

BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

SECTION XII

2011-EI-03

The rights and responsibilities of teacher professional autonomy: A BCTF discussion paper

<http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630>

Charlie Naylor, Ph.D., Senior Researcher, BCTF Research
October 2011

This paper consists of three sections:

1. BCPSEA's arguments for reducing teacher autonomy.
2. Analysis of the literature to better understand autonomy.
3. Reviewing the evidence and moving forward.

Introduction

The issue of teacher autonomy is addressed in this paper in part because autonomy has been a focus of teacher discussions in recent years. This paper aims to enable teachers to reflect more deeply on the issues by an exploration of the literature.

This discussion paper is also intended to provide an alternative perspective to that published in the BCPSEA *Perspectives in Practice* paper, "Professional Autonomy: Discretion and responsibility in K-12 public education"¹. Another BCTF discussion paper, *Professional development/professional growth and engagement: What's wrong with the BCPSEA picture?*,² addresses BCPSEA's efforts to increase their level of control over teachers' professional learning.

In terms of critiquing the BCPSEA position on autonomy, both this BCTF discussion paper and the one on professional development mentioned above should be considered alongside the BCPSEA *Perspectives in Practice* reports on autonomy and on professional growth³, as well as with the BCPSEA language tabled in bargaining, *Professional growth and engagement*.⁴

¹ <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/publications/05-HJF-%20Professional%20Autonomy.pdf>

² <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-EI-01.pdf>

³ *Teacher professional development: A question of development, growth, and currency.*

<http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/Publications-ResourceDiscussionDocs/03-HJF-Professional%20Development.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/teacher%20bargaining/E28-CW-Professional%20Growth%20and%20Engagement.pdf>

The rights and responsibilities of teachers' professional autonomy

Critique of BCPSEA case

- Narrow managerialism: ignoring or avoiding the literature
- De-professionalization of teachers
- Avoiding the complexity of addressing moral and ethical issues

Literature review-- Creating alternative understanding

- Autonomy: a basic human need and an imperative in teaching
- Schools as emotionally-charged spaces where students are finding their place, and where teachers must exercise judgment
- Building autonomy requires teachers to move from 'private' to 'public' spaces
- Autonomy is supported by, and requires reflection and collaboration with peers
- Teachers' professional development needs to be autonomous
- The evolution of teacher professionalism and the erosion of trust in public services
- Three policy shifts that have eroded teacher autonomy (standardization; narrow focus on literacy/numeracy; consequential accountability)
- Teachers' work intensification reduces their autonomy
- BCTF *Worklife of Teachers* study: autonomy is greatly valued by teachers
- Reducing autonomy negatively impacts schools and increases teacher attrition

Reviewing the evidence and moving forward

- Teacher autonomy has been reduced in many but not all education systems, as control of education provision in schools has shifted from educators in those schools to managers and/or governments.
- Reducing autonomy by increasing accountability often fails to improve students' learning.
- While teacher autonomy has been eroded in some jurisdictions, the erosion has been challenged, and alternatives to the dominant accountability ethos and agenda do exist and have proven beneficial effects for students and teachers.
- Teacher autonomy includes responsibilities as well as rights, and these responsibilities, while accepted by teachers, might be a focus of renewed teacher discourse.

Section 1: BCPSEA's arguments for reducing teacher autonomy

The primary goal of BCPSEA's paper, *Professional autonomy: Discretion and responsibility in K-12 public education*, appears to be to build a case that teacher autonomy is or should be limited, for the following reasons:

- Teaching is not on the same standing as other professions; therefore, teachers do not enjoy, and are not entitled to, the same levels of autonomy as other professions.
- High levels of regulation in K-12 public education restrict autonomy. As one example, curriculum authority rests in the control of the Ministry of Education.
- The BC College of Teachers does not have structures similar to other professions which regulate autonomy.
- Teachers are employees subject to management rights that can define duties.
- Collective agreements limit autonomy.

While the BCPSEA paper makes no reference to Judith Anderson's (2010) paper, its directions are clearly synonymous with Anderson, who builds a case to limit teacher autonomy when she argues in several areas that the "rights" of the employer to manage and direct trump any supposed "freedom" of the teacher, or, as BCPSEA prefers, the "employee":

- management rights
- teaching as a profession
- teachers as employees
- academic freedom
- freedom of expression
- duties of teachers.

What's problematic about this approach?

The BCPSEA paper utilizes the findings from those arbitrations that have supported the employers' positions on limiting teacher autonomy to build its case. Yet this is also one of the main weaknesses of the BCPSEA paper; it fails to include any reference to the academic literature on autonomy, and by failing (or deciding not) to do so, misses (or avoids) an opportunity to consider autonomy within wider conceptual, moral/ethical, and historical perspectives. Such perspectives open up questions which BCPSEA likely prefers not to address, but which will be considered here. This paper will also attempt to consider a range of literature and to respond to the specific arguments made by BCPSEA.

BCPSEA's managerial approach to education and its view of teacher professionalism

BCPSEA's stance fits within the managerial and directive modes that have recently dominated the education systems in the US and England, but is in stark contrast with high-performance jurisdictions, including Finland. One of BCPSEA's key arguments is that teachers are essentially "lesser professionals"—an argument which finds mixed support in the literature. Ingersoll (2011) quoted Mills (1951), who described teachers as the "economic proletarians of the professions," a statement which implies that teachers, while professionals, were less well remunerated than other

professionals. BCPSEA also imply that they can identify what being a “professional” actually means for teachers.

What’s problematic about this approach?

What BCPSEA fails to mention is that definitions of teacher professionalism are not necessarily universal—Heltebran (2008) has argued that “the literature does not support a universally accepted definition of teacher professionalism” (p. 124). In the medical literature, Swick (2000) has argued, “There is no common understanding of what is meant by the word *professionalism*.” There are examples of definitions within the literature that have different criteria to those used by BCPSEA for defining professionalism. Millerson (1964) identified four criteria, all of which could apply to teachers:

- the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge
- education and training in those skills certified by examination
- a code of professional conduct oriented towards the public good
- a powerful professional organization.

BCPSEA feels able to define professionalism, while others claim that no clear definition exists. BCPSEA also fails to recognize that some societies do confer teachers with a status similar to other professionals:

Today the Finnish teaching profession is on a par with other professional workers; teachers can diagnose problems in their classrooms and schools, apply evidence-based and often alternative solutions to them and evaluate and analyze the impact of implemented procedures. Parents trust teachers as professionals who know what is best for their children. (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 155)

While there may not be an exact and universally-agreed-on definition of professionalism, there is considerable literature on what constitutes professionalism. Schön (1983), as one example, articulated the concept of professionals reflecting on practice, a practice currently a component of the BCTF’s Teacher Inquiry projects but missing from BCPSEA’s focus. Teacher Inquiry supports teacher autonomy because it builds teacher-directed and collaborative reflection on practice. BCPSEA’s position, in contrast, appears to be focusing on control, but it has little to say about what it might do once (and if) a tighter managerial control over teacher autonomy were achieved. To gain a better understanding of its potential direction, it is important to consider a second BCPSEA *Perspectives in Practice* paper, on professional growth⁵, discussed in another BCTF report⁶. Essentially, BCPSEA argues for teachers’ PD to be controlled and directed in line with employers’ objectives, thereby significantly reducing teachers’ autonomy in terms of their own professional learning.

Many BC teachers pursue academic studies beyond the minimum necessary to teach, which indicates a high level of professionalism. A BCTF survey of teachers in 2009, in which responses were obtained from a random sample of teachers, found that:

Slightly over 50% of respondents report completing levels of education beyond the bachelor’s degree plus teacher training that are required for certification in

⁵ *Teacher professional development: A question of development, growth, and currency.*
<http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/Publications-ResourceDiscussionDocs/03-HJF-Professional%20Development.pdf>

⁶ *Professional development/professional growth and engagement: What’s wrong with the BCPSEA picture?*
<http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-EI-01.pdf>

British Columbia: 26% had completed a university certificate/diploma, 25% had earned a master's degree, and 1% had a doctoral degree. If samples from this and a comparable survey are broadly representative, then it appears that proportionately more public-school teachers in BC have completed certificate or graduate programs than teachers in most other provinces—a pan-Canadian survey by Kamanzi, Riopel, and Lessard (2007) reported that 43% of its respondents had education beyond bachelor level, compared to the 52% of respondents in this survey.⁷

Such a high level of participation in educational programs also indicates that many teachers are motivated to improve their understanding of educational theory and practice, and are themselves initiating studies beyond those required for certification. This is one indication of autonomous professionalism, yet not one acknowledged or discussed by BCPSEA.

By focusing narrowly on their imposed view of what constitutes “professionalism,” BCPSEA avoids consideration of more complex issues of judgment

The BCPSEA autonomy paper⁸ reflects an approach that Beck (2009) described as “appropriating professionalism” and “suppressing alternatives.” Beck describes how the English *Professional Standards for Teachers* “implicitly presents itself as innocent of any theoretical grounding” and articulates a stance “as being simply what any sensible person would recognize as what it now takes to be a successful teacher” (p. 9). Beck argues that by selecting limited perspectives from management theory, and by adhering to a loose form of behaviouralism which lists and limits competencies, “professionalism” and the work of teachers is narrowly framed in specific ways that exclude consideration of wider focus found in the literature, and that this narrow and excluding perspective suits management control. The greater the level of management control, the lesser degree of autonomy occurs.

If teachers are increasingly directed, they may over time become deskilled. If they are deskilled they are not “professionals.” BCPSEA argues that teachers are different from other professionals:

Do teachers have professional autonomy? Of all the criteria that are said to define a profession (which generally include shared standards of practice, monopoly over service, long periods of training, etc.), a *high degree* of professional autonomy is the one criterion that is most at odds with the education profession.

By the very nature of their position, teachers have less autonomy than other professionals. Educators work in a regulated work environment, must generally follow a prescribed centralized curriculum, and are often asked to administer specific assessments of students on behalf of their school, district, or ministry of education. (p. 2)

The argument is both false and insidious, intimating that such “lesser professionals” can and should be directed further in their work. It's false because teachers do have long periods of training, especially with the high numbers of teachers completing graduate and other studies beyond the minimum required to teach. It's insidious because it is built on the false premise that teachers are lesser professionals, employees requiring increased direction from their employer.

⁷ <http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/WorklifeWorkload/2009/Chapter2.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/publications/05-HJF-%20Professional%20Autonomy.pdf>

Teachers following prescribed curriculum are somewhat akin to lawyers being guided in their work—just as legislation and precedent guide and control lawyers’ approach to the law and their profession, so does curriculum prescribe some aspects of teachers’ work. Yet teachers create and build units connected to curriculum guides as autonomous professionals, just as lawyers and judges use the precedents set out in previous cases to build new interpretations of legislated or common law. Thus, curriculum evolves in part because of autonomous and professional teachers, just as the law evolves in part because of the autonomy of lawyers and judges. Both professions work within parameters, and lawyers and teachers both contribute to the evolution of law and learning because of their autonomy.

Perhaps teacher autonomy could be further developed by consideration of “cases” where judgment is needed in the context of practice. Such cases might be “real life” situations (with student privacy protected) where teachers might discuss their actions with peers so that judgment becomes a focus of reflection, and enables teachers to build their understanding and capacity to be moral, ethical, and professional in the interests of children and youths’ learning and development.

What’s problematic about this approach?

It could be argued that BCPSEA attempts to appropriate professionalism (by further limiting autonomy), suppresses alternative views (by ignoring the literature but citing arbitrations), and fails to participate in serious debate, because its goal is one of control rather than engaging in the current discourse on teacher professionalism and autonomy.

BCPSEA also avoids any focus on judgment, which should also be considered, rather than the sole and narrow focus on professionalism. Exercising, refining, and testing judgment is crucial to teachers’ work and to their profession. Teachers are morally and ethically bound to exercise such judgment in the best interests of children and youth in schools. Such an obligation is a professional responsibility which is deeply felt and owned by teachers, but it cannot be legislated, nor delineated in terms of management directions. Because education systems have become increasingly “managed” by governments and employers does not mean that the only lens for considering education is the one they provide. Instead, consideration of judgment within professional, ethical, and moral contexts should be considered and discussed.

Section 2: Analysis of the literature to expand understanding of autonomy beyond narrow parameters

Ten areas of analysis are considered here:

1. Defining and exploring autonomy: a basic human need and an imperative in teaching.

Resulting from empirical methods and inductive reasoning, the theory has proposed that all humans need to feel competent, autonomous, and related to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Social contexts that facilitate satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs will support people’s inherent activity, promote more optimal motivation, and yield the most positive psychological,

developmental, and behavioural outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In contrast, social environments that thwart satisfaction of these needs yield less optimal forms of motivation and have deleterious effects on a wide variety of well-being outcomes. (Deci & Ryan, 2007)

The above quote, reflecting a range of mental health research, clearly indicates the basic needs of all people to feel competence, experience autonomy, and relate well and positively to other human beings. People need some levels of autonomy in their life and work in order to improve the chances of experiencing positive mental health.

In terms of education, Hawkins (2000) states:

If we ask how the teacher-learner roles differ from those of master and slave, the answer is that the proper aim of teaching is precisely to affect those inner processes that...cannot in principle be made subject to external control, for they are just, in essence, the processes germane to independence, to autonomy, to self-control. (p. 44)

Hawkins argues that one primary goal of teachers' work is to build independence, autonomy, and self-control in students, a task difficult to complete if the teachers have no autonomy in their work, as they would be aiming to build autonomy in others while having little control over their teaching. Teaching without autonomy thus creates a paradox that most students would quickly notice, and that would make the encouraging of students' autonomy meaningless for teachers and students alike.

One of the curious things about exploring the issue of teacher autonomy is that very few people who write about autonomy actually define it. Pitt and Phelan (2008) do, with the following quote:

Autonomy refers to thinking for oneself in uncertain and complex situations in which judgment is more important than routine. For teachers, the nature of their work and its social context complicates this definition. Teaching involves placing one's autonomy at the service of the best interests of children. (pp. 189–190)

BCPSEA's *Perspectives in Practice* discussion paper, "Professional autonomy: Discretion and responsibility in K-12 public education," implies a definition in its opening sentence with the phrase "the power or right to decide or act according to one's own judgment at work".

Phelan (2008) explored some of autonomy's parameters in a keynote presentation to a Canadian teacher education audience:

Teacher autonomy vacillates between being portrayed as a mark of a robust professionalism and as a sign of the difficulty other educational stakeholders have in influencing or believing they have influenced what teachers do behind classroom doors (Labaree, 1992). Whether cast as earned or stolen, bestowed by professional membership or diminished by external forces, autonomy is generally perceived as a quantifiable characteristic of an individual (Fournier, 1999). As such autonomy is equated with freedom to act in accordance with one's personal beliefs and, most dangerously, in one's own interest (Pitt & Phelan, 2005). Freedom of will and self-interest are potentially entangled in a dangerous fantasy of sovereignty according to which perfect liberty is incompatible with the existence of others. (p. 5)

Pitt and Phelan's definition and exploration of autonomy is important because it encourages thinking which recognizes uncertainty and complexity in both defining and exploring the concept and context of autonomy. Their research also signals that autonomy is a hotly-contested issue. Autonomy is a difficult concept to grasp precisely, because judgment in terms of human interactions is not precisely or easily defined, nor is it universally agreed which judgments are appropriate in a range of situations. But Pitt and Phelan, like most academic writing on the issue of autonomy, explore the issue in various ways: conceptually and philosophically; historically; contextually; politically; and by conducting research which focuses on the work and perceptions of teachers. This range of exploration is not one emulated by BCPSEA, whose minimalist definition of autonomy is followed by a discussion with much narrower parameters, largely based on their own assertions (largely unsupported by research), legislation and arbitrations, and by including a limited and selective referencing of the BCTF discussions on autonomy.

2. Schools as emotionally-charged spaces where students are finding their place, and where teachers must exercise judgment.

Pitt and Phelan (2008) have argued that schools are highly emotionally-charged places, where authority is tested as students grow. They include sometimes quietly private and at other times highly-charged public spaces, and experiences where old ideas give way to new. Their argument was supported by Ayers (2004), quoted in Hyslop-Margison & Sears (2010). He stated:

We teachers stand on the side of our students. We create a space where their voices can be heard, their experiences affirmed, their lives valued, their humanity asserted, enacted. Students cannot enter the school as 'objects'—thingified doohickeys and widgets—and emerge as 'subjects'—self-determined, conscious meaning-makers, thoughtful, caring and self-activated. (p. 102)

Students are negotiating their shifting world, and teachers are instrumental in guiding them through their learning and life changes. To guide and to teach in such places, teacher judgment is crucial, and to exercise judgment teachers must have that degree of autonomy within the requirements of the ethics and the law, but without those tight managerial controls over teachers' work and teachers' learning which BCPSEA wants to impose. Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) made this case when they said:

Teachers cannot be expected to prepare autonomous, reflective and politically engaged citizens unless they possess the professional autonomy and political freedom to act as role models for their students. Professional autonomy for teachers is not merely a fundamental requirement of quality education, but for creating students who become engaged and politically active democratic citizens. In the final analysis, the neo-liberal policies seeking to de-professionalize teaching are actually creating an inefficacious and unethical situation that undermines teacher confidence, vocational ownership and the advancement of robust democratic schooling practices. (p. 12)

The ability of citizens to exercise judgment is crucial to maintaining democracy. Without judgment, societies can veer toward totalitarianism, an argument made by Arendt (1963). In her analysis of Adolf Eichmann's role in the mass murder of Jews in World War II, she spoke of the "banality of evil" when Eichmann committed horrific actions in the absence of any ethical or moral judgment, and justified them as complying with orders. Orders were followed, to the letter, but judgment was absent. Schools play a role in helping students apply judgment so that they can function as autonomous critical thinkers in a democratic society, and to fulfill that role, teachers require autonomy to both exercise their own judgment and build judgment in students.

3. Building autonomy requires teachers to move from “private” to “public” spaces.

“Private” space or place refers to work environments where a teacher essentially works alone, without peer discourse or some explicit sharing of pedagogical approaches, either while teaching or in reflections on teaching. “Public” spaces or places are those in which teachers are engaged in some form of peer discourse, or where teachers are making their approaches more public, perhaps through presentations. There may be degrees of moving into a more public place or space, such as dialogue with a colleague, engagement in an inquiry group, or presenting and publishing.

Coulter (2002) argued why both private and public spaces are crucial to support teachers’ communication and dialogue about their practice:

(Teachers)...must be given the requisite conditions for this kind of communication. Teachers require privacy to prepare themselves for the task; they too need to try out new roles in safety, to form their own identity as educators. Teachers also need to recognize, however, that their roles are public concerns and that they have a responsibility to initiate and sustain public discussions about education and teaching; they cannot remain in the comparative safety of their schools, their districts, their unions (or their universities). (p. 40)

Moving into more public space represents one part of the responsibility that accompanies autonomy: the responsibility to engage in discourse about practice in ways that teacher judgment can be shared and discussed with peers and others in public spaces. Teachers, by “giving an account” of their teaching, are being pro-actively accountable and thereby taking more control of accountability rather than reacting to the accountability demands of districts or governments.

4. Autonomy is supported by and requires reflection and collaboration with peers.

Eagleton (2003) articulated a perspective on autonomy that indicated that teachers need to develop as autonomous professionals through reflection on practice with peers, recognizing a duty and a responsibility to build judgment in community rather than in isolation:

(Professional) autonomy should not be taken to mean teachers exercising professional judgment in isolation from their peers, but rather that they develop their professional learning through systematic investigation, rather than by fiat. (p. 332)

Gabriel, Day, and Allington (2011) considered the concept of “engaged” autonomy, where teachers had considerable autonomy but were active and engaged in dialogue with other teachers and administrators, so that ideas could be discussed and challenged through reflective conversations.

Thus, a range of literature argues that autonomy in isolation can prove problematic, as isolation avoids discourse that enables critical reflection on practice and that gauges judgment in community. The case is made that autonomy needs to be tested in more public spaces, especially with peers, so that teaching is less private and is more openly shared and discussed, harnessing the creative energy of autonomous individual teachers while connecting them with others in more public spaces to discuss teaching and learning, to share ideas and critiques, and to exercise their autonomy within an engaging and challenging discourse about practice. Thus, teacher

judgment is honed and applied to teaching and to professional relationships with students, peers, parents, and community.

Authors such as Eagleton (2003), and Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005), support this argument, suggesting that autonomy should be perennially tested and challenged in constructive and public debates. A range of literature therefore argues that autonomy involves responsibilities as well as rights, and responsibilities might form one focus for future teacher discussions on autonomy: what moral, ethical, and pedagogical responsibilities should teachers consider? What is judgment and how might it be exercised? Such discussions might help teachers build forms of autonomy that create or connect to intelligent forms of accountability, thereby extending the professionalism of teaching, meeting the needs of students to learn and grow, while also addressing the needs of an education system to show accountability to parents and communities.

5. Teachers' professional development needs to be autonomous.

Burbank and Kauchuk (2003) stated that “autonomy, choice and active participation are critical to effective professional development.” Ingersoll (2007) argued that increased teacher control was beneficial to both students and teachers:

Schools in which teachers have more control over key school wide and classroom decisions have fewer problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and cooperation among teachers and administrators, have a more committed and engaged teaching staff, and do a better job of retaining their teachers. (p. 24)

The link between trust, teachers engaging in collaborative professional development, and improved student outcomes was noted in a recent paper from the Stanford Social Innovation Review (Leana, 2011):

When the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve. (p. 33)

Randi and Zeichner (2004) state that teachers working as autonomous professionals is a fundamental component of defining teachers' professional development:

The significance of active teacher autonomy in professional development opportunities cannot be overstated. In one study of teacher development, (Sandholtz, 1999) found that experiences that provide teachers with autonomy, choice, and active participation were critical to effective professional development. Further, in many 'collaborative' endeavors, the framing of research questions, data collection measures, and reporting of outcomes are dictated by those outside of classrooms who are often in positions of power (Erickson & Christman, 1996). Not only has teacher professional development been dictated by bureaucrats' voices within school systems, but also by those outside of schools within the higher education research community. (p. 503)

However, many governments have shown considerable reluctance to respect teacher autonomy, and the issue is often contentious, notably in those jurisdictions with a high number and frequency of government interventions in education systems. Elliott (2005), reflecting on Action Research in the UK, argued that teachers have struggled and will continue to struggle against controls that reduce autonomy and limit reflection and peer discourse:

The space for the exercise of such (teacher) agency will not come simply as a gift from government. It will be wrought out of a political struggle, by teachers and others within society, to create the material conditions for a free, open and democratically constructed practical discourse to emerge as a context for professional action. (p. 363)

6. The evolution of teacher professionalism and the erosion of trust in public services.

Pitt and Phelan (2008) argue that because, historically, teaching has largely been a feminized profession, autonomy for teachers “is not always perceived as a social good” (p. 191). Limited autonomy might thus have been seen as necessary by those in power in a system where women taught and (generally) males supervised and controlled women teachers. Thus the implication was that limited autonomy was a necessary constraint reflecting a dominant male perception of a “natural order” which institutionalized women’s subservience to men.

Whitty and Wisby (2006) consider four forms of teacher professionalism: traditional, managerial, collaborative and democratic, and argue that from the mid 1970s:

...the so-called ‘liberal educational establishment’ principally comprising teachers, the local authorities that employed them, and the universities that trained them, came to be regarded by governments as left-leaning and favouring what in their view were highly questionable ‘progressive’ or ‘child-centred’ approaches to teaching. Together, lack of competitive discipline and ‘progressive’ teaching methods were blamed for a leveling down of standards. The effect of these attacks was to erode trust in teachers, thereby facilitating subsequent educational reform. (p. 29)

Reduced trust, whether real or perceived, has resulted in increased government involvement in directing many public services, a concept articulated by Onora O’Neill in the BBC Reith lectures of 2002⁹:

The diagnosis of a crisis of trust may be obscure: we are not sure whether there is a crisis of trust. But we are all agreed about the remedy. It lies in prevention and sanctions. Government, institutions and professionals should be made more accountable. And in the last two decades, the quest for greater accountability has penetrated all our lives, like great draughts of Heineken’s, reaching parts that supposedly less developed forms of accountability did not reach.

For those of us in the public sector the new accountability takes the form of detailed control. An unending stream of new legislation and regulation, memoranda and instructions, guidance and advice floods into public sector institutions.

Perhaps the present revolution in accountability will make us all trustworthier. Perhaps we shall be trusted once more. But I think this is a vain hope—not necessarily because accountability is undesirable or unnecessary, but because currently fashionable methods of accountability damage rather than repair trust. If we want greater accountability without damaging professional performance, we need intelligent accountability which requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control.

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lectures.shtml>

O'Neill's articulation of "intelligent" accountability precedes but is similar to that of Sahlberg (2007), which is discussed below with reference to accountability structures in Finland.

7. Policy shifts that have eroded teacher autonomy.

Sahlberg (2007) outlined three policy shifts in various countries designed to raise student achievement:

- a. Standardization of education
- b. Increased focus on literacy and numeracy
- c. Consequential accountability.

a. Increased standardization and accountability in educational systems

All three policy shifts impact and reduce teacher autonomy. Standardization forces compliance, occasionally with ludicrous and detrimental effects. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) chillingly offered one example of standardization and describe how some US school districts have demanded "fidelity" to district mandates which implement the "Open Court" reading program. "Fidelity" essentially means compliance, with no dissent tolerated and no alternative approach to teaching reading and developing literacy allowed. They describe how every teacher in a district was expected to teach the same program in the same way at the same time. Two new teachers, both positively evaluated, and achieving excellent student outcomes, argued that "Open Court" approaches did not meet the needs of their students, and taught reading in ways that in their views did meet student needs. One was fired and the other resigned and moved to a district that did not use "Open Court":

Thus teachers who question state-authorized and district-adopted programs are deemed 'resistant' and deviant, and are pushed out of the profession or compelled to leave the school. Use of the term fidelity to characterize adherence to the literacy program suggests that dissent is an expression of 'infidelity'. Instructional policy environments that define professionalism in terms of fidelity and, thus, infidelity, do not leave room for dissent and disagreement. (p. 56)

Teachers' autonomy is challenged and reduced when imposed accountability agendas dominate, yet there are other views of what constitutes accountability, some from highly-regarded educational systems. Sahlberg (2007) offers an alternative version which he labels "intelligent accountability":

Finland has not followed the global accountability movement in education that assumes that making schools and teachers more accountable for their performance is the key to raising student achievement. Traditionally, evaluation of student outcomes has been the responsibility of each Finnish teacher and school. The only standardized, high-stakes assessment is the Matriculation Examination at the end of general upper secondary school, before students enter tertiary education. Prior to this culminating examination, no external high-stakes tests are either required or imposed on Finnish classrooms. As a consequence of decentralized education management and increased school autonomy, education authorities and political leaders have been made accountable for their decisions making implementation of policies possible. This has created a practice of reciprocal, intelligent accountability in education system management where schools are increasingly accountable for learning outcomes and education authorities are held accountable to schools for making expected outcomes possible. Intelligent accountability in the Finnish education context preserves and enhances trust among teachers,

students, school leaders and education authorities in the accountability processes and involves them in the process, offering them a strong sense of professional responsibility and initiative. (p. 155)

In the above quote, Sahlberg explicitly identifies school autonomy and implicitly endorses teacher autonomy. Later in his article he explicitly includes teacher autonomy as a key factor in Finnish success:

Increased teacher and school autonomy in the 1990s has led to a situation where schools can not only arrange teaching according to their optimal resources, but allocate teaching time within the national curriculum framework differently from school to school. This is rarely possible in more rigid and test-heavy education systems. (p. 156)

Valijarvi (2007)¹⁰ concurred with Sahlberg's analysis:

Finnish teachers have been given considerable pedagogical independence in the classroom, and schools have likewise enjoyed substantial autonomy in organizing their work within the constraints of the national core curriculum.

b. An increased focus on literacy and numeracy

Hargreaves and Fink (2006), and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), are among those authors who have criticized the excessive focusing on teaching and testing literacy and numeracy in schools, arguing for a widening of areas of focus to include creativity, communication, engagement with new technologies, understanding cultural differences, and building environmental sustainability. All of these areas were a feature of the Multiliteracies movement (New London Group, 1996) and are generally featured in discussions of 21st century learning¹¹. When governments mandate specific programs or approaches to literacy and/or numeracy, they reduce teacher autonomy by forcing compliance to the program, thus leaving less scope for autonomous decision-making by the teacher to meet individual student needs.

Yet, paradoxically, those same governments now argue for and expect teachers to “personalize” learning as though their previous (and still operational) mandates to standardize and control teaching and learning never existed. Such a stance reflects the classic policy-makers’ method of avoiding their own accountability—when in doubt, create a new level of accountability in the hope that people forget that the old one failed. The new policy may indeed be a new dawn, but what happened to the last one?

c. Consequential accountability

Consequential accountability, as its name suggests, implies that there are consequences for educators if found wanting when accountability structures and processes imposed by governments or districts result in less-than-satisfactory exam or test scores. Sahlberg (2007) described it in the following way:

The third global trend is introduction of consequential accountability systems for schools. School performance—especially raising student achievement—is closely tied to processes of accrediting, promoting, inspecting, and, ultimately, rewarding or punishing schools and teachers. Success or failure of schools and their teachers is often determined by standardized tests and external evaluations that only devote attention to limited aspects of schooling, such as student

¹⁰ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb4779/is_30/ai_n31044847/

¹¹ Teaching and learning in the 21st century, <http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=21932>.

achievement in mathematical and reading literacy, exit examination results, or intended teacher classroom behavior. (p. 151)

If there are consequences, usually negative, then a range of research has shown that teachers often do what is necessary to avoid such consequences, including “teaching to the test” to comply with the desired outcomes or performance measures. However, any assumption that such teaching will produce required outcomes is highly problematic, as has been shown by Ravitch (2010), who argued that although the mayor (Bloomberg) and chancellor (Klein) of New York lauded what they claimed to be major improvements in the test scores, the actual evidence was mixed. New York cynically reduced test passing scores so that more students “passed” tests. Fourth-grade improvements in reading and math test scores were considerably less in the Bloomberg era than in the four pre-mayoral-control years, while there appeared to be gains in Grade 8 reading and math scores. However, when New York students were tested by the federal NAEP, New York students made no significant gains in either reading or math between 2003 and 2007. Graduation rates, Ravitch claims, were inflated by not counting many dropouts and by a credit recovery system where students who failed or never showed up for courses could complete an independent project and still graduate.¹²

The dilemma for teachers is that the kind of problem-solving and critical thinking skills they wish to develop in students may not be the focus of tests, so that a teacher may in some situations choose between what they intend to be a richer experience of student learning, and styles of teaching that are primarily targeted towards generating good marks on tests. The difference is between a wider view of what constitutes student learning (to include problem-solving and critical thinking) compared to a narrower view of what constitutes student achievement measured by tests (often regurgitation of information). One example of this might be in terms of experiential learning that is intended to engage students and build creative problem-solving skills, which tends to be minimally utilized when teachers feel pressured to use less engaging but more test-ready lessons. This effect was described in a report by the science teachers of British Columbia (BCScTA, 2009)¹³:

The vast majority of respondents indicated that the Science 10 Provincial Final Exam has caused a significant decrease or entire deletion of lab activities in Science 10 classrooms, coupled with a preponderance of direct instruction through lectures. Additionally, Science 10 students now rarely have the opportunity to do group work, research projects, and classroom presentations, take field trips to Science facilities, or explore local topics or current events, due to the stringency of the approximately 100 Prescribed Learning Outcomes and hundreds of scientific terms that students have to memorize for this exam. Respondents repeatedly stated that the science teachers in their schools no longer wish to teach Science 10. (p. 3)

8. Teachers’ work intensification reduces their autonomy.

Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) argued that another factor which tends to limit teacher autonomy is work intensification, often caused by government policies such as staffing levels which are dependent on government funding. In BC, there are 737 fewer Special Education teachers in 2010–11 compared to 2001–02, and a total of 1,459 fewer learning specialist positions (teacher-librarians, counselors, Special Education teachers, ESL, and

¹² <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-EI-02.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.bcscta.ca/Sci10%20Report.pdf>

Aboriginal Education teachers)¹⁴. With the learning specialists reduced far more (in percentage terms) than the reduction in student numbers, the workload and caseloads of these teachers have dramatically increased. And just as their caseloads and workloads increase, so do classroom teachers receive less support to meet diverse learners' needs, and their work intensifies as a result. Thus, as all teachers' work intensifies because of increased workloads and reduced support, they necessarily have less time, more stress, and fewer opportunities to exercise judgment, thereby reducing autonomy.

Ballet et al (2006) have identified work intensification for teachers across several countries, and quote Merson (2000):

Interpretations of intensification vary with author but common themes emerge: more of the teachers' time devoted to the task of teaching, the scope of administrative duties extending, and less time for collegial relations, relaxation and private life. (p. 160)

Ballet et al argue that work intensification has the capacity to de-professionalize, reducing the autonomy of teachers in part because "a teacher's job is no longer conceived of as holistic but rather as a sequence of separated tasks and assignments" (p. 211). They quote Apple and Jungck (1996) in support of this view:

Concerns of care, connectedness, nurturing and fostering 'growth' are devalued. In essence they (teachers) are no longer given credit for being skilled at all, as the very definition of what counts as a skill is further altered to include only that which is technical and based on a process 'which places emphasis on performance, monitoring and subject-centred instruction.' (p. 211)

9. BCTF *Worklife of BC teachers* study: autonomy is greatly valued by teachers.

Data from the BCTF *Worklife of BC teachers* study (2009)¹⁵ found that, for many teachers, satisfaction came from having autonomy, while respondents also clearly understood some limits.

I can teach what I want, how I want, within the curriculum guidelines.

Some respondents either expressly referenced autonomy or spoke of the freedom they had to teach in the way they wanted. Their capacity to make choices in terms of pedagogical approaches and in curriculum within the boundaries of the provincial curriculum documents clearly provided considerable satisfaction:

I have freedom to teach...with a great deal of autonomy in regard to subject and curriculum focus, lots of freedom in how to deliver, what to deliver within the curriculum, how to support students in need.

I greatly enjoy the variety of the work I do; working with principals, vice principals, teachers, students, parents, agencies...I have a lot of autonomy. I am glad that the work I do is with people, helping students and families. This is very satisfying.

Autonomy was not defined by any respondent, yet teachers' comments provide a sense that there is a commonality of meaning: to have some space to make decisions, to do the job in a way defined by the individual rather than by an employer or administrator, to have the flexibility to change and adapt as necessary. The value placed on autonomy by teachers appears to be

¹⁴ <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-TD-01.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/WorklifeWorkload/2009/Chapter5.pdf>

identified along with values placed on community and relationships, suggesting that many teachers thrive in a combination of autonomous decision-making within a supportive community.

A recent *Guardian* survey of English teachers¹⁶ (Berliner, 2011) strongly supported the BCTF findings, and comments on the *Guardian* findings from Cary Cooper, professor of organizational psychology at Lancaster University, who has done major studies on workplace stress, are quoted in the article:

Global evidence is clear—lack of control and autonomy in your job makes you ill. It is stressful to be in an occupation where you feel you have people looking over your shoulder and where you can be named and shamed. All those characteristics were there in teaching 10 years ago, but it is worse now because jobs in the public sector are no longer secure. Teachers want autonomy and respect—the people who go into it have a real vocation; they don't do it for the money.

10.Reducing autonomy negatively impacts schools and increases teacher attrition.

Ingersoll (2007) argued that reducing teacher control over areas for which they have responsibility essentially has the potential to negatively impact schools:

At the crux of the role and the success of teachers, then, as the men and women in the middle, is their level of control over the work for which they are responsible. On the one hand, if teachers have sufficient say over decisions surrounding those activities for which they are responsible, they will be more able to do the job properly, and, in turn, derive respect from administrators, colleagues, and students. On the other hand, if teacher control over school and classroom policies is not sufficient to accomplish the tasks for which they are responsible, teachers will be less able to get things done and have less credibility. Students can more easily ignore such teachers, principals can more easily neglect backing them, and peers may be more likely to shun them. This, in turn, could lessen teachers' commitment to their teaching job and a teaching career. (p. 24)

In a later work, Ingersoll (2011) argued that several factors positively affected teacher commitment, school climate and teacher retention. These included teacher autonomy and teacher influence on decision-making (p. 196).

Reducing teachers' autonomy further, as BCPSEA clearly wants to do, will erode the status of teaching as a profession, thereby making it less attractive to those who want a professional career which offers significant autonomy. Eroding the status of teachers is hardly likely to improve student achievement, as any cursory glance over several jurisdictions will show. It may also damage teacher recruitment and retention, and some authors have linked reduced autonomy with teachers leaving the profession. Warfield et al argued:

When teachers do not believe that they have the authority to make decisions about their teaching they become frustrated and may eventually leave teaching (Cooney & Shealy, 1997; Cooney et al.,1998). (p. 454)

¹⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/oct/03/teacher-survey-professionals-bullying-parents>

Section 3: Reviewing the evidence and moving forward—four points to consider

- **Teacher autonomy has been reduced in many but not all education systems, as control of education provision in schools has shifted from educators in those schools to managers and/or governments.**

Such a shift can be from the right of the political spectrum (Thatcher and the current Conservative government in the UK; almost anywhere in the USA), and from the left—ostensibly but in some cases questionably (social democratic parties like the NDP in British Columbia, which introduced Foundation Skills Assessments [FSAs]; Britain’s and Australia’s Labour parties). Thus, reducing teacher autonomy through increased levels of accountability is appealing to political parties of the left and the right as they seek to demonstrate their determination to “improve” education systems and to be seen to be making teachers in such systems “accountable.”

While governments exercise their ultimate power to govern and manage public education systems, their agents, such as ministries of education, are often integral to either the development of accountability structures which reduce autonomy, or to the implementation of accountability policies mandated by government. In considering analysis of the BCPSEA perspective on autonomy and professional growth, BCPSEA’s role as initiator of discussions and their tabled language should be scrutinized not only for the content of their published documents, but also for what they reflect or imply in terms of the organizations that fund and theoretically control BCPSEA. Are the documents reflective of government’s and/or school-districts’ thinking, or are they attempting to influence and even direct districts and the provincial government? While one might assume BCPSEA simply reflects the will of districts and government, there has been, to date, silence from school districts about BCPSEA’s *Perspectives in Practice* papers, so that it’s difficult to understand whether the proverbial tail (BCPSEA) is wagging the dog (BCSTA), is synchronized with the dog, or the dog is asleep in the sun and may be unaware that the tail is wagging. At the time of writing, there is no mention of the BCPSEA *Perspectives in Practice* on the BC School Trustees’ Association website, nor any evidence accessible on either the BCPSEA or the BCSTA websites to suggest that trustees were involved in developing the BCPSEA papers.

But it’s crucial to note that other jurisdictions are not reducing teacher autonomy—they actually believe in its importance, and research evidence suggests that there is little connection between increased control and improved outcomes.

- **Reducing autonomy by increasing accountability often fails to improve students’ learning.**

New accountability structures that reduce autonomy have often failed to improve educational outcomes for students, and some managers and governments have been complicit in dubious claims of improvements by dubious testing processes or by reducing test passing scores (New York¹⁷), and by mass cheating of test marking (Atlanta¹⁸), to name but two examples. While reducing autonomy often increases accountability, the assumption made by those stressing

¹⁷ “New York State Test Scores: Who to Believe? National tests cast doubt on New York’s feel-good story.”
<http://www.city-journal.org/html/eon2007-09-28dr.html>

¹⁸ “Atlanta’s cheating ways: School officials changed test scores.”
<http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/politics-raising-children/2011/jul/7/atlantias-cheating-ways-school-officials-test-score/>

increased accountability is that outcomes for students will improve. Such an assumption has proven problematic, if not false, in many US states, where massively increased accountability has failed to generate improvements in test scores and has arguably reduced potentially rich learning experiences with stultifying “teach-to-the-test” approaches. Such obliteration of teacher autonomy by standardizing approaches to teaching and learning, while also narrowly focusing on literacy and numeracy, is not a rare event in the USA, where Ravitch (2009) has illustrated many examples of reduced autonomy and increased accountability and made a strong case that forcing accountability with legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) does not equate to improving outcomes, and that outcomes in systems with less rigid accountability and greater autonomy are often superior:

No Child Left Behind... was bereft of any educational ideas. It was a technocratic approach to school reform that measured ‘success’ only in relation to standardized test scores in two skill-based subjects, with the expectation that this limited training would strengthen our nation’s economic competitiveness with other nations. This was misguided since the nations with the most successful school systems do not impose such a narrow focus on their schools. (p. 29)

This demonstrates one curious twist to assessing the actions of the architects of reduced autonomy/increased accountability: they are not accountable when they lower passing scores or create systems that lead others to falsify test scores in order to manipulate the impression of improvement. Accountability, it seems, is defined and controlled by those in power who can force compliance. When the architects of accountability fail to achieve (or in some cases falsify) the results they promised when implementing their reforms, there appear to be no consequences for them.

- **While teacher autonomy has been eroded in some jurisdictions, the erosion has been challenged, and alternatives to the dominant accountability ethos and agenda do exist and have proven beneficial effects for students and teachers.**

The third perspective is that there are alternative approaches to education that provide teacher autonomy and articulate trust in teachers while also working collaboratively to build systemic capacity. Such jurisdictions have demonstrated impressive levels of success for student learning, and for the creation of more harmonious working relationships in schools and educational systems. Thus, more energy is being put into a collective and consensual will to improve education rather than to fight for ideological or managerial dominance. Earlier sections of this report outline Finland’s approach, while those of Singapore and Ontario may offer counters to the managerial ethos of BCPSEA.

While teacher autonomy can be and has been limited and eroded in a number of countries by the policies, legislation, and funding decisions of governments, there is also a literature which has criticized the limits and erosion while arguing that teacher autonomy is beneficial to students’ learning. Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2010) wrote:

Professional autonomy enhances rather than undermines teacher responsibility by situating educators as the primary authors of their own success or failure. This professional personal responsibility encourages teachers to take ownership of their teaching and assume greater personal responsibility for student academic achievement. (p. 2)

They make a case that with greater autonomy, there is a shift of responsibility from bureaucrats and politicians to teachers, but that teachers also need to exercise responsibility and judgment as key parts of what constitutes autonomy. Autonomy is not, in their view, equated with doing whatever one likes or wishes to do, but requires a teacher to reflect critically on one's own practice while also engaging with current research about teaching:

Professional autonomy and teacher development require critical engagement with contemporary ideas about teaching and learning. A key component of a vibrant professional life is the continual exploration and critique of widely accepted knowledge and ideas. From this perspective, orthodoxy about classroom practice becomes suspect, and knowledge and idea about teaching and learning remain open to re-examination and revision. (p. 8)

The above quote links to the work of Schön (1983) who argued that professionals make their practice problematic in order to reflect on and improve practice.

- **Teacher autonomy includes responsibilities as well as rights, and these responsibilities are accepted by teachers.**

Hyslop-Margison and Sears clearly state that autonomy includes responsibilities as well rights, a position understood and endorsed by the BCTF, with the union's Code of Ethics¹⁹ including the following clauses:

1. The teacher speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The teacher respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. *The teacher follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.*
3. The teacher recognizes that a privileged relationship with students exists and refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The teacher is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the quality of service rendered by the teacher and the practices employed in discharging professional duties.

The BCTF has therefore recognized that teacher autonomy is subject to and limited by ethical responsibilities and legal requirements through its Code of Ethics. While the union has identified threats to autonomy, the BCPSEA paper implies that the BCTF sees every limit as a threat. The point missed by BCPSEA is that the union has accepted limits to autonomy so that children are not harmed or damaged in schools and so that reviews of practice can occur with colleagues, students, and parents. But just as there are instances where some teachers may breach ethical and legal codes, so there are also some principals and district managers who may reach beyond their defined powers and in so doing attack what teachers consider to be their autonomy to use their professional judgment to teach and assess students.

¹⁹ BCTF Code of Ethics, <http://bctf.ca/ProfessionalResponsibility.aspx?id=4292>.

Conclusion

Teachers' autonomy in BC's public schools is already limited by law and regulation, and has been reduced by government mandates and work intensification. Yet it remains an essential component of professionalism, and if teachers are professionals then they need and deserve significant degrees of autonomy in terms of what and how they teach. Such autonomy has generally been a feature of the BC public school system, and has contributed to the impressive levels of student achievement in international assessments such as PISA (the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment).

This discussion shows that there is a literature promoting a rationale for teacher autonomy and arguing against narrow forms of managerialism. There are educational jurisdictions that embrace teacher autonomy and attain high levels of student achievement. In the classrooms of BC's public schools, there are positive and current examples of teachers exercising autonomy, stating that such autonomy is in part what attracted them to teaching, and is in part what keeps them in the profession. And there is also a literature that argues for sustained teacher reflections and discussions about the responsibilities as well as the rights of an autonomous professional.

All of this suggests that autonomy is a complex matter requiring significant engagement by those within the teaching profession, so that exploration of autonomy becomes collegially both reflective and active, and deliberations become collaborative rather than individualistic. Yet there is also a strong case to be made that BCPSEA should "back off" from its narrow managerial and controlling focus so that these research-based alternatives to address issues of autonomy might be more widely considered, and so that teachers' energy might be directed towards building professional autonomy while also ensuring that intelligent accountability occurs.

BCPSEA's efforts to reduce the consideration of teacher autonomy are conducted through a narrow consideration of teachers' professionalism, a repetitive insistence on employers' right to direct and control every aspect of teachers' work, and a belief that autonomy can be explored solely within the constraints of managerial thinking and arbitration precedents. Yet autonomy includes much more than what is contained within these parameters, and this paper's exploration of the academic literature is intended to expand the discussion of autonomy, while creating a better understanding of its complexity. Or, as William Shakespeare said, and which BCPSEA might heed:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
Hamlet, Act 1, scene 5, 159–167

The only real gain, if BCPSEA has its way, will be for those managing and directing the downgraded work of teachers, whether a school administrator, school district or, perhaps, those same BCPSEA executives who appear to be drafting or approving the BCPSEA *Perspectives in Practice* documents and their tabled language. Yet there are many administrators who work as effective instructional leaders for whom this narrow approach to management rather than leadership might also prove problematic.

Evidence to support the suggestion that BCPSEA is out to carve itself a bigger role in the K-12 education system can be found in Clause 11d of their tabled language²⁰:

²⁰ *Professional growth and engagement*, <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/teacher%20bargaining/E28-CW-Professional%20Growth%20and%20Engagement.pdf>.

The employer, in consultation with the union, will develop a template Professional Growth Program for use in all school districts. The template will be based on best practices in this area, taking into account the policies, practices and experiences of school districts who have implemented successful plans in this area. The template will also set out [sic] suggested timeline for the development and ongoing annual review of Professional Growth Plans. (p. 3)

Thus, BCPSEA proposes a province-wide template for professional growth plans developed by “the employer,” who need only “consult” the union. Presumably what constitutes “best practices” will also be decided by the employer. Should BCPSEA be deciding what constitutes “best practice,” their apparent inability or unwillingness to access and analyze current education literature might also prove a major concern, as their limited publications to date offer little in terms of serious professional discourse about teachers’ professional learning.

The identity of “the employer” is not stated, as there is currently no provincial employer of teachers in BC, who are employed by school districts. But “the employer” in BCPSEA’s brave new world will not only impose a provincial template for teachers’ professional growth for use in all school districts but also, BCPSEA’s language implies, it will likely monitor and aim to control the evolution of such plans’ annual reviews. Progressive contractual agreements reached between locals and school districts would likely also be stripped as a universal template and approach is forced upon every district. It’s an ominous development, not only for teachers but also for the province’s school districts, which will simply apply the provincial templates provided by an as-yet-undefined provincial employer.

This paper has attempted to move beyond BCPSEA’s limited and limiting explorations and positions on autonomy, and to argue that there is merit in maintaining and encouraging teacher autonomy which includes consideration of the rights and responsibilities of autonomous professionals in BC’s K-12 public schools. The province needs a more constructive and engaging discourse about autonomy and accountability than that initiated by BCPSEA.

BC does not need to extend the narrow managerial approach to education that appears to be popular in England and the USA, both with little to show for years of reducing teacher autonomy and increasing accountability. The province should be looking instead at jurisdictions like Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, all of which, in different ways, have shown respect for teachers and for their profession, and are reaping the results in terms of student learning and in more harmonious school environments. They are building better education systems rather than wasting time and energy with divisive and minimally researched initiatives like those emanating from BCPSEA.

In terms of their responsibilities as autonomous professionals, teachers might take some time to consider issues of judgment, and how the private and public spaces for dialogue could be used to consider moral, ethical, and pedagogical issues in teaching. By initiating such discussions, teachers will be better positioned to move the autonomy debate away from those who wish to narrow its focus and establish their control, and shift it into a more prominent focus within the professional discourse of teachers.

References

- Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R.T. (2006). (In) Fidelity: What the resistance of new teachers reveals about professional principles and prescriptive educational policies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76(1), 30–63.
- Anderson, J.C. (2010). *Teacher professional autonomy: Balancing competing interests*. Canadian Association for the Practical study of Law in Education (CAPSLE) conference, April.
- Arendt, H. (1963). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. London: Penguin Books.
- Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching towards freedom*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ballet, A., Kelchtermans, J., & Loughran, J. (2006). Beyond intensification towards a scholarship of practice: Analyzing changes in teachers' work lives. *Teachers and teaching: Theory and practice*, 12, 2, April 2006, 209–229.
- BCPSEA. (2011). "Professional Autonomy: Discretion and responsibility in K-12 public education." From the series *Perspectives in Practice*. Published online at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/publications/05-HJF-%20Professional%20Autonomy.pdf>.
- BCPSEA. (2011). *Professional growth and engagement*. Bargaining proposal tabled in June; published online at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/teacher%20bargaining/E28-CW-Professional%20Growth%20and%20Engagement.pdf>.
- BCPSEA. (2011). "Teacher professional development: A question of development, growth, and currency." From the series *Perspectives in Practice*. Published online at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/documents/Publications-ResourceDiscussionDocs/03-HJF-Professional%20Development.pdf>.
- BCScTA. (2009). *Science 10 provincial final exam provincial survey results*. Available online at <http://www.bcscta.ca/Sci10%20Report.pdf>.
- BCTF. "Code of Ethics", in the *Members' Guide to the BC Teachers' Federation, 2011–12*. Available online at <http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/public/AboutUs/MembersGuide/guide.pdf>.
- Beck, J. (2009). Appropriate professionalism: Restructuring the official knowledge base of England's 'modernised' teaching profession. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30, 1, 3–14.
- Berliner, W. (2011). "Guardian survey finds teachers want to be treated as professionals," *The Guardian*, October 3. Available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/oct/03/teacher-survey-professionals-bullying-parents>.
- Burbank, M., & Kauchak, D. (2003). Collaborative action research: A new model for professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(5), 499–514.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 1, 14–23.
- Eagleton, T. (2003). *After theory*. London: Allen Lane.

- Elliott, J. (2005). Becoming critical: The failure to connect. *Educational Action Research*, 13(3), 359–373.
- Fenstermacher, G.D., & Richardson, V. (2005). On making determinations of quality in teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 107(1), 186–213.
- Gabriel, R., Day, J.P., & Allington, R. (2011). Exemplary teacher voices on their own development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92, 8, 37–41.
- Ghatt, J. (2011). “Atlanta’s cheating ways: School officials changed test scores.” *The Washington Times Communities, Politics of raising children*. (July 7). <http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/politics-raising-children/2011/jul/7/atlantas-cheating-ways-school-officials-test-score/>
- Heltebran, V.R. (2008). Professionalism: Taking the reins. *The Clearing House*. January/February.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The fourth way: The inspiring future for educational change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Hawkins, D. (2000). *The roots of literacy*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Hyslop-Margison, E.J., & Sears, A.M. (2010). Enhancing teacher performance: The role of professional autonomy. *Interchange*. 41, 1, 1–15.
- Ingersoll, R.M. (2011). “The status of teaching as a profession.” In *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education*, 4th edition, 185–196. Newbury Park, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Ingersoll, R.M. (2007). Short on power, long on responsibility. *Educational Leadership*, 65, 1, 20–25.
- Leana, C.R. (2011). The Missing Link in School Reform. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Fall.
- Millerson, G. (1964). *The qualifying association*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Naylor, C. (2011). *Professional Development/Professional Growth and Engagement: What's wrong with the BCPSEA picture?* Vancouver, BC: BC Teachers’ Federation. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-EI-01.pdf>.
- Naylor, C. (2011). *The dearth (or is it the death?) of discourse in the United States: What does Diane Ravitch say about educational change, and why is there so little response?* Vancouver, BC: BC Teachers’ Federation. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-EI-02.pdf>.
- Naylor, C., & White, M. (2010). *The worklife of BC teachers in 2009: A BCTF study of working and learning conditions*. Vancouver, BC: BC Teachers’ Federation. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/WorklifeWorkload/2009/FullReport.pdf>.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1) 60–92.

- O'Neill, O. (2002). *A question of trust*. Lecture 3 in a series of 5 for the BBC Reith lectures of 2002. BBC Radio 4, "Called to account." Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lectures.shtml>
- Phelan, A. (2008). *Between judgment and constraint: reconsidering autonomy in professional life*. Keynote presentation for the Canadian Association of Teacher Education, UBC, June.
- Pitt, A., & Phelan, A. (2008). Paradoxes of autonomy in a professional life. *Changing English*, 15, 2, June. 189–197.
- Randi, J., & Zeichner, K. (2004). New visions of teacher professional development. In M.A. Smylie & D. Miretzky (Eds.). *Developing the teacher workforce: 103rd yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Part 1*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ravitch, D. (2007). "New York State test scores: Who to believe? National tests cast doubt on New York's feel-good story." *City Journal*. (September 28). Available online at <http://www.city-journal.org/html/eon2007-09-28dr.html>.
- Ravitch, D. (2009). *The death and life of the great American school system*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sahlberg, P. (2007). Education policies for raising student learning: The Finnish approach. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 2, March 2007, 147–171.
- Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Swick, H.M. (2000). Towards a normative definition of medical professionalism. *Academic Medicine*, 75, 6, June.
- Valijarvi, J. (2007). "Finland has built Europe's most admired education system by focusing on 'outcomes', giving schools autonomy, and by supporting teachers." *European Business Forum*, Autumn. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb4779/is_30/ai_n31044847/
- Warfield, J., Wood, T., & Lehman, J.D. (2005). Autonomy, beliefs and then learning of elementary mathematics teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 439–456.
- White, M. (2011). *Changes in FTE learning specialist teachers, 2001–02 to 2010–11*. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2011-TD-01.pdf>.
- Whitty, G., & Wisby, E. (2006). 'Collaborative' and 'democratic' professionalism: Alternatives to 'traditional' and 'managerial' approaches to teacher autonomy. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*. No. 1, 25–36.