

# Parents, Providers and Political Extremists: Analysing Accountability for Quality Education in a Global Context

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## I. Introduction

The quality of a child's education depends not only on the competence of the people involved but also on their commitment. One means of motivation is through a system of accountability. The World Bank in particular is encouraging global action on public accountability to improve the quality of education.

"Accountability" and "Quality Education" are both highly subjective terms whose meaning depends on the context. A statement that certain public employees are "unaccountable" may just mean that they are not under active supervision. To make such officials accountable, education systems have traditionally applied upward, managerial reporting structures with ministers at the top being publicly accountable to all citizens. The 2004 World Development Report highlighted the alternative "short route of accountability" in which the "education service provider" is responsible to the "client": the child's parents. Some countries have introduced this approach through market-inspired systems based on a standardised measurement of school performance. Many researchers criticise this approach, some calling for more attention to the mutual accountability of all adults involved in a child's education. Some seek school-based systems of quality assurance in which Ministry inspectors, advisers and teacher trainers are essential service providers to the school. Moreover, accountability is needed not just for the public sector but also the private sector. This is especially true where a private school or other institution has taken on a culture of political or sectarian indoctrination. This last example is also a reminder that the quality of education

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is not just a matter of academic standards.

Is it possible to adopt a common approach to these different forms of accountability? Can we plan accountability systems on the basis of mutual accountability of all contributors to a child's education?

This paper provides an attempt at such a generalised approach. After examining the general concepts of quality and accountability in an educational setting and their current application, the paper introduces a general tool for analysing a matrix of accountabilities in a systematic manner. This approach helps identify where and how formal systems of accountability need to be created or modified within the sector to improve the quality of education. It allows a broadening of the scope of accountability beyond the present top-down "bureaucratic-professional", "evaluative state" and "market-based" approaches. It includes but goes beyond controls for under-achieving teachers, national tests and parental choice.

Three examples of the use of this analytical tool are given in the final sections of the paper. The first re-examines the approach towards quality improvement through increasing the accountability of the education system to parents. The second examines quality improvement through increasing the authority of school management. The third looks at the very different issue of preventing extremist sectarian or political indoctrination.

The concept of accountability can be employed as more than mere quality control. At best it is a means of introducing systems of "quality assurance" that positively encourage and empower all stakeholders in a child's education to "give of their best" and achieve high quality education for all.

## **II. Calls for Greater Accountability in Systems of Education**

### **1. Developments in Europe, Australia and the US**

Concerns about accountability in education have a long history. Religious institutions needed to ensure the teaching in their schools was in line with accepted doctrine. Political leaders wished to ensure that education promoted their or the national interest and avoided sectarian divisions. Adams and Kirst<sup>1</sup> describe ways in which providers of education have been required to give an

account of their work and be held responsible for school performance. These include: the “performance by results” schemes in nineteenth-century England; the American school superintendents and district staff being made accountable to democratically-elected school boards; Dutch funding of government schools using the same system as private schools; and historical use of schools inspectorates in many European countries.

The present emphasis on public accountability began in the 1960s and 1970s. Dimmock<sup>2</sup> links this in England and Wales with a reduction of expenditure on public services alongside a “desire for greater public participation in decision-making ... a general demand to make those responsible for spending public money more answerable to taxpayers and ratepayers. He quotes Halsey’s reference to a “rotting of public confidence in public institutions”<sup>3</sup>. The government response was “a programme of widening and intensifying testing programmes (e.g. through the Assessment of Performance Unit), of emphasising the inspectorial role of the Inspectorate and local advisory service, and of increasing parental choice and involvement.” Dimmock notes “various schemes for school evaluation and accountability” from that time including Local Education Authority initiated schemes, teachers’ self evaluation and “combinations of external and internal accountability of schools”.

Hill<sup>4</sup> notes similar developments in Australia. “All government school education systems in Australia, except the ACT, now operate programs to monitor educational standards. ...The principal motivation behind current assessment programs is to meet public demands for educational systems to be accountable for maintaining and indeed improving standards. As such, they tend to command broad support from the community, but rarely receive enthusiastic support from the teaching profession.”

The US has seen a major emphasis on measures to increase school accountability. Key developments in this direction include league tables based on standardised testing, charter schools and school voucher schemes.

“Charter schools are independent public schools, designed by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs and others who want to provide quality education tailored to student need. Charters operate outside the

educational bureaucracy that too often stifles innovation in traditional public schools.”<sup>5</sup> They are “based on the belief that America’s public schools should meet standards of excellence and be held accountable”. (There has recently been strong teacher union opposition to similar schools in England on the grounds of inadequate local accountability.)

Voucher schools had an unfortunate start in the 1960s as means of perpetuating racial segregation in some Southern US states. They were later taken up as a means of increasing accountability in schools. To quote the economist Friedrich Hayek<sup>6</sup>: “It would now be entirely practicable to defray the costs of general education out of the public purse without maintaining government schools, by giving the parents vouchers covering the cost of education of each child which they could hand over to schools of their choice... it would undoubtedly be possible to leave the organization and management of education entirely to private efforts, with the government providing merely the basic finance and ensuring a minimum standard for all schools where the vouchers could be spent.”

## 2. World Bank Calls for Public Accountability of Service Delivery Providers

The 2004 World Development Report raised the importance of accountability for improving service delivery in poor countries. Whilst the public sector had taken responsibility for delivery services with some success, there were still major problems, especially for poor people. The solution was not just increased spending or “technocratic solutions”. “The general question: what institutional conditions support the emergence of capable, motivated frontline providers with clear objectives and adequate resources? The answer: successful services for poor people emerge from institutional relationships in which the actors are accountable to each other.”<sup>7</sup> The report expands on this comment by providing an accountability framework and arguing for greater emphasis on the “short route of accountability” between “client” and “provider” as opposed to the “long route” through central elected government.

More recently, the World Bank’s 2008 Flagship Report on Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa<sup>8</sup> emphasized “the central role of *incentives* and *public accountability* to meet sector goals. Most reforms in the region have

attempted to engineer changes in the education system: building schools, hiring teachers, and writing curricula. The success of future reforms will require instead changes in the *behavior* of key education actors—teachers, administrators, and educational authorities. This is the road not traveled in the education sector.” The report introduces the equation: “successful education reform” = “engineering” (i.e. Physical resources, curriculum and teaching, finance and administration) + “incentives” + “Accountability”.

### III. Basic Concepts

#### 1. Accountability

In the simplest journalistic terms, people are said to be “unaccountable” if they can behave badly and get away with it. Accountability implies assessment against a basic standard and punishment of those who fail to keep to this standard. Dimmock<sup>9</sup> contrasts *evaluation* which involves a judgement or assessment of the worth or value of something with *accountability* which involves responsibility and answerability.

Accountability also implies a relationship. Shedler defines accountability as follows: “A is accountable to B when A is obliged to inform B about A’s (past or future) actions and decisions, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct.”<sup>10</sup> Adams and Kirst<sup>11</sup> argue that what the various examples of accountability in education have in common is a relationship in which a “Principal” holds an “Agent” responsible for certain kinds of performance. The Agent is expected to provide an “account” to the “Principal” which describes the performance for which the “Agent” is held responsible. The account may be simply descriptive or include an explanation or justification of the performance achieved. The “Principal” may set standards for what constitutes adequate performance and may reward the “Agent” for performance that exceeds the standard or punish the “Agent” for sub-standard work.

The online Education Encyclopaedia State.University.com<sup>12</sup> gives a range of different kinds of accountability fitting this definition and relevant to the education sector: moral and professional accountability; bureaucratic accountability; political accountability; market accountability and legal accountability.

The 2004 World Development Report<sup>13</sup> adds the element of financing to its definition of accountability. “What this Report means by accountability is a relationship among actors that has five features: *delegation, finance, performance, information about performance, and enforceability.*” However, this inclusion of financing is not common to other definitions of accountability and unnecessarily limits the situations in which the context can be applied. For example, a teacher may “delegate” a member of the local community to help “teach” an area (e.g. piece of local history) in which that person has particular expertise, but without providing payment. That person, having accepted the task, should be accountable to the teacher on the basis of a “moral contract” even though no funds have been exchanged. This paper will thus not include finance in its definition of accountability.

The World Bank Middle East Education Report uses the term “public accountability”. This “is concerned with the ability of parents/students to influence the formulation of education objectives, policies, and re-source allocation, either at the national and/or local levels”.<sup>14</sup> This is one particular aspect of accountability in which the parent or student is the delegating “Principal”.

There are many other examples in education where accountability is relevant. For example, a school principal delegates most of the teaching in the school to other teachers. Darling-Hammond notes that: “Accountability encompasses how a school or school system hires, evaluates, and supports its staff, how it relates to students and parents, how it manages its daily affairs, how it makes decisions; how it ensures that the best available knowledge will be acquired and used; how it generates new knowledge, how it evaluates its own functioning as well as student progress, how it tackles problems, and how it provides incentives for continual improvement.”<sup>15</sup> In a study by Arens<sup>16</sup> of public views on education accountability, “the vast majority of community representatives felt that accountability responsibilities should not just reside in the education system—that accountability ‘is a society issue’ and, as such, the community, its students and its parents need to be accountable”. Barrett’s experience of education in Tanzania led her to conclude that: “Ultimately as adults, teachers, parents and education managers have a shared moral responsibility to children that binds them

together in relationships of mutual accountability and support”.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of someone (the “Principal”) giving someone else (the “Agent”) responsibility for a task is common to most definitions of accountability. For example, Kogan<sup>18</sup> defines accountability as “the duty to render an account of work performed to a body that has authority to modify that performance, by the use of sanctions or reward”. Dimmock<sup>19</sup> notes that this involves three distinct elements constituting accountability: “first, the ascription of certain tasks and responsibilities; secondly, the duty of those assuming responsibility to render an account to a person or body in authority; and thirdly, the right of those to whom an account is given to exercise power by intervention in the form of sanctions or rewards.”

Dimmock also points out that individuals may be answerable to a number of diverse constituencies. He quotes the East Sussex Accountability Project<sup>20</sup> argument that teachers should be: answerable to their clients (parents and pupils) through *moral accountability*; responsible to themselves and to colleagues through *professional accountability*; accountable to their employers or political masters through *contractual accountability*. “Exemplifying these differences with regard to schools and Education Committees, the Project researchers argue that: ‘schools are primarily answerable to parents, but legally accountable to the Local Education Authority (directly or via their managers). Education Committees are answerable to their schools, but constitutionally accountable to the electorate (either directly, or via their governing Council). Both have also to acknowledge certain responsibilities to their own professional consciences and to their peers.’”

## 2. Accountability and the Quality of Education

Accountability is only important for education to the extent that it improves the quality of education. But this begs the question of what we mean by the quality of education and what contributes to its achievement.

The UNESCO 2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Report focused on these issues.<sup>21</sup> The report notes that: “Two principles characterize most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners’ cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. Accordingly, the success

with which systems achieve this is one indicator of their quality. The second emphasizes education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. The achievement of these objectives is more difficult to assess and compare across countries."

Most current approaches to accountability focus on learners' cognitive development, particularly in the core subjects of language, mathematics and science. Achievement in these subjects is important for ongoing learning and skills development and for a wide range of future careers. Assessment of this achievement can be achieved to a high degree through standardised tests and compared between countries. It thus provides a straightforward basis for results-based accountability of schools and education systems, especially if the assessment is nuanced to take into account differences between students entering the various schools.

However, values, attitudes, and knowledge and skills in other areas are also vital aspects of a high quality education. In the words of the Japanese Fundamental Education Law: "Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving to develop healthy citizens in mind and body who are imbued with the qualities necessary to build a peaceful and democratic state and society".<sup>22</sup> Even on a vocational level, employers require employees who can communicate well, work responsibly and constructively with others, and take the initiative in solving problems and devising creative solutions. Democratic nations require citizens who can think critically, exercise sound judgement, avoid extremist sectarian divisions and violent confrontation and instead contribute to the development of society and the nation as a whole. Cultural and creative development are vital aspects of social and national development. Religious education was the initial basis for education, providing moral education and personal, national and cultural development. For much of the twentieth century it was the only compulsory subject in the English curriculum. This aspect of the curriculum is still crucial for national and social development, even where, as in Japan, religious education has been replaced by moral education. Moreover, accountability in the teaching of religion and politics is important for national cohesion and national security. Many countries go to great lengths to prevent extremist groups and



individuals from spreading socially and politically divisive indoctrination and, in the worst cases, encouraging violent insurrection and terrorism. As elsewhere, accountability systems need to be strong yet well designed to avoid creating resentment and limiting individual and academic freedom and development.

In terms of evidence-based guidance on what makes schools effective, the UNESCO 2005 report identifies:

- Teachers: well paid, well trained and using a pedagogy based on structured learning (direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning) in a child-friendly environment;
- Learning time at least 850 hours of instruction per year;
- Emphasis on core subjects, especially literacy;
- Starting with the learner’s first language as the language of instruction;
- Learning materials (with a note that lack of textbooks can result from an inefficient distribution system, malpractice and corruption, i.e., poor accountability);
- Facilities, especially water and sanitation;
- Leadership: “Central governments must be ready to give greater freedom to schools provided that adequate resources are available and that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Head teachers/principals can have a strong influence on the quality of schools”.

There is ample evidence that teachers are the key element in raising the quality education. One study found that “students benefiting from regular yearly assignment to more effective teachers (even if by chance) have an extreme advantage in terms of attaining higher levels of achievement. (The range of approximately 50 percentile points in student mathematics achievement as measured in this study is awesome!!! Differences of this magnitude could determine future assignments of remedial versus accelerated courses.)”<sup>23</sup>

However, the ability of teachers to be effective depends on the contributions of a wide range of others within and outside the sector, all of whom need to be accountable.

## IV. Some Current Systems for Accountability in Education

### 1. Traditional “Bureaucratic-Professional” Model

Traditional systems of accountability in education have been based on upward reporting systems from teacher to school principal to local authority to national government through relatively tenuous bureaucratic procedures relying heavily on professional self-accountability. “On the one hand, the regulation is based upon general and standardized bureaucratic rules, on the other, the teaching profession has a collective power over the content of its work (concerning pedagogical issues) and its working conditions through its representatives”.<sup>24</sup> Government is in turn politically accountable to the population and thus to parents.

Upward accountability to government and political accountability of government are vital whatever other accountability systems are in place. Without this, parents have no means of ensuring that education provision is undistorted by local vested interests or ethnic or sectarian values—and, in the worst circumstances, extremist religious or political indoctrination.

The World Bank refers to this system of accountability from the teacher to parent via the government as “the long route of accountability”.<sup>25</sup>

Parental influence on schools through this process is only effective to the extent that there is accountability between levels of government and good overall political accountability. The approach on its own does little to encourage parental ownership of schools, or to encourage the latter to pay attention to parents’ opinions. In some countries, strong accountability of teachers to government inspectors detracts from internal school accountability by making teacher’s less accountable to the school principal.

### 2. “Evaluative State” Model

Maroy<sup>26</sup> sees recent attempts to increase accountability as moving into a “post-bureaucratic regulation regime which seeks to go beyond the bureaucratic—professional model which remains dominant today, by highlighting either the traits of an ‘evaluative state’ or those of the ‘quasi-market’ model.” In the evaluative state model used in Belgium, France, Hungary and Portugal, “the central

state negotiates ‘goals to reach’ with local entities (such as schools) and delegates the responsibility for and increasing means of reaching these goals ... In addition, a system of external school performance evaluation and symbolic or material incentives, or even sanctions, is established to favour improved performances and fulfilment of the explicit or implicit ‘contract’ signed between the state and schools.”

Whilst England employs the *quasi-market* model of accountability, the contractual element is still present between the Ministry of Education and Treasury through a *Public Service Agreement*. The budgetary allocations to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) are on the understanding that the DCSF will pursue an aim and objectives agreed by the Treasury. Indeed, the section of the DCSF website dealing with Strategy refers the reader to the Treasury website.

### 3. Market-based Approaches

In England and Wales, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, school accountability is strengthened by establishing a market-type customer-provider relationship between parents and the school. The latter have delegated autonomy to choose the means to implement the government education objectives and curriculum. Parents are free to choose their school, and government provides them with information on school performance. (This publically-available information is based on national assessments against standard attainment targets on cognitive learning in the core subjects). The implication is that student numbers will increase in high performing schools and decrease in poorly performing schools. As government funding depends on student numbers, this provides parents with a means of rewarding or punishing schools according to the school performance and encouraging poorer schools to improve. *Failing schools*, like failing businesses, may be closed or given new management. In England and Wales, this *education market* is overseen by a government regulating body, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which reports to directly Parliament and not through a Ministry.

As Maroy points out,<sup>27</sup> there are differences between this “quasi-market and

a classical market: (1) the balance between supply and demand is not achieved through prices; (2) the state is still a key actor fulfilling several roles: approval of 'new providers', funding the providers, definition of compulsory rules for demand (age of compulsory schooling for example), and the educational offering (programmes, certification system, etc.)."

There have been many criticisms of this approach:

1. Koretz<sup>28</sup> notes that despite "the long history of assessment-based accountability, hard evidence about its effects is surprisingly sparse, and the little evidence that is available is not encouraging ... closer scrutiny has shown that test-based accountability can generate spurious gains—thus creating illusory accountability, distorting program effectiveness, and degrading instruction." De Fraine<sup>29</sup> notes that "in Belgium, ranking of schools is considered inappropriate. One reason for this attitude of resistance is the difficult choice of appropriate and valid indicators of school effectiveness".
2. Teachers are de-motivated by a clash between their own professional competence/standards and judgements based on external standards which they regard as dubious. "In England, teachers have traditionally been committed to a humanist ideology that stresses the interpersonal relationship between teacher and pupil and encourages teachers to invest their whole selves in the development of the whole child ... Thus English teachers have experienced the changes as a threat to their self-identity."<sup>30</sup>
3. Given that Government sets the standards and targets, undertakes the assessments and issues the results, there is in principle little strengthening of links between parents and the school. Indeed, weaker pupils may be disadvantaged in reducing the school's place on the "league tables".
4. The assessments have high management and contractual costs.
5. There are questions over the key aspect of parental choice:
  - Better schools tend to choose the parents rather than vice versa.
  - In many countries, "voting with your feet" is likely to mean opting out of education altogether.
  - "Neither the withholding of financial or other support nor moving to another

school [has] much effect on school quality if the school principal [is] not personally held accountable for, or otherwise affected by, this loss of revenue.”<sup>31</sup>

- Parents can impact on school standards without the quasi-market arrangement. Teachers in some Japanese schools have suffered intolerable pressure from what the media call “monster parents”. “In Tanzania, ‘teacher’ is much more than a job in a school, it is a role and position in society and as such is associated both with honour and responsibility.... Teachers, who are irresponsible in the performance of their contractual duties or their care of children, forfeit respect from the local community and society.”<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion of Hanet and Raczek is that “Prevailing approaches that focus heavily on standardized test results are unlikely to solve what is wrong unless we begin to think about accountability more broadly. Alternative approaches to educational accountability need to be explored in order to return to a broader sense of what it means to be accountable, and to lessen the negative aspects of outcome accountability.”<sup>33</sup>

#### **4. Accountability Based on School or Local Government Self-evaluation**

Barrett’s studies of accountability in education in England and Tanzania led her to conclude that: “The business analogy for education, which casts parents as customers and, by implication, teachers as service providers, is shown to be erroneous in that accountability is a two-way street. Ultimately as adults, teachers, parents and education managers have a shared moral responsibility to children that binds them together in relationships of mutual accountability and support.”<sup>34</sup>

And as Cowie and Croxord point out, “Models of accountability based on compliance represent the antithesis of a professional learning community because there is little scope for collaborative working or collegiate decision-making, and limited opportunity to learn from collective experience. Intelligent accountability should support an open and professional approach, and should involve the school and its community in defining the measures by which it is assessed. Accountability could then be seen in terms of the quality and robustness of the school’s

self-evaluation structures and processes.”<sup>35</sup>

“Quality management” or “total quality management” are approaches towards harnessing mutual accountability through self-evaluation by the school or local government.

The Scottish education system has moved in this direction, enhancing mutual accountability at school level with accountability to government through the national inspectorate. “Recent policies from the Scottish Executive appear to signal a shift away from the “top-down” systems that focus on measuring and comparing attainment, to approaches that give more scope to teachers’ professional judgment and to the assessment of pupils’ wider educational outcomes”<sup>36</sup>.... Scotland accountability system involves, besides inspectoral visits “rigorous self-evaluation by schools to a standard agreed with Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE).”<sup>37</sup> “Quality Management in Education (QMIE)”<sup>38</sup> and “Quality Management in Education 2: Self-Evaluation for Quality Improvement”<sup>39</sup> set out and elaborate a framework for self-evaluation of the performance of Education Authorities in Scotland.

An analogous American initiative is the South Eastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) programme of “Total Quality Management”, a research-and-development effort to support four schools and two school districts in mutual accountability through self-evaluation.<sup>40</sup>

Finland eliminated its education inspectors and raised quality partly by creating a higher-status teaching profession with high competition for entry. Teachers are still given objectives and intended outcomes but with more freedom in how they achieve them and more reliance on self-evaluation.<sup>41</sup>

A number of education systems including in Uganda,<sup>42</sup> Ghana,<sup>43</sup> the Yemen<sup>44</sup> and Brazil<sup>45</sup> have used or piloted a whole-school-development approach to self-evaluation and quality improvement involving school based planning and stronger relations with the local community.

Note that the mere creation of parent teacher associations (PTAs) and school management committees is not sufficient to ensure accountability at school level. For example: “Dissatisfaction with the PTAs has led Mali and Senegal to set up an alternative structure: the School Management Committee (SMC). But this

structure is not functioning much better. ...what is needed is not so much the creation of a new structure, but the development of a culture of accountability and participation.”<sup>46</sup> Suzuki reaches similar conclusions from his work in Uganda: “If the purpose of educational decentralisation is to facilitate participation of parents in democratic decision-making over the education of their children, then the role of school governing bodies is to provide a venue and avenue for such participation. To realise that, school governing bodies need to become more accountable to parents who have, at the end of the day, the greatest interest in educating their children.”<sup>47</sup>

## **V. A Conceptual Tool for Analysing Systems of Accountability**

If we are to consider these broader approaches to accountability including mutual accountability between a wide range of stakeholders, it is helpful to be able to map and analyse the process. The following paragraphs describe the development of a potential tool to aid this analysis.

### **1. Defining “Accountability Nodes” in Terms of “Delegated Responsibilities”**

“Delegated responsibility” is the key factor for locating what I will call “Accountability Nodes”: situations where an accountability system is relevant. If, in a specific situation, someone (the “Agent”) has delegated a set of tasks to someone else (the “Principal”), then we have an “Accountability Node”. This means that it is reasonable to apply a system of accountability to this situation. If there is no delegated responsibility in a particular situation, then the concept of accountability is not relevant. This would be the case if, for example, someone undertakes a set of tasks on their own initiative. It would also be the case if a potential “Principal” could delegate a task to an “Agent” but instead undertakes the task without delegating; or if sanctions are being applied to someone in respect of an outcome for which the person sanctioned had no delegated authority.

Other aspects of accountability—providing a report, assessing the task, the application of sanctions—do not have this feature: they can exist in situations where the concept of accountability is not relevant. They are in a sense

secondary: they establish whether or not accountability exists in a situation where it is already seen to be relevant.

## 2. Mapping School Education in Terms of These “Accountability Nodes”

The education of a child involves a vast number of delegated responsibilities and thus accountability nodes. For example:

- The child’s parents will delegate to the school the responsibility of providing some aspects of that child’s education.
- The “school” - say the management committee - will delegate responsibility for the child’s instruction to the school principal.
- The school principal will delegate in turn to the child’s teachers.
- The parents will also delegate the responsibility for building and maintaining the school either to government or to a private education provider. In the case of government education, they will do this as citizens alongside others.
- The Ministry of Finance, on behalf of Government, will delegate the Ministry of Education to develop and manage the education sector. (In England, this is the basis of the Education Service Delivery Agreement.)
- The Ministry of Education may delegate a Curriculum Development agency to develop the curriculum, an Examinations Board to run examinations, an Inspectorate to inspect the schools, and a Procurement Department to manage contracts for educational materials. These contracts are themselves a statement of delegated responsibilities.

In the last paragraph, a single “Principal” has several “Agents”. Similarly, a single “Agent” may have many “Principals”. For example, a school principal may have delegated responsibilities from parents, the school management committee, inspectors, local government and central government. Also, the “Principal” and “Agent” for one delegated responsibility may reverse for another delegated responsibility. For example, whilst the school principal and teachers may have delegated authority from parents to educate their children, the school principal may ask the parents to contribute funds for additional educational materials and teachers may ask parents to supervise homework.



### 3. Simplifying the Matrix

One could envisage a giant matrix of reciprocal delegated responsibilities between the many thousands of organisations and people that impact on a single child's education. To make this tool practicable, we need to drastically reduce the numbers of responsibilities and stakeholders.

The World Bank service-delivery accountability model has just two stakeholders: the parent as client/citizen and a grouped "service provider" whose responsibility (delegated by the parent) is to provide education for the student. That is too restrictive for present purposes, and we will instead group the stakeholders as: parents; teachers; school management (school principal plus governors/management committee); local community; Local Government; Ministry of Education; National Executive + Treasury; national and international community.

The delegated responsibilities will depend to some extent on the context, for example the extent to which the sector is decentralised. Table 1 shows an example.

#### Note that:

- Parents are not included as "Agents"; any "delegated" support they provide to the school can be included through their membership of the local community.
- "Delegation" by others in the same group (e.g. between teachers) is included in terms of maintaining the professional standards or reputational or educational standing of the group.
- Delegation in the opposite direction to contractual relationships may not in practice be recognised as delegation, and may be involuntary—for example the "delegation" by the school to local government of securing educational resources rather than purchasing direct.
- In the cases shown in italics, the "delegated authority" is normally felt and managed through a third party. For example, the Ministry of Finance may rely on Local Government to ensure schools manage funds effectively rather than directly delegate the schools. These nodes are kept in the matrix at present as they are still needed when checking that accountability

TABLE 1: Example of Matrix of Delegated Responsibilities (Accountability “Nodes”)

Agent undertaking the responsibility	“Principal” delegating the responsibility							
	P1 Parent	P2 Teacher	P3 School management	P4 Local community	P5 Local government	P6 Ministry of Education	P7 National executive/treasury	P8 National & international community
A2 Teacher	Provide appropriate learning activities	Maintain professional standards	Provide equitable learning activities and raise school effectiveness	<i>Improve the community's education status/well-being</i>	Provide learning activities in accordance with local government contract	Teach the set curriculum in accordance with national guidelines	<i>Fulfill public service duties and regulations</i>	<i>Provide learning activities that contribute to national &amp; international development</i>
A3 School management	Provide a good education that results in future employment	Provide learning resources, staff development and conducive to learning	Maintain professional standards	Provide an education that equitably raises community's status and well-being	Manage the school in accordance with local government regulations	Ensure curriculum is taught and examined in accordance with guidelines	<i>Manage school funds in accordance with national regulations &amp; international development</i>	<i>Provide an education that contributes to national &amp; international development</i>
A4 Local community	<i>Provide additional resources to improve school performance</i>	Complement the student's learning experiences	Support the school in attaining academic excellence	Maintain reputational standing of the local community	Contribute to school management and monitoring	Contribute to inspection of school performance	<i>Monitor use of school funds</i>	<i>Assist schools contribution to development</i>
A5 Local government	Regulate, fund and monitor to ensure a good school performance	Provide teacher training and school learning resources	Provide learning resources and school maintenance	Provide resources to raise educational standards in the community	Maintain professional standards	Inspect the performance of the school and provide advisory support	Manage school support from local government funds	<i>Ensure effective education conducive to national &amp; international development</i>
A6 Ministry of Education	Regulate, fund and monitor to ensure a good school performance	Provide teacher training and school learning resources	Provide and monitor for school curriculum, examinations and national resourcing	Regulate, monitor and support school performance	Provision of central resources for an effective learning environment	Maintain professional standards	Manage and monitor national funds for education	Provide education system conducive to national and international development
A7 National executive/treasury	<i>Provide funds to support the school and family</i>	Provide salary and other funds to support the school	Provide funds to support the school	Provide funds to support the school and community	Provide legal framework and funds to maintain and develop the school	Provide legal framework and funds to maintain and develop the education system	Maintain professional standards	Fund an education system conducive to national and international development
A8 National & International community	<i>Provide support for the school and community</i>	<i>Provide financial and technical support for the learning environment</i>	Provide financial and technical support for the school	Provide financial and technical support for the school and community	Provide financial and technical support to the district	Support the development of the education system	Provide aligned support to complement government resources	Improve status and impact of education within society

arrangements are in place.

#### **4. Identifying Key Accountability Nodes for Raising Educational Quality**

In most educational contexts, we have some idea of the major constraints affecting quality from studies, anecdotal evidence and findings from other, similar contexts. For example, in many situations, quality is hindered by:

- Poor quality teaching;
- Shortage of educational materials;
- The distracting demands and inadequate support from a poor, educationally-deprived community.

These can be analysed in terms of the delegated responsibilities in the matrix. For example, poor quality teaching may be due to:

- inadequate accountability of teachers to parents (node P1-A2 in the table) or to the school (node P3-A2) or to their professional (P2-A2);
- inadequate training (P2-A5 and P2-A6);
- an overloaded curriculum (P3-A6);
- poor support from the school (P2-A3);
- inadequate feedback from the local government inspectors (P6-A5);
- teachers spending time elsewhere finding out why their salary has not been paid (P2-A7).

The shortage of educational materials may be a problem at school level (P2-A3), local government level (P3-A5) or central government level (P3-A6, P5-A6).

Lack of local community support may be exacerbated by inadequate involvement with the school (P5-A4) and poor support from government (P4-A7 and P4-A4).

Having identified the potential nodes, we can look further at the contextual evidence around each to attempt their prioritisation.

#### **5. Analysing and Developing Accountability Systems for the Key Interactions**

Having deduced that a particular node is crucial, we can then look at the other aspects of accountability for that node:

- Is there a reporting system in place from the *Agent* to the *Principal*?
- Is there a mechanism by which the *Principal* can assess the *Agent's* report?
- What means are available for the *Principal* to reward or “punish” the *Agent*.
- Are these effective?
- If not, what action can be taken to rectify the situation?

Whilst this tool will not show the optimal, practicable accountability measures that need to be put in place, the raising of these questions for a particular node will help identify the available options.

## VI. Examples of Applying this Conceptual Tool

### 1. Enhanced Accountability to Parents

The only “Principal” in this case is the parent, so only the first column P1 of table 1 applies. The primary “Agents” are the school (A2) and teachers (A3) and the Ministry of Education (A6).

For the teacher-to-parent, school-to-parent accountability to be effective, parents need:

- Reports from the school and teachers, which could include end of term and verbal reports from “parents’ evenings”.
- Information to assess the reports, for example: past examination records; comments from the child being educated; standardised test results; inspection reports.
- Ability to apply sanctions on the basis of this assessment. These can include the child leaving the school and moving to another, but also parents expressing views to school inspectors or school management, threatening the school’s reputation or withholding (or increasing) financial and other support.

For the Ministry to Parent accountability to be effective, parents need:

- Reports from the Ministry of Education on problems with the school and action the Ministry of Education is taking to rectify the problems;
- Information to check that this action is actually being taken and is correcting the problem. This information could be the same as above for the school-

to-parent nodes.

- Some redress when the Ministry fails to take the necessary action, for example questions through the local Member of Parliament, legal redress, use of the media and voting in the national elections.

## **2. Increasing the Authority of School Management**

In this case the objective is to assist school management to improve the quality of the school. Local and National Government are seen as supporting rather than directing the school—the school is the client of their services. The sole “Principal” here is therefore School Management—column P3. The main “Agents” are the teachers (A2) and the main providers of support to the school: local and central government (A5, A6 and A7).

For the teacher-to-school accountability to be effective:

- Teachers must report to the school principal and thereby any higher level of school management. (In some countries, teachers see the main target of professional reporting as the subject inspector rather than the school principal.)
- The school principal needs to be able to check the teacher’s performance, for example by visiting the classroom and obtaining reports from any visiting inspectors or advisers.
- The school principal or higher levels of school management need to be able to sanction or reward teachers. Options include: authority to hire and fire; ability to alter the teacher’s salary—possibly through performance pay; influence on the teacher’s role or status within the school, or future career.

For the accountability of local and national government to schools to be effective:

- Local government and the Ministries of Education and Finance need to provide reports to the school management on services they are providing to the school, for example the supply of teachers, educational materials, advisory support and training. This should include plans for forthcoming deliveries, and on action being taken over delayed deliveries.

- The school should have some means of checking this information. For example, central government could provide schools with information on the funding allocated for the school's teachers and materials so that schools can check they are receiving their allocation.
- The school should have some means of redress if it is not receiving these services. For example, whilst central purchasing is normally cheaper, if there are problems in getting educational materials, equipment—or even staff—to the school, then perhaps schools could be given the funds and the option of buying or hiring direct. This raises the issue of accountability in the school's use of these funds.

### 3. Protecting against Political Extremism

The national and international community need to be protected from students leaving educational establishments as potential terrorists or instigators of sectarian violence. The national and international community, in effect, delegate the Ministry of Education to ensure that all schools provide an education geared to social inclusivity, political and religious tolerance, and a willingness and capacity to use democratic, non-violent approaches to societal change. The international community may also call for the national government to avoid negative national stereotypes and incitement to hatred against other countries in their textbooks and teaching. At the extreme, the national and international community expect the Ministry of Education to close any private school dedicated to an extremist political or sectarian viewpoint. On the other hand, they also expect the government to avoid political propaganda on its own behalf within the education system, and to allow open questioning when developing students' critical skills and skills of academic enquiry. They also expect government to have efficient, non-extreme mechanisms for dealing with problems in this area.

At this level, the “Principal” is thus the national and international community. The main “Agent” is the Ministry of Education. For this accountability to be effective, the Ministry needs to provide public reports on the action it is taken in this area. The public need a way of checking this information—which implies free academic enquiry and a free media. The public also need to be able to take

action, the obvious forms of which would be through parliament and elections.

The Ministry of Education will in turn, as “Principal”, requiring accountability from the appropriate “Agents” to ensure that:

- The curriculum and textbooks promote tolerance, inclusivity and democratic nation-building;
- Schools also promote these qualities, and remove all forms of political or sectarian indoctrination from the classroom;
- Private schools operate under an effective system of accreditation and inspection;
- Private applications to manage government-funded schools (where this is an option) undergo public scrutiny;
- Local authorities inspect and take action to ensure effective accountability measures are in place for schools within their remit.

For this accountability to be effective:

- The respective agents will need to provide justified reports to the Ministry of Education;
- The Ministry of Education will need to be able to assess these reports through a national inspectorate (which need not necessarily report to the Ministry—in England, the inspectorate reports to parliament);
- The Ministry need a means of taking action, for example in extreme circumstances, closing offending private schools. (There have been extreme examples of this involving military action—obviously that should be avoided if at all possible.)

## **VII. Conclusion**

The purpose of accountability is the improvement of the quality of education by providing an incentive to good performance and a deterrent to harmful practices. Traditional forms of accountability have been light and bureaucratic and have relied on inherent professionalism. Recent changes have introduced a greater delegation of decision-making alongside stronger systems of accountability involving at least one of the following, alongside a system for national oversight:

- Formalised accountability between schools and parents;
- Contractual arrangements between schools and levels of government;
- Systems of self-evaluation.

These developments have all been criticised, for example as being too centrally driven. Accountability should operate in both directions, for example enabling a school to hold government accountable for supplies. Individuals throughout the system, indeed all stakeholders in a child's education, need to be accountable to different people for different things.

This paper demonstrates the possibility of analysing this complicated situation by:

- mapping the education system in terms of “accountability nodes”—places where one person or body is in effect delegating a responsibility to another, though not necessarily alongside the transfer of funds;
- focusing on those accountability nodes most likely to impact on the quality of education in a particular context;
- seeking the requirements for effective accountability at these nodes in terms of: (a) reporting; (b) means of checking the reports, and (c) means of taking effective action.

This approach enables the analysis of accountability at all levels, amongst all stakeholders and in all contexts. It includes the special case of upholding the quality of education by removing opportunities for political and sectarian extremism.

Whilst highlighting the situations where decisions need to be made and the outline steps of what needs to be in place to improve accountability, this approach leaves open the decisions on what kind of reports are needed, what evidence is needed to assess the reports, and what sanctions are appropriate. These should be selected to build on inherent professionalism, self-motivation and moral accountability, on a broad, well-balanced concept of educational quality, and on appropriate and realistic sanctions. The outcome should be more effective systems of accountability that can really be described as total quality management.



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