and c) produce good quality empirical data and analysis. The purpose of this article is to make a contribution to the first two of these tasks which are relatively neglected in the education research literature. The authors begin by unpacking some *conceptual complexities* involved in debating issues of autonomy and control, distinguishing between three dimensions of autonomycontrol: loci and modes of autonomy, domains of autonomy-control and loci and modes of control. They then go on to illustrate some of the *normative complexities* surrounding issues of autonomycontrol, using the case of individual teacher autonomy to explore arguments about the value of autonomy and control. Finally, the authors discuss the implications of these complexities for the task of *policy analysis*. In doing so, they seek to: 'trouble' the presumption that autonomy is necessarily good; challenge the notion that control and autonomy are discrete entities in some simple zero-sum relationship to one another, drawing attention to the ways in which control can be seen as 'productive' as well as 'destructive' of autonomy; and sketch out the multi-dimensional nature of cross-national comparative evaluation of regulation in education.

In order to make meaningful comparisons of the consequences of new modes of regulation for local autonomy in different national settings, it is necessary to proceed slowly. In particular, there are three tasks that need to be undertaken. First, we need to be clear about what is meant by local autonomy and state control, and specifically we need to be able to separate out and make distinctions between the different kinds of concern that are bundled together in these ideas. Second, we need to be clear about why the balance between local autonomy and state control matters; i.e. what exactly is at stake if we speak about the balance shifting between the two? Third, we need good quality empirical data and corresponding analyses to enable us to make defensible inferences about the consequences of new modes of regulation. The purpose of this article is to make a contribution to the first two of these tasks as we feel these are relatively neglected in the education research literature. In particular, we are keen to avoid the seemingly widespread – and usually unspoken – normative presumption that autonomy is good and control is bad and to open up space for the possibility of richer debates about the value of different forms of and balances between autonomy and control. For, whilst autonomy is in certain circumstances something to be valued and worth defending or promoting,

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autonomy does not trump every other good and is not always and everywhere a good thing. If we are to be in a position to make judgements about when and where autonomy is a good thing and for whom and to be able to evaluate policies that have altered patterns of autonomy and control, we need a detailed understanding of the conceptual complexities surrounding autonomy and control as well as a good understanding of arguments

about the value of autonomy and control. In the next two parts of this article, therefore, we want to unpack some of these conceptual complexities and normative arguments before going on to consider their implications for the analysis of new forms of regulation in education.

Three Dimensions of Autonomy-Control

The linked concepts of autonomy and control refer to very broad – indeed loose – categories and in referring to either autonomy or control people can be talking about a very wide range of different things. In order to unpack and debate these issues in more depth, we need to distinguish between three dimensions of autonomy-control: loci and modes of autonomy, domains of autonomycontrol and loci and modes of control.

Loci and Modes of Autonomy

This first dimension relates to the question of whose autonomy is in question and how it is being exercised. To talk about autonomy presupposes the existence of agents but obviously these do not exist as an undifferentiated mass. There is a range of individual, collective and institutional agents to consider in the educational arena. Examples of individual agents include individual parents, students and teachers (themselves differentiated of course by their location in relation to social axes of race, class and gender etc.) Collective agents include teachers acting in teams within schools or politically, e.g. through trade union activity or lobbying at a national policy level, and parent or student associations. And institutional agents include central government agencies, local authorities, professional bodies and schools. It is important to spell out these distinctions because it is often the case that increasing one agent's autonomy decreases that of another. Indeed social and political life is characterised by constant shifts in, and negotiations and conflicts around, the degrees of autonomy that are attached to different agents. Hence, if we want to evaluate the effects on autonomy of new modes of regulation consequent upon policy change, we need to consider a range of agents and be sensitive to the differential impact of policies on different agents, including the way in which one agent's autonomy can foster or inhibit the autonomy of other agents.

We also need to be sensitive to the different ways in which agents can exercise their autonomy. An individual agent can exercise autonomy as an individual, or as part of a collectivity or on behalf of an institution and greater autonomy with respect to one of these dimensions can result in a reduction of autonomy in relation to another. For example, the Norwegian policy of enforcing teacher collaboration was introduced precisely in order to encourage a move away from the traditional Norwegian emphasis on individual teachers acting autonomously within their individual classrooms (Helgøy & Homme, 2007). And Rönnberg's study of the effects of the Swedish local time schedule experiment on teacher autonomy (this issue) points to the complicated relationship between institutional autonomy, collective autonomy and individual autonomy and suggests that attempts to extend school autonomy and the autonomy of teacher teams within schools in Sweden have in some cases weakened individual teacher autonomy.

Domains of Autonomy-Control

This second dimension relates to the spheres over which autonomy or control is being exercised. Whilst the first dimension relates to the question '*whose autonomy*?', this dimension relates to the

question '*autonomy/control over what?*' A classic way of conceptualising different domains of autonomy-control relates to the relative freedom classroom teachers have to make decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment respectively. It is quite possible for one or two of these domains to be relatively prescribed whilst relative freedom is allowed for teachers to exercise their autonomy in relation to the other one or two domains. But there are countless other ways in which this notion of domains of autonomy-control has relevance. For example, in many countries quite a high priority has been attached to policies that encourage parental autonomy with respect to choice of school but there is little priority attached to the idea that parental autonomy is important in relation to decisions about school selection policies where states, local authorities or schools themselves have tended to retain control (although it is not impossible for some parents to exercise autonomy in relation to this domain, e.g. in the case of small independent schools). This example, however, may be misleading because it refers to two domains of action (choice of school and school selection policies) which are relatively well insulated from one another. In other cases it is difficult to insulate domains in this way. For example, as is well known, those agents who play a determining role in constructing models of assessment are necessarily influential in shaping the curriculum and pedagogy. Thus, as well as conceptually distinguishing between domains of autonomy, we need to be aware of how they interconnect and of the extent to which they are either insulated from one another or mutually constitutive.

Loci and Modes of Control

This final dimension relates to the questions, *who are the agents of control* and *how is their agency exercised?* The different kinds of individual, collective and institutional agents identified above, as well as being subject to control have the potential to exercise control. Sometimes it is not clear where the locus of control lies. For example, control is not always exercised self-consciously and deliberately by specific agents. It can also be the product of apparently impersonal processes (e.g. markets, consumer cultures). But in so far as we are interested in 'control' as opposed to 'constraint' then we are likely to be focusing on who lies behind or could lie behind these processes.[1] As the example of markets indicates, control is also exercised in very different ways using different forms and mechanisms of influence. For example, contemporary governments are using a combination of 'input' controls (e.g. targeting of resources) and 'output' controls (e.g. performance measurement) (see Helgøy & Homme, 2007). It is also possible to distinguish between different styles of control; for example, how far the forms of influence that 'control agents' use are bluntly coercive as opposed to gently persuasive. Some of these distinctions about different forms of influence are well illustrated by Hudson in this issue, who sets out the very different kinds and degrees of prescription and guidance that exist in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and inspection in different national systems. These can be more or less rigid, direct, closed or crude. For example, she contrasts the 'in-your-eye' direct control style of the British inspection system with 'the much more subtle, indirect control' that characterises the Finnish system.

These three dimensions, each complex in their own right, when put together, provide a highly complex multi-celled matrix and the ways in which we understand or evaluate changing patterns of autonomy-control will depend crucially on which configuration of cells we are looking at. Later in the article we will consider the implications of this conceptual complexity for doing policy analysis, but before we do that we need to turn to a consideration of some of the normative arguments surrounding issues of autonomy and control.

Some Normative Arguments around Autonomy-Control

Here we want to set out what we see as some of the main normative arguments about the value of autonomy [2] and explore these in relation to a few examples in the hope of illustrating the major value conflicts that arise in processes of enacting autonomy or control. Underlying this approach is a view of autonomy/control as both 'always in process' and ubiquitous. In other words, the extent and nature of the autonomy we have and the control we are subject to are not set in stone and nor are

they the result of one-off policy decisions; rather they are constantly being made and remade, and negotiated and renegotiated in all of our daily interactions.

Whilst there are clearly generic arguments for autonomy, in practice these and other arguments need to be applied, interpreted and evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Here we will concentrate on exploring the value of *individual teacher* autonomy before going on to explore the value of limiting individual teacher autonomy by state control. We could just as easily have chosen to focus on collective teacher autonomy or the autonomy of other individual or collective agents or of institutions but have simply chosen to focus on one case for the sake of manageability.

Through a focus on the case of individual teachers, we hope to underline the difficulty of making unqualified evaluations of the consequences of devolution or centralisation. To illustrate our points we will draw on examples from recent research on England and also from work on other countries represented in this issue.

The Value of Autonomy for Individual Teachers

The arguments for individual teacher autonomy that we will focus on here are that autonomy is a precondition for the exercise of teachers' professional expertise, and that it can be a source of job satisfaction, health and well-being for teachers, a source of creativity, experimentation and variety and a source of effectiveness. These arguments can be summed up by a single claim, that what is good for teachers is good for learning, although, having noted that claim, the fact that autonomy can be good for teachers is obviously something to be valued in its own right as well.

1.   Autonomy as a precondition for the exercise of teachers' professional expertise.
Autonomy is important in teaching in large part because of the nature of teachers' professional expertise. The exact nature of the forms of expertise that make up good teaching is a highly contested issue. However, there is widespread agreement that, in addition to subject knowledge, good teaching requires a combination of technical knowledge and practical wisdom.[3] Technical knowledge involves an understanding of what actions it is appropriate to take in order to meet certain educational aims, for example, to teach a child to read. This will often be informed by theoretical perspectives and general principles, but it is more than the mere application of rules. Teaching a child to read involves an understanding of specific contexts, texts and children and an ability to be imaginative and make improvisations tailored to each unique learning situation and each unique teacher–child relationship, as well as in some cases specialised technical knowledge and relatively advanced diagnostic and assessment skills.

But technical knowledge, however sophisticated, is not enough because a teacher's job is about much more than meeting specified goals. As well as being concerned with how to teach effectively, teachers also need to be able to make normative judgements about the kinds of attributes, dispositions and values that they want to inculcate in their students and the kinds of formal and informal curricula, pedagogies and forms of assessment that are worthwhile. This judgement-making process cannot be a once-and-for-all event because as with technical knowledge, practical wisdom involves being responsive to changing circumstances and the specificities of the unique situations teachers encounter on a day-to-day basis.

In short teachers have to make technical *and* normative judgements; for example, will this approach work in the particular classroom I am working in *and* is the approach desirable and acceptable? In relation to the latter, teachers need to reflect on their educational ideals – i.e. their 'ideas about what is educationally worthwhile, ideas about what it means to be an educated person, ideas about "the good life", and ideals about the "good society"' (Biesta, 2005, p. 4). Because teaching is not a narrowly technicist job, teachers often resent policies which try to specify what they should be doing and how (Biesta, 2005).

2.   Autonomy as a source of job satisfaction, health and well-being for teachers.
For the individual teacher freedom to decide what to teach and how to teach it and freedom to play an active part in decision making about the conditions in which s/he teaches can be seen as a vital source of job satisfaction and physical and mental well-being. There is indeed a growing research

literature which suggests that the curtailment of teacher autonomy in England has resulted in an increase in teacher stress and a decline in teacher morale. For example, Moss found that in the primary schools she studied league table pressures have demanded a restructuring of the objectives, pace and content of teachers' work and this in turn has resulted in 'a deep level of exhaustion as schools continue to struggle with the never ending task of making their results improve year on year' (Moss, 2004, p. 130). At the other end of the educational spectrum, in higher education (HE), Sikes' review of the literature on increased state control of academic work points to 'conflict, contestation, intensification, stress, pressure, work overload, and widespread unhappiness' (Sikes, 2006, p. 558). She cites Beck & Young's (2005, p. 184) depiction of HE as characterised by 'alienation and anomie ... crisis and loss', a site where '[c]herished identities and commitments have been undermined [which] for some ... has been experienced as an assault on their professionalism'.

3.   *Autonomy as a source of creativity, experimentation and variety.*

Autonomy can also be defended on the grounds that it is a condition for creativity, experimentation and variety. Once again the English case can be used as an illustration. The impact of managerial modes of regulation on the nature of teaching and learning in English schools has been well documented with some commentators pointing to an increase in uniformity and an associated decline in creativity. For instance, MacBeath (2005), reporting on his 40-school study on the role of school leadership in supporting innovative pedagogies, paints a depressingly uniform picture of English schools taking up the same or similar combinations of current learning developments (e.g. brain-based theories of learning, multiple intelligences) in relatively uncritical ways and rushing through the curriculum to meet targets and performance levels using a standard three or four part lesson 'delivery' format and teacher-centred methods. The imprint of targets and levels was everywhere – on classroom walls, in exercise books, and internalised in the consciousness of students.

A system that encourages variety of provision is not to be preferred simply because of the freedom of manoeuvre it gives to teachers to deploy their full personal resources in all of their idiosyncrasy, but arguably also because the innovation and experimentation that is fostered through these means can open up new conceptions of good practice and generate ways for teachers to learn from one another and in so doing extend their conception of teaching for the benefit of students.

4.   *Autonomy as a source of effectiveness.*

There are at least two senses in which it can be argued that professional autonomy can be a source of effectiveness. First, if autonomy makes teachers happier in their jobs and enables them to exercise their creativity, then teaching is more likely to be seen as an attractive profession and this, in turn, is good for recruitment to and retention in the profession. The negative consequences of regulation in England, referred to above, have been linked to problems of recruitment and retention, with 35 per cent of teachers surveyed by the English General Teaching Council in 2002 reporting that they intended to leave the profession within five years (GTC, 2003, cited in Hoyle & Wallace, 2005).

The second sense in which autonomy can be said to lead to greater effectiveness connects to the qualities of adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness that we mentioned above in relation to the nature of teachers' expertise. That is to say, autonomy enables teachers to make context- and person-sensitive judgements and thereby to target resources, including their own attention, where it is they are most likely to be needed and produce the greatest benefit.

Arguments for State Control of Teachers

In this section we want to propose an alternative set of readings of the value of autonomy by briefly rehearsing and elaborating what we take to be the key arguments for state control of teachers and hence for limiting teacher autonomy. For the sake of symmetry, we will present these arguments under four headings: protecting learners from harm, ensuring equal access, the personal costs of autonomy, and commonality and cohesion.

1.   *Protecting learners from harm*

Perhaps the least contentious argument for the state controlling teachers concerns the prevention of harm. Although the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are contestable, it is clear that there are limits to what teachers should be able to do. For example, it is hard to argue against the proposition that teachers should not be allowed to abuse, bully or wilfully neglect their students. Other practices are subject to debate, including, for instance, whether they fall into the category of abuse etc. (e.g. the use of corporal punishment). Analogous considerations apply to the design of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; that is, ideas or educational processes can in themselves be seen as sources of harm. For example, the encouragement of racist or sexist dispositions would be almost universally condemned, whereas the decision to limit the teaching of human origins to a creationist perspective would be condemned by many but may be defended by some. In circumstances where there is a risk of more or less serious harm, the state has a responsibility to at least draw some limits which are designed to prohibit harmful practices and the argument that this will always be a hotly contested and imperfect process is not in any way an argument against the fundamental premise that some such limits are necessary.

2. *Ensuring equal access*. Another major argument for limiting teacher autonomy, at least for those who are committed to social justice in education, is the need for the state to underpin equal access to a decent standard of educational provision, which would seem to necessitate a degree of state regulation. For example, the introduction of a national curriculum in England and Wales for the first time in 1988 was supported by many people from across the political spectrum and those on the left in particular stressed its importance as a means of underpinning an equal entitlement to a proper standard of education (O'Hear & White, 1991). More generally, the introduction of new academic standards-related accountability mechanisms across Europe has been supported not only for economic reasons but on the grounds that provision should be 'fair for all and fully consistent' (Eurydice, 2004, p. 2, cited in Hudson, 2007). For example, the Swedish teachers interviewed by Helgøy & Homme (2007) welcomed the national tests because, as one of them put it, 'We need some kind of conformity in education and between schools, a standard everybody has to reach'. These teachers expressed hostility to recent moves to devolve responsibility for education to the municipalities precisely because they viewed central state control as necessary to enable common national standards. This argument echoes those made in defence of bureaucracy by those inspired by a Weberian perspective about the importance of bureaucratic forms of organisation in underpinning both fairness and social order (e.g. du Gay, 2000).

3. The personal costs of autonomy.

It is important to recognise and rehearse counter-arguments to those that link autonomy to personal well-being. Any experienced professional knows that official institutional rules, guidance and norms play a very important role in framing and supporting the decisions they have to make. It is absurd to imagine that, in having to respond to each contingency of day-to-day practice, every teacher would prefer to have to think through all of the possible ramifications of different policies for themselves and make a decision as if they were writing on a completely blank slate. Most of the time the frameworks provided by local and national institutions including the state are experienced as supportive and facilitative. Likewise, there are limits as to how fair or realistic it is to ask teachers to be continuously innovative and imaginative in the way they do their jobs. Innovation and imagination are highly demanding of time and energy. Unless such calls are accompanied by massive reductions in very high workload pressures, there is a danger of being punitive if constant imagination – or for that matter the fashionable concept of continuous improvement – is to be a standard expectation. This is in no way to take back the importance of imagination and inspiration in good teaching but merely to acknowledge that there are costs as well as benefits associated with these things.

4. Commonality and cohesion.

As the many current controversies around multiculturalism and faithbased schooling highlight, diversity, like autonomy itself, has costs attached to it. National curricula are not just defended on

the basis of a commitment to equal access to education but also on the basis of a commitment to access to, at least in large measure, a common educational experience. Similar arguments often lie behind the advocacy of the principles of comprehensive schooling. Once again this is a hugely controversial area. However, policy makers and communitarian philosophers on both the left and the right emphasise the importance of achieving some balance between the recognition of cultural differences and the promotion of sufficient commonality to promote social cohesion and prevent various forms of social, economic and cultural fragmentation and instability that can be produced by non-state forms of control, e.g. the use of market mechanisms or privatisation (see Arnott & Menter, 2007). If we accept that commonality and cohesion are desirable educational principles, then it follows that the scope and parameters of teacher autonomy will need to be in part informed by policies that support these principles.

The four arguments for extending individual teacher autonomy and those for limiting it that we have rehearsed should be seen as merely indicative. There is of course a range of other possible arguments for and against different kinds of autonomy that could be explored. Before moving on to consider the implications of this normative complexity for policy analysis, we should also note that our review of arguments about individual teacher autonomy is not merely limited but is arguably somewhat artificial. This is because, as we indicated earlier, individual teachers frequently exercise their agency as part of some collective, for example, as a member of department, a school, a subject association or a trade union. Individual teachers are often not free to use their autonomy to make a difference to the things they think are worthwhile acting on their own. Some of the examples we have considered, such as a concern with equal access or social cohesion obviously require concerted and collective professional and political action. This means, amongst other things, that analyses of teacher autonomy must encompass the ways in which teachers' choices are constrained not only by state regulation but by the values and actions of other teachers.

Implications for Policy Analysis

Having outlined some of the conceptual complexities surrounding autonomy and control and some of the arguments about the value of autonomy, we now want to consider some of the implications of this conceptual and normative work for making sense of and evaluating new forms of regulation in education. We discuss these implications under two broad headings which relate (a) to the need to challenge facile normative and conceptual distinctions between autonomy and control, and (b) to the challenges of comparative policy analysis.

Troubling Blanket Assumptions

First, we hope that setting out some contrasts between the arguments for teacher autonomy and for the state control of teachers begins to illustrate what is wrong with any blanket presumption that teacher autonomy is a good thing and that limiting it is bad. Whilst there are good arguments for extending teacher autonomy, there are, as we have seen, also some very strong arguments for limiting it. For example, the exercise of teacher autonomy can be harmful – either for individual learners or because, if unchecked, it can produce unacceptable forms of inequality or threaten social cohesion. The same arguments can be advanced for limiting or extending state control. Moreover, there are, as is apparent from the other contributions to this issue, different modes and styles of state control some of which are more productive and/or less harmful than others. Thus, in attempting to assess the value of a particular form of autonomy-control we need to pay attention to its specific loci, modes and consequences in specific domains.

Furthermore, the above account begins to illustrate that the relationship between autonomy and control is by no means a simple one and in particular should not be read in a zero-sum fashion, that is, as if increases in control are necessarily inversely proportionate to decreases in autonomy or vice versa. For example, Gustafsson (1999, cited in Rönnberg, 2007) claims that Swedish secondary school teachers experienced more freedom in the highly centralised 1970s than in the decentralised 1990s.

There are also a variety of ways in which autonomy and control overlap and, if anything, the conceptual interrelatedness of autonomy and control has been made particularly salient by new modes of regulation (and the shift from 'government' to 'governance') where control is exercised precisely through the uses of autonomy at various levels. Indeed recent moves to fragment and decentralise authority have been accompanied in some cases by an increase in central government steering leading some commentators to argue that devolved systems of governance actually *require* an intensification of central government control or alternatively that devolution in itself *represents* a central steering mechanism (Majone, 1996, and Bache, 2003, cited in Hudson, 2007). For example, Hudson (2007) suggests that moves towards more self-evaluation by schools, evident across the Nordic countries and in Britain, can be understood as 'a smart move on the part of the state as it effectively gets schools to regulate themselves in the way it wants'. Here Hudson is talking about the 'self-regulation' of schools but one could equally talk about the self-regulation of individual teachers, i.e. teachers' subjectivity and agency being colonised by the imperatives and priorities of national and local policies such that there is no clear distinction between teachers 'being controlled' and teachers 'being autonomous'.

Yet, just as autonomy can be harnessed as a form of control or steering, so control can enable the exercise of autonomy. For example, as we indicated when discussing the costs of personal autonomy there is a real sense in which rules and procedures, for example, can be facilitative. Indeed, by enabling teachers to process certain decisions efficiently and confidently, they can even be seen, in some instances, as positively empowering. Behind this idea is a basic philosophical insight, namely, that autonomy cannot exist in a vacuum but is always exercised within systems of constraints and conventions which at one and the same time both circumscribe action and make it possible. This interplay between control and autonomy is an inevitable and pervasive phenomenon – and parallels the oft-quoted Foucauldian notion of power as neither simply bad nor good, destructive nor productive. It is this productive property of control that has enabled proponents and defenders of the English education reforms that we discussed in relation to the erosion of teacher autonomy to present many of these reforms as empowering. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in HE will serve as an example. Whilst often interpreted as a coercive mechanism to require all academics to become research active, it can and has also been interpreted by some as liberatory. For example, Sikes (2006) has shown how in the new university she studied, the RAE provided recognition and a legitimacy and stimulus for some academics to engage in research when previously this had not been encouraged. Similarly, Erica Pienaar, a South London head teacher reporting to a recent seminar on teacher professionalism [4], talked about how the introduction of the national curriculum and national testing prompted some of her teachers to exercise their professional autonomy in ways that they sometimes neglected pre-reform because it concentrated their minds on what they were teaching and what pupils were learning. This view appears to echo the kinds of sentiments expressed by some of the Norwegian teachers interviewed by Helgøy & Homme (2007), who experienced the national curriculum as facilitative of their professionalism; as one of the teachers put it, 'it opens up ... a certain degree of freedom'. More generally, the multiple ways in which practitioners respond to and actively reject or adapt regulatory policies represents a major site of teacher autonomy and one which Hoyle & Wallace (2005) have advocated as an important guiding principle for teachers under the oxymoronic banner of 'principled infidelity'.

The Multi-dimensional Agenda of Cross-national Evaluation

Finally, it is clear from the conceptual matrix we sketched out earlier in the article and the normative complexities surrounding autonomy that to do cross-national comparison is a complicated task involving not only empirical assessments but also complicated conceptual and normative discriminations. So, if we are interested in systematically evaluating the consequences of new forms of regulation across different national settings, we face a daunting set of challenges. First of all, we need to examine the empirical effects of regulations in each cell of the matrix in each national setting; i.e. what effects do different combinations of forms and styles of regulation each have on the autonomy of different individual, institutional and collective agents, in relation to each of the different relevant domains? Doing this work just for one national setting is obviously complicated

enough but if we want to do comparative analysis the task is even more complex. This would involve looking at the similarities and differences in the effects of more or less similar forms of regulation in each of the cells. Helgøy & Homme's contribution to this special issue helps to illuminate both the complexity and value of this task. Their analysis reveals how the autonomy of Swedish and Norwegian teachers is differently affected depending on whether we focus on the effects of new regulatory mechanisms on individual teachers working in the domain of their classroom or on teachers' collective autonomy working in the policy-making domain (with Swedish teachers experiencing stronger individual classroom autonomy and weaker collective autonomy with regard to policy making than their Norwegian counterparts).

However, if we want to normatively evaluate the overall effects of policies in a systematic way and try to draw conclusions about whether on balance they are a good thing or a bad thing or whether they are to be valued more in one national setting than another, the task becomes even more difficult as at this point we need to grapple with the conceptual, empirical and normative complexities simultaneously: i.e. in each national setting we need, in summary, to (1) include each cell of the matrix in the analysis, (2) find out what is empirically going on in each cell, e.g. in what ways is autonomy being extended or limited?, (3) consider the respective value of the limits to autonomy that are evident in that particular cell and the value of the autonomy that is evident within it, (4) look across all the cells trying to consider and weigh the value of all the different kinds of autonomy and limits to autonomy that are occurring across the matrix (in other words consider system-wide *patterns* of autonomy-control) and, finally, (5) try to draw some comparisons about all of this across national systems. This mapping of the methodological elements and difficulties of this kind of cross national comparison could be extended and refined indefinitely, but even this relatively crude five-element map is enough to indicate the scale of the challenge.

Before concluding we should stress that we are not advocating a kind of technical method – perhaps involving some algorithm that aggregates a series of evaluative 'cost–benefit' analyses – in this account. We do not imagine that is possible to 'measure' the normative acceptability of patterns of autonomy-control. On the contrary, we take the view that these judgements are fundamentally non-technical because they are inherently practical, political and contested, and we will say more about that in a moment. Rather we are interested, as we have indicated above, in opening up, and drawing attention to, the range of relevant considerations and in thereby resisting the temptation to make these judgements on unexamined normative assumptions or on very partial evidence. It is perhaps worth briefly summarising and stressing four of the reasons why we take it that the making of comparative evaluative judgements about patterns of autonomy-control is an inherently inexact and contested business. First, and most obviously, these evaluations draw upon ethical and political value judgements which are, almost by definition, contentious. Second, these evaluations will involve 'swings and roundabouts'; i.e. they will involve judging trade-offs between different kinds of 'gains' and 'losses' (e.g. less individual versus more collective autonomy for teachers) where there are plausible, but different, grounds for favouring both the competing patterns. Third, these evaluations will, to some extent, be context-sensitive; i.e. they will reflect the socio-economic and cultural history and circumstances of particular systems. For example, in different national systems different levels or modes of autonomy will have come to play an important role or will be viewed as embodying valuable traditions – municipal political representation in the Swedish system, for instance. Hence a pattern of autonomy-control that suits one system well may be seen as much less 'fitting' for another system. Fourth – and this might be viewed as a very specific example of context-sensitivity – there is no reason to suppose that patterns of autonomy-control are 'stable objects' that can be definitively identified by policy analysts or made to last by policy makers. It seems more plausible to see patterns of autonomy-control as, at best, in unstable equilibrium and embodying constantly evolving tensions and corrections. On this model the job of policymakers is to continuously manage and 'correct for' what come to be seen as imbalances in autonomy-control, and the job of policy analysts is to make sense of these processes of adaptation and to produce analyses which capture this 'path dependency'. Hence, on this model, normative judgements about new forms of regulation need to reflect the very specific adaptations in play within the policy dynamics of particular systems.

Some of these considerations are illuminated in Arnott & Menter's comparative analysis of regulation in Scotland and England (2007) which lucidly opens up the problem of making sweeping

comparative judgements and the contestability and ambivalences inherent in comparing even two such closely related systems. For example, it seems clear that in Scotland there is a greater emphasis on the inclusion of teachers and other stakeholders in the policy process and that more importance has been attached to the potential for individual professional responsibility and autonomy to achieve desired educational ends. But it is relatively unclear how far these things make a real difference to the experience of teachers in the classroom. This uncertainty is partly a product of the many conceptual and empirical difficulties involved in producing valid descriptions of education policies in transition, one part of which is the difficulty of distinguishing between the symbolic use made of notions such as individual and collective teacher autonomy as opposed to real-world practices. However, it is also a product of the difficulties of weighing up the respective value of, for example, the collective involvement of teachers in the policy process, on the one hand, and the material impact of policies on teachers' autonomy and practices in the classroom, on the other. What Arnott & Menter's account thus clearly illustrates is how it is far more difficult to make comparative judgements about the effects and value of new modes of regulation in different systems than is apparent in much popular discourse around this issue.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued that it is necessary to develop a more differentiated view of autonomy and to unpack and analyse the different facets and modes of control. In particular, we have suggested that it is important to differentiate between the many different ways in which autonomy can be structured and constrained and the different modes of influence and degrees of coerciveness involved in the production of autonomous subjects. There is a world of difference between the state requiring teachers to teach a specific subject in a specific way to be measured against specific tests and the case of the state introducing a new set of curricular principles and pedagogic strategies and assessment practices which, whilst constraining teachers in substantial ways, are thereby designed to encourage creativity and progressive practices on the part of teachers. Although both reforms are top-down and mandatory, the former is likely to be seen as an erosion of teacher autonomy, whilst the latter can plausibly be defended as directed at the development of teacher autonomy.

Although it is perhaps simplistic to say so, it is nonetheless true that teachers need both autonomy and control and that what is at issue is really the balance between these closely linked ideas and the different forms that they can take in combination. In making assessments about the value of different patterns of autonomy-control it is necessary to grapple with conceptual, empirical and normative complexities. Whilst this article has sought to expose the difficulty of this task, we hope, nonetheless, that we have also provided some starting points and tools for a more sensitive and holistic comparative evaluation of new modes of regulation in education.

Notes

[1] If a firm distinction between control and constraint is accepted, then it follows that those things that are described as control are the products of agents exercising their autonomy, i.e. that control is one exercise of autonomy, namely that use of autonomy which, at least with regard to certain domains, limits the exercise of autonomy by other agents.

[2] There is obviously a substantial philosophical literature exploring and debating the importance of autonomy and the value of both promoting and limiting autonomy. However, we do not have space to review this literature here and nor do we see this as the task of this article.

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