

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITIES FOR LEARNING IN EDUCATION

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### **Abstract:**

Accountability can be connected with the management of diverse expectations generated within and outside the organisation. The expectations can sometimes be contradicting, and the degree of authority and control of key actors can differ. This emphasise societal concerns, political pressures, bureaucratic concerns, top-down management, responses to market dynamics, professional responsibility and ethical principles. In that frame researches on translating outside expectations into schools will be presented. The importance of aligning external expectations with the context, priorities, capacity and visibility of teachers and leaders will be stressed. Paper will discuss accountability for outcomes in education, considering dilemmas of accountability for students' achievements on external testing on international and national levels. The questions will be raised how far we can hold schools and teachers accountable for student results in particular year. Importance of managerial aspects in order to make external initiatives work in schools will be discussed in conclusions.

*Keywords: education, accountability, management, learning, knowledge, equity*

# 1. ACCOUNTABILITY, CONTROL IN THE LIGHT OF EXPECTATIONS

The question of accountability and/or control is a complex one. From one point of view, they seem to be exclusive in the sense that state control is replaced by a form of accountability. Accountability can be discussed in relation to market mechanisms and the state they claim that schools become more accountable when they become part of an educational market. From another point of view, schools are professional organizations and hence accountable to professional associations and organizations. They have a relatively high level of autonomy but it seems that their accountability is more related to specific groups of experts and not largely to publics and stakeholders. Yet, here the state also regulates, imposes and controls. There is always some state control although the means and the aims can be hidden and multiple. However, there is also some level of accountability to local elements, to stakeholders, and to the professional community. Therefore, we can understand the relationship between accountability and control as intertwined and dependent on the position between two extremes, decentralisation and centralisation (Koren 2007).

Accountability can be defined as the management of diverse expectations generated within and outside the organisation. These expectations differ according to direction, clarity and consequences and imply processes where the distribution of different functions, tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined. The expectations can sometimes be contradicting, and the degree of authority and control of key actors, such as school leaders, can differ. In order to differentiate between different types of expectations for our analysis, we build on (Koren 2007, Moos 2013) a number of categories:

- The first category is *managerial* expectations and the extent to which they have changed at the national and local levels, as interpreted in acts, regulations, policy documents, evaluation procedures, official standards and criteria for success and accountability practices. This can also be linked to increasing demands from the *marketplace*: competition between schools and schools' financial situations. In short: Outcomes are being used as means for competition. When the state holds control, the school system reflects a hierarchical structure. The governing bodies at all levels are held accountable for school achievement and performance. The state, the district, the school – the principal have the power to impose and control the aims, goals and implementation of the curriculum, and of teacher performance. In democratic states the purpose of accountability is to maintain democratic control over public bureaucracies and to ensure that the will of people is carried out.
- The second category relates to expectations of the *public* – of the local community and parents. In many cases local political and community expectations are more important than national political expectations. In short: Schools must seek legitimacy.
- The third accountability category is *professional expectations*. In this model of accountability and control, teachers are autonomous professionals that are accountable for process rather than for results embodied in students' performance. The model can be discussed as an alternative to a results-based model. There are many forms of this model in educational practice. Self-accounting schools and others are based on the idea that teachers are accountable as professionals and less so to parents and customers. Codes of ethics and conduct become central - the ethical implications of collegial loyalty can be one view of teachers' professionalism. The ethical code can also be seen in the light of constraining professionals against bureaucrats or as a form of administrative centralism and professional control. This category refers to how school leaders believe they best meet the needs of pupils, staff and the school organisation. Closely linked to this are possible changes in cultural and ethical considerations with respect to the needs of the children and adults affiliated to the schools, and school leaders' understanding of the societal aims and purposes of education. In short: School live on professional experiences and expertise with a strong recollection of the main purpose.

The different types of expectations relate to different logics, which emphasise societal concerns, political pressures, bureaucratic concerns, top-down management, responses to market dynamics, professional responsibility and ethical principles. These logics can exist in combination or parallel to each other, and they can easily conflict. If we look at the relationships between the different categories, they are linked to different areas. For instance, responses to political, managerial and public accountability are more likely to be linked to external accountability dynamics, while professional expectations often relate to school internal processes. However, schools seem to vary in their configuration of the elements that comprise their internal processes, e.g. teachers' sense of work responsibility, the collective expectations of staff, school leaders and parents, and the organisational

rules, incentives and processes that encourage or compel external as well as internal accountability practices.

## 2. EDUCATION FOR EQUITY IN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Traditionally we talk about equity in education in two different ways: The first is about 'equality of opportunity.' In this understanding access to education is essential and therefore it is understood that the state is responsible for providing opportunities for children and youngsters to participate in formal and non-formal education. Whether students and their parents choose to access education and whether they are successful, is not in the focus of educational politics. The second way is more concerned with equity in the results of education in ways of graduations or access to employment. From this perspective it is not enough being concerned with providing the same opportunity because children need different kinds of opportunities and support. Some of them need more support than others in order to succeed (Moos 2011). Although that in many countries some progress has been made, there are evidences to suggest that background, for example gender, deprivation or ethnicity, continue to make a real difference in attempting to improve pupil performance and, in particular, close the 'attainment gap' (Collarbone and West-Burnham 2008).

## 3. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUTCOMES

One very important player in the Global plays on education and school leadership is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) because the agency produces a long series of annual and special reports and recommendations in order to enhance the 'peer pressure.' The borrowing of ideas, comparisons of frames and outcomes (like the PISA), best practice and advices. In 2008 the OECD launched the 'Improving School Leadership' project and reports (Pont et al 2008). In the report is an image of the expectations towards the contemporary school leader, that is described in three categories: School autonomy, saying that educational decisions are being delegated or distributed from the state to schools in all OECD countries, leaving school leader to 'Run small business.' The second category is called 'Accountability for outcomes,' and it will be discussed in more details. The third category is 'Learning-centred leadership', that focuses on school leaders leading teachers and teaching (OECD Presentation).

In the second category, accountability is in the focus and not accountability as such, but accountability for outcomes. Meant here is not outcomes as graduation or access to employment, but outcomes as results of evaluations and assessment. In focus is the data from tests etc. This discourse produces the image of the purpose of schooling. The purpose then is what can be measured. In general accountability is understood as the responsibility for actions, decisions, processes and policies – and of course for outcomes.

It is clear, that the accountability, which OECD is focusing on, is the first: managerial and market place accountability for outcomes. The discourse, put forward by the OECD in this slide, is clearly in line with the PISA and other similar social technologies, that is de-focusing on comprehensive 'Bildung' and focusing on basic skills. The agency also focuses on one kind only of outcomes – those that are easily measurable - and de-focusing on the broad range of competencies necessary for living and working in complex societies. One reason for this seems to be that only basic skills can be measured and only what can be measured, counts. The Global need for innovation and reflection is neglected and will over time have devastating consequences for nations, societies, cultures and human beings.

There are more dilemmas to be considered in accountability for outcomes. Elmore (2004) raises questions:

- Is it ethical to hold individuals, educators, accountable for doing things they don't know how to do and can't be expected to do without considerable in their own knowledge and skill?
- Is it possible to solve the problem of increasing the performance of teachers and students in one classroom without also solving that problem in schools and school systems more generally? The problem is that schools, on average, are largely organisational fictions in the way they affect the actual work of teachers and students around content. That means that teachers work autonomously in classrooms.

In that light Elmore (2004) states:

- Individual and collective stakes should be based on defensible, empirically based theories about what it is possible to accomplish on measured performance within a given period of time.
- Stakes should be based on valid, reliable, and accurate information about student and school performance. No decision that has a major impact on student should be made on the basis of a single measure, nor should be students be judged based on a single opportunity to demonstrate performance.
- Student should not be held accountable for learning content they have not been taught.
- Schools should be accountable for the value they add to student learning, not the effect of prior instructions; school systems should be accountable for the cumulative learning of students over their career in the system.
- The reciprocity of accountability and capacity – for each increment in performance I require of you, I have an equal and reciprocal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to produce that performance.

#### 4. TRANSLATING OUTSIDE EXPECTATION INTO SCHOOLS

Extensive analyses (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) of research, point out that 'setting the direction for their school' as a major leadership practices.' This understanding is implied in the concept of leadership that is understood as: 'lead the way ...' and 'be at the head of'. It is also understood in this way in the research (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) where it is found that successful principals are setting the direction for their schools: "... successful leadership creates a compelling sense of purpose in the organizations by developing a shared vision of the future, helping build consensus about relevant short-term goals and demonstrating high expectations for colleagues' work." (Leithwood, 2006).

Leaders, however, do not work in a vacuum: schools are built on relations with the outer world and that means that school leaders are responsible for bringing external expectations into the school and to implement them by cultivating acceptance, by adjusting and adapting them to the internal sense of meaning of the school. There are many legitimate and legal expectations from stakeholders outside and inside schools that create, limit and direct the work. Many of the expectations contradict each other and many external expectations, demands and structures can seem strange and meaningless to professional cultures. This puts the school leader in a position where she/he needs to interpret, translate and mediate these external demands in order to facilitate sense-making and the creation of a shared direction inside school.

Governments and local, educational authorities make policies, plans, principles and strategies for education in school. Some parts of those are accompanied by social technologies (e.g. test, manuals, standards) and some parts are declarations of intent: descriptions of aims or values. This can be formed as soft governance that leaves room for school discretion, interpretation and room for manoeuvre when they choose ways and methods.

The intentions are of course to have schools develop according to the general aims and directions as they are described in 'organisational ideas' (Røvik, 2007). Røvik describes the difficulty in having ideas implemented into existing organisations in effective ways, that change and form their practices and thinking. Therefore he argues that much more attention needs to be given to the phase where the idea meets the organisation: The idea needs to be understood and accepted by the organisation, leaders and teachers, in order to have effect on practice and thinking. Ideas need to be translated so they fit into the mental models or the worldviews of professionals. In this aspect of school life leaders and leadership are pivotal players: They get the information and demands from the outside while they also know the organisation, its culture and the professionals in it. They are better positioned than anybody else to translate, reformulate and negotiate the direction of what needs to be done so it makes sense to teachers.

This insight is supported by the research done by Cynthia Coburn (Coburn, 2004; Coburn, 2005; Coburn & Stein, 2006). She finds that some aspects of leadership are important in order to make external initiatives work in schools: There should be agreement between the life views of teachers and the new idea; there is a need for intense and coherent knowledge and opportunities to try new

practices out. All of the aspects build on knowledge to both 'sides': the external expectations, the idea, and the internal culture and expectations. A position, that school leaders have.

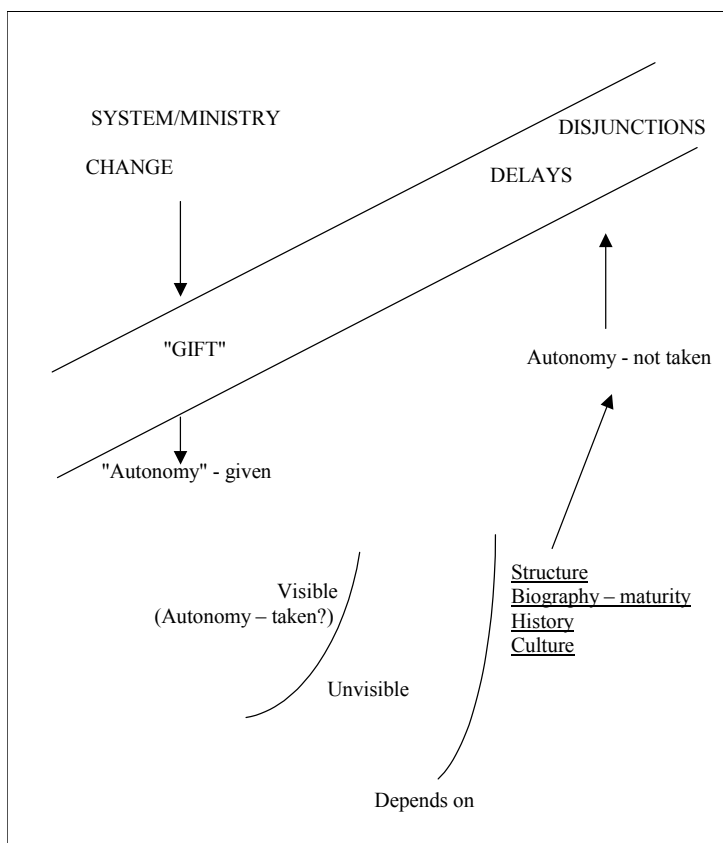
The study on limited visibility (Koren 2007) shows that at any level, any position in society, people have limited visibility, and also this research is succumbed to this limitation. In school system teachers see the classroom and relate all questions to it. Their focus is curricula. Head teachers are focused on operational matters and the Minister on processes in the whole system.

This theory of visibility suggests that there are no Us and Them, those who see and those who do not. We all have limited visibility, that joins us, but we have different limits of visibility that also separates us. As there is no general 'visibility' we could argue that the system is embedded and shaped by 'visibilities' that are never congruent and resolved into one shared understanding but always remain fragmented and specific.

Emerging data revealed the questions of 'visibility' and 'autonomy given – autonomy taken' relationship. Visibility cannot be understood as a unified, generic concept, but it is constructed in interactions, it is complex and perpetually changing as the world we live in has been changing. There is perpetual and unresolved tension between what participants in the study understood, perceived and 'saw' as autonomy that was 'given' to them by the 'Centre' and what they 'took', wanted to take, saw and understood as their field of freedom for autonomous decisions and actions.

Perceptions changed over time and their visibility changed as well. They related these changes to maturity, knowledge and experiences. Yet, knowledge and experiences are also contextualised and hence limited. Within visibility, a flexible and changing individual's frame, somebody will always take what is 'given' to him/her through the lenses of his/her own glasses.

**Figure 1:** Translating outside expectation and visibility



Visibility seems to be lost when looking down at the system and not gained when looking up at the system. Yet, the dynamics of visibility is also associated with and implies that, knowledge in its broadest meaning does not last forever. It changes over time and is often reshaped, and almost relative. What is then professionalism if it is based on knowledge, skills and values in relation to visibility? It seems that there is no unified professional body but only an array of the specific,

contextual and the individual. The relationship could be illustrated through Hegel's dialectical relationship between individual, specific and general. The general body of knowledge is materialised and expressed through the specific and individual only.

## 5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTONOMY

Issues around accountability often revolve around autonomy. Autonomy is multifaceted in terms of its relationship with degrees of freedom, accountability and control. Autonomy is sometimes related to teacher autonomy (Smith, 1999, Fullan and Hargreaves, 1998, Haydon 1983), the autonomy of school space or/and the autonomy of schools as organizations (Mintzberg, 1993, Haugen, Becker, Erffmeyer, 2004). Haydon (1983) also discusses autonomy as an aim in education. I understand autonomy as a guiding principle and as a condition for work. In which case, I embrace many concepts, such as professionalism, space, organisations and individuals and also all levels within a system – central and local.

Smith (1999) is discussing autonomy as an independence from authorities, those who prescribe and those who are prescribed. Oakeshott (1991) understands autonomy within a framework of shared moral practice that involves a set of understandings and language that informs our actions. He writes that our actions are not prescribed within and by this set of understandings; nevertheless we can only act autonomously within them. His argument of shared moral practice could be well related to Dawson's (Stronach et al. 2002) argument that 'inside-out' professionalism needs a kind of ethical space.

Autonomy can be discussed through two sets or levels, one being a commitment which is expressed in a legal framework as an underlying principle and the highest aim, and the second one which is about the effectiveness of autonomy and conditions and requirements for it. I, however, do not see them as being simply put together and seen as one.

Regardless of the specific label applied, autonomy is often meant to describe "a school in a system of education where there has been significant and consistent de-centralisation to the school level of autonomy to make decisions related to the allocation of resources" (Caldwell & Spinks, 1991).

We also wish to address the concept of autonomy in relation to teacher autonomy. Teachers are in isolated classrooms (Fullan and Hargreaves 1998) and this specific phenomenon seems to be influential in terms of the level of teacher autonomy. In such circumstances, teachers can act and have power to act on the basis of their own professional judgments, knowledge and skills. Therefore, I need to relate autonomy to individual levels that include principals as well as teachers in classrooms. Principals also have a certain level of autonomy. Their autonomy in Slovenia is reflected in the areas of staffing, financing and extracurricular activities in schools although Smith (1999) claims that the level of principals' autonomy is related to school culture. Autonomy, hence, also means making reflective decisions on the basis of personal characteristics, knowledge and position.

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