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Professionalism in the era of accountability: Role discrepancy and responses among teachers in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The roles and identities of professionals have undergone significant transformation in an ever-globalising world shaped by neoliberal values. In the field of education, standardisation and outcome-based quality measures have become the norm. Teachers are held accountable through their students' results, with their work subject to ongoing surveillance (performance-based accountability). This has changed the nature of teachers' tasks, and what it means to be a "good teacher". Based on 20 teacher interviews across six primary schools in the Netherlands, this study examines teachers' practices and beliefs, asking: do they experience role discrepancy? What responses do we see as a result? And, what does this reveal about teachers' sense of professionalism today? Findings show that all teachers experience the pressure of high workloads and the need to prioritise tasks. Whereas a small minority of respondents understand performative tasks as having a crucial function of supporting student learning and achievement, others experienced a discrepancy between these performative tasks and the tasks they believed to be at the heart of good teaching. Confronted with this, teachers responded in different ways; either incorporating all tasks into their schedule, or feeling

forced to choose between them. Beyond this, findings indicate that teachers' understandings of key aspects of the profession, such as autonomy, are changing in response to the policy environment. This supports conceptualisations of professions and professionalism as not only "being changed by" external reform, but changing from within.

KEYWORDS
performance-based accountability, policy enactment, professionalism, role discrepancy, teachers

1 | INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal agenda has acted as a major catalyst of change across the professions which have seen a growing adoption of business values in the quest for efficiency and effectiveness (Ball, 2016; Muzio et al., 2013). This has not only transformed the requirements and roles of professionals, but has also transformed how they see themselves and the nature and purpose of their work. This is no truer than in the field of education, where managerial reforms have increased decisions taken at the school level, while external "surveillance" mechanisms ensure that stakeholders remain accountable (Verger et al., 2019). Primarily, this accountability hinges on the attainment of core standards, measured by way of performance "outcomes." Certainly at a policy level, rather than acting as a proxy of quality, test-based performance indicators have, therefore, come to represent quality. As well as being expected to "perform" (see Ball, 2003), teachers are also expected to account for their work more broadly through the ritual (and predominately recorded), planning, monitoring, and evaluation of teaching and learning. These policy tools are collectively referred to throughout the paper as "performance-based accountability" or "PBA."

These reforms have fundamentally changed the concept of quality education and what it means to be a teaching professional. "Successful education systems" are those topping the international league tables in large-scale student assessments; "successful schools" are those that outperform their neighbors in standardized tests, and "successful teachers" are those that add the most "value" (grade points) to their students. A considerable amount of research has examined the transformation of the professions over the decades (see for example: Evetts', 2003; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012) and teachers' changing roles and identities through their enactment of these reforms constitutes a significant part of this (Day, 2002; Sachs, 2001; Valli & Buese, 2007). The degree to which teachers' beliefs and practices align with policy varies (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Moore et al., 2002), linked to a complex interplay of factors at various levels. What is clear is that, like all professionals, teachers are not passive implementers of policy; they are key actors who shape policy through processes of interpretation and translation (Ball et al., 2011). The policy demands on teachers may be at odds with their own understanding of what it means to be a good teacher, inevitably resulting in compromises being made—either on behalf of the teacher's professional beliefs, on behalf of the policy, or both.

Based on 20 interviews in six primary schools in the Netherlands, this study examines teachers' professionalism in the era of (performance-based) accountability, using the concept of *role discrepancy*. More specifically, it seeks to discover whether teachers experience a divergence between what they do—those tasks they actually engage in (or are expected to engage in) at work, and what they believe—those tasks they consider at the heart of good teaching. It is framed around three questions:

1. What are teachers' experiences of their work tasks: what tasks do they engage in, to what extent are they "performative," and how do they feel about these tasks?

2. Do teachers experience role discrepancy and if so, what work-management approaches are adopted?

3. What does the examination of teachers' roles, practices, and beliefs, reveal about their professional identities in the era of PBA?

The study forms part of a broader research project [ReformEd] which examines globally-spread school autonomy and accountability policies and their development and enactment in various countries [reformedproject.eu]. The paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the enactment of accountability reforms, and more broadly, to the possible impact of PBA on the teaching profession, in a number of ways. Regarding the study's *conceptual contributions*, although the core aspects of "beliefs" and "practices" cut to the heart of professionalism (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Hendrikx, 2019), the concept of "role discrepancy" is still rather limited. While it has been applied (quantitatively) to some professions, including nursing (Takase et al., 2006a; 2006b) and school social workers (Agresta, 2006), its use in teaching, and as a part of a qualitative exploratory study is largely absent. Further, the paper contributes new conceptualizations of policy enactment that go beyond the dichotomous labels of "resistance" and "compliance," providing a deeper understanding of teachers' working realities. Regarding the study's *contextual contributions*, while widespread in certain neoliberal, high-stakes contexts (particularly England and the U.S.), there is insufficient research examining the enactment of PBA in systems with different institutional traditions and differently-constructed policies, and therefore insufficient understanding of which formulations of PBA produce which effects. Further, in the Netherlands, little research has focused on the enactment of such policies and their impact on primary school teachers (for research at the secondary level, see Hendrikx, 2019), and yet, the Dutch policy changes imposed over the last dozen years have fundamentally reshaped the primary education system (Browes & Altinyelken, 2021). Finally, the study has important *policy and social implications*. Research has found that a change in teacher's roles and excessive role regulation can result in: "job dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, burnout, loss of self- esteem, and early departure from the profession" (Calderhead 2001 in Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 521). Similarly, role discrepancy has been found to be linked to intention to quit (Takase et al., 2006b) and job dissatisfaction (Agresta, 2006). Given the instabilities and uncertainties currently surrounding the teaching profession in the Netherlands (including ongoing national strikes and crippling teacher shortages), a better understanding of teachers' practices and beliefs in the current policy environment is crucial.

2 | PROFESSIONALISM, ROLE DISCREPANCY, AND ENACTMENT

Professionalism is an elusive and changing concept. It is multi-faceted, multi-scalar, and multi-purpose. According to Evetts (2003, 2009), the term can be understood as a set of normative values, practices and discourses around a given profession which can generate and facilitate alterations of the occupation. While efforts to exclusively define "the professions" are somewhat outdated (Evetts, 2003; Muzio et al., 2013), certain key aspects have traditionally been associated with this group of workers including autonomy and the ability to make discretionary judgments, a "public service" dimension, and (development of) competency and "expertise" (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010), as well as collegiality and collaboration (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000). Evetts (2009), highlighting the dynamic nature of professionalism, has identified two "types;" *occupational professionalism*: understood as produced from within and defined by collegiality, trust and autonomy, and *organizational professionalism*: produced through an external discourse of control and defined by managerialism, standardization, and external accountability.

A number of studies have examined the concept of teacher professionalism and, more specifically, its metamorphosis through educational reform (Day, 2002; Hargreaves, 2000). Essentially, we can understand professionalism here as the development of the individual teacher in order to improve quality and standards of practice for the student, not to be confused with *professionalization*, where the concern is with (improving) teachers' status, standing, regard, and reward (Hargreaves, 2000). Based on the Anglo-American experience, Hargreaves (2000) describes professionalism in teaching as passing through several stages; from the pre-professional, to the autonomous

professional, the collegial professional, and finally, to the post-professional of today, where teachers struggle to counter centralized curricula, testing regimes, external surveillance, and the economic imperatives of marketization.

Whether "post-professionalism" (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000), "organizational-professionalism" (Evetts, 2009), or one of several similar constructs, there is a strong argument that professionalism today is shaped by new public management values: efficiency, standardization, and competition. This is challenging teachers' broader identities: "teachers and other public services workers succeed only by satisfying and complying with others' definitions of their work" (Day, 2002, p. 682), yet teachers' own perceptions of their work might diverge from these definitions, resulting in a mismatch between (required) practices and beliefs. The distinction between what teachers do and what they feel they should do (i.e., their professional values), can be understood as *role discrepancy*: "the incongruence between their [the professionals'] ideal roles and the roles they actually engage in at work" (Takase et al., 2006a).

This concept has been applied to a number of professions, including nursing (Takase et al., 2006a, 2006b), school social workers (Agresta, 2006), and occupational therapists (Lloyd et al., 2004). These studies have found role discrepancy to be prevalent. More specifically, Agresta (2006) notes that school social workers wanted to spend less time on routine tasks, particularly report writing, and more time on those tasks considered at the core of their profession: individual and group counseling. Lloyd et al. (2004) similarly found that occupational therapists desired to spend more time on their areas of specialism. These quantitative studies have also shown experience of role discrepancy to be negatively associated with job satisfaction (Agresta, 2006) and positively associated with intention to quit (Takase et al., 2006b).

Application of the role discrepancy concept to the teaching profession has not been found, at least not within major English literature databases, yet research has built on similar ideas. Studies, particularly U.S.-based, have revealed the largely negative impacts of high-stakes PBA on teachers' roles. Olivant (2015) saw teachers struggling with time pressures, diminished autonomy and professionalism, and creativity in the classroom. Valli and Buese (2007) found teachers who were governed by prescribed curricula and standardized testing to be experiencing role increase, role intensification, and role expansion, with negative impacts on pedagogy, "professional well-being" and student relationships. The authors' discussion of "role expectations" and the conflicts surrounding this, are particularly close to the notion of role discrepancy.

Teacher response to PBA has also received considerable attention, with studies showing significant variation in enactment strategies. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) examined the "principled resistance" of teachers in a Californian policy context, who refused to follow a heavily-prescriptive literacy program on ideological grounds. Other, more subtle responses include Perryman et al. (2011) notion of "policy evasion," whereby, rather than outright resistance, teachers in English secondary schools were constrained to selecting the aspects of policy considered (not) worth implementing. Similarly, Moore et al. (2002), also observing the English context, found teachers—whether adopting more "compliant" or "resistant" positions—to adopt an eclectic, pragmatic approach to policy enactment. The authors use the term "contingent pragmatism" to describe teachers who see their practices as somewhat of an enforced survival strategy, and "principled pragmatism" for those who better reconcile their beliefs and practices, often justified through their students' performance outcomes. In the Dutch context, a recent study in secondary schools (Hendrikx, 2019) found that mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices were common, resulting in compromises being made on one side or the other. The (qualitative) study also identified a third response, in which teachers reduced their contracted work hours without reducing their actual work hours, enabling them to engage in the work meaningful to them while still fulfilling obligations.

Similar studies in the enactment field have indicated that, as well as factors at the school, locale, and system levels, at the individual level a teacher's professional experience might play an important role in their perception and experience of daily work tasks. It has been found that more experienced teachers feel more frustrated with their roles and experience of PBA, perhaps as their training and formative teaching years were shaped in a different policy environment (Day & Smethem, 2009; Holloway & Brass, 2018) or perhaps because they are simply worn down by "repetitive educational change" (Hargreaves, 2005). Teachers who entered the profession more recently (for whom, such demands have been a constant reality) were found to have had their professional beliefs and identities inherently shaped by this policy environment (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Wilkins, 2011).

Notably, Takase et al.'s study (2006a), which explicitly tested the relationship between role discrepancy and years of (clinical) experience, presents a contrasting premise:

> … it has been assumed that experienced nurses perceive less role discrepancy than inexperienced nurses, either because the former adjust themselves to their actual practice or because they have the expertise to improve their practice.… (p. 751)

In fact, the study's findings revealed that more- and less-experienced nurses experienced similar levels of role discrepancy, yet more-experienced nurses reported more positively on their work roles.

3 | TEACHERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

3.1 | The Dutch teaching profession

Over the years, the teaching profession in the Netherlands has been steered in different directions. It has recently been experiencing severe teacher shortages, particularly in urban areas, and ongoing teacher strikes over high workload and insufficient pay (Inspectorate of Education, 2019). With a perception that teaching is no longer the respected profession it once was, attracting new recruits is proving a difficult task (only 10% of Dutch teachers are under the age of 30; OECD, 2019). According to the recent TALIS secondary education data (OECD, 2018), teaching was a first career choice for only 53% of Dutch teachers, considerably lower than the 67% TALIS average. While teachers' salaries are somewhat higher than average for OECD countries, they are lower than those of other Dutch professionals (OECD, 2019), particularly at the primary school level.

Over the last decade, the government has been making a clear attempt to professionalize teaching to raise its status and desirability and to encourage into the profession, more men and candidates with academic backgrounds. Initiatives include: reduced training time for those with an academic or professional background, "the hybrid teacher" (encouraging professionals from other fields to combine their work with teaching), reduced tuition fees for teacher training, grants for teachers to complete Masters or PhDs, a teachers' "competency framework" (a professional statute and standard for teachers), and the "teachers' register" whereby teachers must complete a minimum amount of (certified) professional development hours (see "de lerarenagenda 2013–2020"). In response to the aforementioned strikes, primary teachers have recently been granted a pay rise along with extra money at the school level to help reduce teacher workload. Teachers considered these steps insufficient and at the time of writing, intermittent strikes continue.

The goal of these initiatives is teacher professionalization (concerned with status), not professionalism (concerned with practice; Hoyle, 2001). One reason for this may be the high levels of decentralization and autonomy in the Dutch system, inhibiting government involvement in the teaching *process*. Indeed at the input level, legislation is scarce, including a lack of a national curriculum and a centralized system of teacher appraisal. While teaching quality forms an important part of the inspectorate's framework, this is only evaluated at the school level. Yet, the (governance of the) Dutch system has been described as one of the most complex in the world (Waslander et al., 2016) and despite this "school autonomy" label, surveillance operates as a chain. As well as intermediary "sector organizations," such as the council for primary education, which use a variety of steering mechanisms to manipulate school practice, school-boards (under strict accountability themselves) implement various measures and place pressure on school principals to ensure sufficient school performance. These may be formal requirements—since 2006, boards must keep competency files on teachers and ensure that annual performance reviews take place (Nusche et al., 2014)—but equally, may be additional, protective measures. These layered structures mean that teachers are operating under internal, as well as external surveillance (see Skerritt, 2020).

3.2 | Accountability and performativity

Despite little *direct* government involvement in their work, teachers are certainly not free from the demands of performativity. PBA policy tools have been introduced incrementally, most significantly between the period 2007 and 2016 (Browes & Altinyelken, 2021). Core learning standards, measured by compulsory standardized testing throughout primary education, manipulate teachers' goals, values, and teaching practices. This is amplified by the presence of administrative and market tools that increase the stakes attached to school performance: Average test scores are published and compared with national averages. Parents are encouraged to consult this data, whether choosing a school or "keeping an eye" on one. Performing below average for three consecutive years, a school will be labeled "very weak" and subjected to an intensive and extensive inspection process (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2020). Tests also have significant stakes for students given that they are tracked into secondary education based on their performance at primary level. This is an added pressure for teachers (Browes, 2021).

Companies have developed subject packages or "methods" to support schools in meeting government outcome requirements. These include detailed syllabi, textbooks, and end of unit assessments. It is extremely common for schools to purchase and follow these methods, particularly in the core learning areas. Schools are also required to show data-oriented working and the use of effective quality assurance systems. This has led to the purchasing of student administrative systems, on which teachers are expected to record student progress and performance, as well as other student-related matters such as behavior and meetings with parents. Also indicative of a data and documentation culture—producing, updating, and evaluating "class plans" has become a core part of teachers' work. Not to be confused with daily lesson plans, these are longer-term, standards-oriented plans for each school period, often broken down by teachers into weekly plans. Class plans (usually) differentiate students by ability and organize learning accordingly. Ability groupings and lesson content are heavily influenced by standardized tests. Contrary to common belief, class plans are not a government requirement. This fact has been lost under layers of governance, and the plans have come to play a pivotal role in the organization of learning and often in schools' own evaluation of teachers (Browes, 2021).

4 | RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to uncover new ways of understanding teacher enactment of, and beliefs toward, PBA through a qualitative research strategy. For reasons outlined in the introduction, teachers in Dutch primary schools were sampled to explore the impact of "global" education trends through a case-study approach (Yin, 1984). Subscribing to the work of authors such as Stephen Ball, Anette Braun & Meg Maguire, enactment is understood as context specific and teachers are seen as pivotal actors in the interpretation and translation of policy. For this reason, a realist evaluation approach was adopted to guide data collection and analysis (see Pawson & Tilley, 1997), acknowledging the, often unobservable, mechanisms that impact teachers' (different) policy experiences.

Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers in six primary schools across three small cities in the central west "Randstad" region.[1] Three of the schools are public "openbaar," two independent "bijzonder" and one, a merger school, is described as both. All are fully government-funded, yet the public schools are also government-established meaning they do not align with any specific philosophical, religious, or social movement (also true of the merger school). The remaining two independent schools are "Protestant," yet background discussions with principals revealed this to be more reflective of the history of Dutch education (Strum et al., 1998) than of school culture. The schools varied in terms of their student populations and their approaches to education. Two of the schools (schools 5 and 6 in Table 1) had recently adopted a project-based, student-centered approach to learning, in which teachers took on a "coaching" role. A third school (school 4) had started using this approach in some non-core subjects. Three of the schools (1, 4, and 6) are located in affluent areas with homogenous "native Dutch" populations, two (2 and 5) in "mixed" neighborhoods, and one (school 3) in a majority immigrant area.

TABLE 1 Respondent information

School no.	Province	Type of school	No. interviews	Name* & position	Years teaching
1	North Holland	Public	4	Sanne, group 3	12
				Emma, group 6	10
				Lotte, group 8	4
				Roel, group 7/8	<1
2	North Holland	Public	4	Mirjam, group 8	12
				Robbie, group 5	4
				Julia, group 6	5
				Emily, group 7/8	17
3	North Holland	Public	3	Lisa, group 2	10
				Thom, group 7	12
				Nick, group 6	11
4	North Holland	Public/ Independent: General	4	Sophia, group 8	17
				Matthijs, group 5	14
				Femke, group 7	18
				Daan, group 8	19
5	Flevoland	Independent: Protestant	3	Tessa, group 7	7
				Lynn, group 8	14
				Martine, VP (previously group 6)	6
6	South Holland	Independent: Protestant	2	Lucas, group 7	1
				Lianne, group 8	25
Total:			20		

*denotes the pseudonyms.

Due to teacher shortages and reportedly high workloads, securing participation was challenging. Four of the schools were contacted "cold" and the remaining two through the network of the second author. Participant selection prioritized teachers from the upper level[2]—groups 6, 7, and 8—where PBA is at its most pronounced (stakes attached to testing are higher for students and for the school than in previous years). One respondent had recently dropped her teaching responsibilities to focus on a management position, and is therefore cited as a "vice-principal." In total, the sample consists of 13 female and 7 male teachers. Years of teaching experience varied considerably, from less than one year to over 25 years. Four teachers had less than 5 years of experience, and 5 teachers over 15 years. For an overview of respondents and their schools, see Table 1.

Interviews were semi-structured and averaged 40 min. They were transcribed verbatim and coded using software for qualitative data analysis. All participants have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. The interview script was guided by the study's research questions and realist evaluation perspective, and by a backlog of previous work which has examined the mechanisms and impacts of accountability and managerialism (for example, Evetts, 2009; Verger & Parcerisa, 2017). Themes included "work schedules and work tasks," "accountability," "ideal work tasks and working strategies," "professional image," and "school environment." It was semi-structured, allowing room for probing and ad hoc questions to adapt to teacher's individual situations and experiences. Coding was initially guided by the interview script and research questions, yet, it was also iterative in the sense that interviews were (re-)read to uncover themes and reflect the meaning behind teachers' responses, with the coding

protocol revised accordingly. The uncovering of various types of "working approaches" in response to PBA for example, initiated a new round of coding.

5 | FINDINGS

Findings are organized around the three research questions. The first section examines teachers' experiences of their work tasks and to what extent these tasks are performative. As well as teacher practices (how they spend their time) it also explores teacher beliefs (how they would ideally spend their time). The second focuses on the differences between these beliefs and practices, asking whether role discrepancy is experienced and if so, how this impacts teachers' working approaches. Finally, section three considers, in this PBA environment, how teachers might be (re)orienting their sense of professionalism.

5.1 | Teachers' tasks: Practices and beliefs

The majority of teachers' in-school time is spent teaching their students. Teachers across the six schools follow similar routines; dedicating (at least) morning lessons to the core subjects in an effort to better utilize student concentration. Respondents unanimously experience teaching time as intense: following crowded teaching plans, prescribed curricula, and fixed attainment goals. For some, this resulted in a sense that there is no time for flexibility, fun, and exploration in the classroom.

> In these developments in the last 10 years, we've become more and more slaves of the method; "we need to do lesson 5 and then you need to go to this topic and then… ." There's very little room to do something for fun, to do something because it is just interesting but it doesn't add up to any measurable results.
>
> (Emma, group 6, school 1)

Several teachers reported that these demanding schedules force a choice between "keeping up" and student understanding, and results in constant "clock watching." Within these teaching schedules, the assessed areas of learning appear to dominate. Many respondents desired to spend more time teaching topics and subjects not part of the core standards. Teachers in four out of the six schools expressed concern that creative subjects such as music and art are being squeezed out. Teachers also want the time and flexibility to be able to address ad hoc socio-cultural or behavioral issues, such as bullying. Yet here, the data reveal a perceptual difference, seemingly stemming from the value that teachers attribute to standards-based learning: whereas respondents generally agreed that more time should be spent on creative subjects, some thought this should come at the expense of core subjects, others, who see these subjects as critical part of their students' education, did not.

> But of course we sometimes say, "*but how? when?*" If I take an hour and a half painting that means I haven't done dictation, so next week I have to squeeze it in. And for some kids it's okay to miss a little lesson, but for the weaker kids, they need that extra time, we can't say "okay, we're all going to paint, but *you* can't!—*You* have to sit and do your extra practice."
>
> (Sanne, group 3, school 1)

Teachers working in schools which adopt project-based approaches generally spoke more favorably of their teaching experiences. Martine, who had recently moved schools, had seen the benefit of this approach first hand:

> [At my previous school] the teacher was leading, and not the children. There, I had a tight schedule; math, spelling, language. And the children there, they did not get the space to discover and to explore.
>
> (Martine, Vice-principal, school 5)

It was common for teachers in the more "pedagogically-traditional" schools to perceive their classes as regimented and inflexible. These teachers felt their students would benefit from a more student-centered approach and many desired a move to project-based learning in particular.

In four of the participating schools, the teaching period has become intensified over recent years due to a shortened school day: The result of devolved responsibilities that have given school boards the flexibility to choose opening hours. While this shortened day is preferred by some, others were not so keen. Robbie, for example, believed these condensed teaching hours were contributing to an erosion of collegiality and ultimately, an increased workload:

> They [the students] are off at 2 o'clock, but what about finishing at 3 and having an extra 45 min of break? (…) And it would save me time, as it would give me time to talk to colleagues, to be together and talk about ideas (…) "I have a measurement lesson in maths, what can I do—any tips?" So that would be good, and it would mean more bonding and you exchange ideas more to reduce the workload. I think that would be my ideal thing.
>
> (Robbie, group 5, school 2)

Other teaching-related tasks are scheduled for afternoons, once students have gone home. In particular, this includes lesson planning for the following day and checking and marking students' home and class work. The majority of respondents felt they have insufficient time for these tasks due to other responsibilities, meetings, responding to parents' emails, and administrative duties. Most of these respondents desired more time for lesson-planning in particular, believing this would enable their students to benefit from more impactful classes and result in a more enjoyable teaching experience.

Beyond these core teaching tasks, test-based activities occupy a considerable portion of teachers' schedules and the vast majority of respondents experience a workload increase during testing periods. Test-based tasks chiefly consist of: preparing for tests (preparing students, organizing papers, and preparing the classroom), inputting and analyzing test data (the majority of tests are done by hand and must subsequently be digitized) and "acting on results" (meetings with management, group meetings with colleagues, parent meetings, student reports, ability grouping and teaching content, and timetables are all based around results). Testing is generally seen as a necessary part of school life, and although numerous respondents felt its role has become too dominant, it is still understood as a useful way to establish goals, assess progress and tailor teaching. Testing itself does not clash with teachers' professional values, yet for some, the *centrality* of testing, and the administrative burdens connected to it, do.

These administrative or more specifically "documentation" tasks reportedly demand a considerable amount of teachers' time. Their general purpose appears to be teacher surveillance and accountability. Teachers are required to show plans and records of students' (differentiated) work, and regularly evaluate and modify these plans to demonstrate they are aware, data-oriented, and responsive. Opinions about the value of such tasks vary. A small minority of respondents had a positive outlook, reporting them to be a necessary way to stay "on track" and abreast of their students' progress. A much larger number considered these documentation demands excessive and never-ending. Some teachers in this second group found the tasks entirely unnecessary:

> Well, the principal of the school wants that [daily report]. I asked why he thinks that's necessary, I said "It's total nonsense! It's absolutely not necessary, because I'm the only teacher here in my

class—I work 5 days." I can imagine that if you have another colleague—you work 3 days and they work 2—you have to show what you've done and explain the difficulties, but I'm by myself, so should I get into a dialogue with myself? That's nonsense. *I know*, I have in *my head* what's happened.

(Matthijs, group 5, school 4)

Finally, teachers' communication with parents was commonly reported to be highly demanding and a generally undesirable task. Notions parents may have of the "accessible teacher" are also symptomatic of the PBA agenda, connected to the goals of transparency and participative accountability. Respondents felt, at times, overwhelmed by parents' questions and demands: For less experienced teachers, this was something they had not expected. For those in the profession longer, it was something they had seen change.

Twenty years ago it was easy. When I started, internet was just upcoming, e-mailing was not a priority. But now parents don't come to your class anymore, [they] just send an e-mail. Sometimes, an angry e-mail. You feel that the tone is angry, but you never know in what mood they texted, always guessing. And that is, that irritates me the most nowadays. Just sending problems.

(Daan, group 8, school 4)

5.2 | Role discrepancy and teacher response

The account of teachers' experiences provided above, reveals strong and recurrent themes of heavy workloads, task-management pressures, and, for many, insufficient time in the working week. Essentially, teachers appear to be experiencing a task-overload. These tasks are heavily influenced by the PBA agenda: teaching, testing, and administrative demands are ultimately shaped by the pursuit of good, or at least sufficient, test scores.

A small minority of teachers (3 out of the 20 respondents), accepted the importance of this agenda, to the extent that they expressed an *alignment* between the tasks they engage with at work and the tasks they considered at the core of good teaching: Essentially, these teachers have seemingly aligned their practices and beliefs: This group of respondents attached importance to PBA tools: Learning standards were considered to keep them focused and abreast of what is important, standardized tests were perceived as an essential way of checking their students' and their own progress, and record-keeping and careful planning were considered to make them more effective teachers, better able to keep track of their students and foster improvement.

Well in your lessons of course you try to see if everybody gets the [learning] goals, and for me it's to see, *what are* the goals? And you need to put those in a report for home [parents] and it's like… well it keeps you *alert*.

(Lotte, group 8, school 1)

While the numbers are small, it is still noteworthy that all three of these teachers were in the very early stages of their careers (teaching for less than five years). They were not blind to the issues that an over-focus on performance could generate and still would have liked more time for particular tasks, yet they wanted their students to achieve to the best of their abilities—believing this to be the essence of teaching—and saw the contribution that performative tasks made to this goal. In this way, their students' test scores were considered to reflect on their own professionalism.

The remaining majority of respondents can be understood to be experiencing a mismatch between those tasks they are (expected to) engage with, and those tasks they considered at the core of good teaching. Performative

tasks were perceived to be numerous and highly demanding. Respondents felt these tasks detracted from those they considered to be at the heart of the profession; planning and delivering engaging, thought-provoking lessons, and helping students to maximize their abilities. Teachers discussed various responses to these role discrepancies. Some, position role discrepancy as something that can be "managed," with teachers finding time for performative tasks *as well as* time for those tasks they felt to be most important. Others, position it as something to submit to, with teachers feeling forced to choose between tasks. Attached to each response are particular working attitudes and approaches. While most respondents can be understood as adopting one position or the other (being fairly evenly spread between the two), and taking one particular approach to their work, a minority of teachers can better be understood as moving between the two.

5.2.1 | Role discrepancy "management"

Some teachers described trying to manage role discrepancy by adapting their way of working to make space for their beliefs as well as required practices. In this way, all tasks are integrated into teachers' working schedules. Respondents spoke of one of two ways in which this was achieved.

The first way is through the *integration* of tasks. Despite not attaching particular importance to the performative tasks required of them, some respondents felt able to integrate these tasks into their work routines in such a way that they were not perceived to impinge on tasks considered more important. Four teachers spoke of their work approach in this way. They seem to have adapted fairly smoothly to the "new realities" of teaching by accepting documentation and data-based tasks as part of the job, without feeling compelled to make them a priority, or to make (significant) compromises.

> Well there are things that *have to* be done—things with parents have to be done, tests have to be checked, but, for example, a meeting doesn't have to be prepared. So that's the reason, that's the difference, and most of the time, perhaps it's a bit braggy, but I have very good memory so everything that has been said I can recall weeks later, so when I have conversations with parents, I don't have to put them in the computer immediately, I can do it a few weeks later (…).
>
> (Lucas, group 7, school 6)

While at times, expressing frustration with managerial demands, these respondents did not see them as worthy of real concern. Teachers who employed this approach had a range of teaching experience, from less than 5 years to almost 20. Interestingly, however, all were male and held positions of responsibility in ICT. Indeed, a technological confidence and an-ease-of-use of the digital systems that have become part of teachers' daily work life, might be central to this more relaxed, integrative approach to administrative performative demands.

Second were respondents who spoke of task *accumulation* being able to meaningfully engage with both lesser-valued but required tasks, and the tasks most important to them by incorporating out-of-hours work as a fixed part of their weekly schedules. Most often, tasks undertaken out-of-hours were core teaching tasks (lesson planning and checking and marking students' work) that teachers reported to have insufficient time for during school hours.

> … because we really like to *teach* children something and when we can manage that, and we can see the *fun* of it and *see* it with the kids, well, that's so nice. So that's [lesson planning] something I do on the weekends and that's why I do it on the weekend, because I really like teaching.
>
> (Sophia, group 8, school 4)

5.2.2 | Role discrepancy "capitulation"

A significant number of respondents (between one-third and a half) felt, at times, forced into a position of compromise: Having to prioritize tasks and choose between (required) practices and those they considered central to good teaching. This was particularly true of those teachers who had made a conscious decision not to work regularly out-of-hours (most of whom had suffered previously from burnout). In these situations, two contrasting working approaches were reported. First, those teachers who reported to economize on required performative tasks in order to make time for other tasks; tasks they considered central to student development. This can be understood as a form of policy *evasion*.

Interviewer: So which tasks do you tend to prioritize then?

Julia: Everything that's most important for the children. [...] So *preparing* my lesson I think is more important than *typing down* the plan for the whole period.

(Julia, group 6, school 2)

The term "evasion" is borrowed from Perryman et al. (2011). This response appears to stem as much, if not more, from practicality as it does ideology: As reported by Lisa, cutting "non-core" tasks is sometimes the only option.

> The middle testing period was in January, and then [again] in May or June. And halfway through you have to make an evaluation of your plans... [whispering] and I didn't do that. So I said to [names of management] "I have no time for it—I have *a lot* of tasks *next to* teaching, I have only two days with an extra assistant, so when do I do it?" And it is in my head... it must be enough!
>
> (Lisa, group 2, school 3)

The ability to adopt this approach appears largely dependent on school management. Certain administrative tasks could be disregarded only because teachers had the trust and support from their school management to do so.

> But I think if I would work at a different school, that would be different. Then you really have to put so much more time in it. But that is something that I would like to do even less of... stupid plans and those kind of things... I never look at those plans when I am teaching.
>
> (Nick, group 6, school 3)

Second, teachers who felt consistently forced to economize on tasks they value and consider central to good teaching, expressed a strong sense of *resignation*. These respondents reported a frustration with their everyday work; drowning in lists of daily demands and a sense of constraint; forced to compromise on what and how to teach. Martine (now vice-principal) cited this as her reason for leaving her previous teaching job.

> For a really long time, I tried to do both, but, it was impossible. So you would go with what the management wanted.
>
> (Martine, vice-principal, school 5)

More specifically, this "response" was characterized by a strong feeling from teachers that demanding workloads have resulted in insufficient time to plan the sort of lessons they want, and a lack of opportunity to teach the lessons they consider really stimulating and beneficial to students. It was primarily reported by more experienced teachers, who spoke of the changes they had seen in the profession and the growing demands upon them. Matthijs, teaching

for 14 years, explained that this was not what he expected from the profession, and it had compromised his enjoyment of the work:

> But since a few years, with all this... what I mentioned a few times, all these extra *things*... I think "shouldn't we get on with teaching, and leave all these other *things* outside the classroom?"
>
> (Matthijs, group 5, school 4)

5.3 | A Shifting sense of professionalism?

Beyond teachers' experiences of performativity and the responses this incites, it is pertinent to consider the impact that is had on teachers' professional identities—their sense of professionalism—and the ways respondents may have (re)oriented their beliefs and expectations to (better) align with the daily realities of being a teaching professional today.

One striking way the data indicate this might be happening, is through teachers' experience of autonomy, traditionally considered a key characteristic of the professions. Accounts indicate that traditional notions of professional autonomy may be shifting: Many respondents understand it as something constricted, to be earned rather than a given. This was commonly described as autonomy "between the lines."

Robbie: I feel like I am in control of what I would like to do. It's only that the IB'er [member of management] and colleagues, they help me to be on the red line, the main path, but which way I would like to go—it's up to me. As long as I achieve my goals that I talked about with management.
Interviewer: And goals in terms of...
Robbie: Numbers. Purely results.

(Robbie, group 5, school 2)

When asked what would happen if these goals were not met, Robbie's response illustrates the creeping normalization of the paramountcy of student achievement.

> ... so, I'd have more observations in the class. So as soon as that happens then, I hope, to be honest, *I hope*, there would be more focus on me than there is right now.

Only a minority of respondents reported to have a meaningful role in choosing and shaping curricula—connected to their school's pedagogical and managerial approach (Browes, 2021)—and yet, most, reported to be content with the autonomy afforded to them. For some, namely those "aligned" teachers such as Robbie, these conditioned "micro-autonomous spaces" (Wilkins, 2011) were sufficient for them to consider themselves autonomous professionals. For others, this stance was merely practical; there was not the time for utilizing the luxury of more meaningful curricular freedom. Indeed, teachers' inabilities to teach lessons with the desired levels of creativity and inspiration, as reported earlier, is generally not attributed to a lack of autonomy, rather, to a lack of time. In environments where time is scarce and tasks are many, we should not assume that curricular autonomy is desired. While often described as "possible theoretically," teachers do not have the time to spend developing curricula (unless this is an integral part of school culture), and many claimed to prefer to work from the textbook. Those who *did* desire more curricular autonomy were are almost exclusively teachers who have been in the profession a decade or more;

> I really feel that it's too little. [...]. We have a method for every single subject.
>
> (Emma, group 6, school 1)

Tight working schedules have other impacts too. Collegiality, (in terms of taking time to discuss, share ideas, and support colleagues) may now also have low precedence:

> Sometimes after work I am like: I *could* go to a colleague, but if I want to ask a question I know I will be there for 10 min, because we start talking about other things while I also want to finish it [other work], and I want to leave at 4 o' clock for example.
>
> (Nick, group 6, school 3)

Finally, it is important to re-stress that the aim of recent reforms has been the *professionalization* of teachers. In the Netherlands, this has included the development of teacher competency standards and professional development courses aligned with these standards. These measures incite changes to the profession by (re)defining its parameters and what it means to be a good teacher. Respondents' experiences of this are mixed: Several (predominantly, but not exclusively, younger) teachers see the teaching standards and courses on offer as an opportunity for professional growth, others generally more advanced in their careers, see the initiative as tokenistic, externally controlled, and narrowly-focused on standards-based learning.[3]

It is, therefore, perhaps accurate to describe teachers' experiences of their professionalism as divergent: separated into those who have (re)oriented their values, expectations, and practices to (better) fit their reality, and those who feel frustrated, holding onto previous experiences and more "traditional" notions of what it means to be a teaching professional. Although a small data set, findings indicate that members of these groups can perhaps best (if not always) be identified by their years of teaching experience. Despite these differing perspectives and the daily compromises some teachers feel they are making, all respondents appear to be able to reconcile their beliefs and practices to some extent; claiming they are still, in some form, able to be the sort of teacher they want to be. Particularly for those who feel they are making significant compromises daily, this is due to expectation realignment, the ability to take refuge in small successes, and the hope that, in whatever way chosen, they are providing crucial support to their students.

Interviewer: and do you feel that you can be this teacher?

Emma: Yeah, at this point I can. But at other levels I can't be, I can't. The challenge is that you always somehow feel it's never going to be perfect—there's always rules and things that you just forgot and missed out on and it's the process of letting go and accepting it, and thinking "well, that was a good day anyway."

> (Emma, group 6, school 1)

> ... you hope to make a difference, you hope that someday the kids will look back and maybe think of *me*, not about the math I explained, but as a person, as a teacher who listened and was there for them.
>
> (Lynn, group 8, school 5)

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study has taken a look at a group of professionals operating within environments of surveillance, whereby they are increasingly held accountable through the recording of their work and their performance outcomes. This has been through a focus on primary school teachers in the Netherlands, using the concept of role discrepancy to understand what teachers do and how they feel about their work. In doing so, while situating professional change as an impact of broader, educational reform, it also demonstrates at the micro level, how the teaching profession might be changing from the inside, through the manner in which teachers' perceive their roles and responsibilities (Ball, 2016).

Findings suggest that primary teachers in the autonomous Dutch system share many experiences with those working in notoriously high-stakes, highly-controlled PBA contexts. Respondents were found to be operating in a "post-professional" environment (Hargreaves, 2000), struggling under time pressures and overburdened with tasks, directly impacting what and how they taught (see Berryhill et al., 2009). The impact of this on teaching however, was reported to be less for those teachers working in schools that adopt project-based learning. Nonetheless, in all schools, tasks traditionally at the core of teaching are apparently being pushed out by tasks that, instead, have the function of *measuring* teaching and learning. In these work environments, as in other professions, role discrepancy was found to be prevalent. As found among social workers (Agresta, 2006) and occupational therapists (Lloyd et al., 2004), teachers desired to spend more time on their areas of specialism and less time on more generic, administrative tasks. Yet, role discrepancy does not necessarily result in feelings of frustration or compromise, rather, teachers were found to adjust to these realities and negotiate policy boundaries in quite different ways.

Teachers' responses to role discrepancy constitute either an adaptation of their work to allow space for beliefs and required performative practices, or regular compromises being made between the two. Whereas the first approach might enable teachers to minimize their experience of role discrepancy, this was not always in a desirable way. Teachers' perspectives and approaches to their work discussed in the paper should not be considered an exhaustive list, rather, were those identified among this study's sample. Neither should they be considered entirely exclusive. The majority of teachers described particular ways of working, yet a small number seem to adapt their approach as deemed necessary; feeling the weight of task accumulation, for example, and thereby regularly working from home, while also at times "evading" policy by avoiding particular performative tasks.

Significantly, a small minority of teachers, all early in their careers, did not appear to experience role discrepancy. Subscribing to the PBA agenda, they measured themselves as professionals against their students' performance outcomes and, despite some frustrations, did not feel the need to compromise or significantly adjust their practices to accommodate their professional values. In this sense, these teachers display the characteristics of Wilkins (2011) "post-performative" teachers, "knowing" themselves as professionals through performative measures (Holloway & Brass, 2018).

These teachers' formative professional years took place before key PBA reforms had (fully) taken hold, and their values and expectations were shaped within different environments (see Holloway & Brass, 2018). Their experiences contrast with their more experienced colleagues (in the profession for at least a decade), who were more likely to feel the burden of compromise and a greater sense of frustration with their work. This finding is contrary to the hypothesis presented in Takase et al.'s (2006a) study on the nursing profession; that more experienced workers may experience role discrepancy to a lesser degree as they are *better able* to adjust or "improve" their practice in line with their beliefs. Rather, teachers are not able to "adjust" the multitude of demands upon them, and thus experience a sense of being pulled in two directions at once. Indeed, it is for this reason that the term policy *evasion* is used to describe those respondents who do, essentially, try to "improve" their practice. As discussed by Perryman et al. (2011), performative policies have become woven into the fabric of teaching, and normalized to the extent that "policy resistance" is not possible. Instead, teachers in this study were found to "drop" particular performative tasks for largely practical reasons, and only if they had the support of management to do so.

These findings complement those from Dutch secondary education, with Hendrikx (2019), noting that teachers either compromise on their beliefs, their required practices, or their time. Yet importantly, they also reveal a greater complexity to policy enactment, highlighting not only the importance of *compromise*, but also the importance of *adaptation*. It is clear that respondents' different perspectives toward PBA and their various responses to the challenge of role discrepancy, reinforce the conceptualization of teachers as "pragmatic" and "eclectic" policy actors (Moore et al., 2002): positioning their professionalism in a way that aligns with policy demands (principled pragmatism), feeling forced into "resignation" and compromising on professional beliefs (contingent pragmatism), or finding themselves somewhere in the middle of this "continuum," and altering their practices to accommodate beliefs, by accumulating tasks, integrating them, or evading them.

From these various positions, teachers held particular views on key aspects of their professionalism. Many respondents were content with what appears to be constricted autonomy or "autonomy between the lines." Whether for pragmatic purposes or ideological ones, such findings point toward a re-professionalization, rather than a de-professionalization of teachers (see Ball, 2016; Noordegraaf, 2013). Despite the small sample, when considered alongside studies such as Holloway and Brass (2018), Moore et al. (2002), and Wilkins (2011), this study suggests that performative policies might be creating a divisive chasm. For those "post-performative" teachers standing on the mainland who have either been professionally socialized within these realities or who have effectively adapted to them, PBA perhaps offers clear and useful professional guidance. For others, whose professional values were shaped in a different policy context, they may feel stranded, unsure of what their profession has become. Moore and Clarke's (2016) "attachment to professionalism" concept is useful in understanding this potential disjuncture, and may explain empirical data showing why some of these "stranded" teachers feel the need to resign to the managerial demands upon them. Further research in the Netherlands would be needed to test this idea.

Policy makers should be wary here, and strive to narrow potential chasms rather than risk the (further) alienation of a large part of the teaching profession. Stubbornly-narrow and, now cemented, quality measurements appear to restrict teachers in the classroom, and unclear quality assurance frameworks have led to the documentation of all aspects of their work and a task overload. In these ways, teachers' autonomy is constricted both directly and indirectly. Surveillance has its impacts: Traditionally-autonomous professionals in a traditionally-autonomous system are being micro-managed through various layers of governance, and, based on shortage figures, it seems teaching has become an undesirable profession. Rather than continue struggling to save the profession through forced, external efforts to raise its status, attention should turn to the nature by which teachers are held accountable, and steps taken to support the development of accountability tools that are rooted within the profession itself, and based upon trust.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has been approved by the ethical committees of both the Autonomous University of Barcelona—the university hosting the wider project, and the University of Amsterdam—the partner university supporting the research in the Netherlands.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] An area of high urbanity encapsulating the country's four biggest cities.

[2] It is common however for teachers to rotate groups every year or few years (usually keeping within the lower, middle, or upper level).

[3] These competency standards have since been rescinded.

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