

---

---

## **To be Accountable in Neoliberal Times: an exploration of educational policy in Ecuador**

**ENMA CAMPOZANO AVILES & MAARTEN SIMONS**

*Laboratory of Education and Society, KU Leuven, Belgium*

**ABSTRACT** The ascendancy of neoliberal modes of governing has caused a shift in accountability practices in the public sector, including in the field of education. This shift can be observed in the accountability regimes introduced into education systems around the world. They reflect a strong focus on quality assurance/control and efficiency in order for countries to be able to survive in a global competitive environment. Increasingly operating in a global context, Ecuador also engaged in a series of policy initiatives to restructure accountability in its educational system. Based on a critical analysis of recent accountability policies in Ecuadorian education, this article determines the regime of accountability that is promoted in Ecuador today and discusses the emerging tensions.

### **Introduction: neo-liberalism and changes in accountability**

In a common understanding, accountability refers to a particular kind of being 'held to account'. Ranson (2003, p. 460) describes it as a relationship in which formal control is exercised between parties where one actor is 'mandatorily held to account to the other for the exercise of roles and stewardship of public resources'. In order to grasp the current understanding and practice of being 'held to account' in the field of education, many authors contrast it with accountability in the 'professional age' (Hargreaves, 2000; Ranson, 2003, p. 464). Here, professionals were empowered and trusted to judge issues pertaining to education in deliberation with their peers, and hence accountability is a matter of professionals complying with the standards dictated by the profession (Ranson, 2003; Olssen et al, 2004).

This kind of accountability emerged within a 'liberal regime of governmentality', which is a mode of governing where professions were granted autonomy for the discrete organisation and responsible provision of services according to professional rules. Techniques of self-control and hierarchical reporting are to be regarded as part of this particular mode of governing that includes 'a form of power based on delegation (i.e. delegated authority) and underpinned by relations of trust' (Olssen, et al, 2004; Olssen & Peters 2005, p. 324). Except for this mode of governing through the granting of professional autonomy, in a lot of western countries during the twentieth century a bureaucratic organisation of state administration and public services took shape. Hence, within the so-called welfare states, and under the banner of welfare liberalism, the governing of education – with schools as professional bureaucracies – took place partly through professional autonomy and partly through governing according to fixed rules, procedures and hierarchical formal relations of accountability (Ranson, 2008).

It is argued that neoliberalism – as a new mode of governing – should be regarded as a critique of pure professional autonomy on the one hand and the bureaucratic organisation of the public sector, including education, on the other hand. Professional autonomy is argued to result in a kind of 'provider capture' (Devine, 2004), hence leading to a situation where professionals actually do not take into account the needs of their clients. In a similar way, bureaucratic modes of organisation are criticised for not being efficient or effective (that is, not goal oriented, nor sensitive

to reaching goals optimally) and for serving the interests of state officials (including teachers) instead of the interests of the citizen consumer (Olssen et al., 2004). What emerges in line with these criticisms is a new mode of governing in which new practices of accountability become of strategic importance. Practices of neoliberal accountability include forms of control - that is, 'sanctions' or 'consequences' through which power is exercised in order to ensure compliance (Mulgan, 2000; Bovens, 2010).

As a form of control and power, accountability is linked up with policies that seek to initiate or imitate principles of the free market (including competitiveness and consumer choice) in the public sector, and in the field of education in particular (Leithwood & Earl, 2000; Biesta, 2009). The role of the state in this new mode of governing is no longer understood in terms of central intervention; instead, it is understood in terms of the creation of the conditions for competition and market freedom to emerge (through deregulation and various forms of decentralisation) and the promotion of entrepreneurship and quality within the public sector (Lauglo, 1995; Ball, 1998).

New public management (NPM) could be regarded as the exemplary articulation of this new mode of governing (Olssen et al, 2004). In its broadest meaning, NPM seeks to introduce private-sector techniques into the public sector so as to reshape it according to the values of efficiency and productivity (Newman, 1998; Peters, 2001). Here, being 'held to account' is mainly framed in terms of set targets and contracts, and 'giving an account' should become part of the daily functioning of people working in the public sector. The introduction of managerial techniques actually creates an environment of regulation conducive to ensuring individual responsiveness (Olssen et al, 2004, p. 137). In sum, techniques such as performance targets, contracting and consumer surveys, as part of practices of quality assurance and management, become part of a neoliberal mode of governing that seeks to raise the quality of public services with effectiveness, efficiency and consumer satisfaction as the most important quality indicators.

What should be stressed here is that in the public sector, and specifically in the field of education, the current focus on accountability is not just about 'holding to account' but includes new forms of regulation and organisation (Tolofari, 2005). Whereas traditional forms of accountability were primarily based on trust and discretion towards public-sector professionals and their responsible modes of self-control, neoliberal modes of governing organise forms of accountability in terms of both 'external regulation and embodied disposition' (Ranson, 2003, p. 469). Here, power is no longer understood in terms of delegated authority and trust, nor as a direct form of coercion; rather, it is exercised through market-like strategies and management techniques. What is created is a regime of surveillance or monitoring in order to control and ensure that teachers, for instance, subject their actions and beliefs to the 'production of (measurable/observable) evidence' (Olssen, 1996, p. 340).

In line with these developments, authors such as Ball (2003) and Webb (2005) have described the consequences of new forms of accountability in education in terms of a 'network of surveillance' or a 'regime of performativity' where the idea of 'visibility' - the feeling of being constantly observed, together with threats of sanctions - actually results in a very particular kind of 'professional' self-understanding. In line with Lyotard, Ball (1998, p. 122) actually stresses that what emerges in this new accountability context is a kind of terror: 'be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear'. The consequence, it is argued, is a process of 'de-professionalisation' (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000). In sum, practices of accountability today not only come to regulate and control education in a particular way but actually reshape (or even destroy) the professional identities of those who are working in the field of education.

Although the previous description points at general trends related to particular contexts and countries, it indicates that current changes in accountability may have far-reaching consequences, and hence the issue deserves close attention from educational researchers. Moreover, these changes in accountability are not limited to particular countries or regions; rather, they are to be regarded as being part of a set of 'travelling policies' that move across the global sphere (Ball, 1998; Rizvi, 2004; Vidovich, 2006). Indeed, as it is increasingly operating within a global context, Ecuador also seems to be engaged in reforms that pertain to accountability, and that are part of policies that strive to enhance quality in the education system. Despite these global tendencies, it is, however, important to focus on the local context in order to come to a detailed understanding of why and how reforms in practices of accountability emerge, and to start to reflect upon possible consequences. The aim of this article is to contribute to this understanding by taking a close look at

the current reforms (initiated in 2006) in Ecuador. For that, we present an analysis of recent accountability policies and seek to determine the regime of accountability that has taken shape. Because only part of these policies has so far been implemented, we cannot focus on the actual practices and their consequences. Yet, the new policies and the accountability reform that has already occurred offer a point of departure to start describing patterns of the new accountability regime. First, however, we contextualise the policies in Ecuador that are the focus of this study. In the second section, we introduce the conceptual and theoretical framework that guides this study, and in the third section we present the results of the analysis and describe the main features of the accountability regime that has taken shape through current reforms in Ecuador. We conclude with a discussion of possible tensions within the emerging accountability regime.

### **Accountability Reforms in Ecuadorian Education**

Most countries in the Latin American region have been engaged in a restructuring of their accountability practices in education since the early 1990s. Torres (2009, p. 10) notes: 'Joined with privatization and decentralization, the agenda that dominated the educative reforms in the region promoted a movement that attempted to increment the educative standards (which of course entails a specific definition of what is quality of education), an extreme emphasis on testing and on what is denominated accountability'.<sup>[1]</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on quality assurance and accountability in the Ecuadorian education system can be traced back to the 1990s when, within the framework of a World Bank loan, the country started various initiatives to measure, compare and improve the quality of education. These initiatives resulted, for instance, in participation in national/international assessment programmes, in the development of curricular reforms for initial, general basic education (EGB) and education at baccalaureate level <sup>[2]</sup>, and in the creation of a system of supervision.<sup>[3]</sup> An important outcome was the development of the Decennial Plan of Education 2006-2015 in 2006. The plan brings together eight policies that delineate the strategy to be adopted to enhance quality, and this plan currently orients the education system. As it will be the main focus of this study, we will discuss this plan in more detail.

The accountability component of the decennial plan is expressed in its Policy No. 6 that determines 'the improvement of the quality and equity of education and the creation of a system of evaluation and social accountability' (Plan Decenal de Educacion, 2008, p. 29).<sup>[4]</sup> In line with that policy, the system of evaluation and social accountability (Sistema Nacional de Evaluacion y Rendicion Social de Cuentas [SER]) was created as part of the broader strategy proposed for securing improvement of quality.<sup>[5]</sup> In order to develop this system, the Ministry of Education has meanwhile taken further steps to set the context that allows for enhancing accountability and consequently the quality of education. A first step was a policy directed at de-concentration that resulted in the management of education at three levels (zonal, district and circuit level). A second step was the creation of the Institute of Evaluation, appointed for the evaluation of the education system in coordination with the Ministry of Education (Ley Organica de Educacion Intercultural [LOEI, 2011]). Finally, and most recently, there is the restructuring of the former supervision system (which was being organised in December 2011 as part of a new follow-up system) <sup>[6]</sup> and the development of new standards of quality for the education system.<sup>[7]</sup> The latter includes four types of standards: standards of learning (which are descriptions of achievements expected from students in terms of competences); standards of performance for school authorities (which consist of descriptions of what a principal/school authority must do to contribute to students reaching their expected achievement); standards of teacher performance (which provide descriptions of a competent teacher); and standards of good school management (which describe processes of management and institutional practices that contribute to students' achievements, to professional development and to successful institutional functioning) (Estandares de Calidad, 2011).<sup>[8]</sup>

The creation of the system of evaluation is to be regarded as a point of departure in terms of going beyond traditional accountability practices based on the system of supervision that had been in operation in Ecuador since 1993. That supervision system comprised activities related to: the control of compliance with goals/regulations of the education system; ensuring optimisation of resources; compliance with the school plan; and promoting community involvement (Reglamento al Sistema de Supervision Educativa y sus Reformas, 2003). That system of supervision thus could

be regarded as being in line with the professional and bureaucratic organisation of the public sector, as discussed in the previous section.

By the time of writing, the current system had been partially implemented.[9] Its objectives are clearly formulated and cover two aspects, 'Evaluation' and 'Social Accountability' (SER, 2008). The former is described in terms of two objectives: 'to monitor the quality of education' and 'to define policies for improvement' on the basis of monitored results. The aspect of social accountability refers to the publication of information aimed at keeping society informed about the levels of quality and efficiency and hence at reinforcing transparency in the education system. The publication of evaluation results is justified as follows: 'transparent information about the results of evaluation processes enables citizens to be aware of the weaknesses of the education system and gives them an awareness of how their taxes are utilised' (SER, 2008, pp.7-8).[10]

The above outline clearly indicates that several major reforms pertaining to accountability have taken place in Ecuador in order to reinforce the overall strategy of enhancing quality. Although it is part of a broader strategy, we limit our focus to the 'System of Evaluation and Social Accountability' (SER, 2008). The reason for this limitation is that this system is already to a large extent translated into concrete policies to be implemented. First, however, it is important to develop in more detail our analytical approach.

### The Analysis of Accountability as a Regime

The topic of accountability has received considerable attention within educational research. Various authors have developed frameworks in order to understand accountability. These frameworks focus, for example, on relationships implied within accountability, or on the kinds of internal and external dimensions of accountability practices (Codd, 1999; Behn, 2003). As Leithwood and Earl (2000) and Vidovich (2009) explain, in order to study accountability more comprehensively it is important to step beyond these traditional approaches that formally focus only on the directions (horizontal/vertical) or scope (internal/external) of accountability. Hence, it is important to open up the 'black box' of accountability and to analyse the accountability *regime* created within the system of evaluation in Ecuador. Here, in line with Young (1983, p. 93), regime is understood as a social institution that governs the actions of participants in a certain activity supported by particular principles, norms or rules. For this comprehensive approach, the framework developed by Ranson (2003) is particularly valuable and will be adopted in this study.

The integrated framework of Ranson not only offers guidelines for focusing on formal relations and the general scope, but also seeks to describe the patterns and cultural codes emerging in practices of accountability. Hence, in line with Ranson (2003), we distinguish between three components in order to describe accountability regimes: 'practices of accountability'; 'structures of accountability'; and 'codes of accountability'. The analysis of accountability as a practice in the reformed policy context in Ecuador implies addressing the purposes of the new system (why is it necessary to give an account?), the implied relations (who is accountable to whom?), the object of the account to be judged (what is accounted for?) and the organisation and criteria (how and on what basis?). The analysis of the system along these dimensions allows for the analysis of the emerging *organisational structure*: the agencies, organisations and actors that come to play a central role, and the kind of power relations that are determined for the system to operate and how these power relations will be justified (Ranson, 2003, pp. 462-464). The identification and description of the structure allow for the analysis of the implied *cultural codes* - that is, the order of discourse/type of rationality that emerges within this organisational structure (Ranson, 2003, pp. 462-464).

The analysis of the accountability regime emerging in Ecuadorian education presented in this article is limited in its focus. First, the analysis is limited to the system of evaluation and social accountability (SER, 2008) and does not cover the whole reform planned for the next decade. But since the structures and practices initiated within this system lay the groundwork for future reforms, for describing the new accountability regime it offers a useful point of departure. Second, the analysis does not focus on the implementation and concrete operation of accountability in education. The main focus instead is on the practices proposed and initiated in the new legal/institutional framework, and the structures and cultural codes that are in the process of

taking shape. Due to these limitations, the reported analysis should be regarded as the first part of a broader research on accountability in Ecuadorian education.[11]

### **Accountability in Ecuadorian Education: practices, structures and codes**

#### *Purposes of Accountability*

The system of evaluation and social accountability constitutes one component in the strategy proposed for achieving an overall transformation of the education system. The document (SER, 2008, p. 35) describes the purposes of the system as being 'to improve the quality of education based on feedback to authorities, teachers, family and society at large'. The improvement of quality is to be done through a process of evaluation which involves making a diagnosis of the strengths/weaknesses and then providing feedback to every actor. The idea is to provide each of the educational actors, from the highest levels (Ministry of Education) to the operational level (schools), with an objective picture about the extent to which their actions contribute to the quality of the system. Quality here is understood as a broad concept that involves various dimensions, such as efficiency (e.g. evaluating adequate use of resources), efficacy (e.g. evaluating whether descriptions of achievements are met), equity (e.g. evaluating to what extent teachers' work involves efforts to compensate deficiencies of students) and pertinence (e.g. evaluating whether education is consistent with the students' needs) (SER, 2008, pp. 33-39).

Professional development and support are to be applied on the basis of the evaluation results in order to promote improvement. It is believed that teachers and school authorities will do better when they address their detected deficiencies by means of a training plan and guidance (e.g. concerning practices of mentoring). When the results of the evaluation are according to expectations, improvement is associated with the opportunity to access internships or scholarships for further professional development. Another strategy of improvement is to provide the best performers with the opportunity to become mentors of those performing not so well (Acuerdo Ministerial 0320-10, 2010). These aims of evaluation are complemented by the publication of the evaluation results of each school. The purpose of the publication is 'social accountability' - that is, to enhance the trust of society by guaranteeing levels of transparency in each activity [12] (SER, 2008, pp. 8-11).

These general aims are translated into some specific operational aims. An integral, permanent and institutionalised process of evaluation [13] is seen as a necessary condition to improve quality (SER, 2008, p. 40). Evaluation is thus considered to be a permanent process applied to each component of the system [14], and it should rely on a set of standards to determine the quality of each of the educational actors. Evaluation and standardisation go hand in hand with a strategy of motivation in order to persuade teachers and school authorities to achieve expected levels of quality. This can be noted, for instance, in the use of results of evaluations as criteria for promotion and pay rises or in the use of economic gains and even layoffs as a form of motivation and control (SER, 2008, p. 21; Acuerdo Ministerial 0025-09, 2009; LOEI, 2011). The central assumption is that education and people working in education need to be continuously motivated, evaluated and controlled in order to assure that they fulfil their responsibilities in their work.

In sum, the general aim of quality improvement through feedback from evaluations is combined with a strategy of specification, standardisation, measurement, monitoring, motivation and control, as depicted in Table I. It is assumed that this quality and accountability system will lead to enhanced levels of transparency and increased trust by society. The identification of the aims that orient the new system of quality and accountability provides the basis for addressing the relationships and evaluative procedures in the next section.

#### *Relationships of Accountability*

Evaluations are to be applied to each component of the educational system and involve both horizontal and vertical relationships. An example of vertical relationships is provided by those practices where teachers are accountable to principals, or where the authorities of the Ministry of Education are being audited by the State Controllorship.[15] Horizontal relationships are evident, for example, in the survey of parents/students that aims at the evaluation of services offered by the

school in terms of satisfaction. Also, the publication of the results of institutional performance in order to give an account to society about the quality of each institution could be regarded as a horizontal relation of accountability [16] (SER, 2008, pp. 8, 72-79). Relations of accountability – either horizontal or vertical – are said to be evaluative in nature, yet different types of interactions take shape within these evaluative practices (Ranson, 2003).

Accountability regime	Main characteristics of the new system of evaluation in Ecuador
Purposes	Main purposes: improvement of quality and trust Specific purposes: compliance with levels of quality, transparency, standardisation
Relationships	Horizontal: e.g. relationships between teachers/school authorities and students, parents or public inspection Vertical: e.g. relationships between authorities of the Ministry of Education and State Controllership Characteristics of relationships: control, motivation, public reporting, judgement
Object of the account	Teacher and school performance in view of standards based on surveys, interviews, observations, tests Expert judgement based on qualitative indicators for curriculum
Rules	Continuous evaluation (culture of evaluation) Continuous monitoring/assessment Judgment of experts (limited)
Structure	Power: of State Controllership Unit to control the administration of the Ministry of Education and its agencies, and of Ministry of Education to control teachers/school authorities/schools Technical agency: Institute of Evaluation Ground of control: legal instruments - results of evaluation associated with promotions, pay rises, professional development, layoffs
Code	Instrumental rationality

Table I. Characteristics of the accountability regime created within the system of evaluation in Ecuador (SER, 2008).

The first type of relationship is a relationship of control. The school authorities or the Ministry of Education, for instance, are entitled to ask teachers or schools for an account in view of their performances. A second type of relationship, that is closely related to the first one, is the motivation of actors in the field of education on the basis of incentives such as promotions, professional development, pay rises, economic incentives, or layoffs (SER, 2008; LOEI, 2011). Another type of relationship is less directly focused on control and more concerned with the reporting of information. An example is the publication of evaluation results. Here, the accounts are about providing information to the public and hence, of course, are an indirect pressure on or incentive to schools and teachers to engage in quality improvement. Finally, the new system of evaluation also involves relationships where those acting as evaluators are not entitled to exert control but can only judge quality. This is the case when students and parents are called to evaluate services provided by schools. The object of the account in these relations of control, motivation, public reporting and judgment will be discussed in the next section.

#### *The Object of the Account*

What is accounted for in the new system of evaluation consists of compliance with performance levels as described in standards. Standards provide the system with descriptions of expected achievement for the evaluation of students, teachers, school authorities and school administration. The object of the account for teachers and school authorities, for instance, is the level of competences that they must demonstrate in order to be able to contribute to students' achievement. For example, teachers are to be evaluated in terms of curricular development, teaching/learning quality, professional development, and ethical commitment (Estandares de

Calidad, 2011). Standards, then, become an instrument that allows for judging the quality of performance of each actor along these dimensions. The following is an example of a standard within the dimension of 'curriculum development': 'The teacher develops his/her practice according to the national curriculum and its implications in the classroom' (Estandares de Calidad, 2011, p. 15). To the extent that this and other standards are met, the teacher will be assigned with a figure that describes the level of quality of his/her practice (e.g. for scores that range from 90 to 100%, the performance is regarded as excellent). The evaluation of schools is based on the performance of teachers, school authorities and students; however, it also involves the participation of community through the application of a survey (SER, 2008, p. 72). The survey seeks to measure the satisfaction of parents/representatives and students in relation to the services provided by the school.

Except for this form of evaluation that accounts for compliance with expected achievement and a kind of consumer satisfaction, the evaluation of curricula is to be done in terms of their pertinence, coherence and applicability. Part of these aspects are to be evaluated according to a kind of curricular guideline which consists of a list of descriptions and levels of performances expected from students (SER, 2008, pp. 103-106). The criteria of experts are to be also partially considered in the evaluation of this component. When it comes to the evaluation of the curriculum at the level of the national system (macro level), experts are required to judge the quality of curriculum through observations; however, the policy document (SER, 2008) does not provide any further information about the kind of observations required or about the weight of this criterion in the overall evaluation of the curriculum.

#### *The Rules of Accountability*

The strategy adopted for achieving the general aims of the system of evaluation (improvement of quality and enhancing trust) implies the application of continuous and integral internal and external evaluation. Each component of the education system is held to account, and the publication of the results is organised in such a way as to enhance transparency (SER, 2008, p. 46). The process consists of assessing the information (collected through different instruments such as surveys, interviews, questionnaires, observations) according to the standards, followed by the assignation of a figure that is based on the level of performance of the actor and the published account of the school's performance (SER, 2008, pp. 62-106). The suggested rationale of evaluation reads as follows: 'To evaluate is to measure and then to give a judgment ... . For that, it is necessary to count on valid reliable information, criteria of comparison (standards) and a defined aim' (SER, 2008, p. 36). The evaluation of the curriculum (at the level of the national system), however, adopts a different rationale. It is partly a qualitative rationale where the pertinence, coherence and applicability of curriculum is to be judged by experts (SER, 2008, p. 107).

The new system thus seems to create a kind of 'rule of evaluation'. This involves the fostering of a positive conception of evaluative practices, and the identification of strengths/weaknesses and the incentives for good performance that motivate educational actors as well as to comply with expected levels of performance and to engage in programmes of professional development. Indeed, it is argued that the new system cannot meet its purposes without evaluation becoming part of the culture where measuring performance is regarded as an important condition for professional growth (SER, 2008, pp. 8-33; Ministerio de Educacion, 2011, pp. 53-55). Evaluation thus is promoted as becoming a routine practice within the education system. In this context, the policy document explicitly states that the aim is to get rid of the traditional punitive image and to make evaluation more attractive by linking it with a motivation strategy (SER, 2008, p. 33). Accountability thus should be about specification and control, but at the same time be a voluntary practice on the part of actors involved in education. The aim is to promote a disposition among teachers and schools towards quality that makes evaluation into a kind of voluntary practice. Based on the elaboration of the rules of accountability, it is now possible to focus on the institutional/organisational framework of accountability in order to identify how authority and power are to operate.

*Structure: organisational arrangements, power and source of control*

Initially, the organisational arrangements determined for the operation of the system pointed to the Ministry of Education through the 'Sub-secretariat of Planning' (a technical agency of the Ministry of Education) as being 'directly responsible for the implementation of evaluations' (SER, 2008, p. 54). However, in view of transparency, a new agency has been appointed to be responsible for evaluations. This agency, named the Institute of Evaluation [17], is regarded as a public, autonomous entity that will be in charge of internal/external evaluations of the education system in coordination with the Ministry of Education (LOEI, 2011). Its functions consist of the design and application of the evaluations, their analysis and the delivery of results. In addition to the Institute of Evaluation, there are other agencies/actors that play a role in the evaluative practices. The State Controllershship Unit in coordination with the Citizen Oversight Committee [18] is responsible for holding to account the administration of the Ministry of Education (and its agencies). The structure created for this form of accountability delineates vertical/horizontal relationships at the same time - vertical because the State Controllershship is legally empowered and can exert forms of control on the grounds of the legal instruments (e.g. Organic Law of General Controllershship of the State). The role of the Oversight Committee, however, represents a horizontal relationship, because it empowers citizens to control transparency in the activities of the ministry as part of mechanism that promotes social participation.

For the evaluation of teachers, school authorities and schools, a number of actors play a role. Peers, principals, students and parents, for example, are called to evaluate quality, although when it comes to control of teachers, school authorities and schools, it is constitutionally legitimate for the Ministry of Education to exert control (based on the legal instruments and agreements aimed at regulation of the educational system). These legal forms of control link the results of evaluations with promotions, pay rises, economic incentives, opportunities for professional development, and layoffs (Acuerdo Ministerial 0025-09, 2009; Acuerdo Ministerial 0320-10, 2010; LOEI, 2011).

*Cultural Code*

In order to grasp the culture code that takes shape within the new evaluation system, it is important to focus again on the main assumptions. One underlying assumption is framed in terms of low trust in the quality and transparency of education in Ecuador, and is perceived as a problem with a long history (SER, 2008, pp. 10-46). This assumption of distrust and opacity seems to be the basis for the belief that people working in education need to be continuously motivated and controlled in order to assure that they deliver quality. It is the grounds for the organisation of a system of continuous evaluation and standardisation and for setting up an organisational structure that allows for permanent control and improvement of measured achievement. The strategy of motivation also draws on the rationale of distrust: incentives are suggested to be necessary in order to secure that actors will commit to perform their work in line with the new standards.

What seems to be dominant in the new system of evaluation is an instrumental rationality, including the values of efficiency and effectiveness (Gleeson & Husbands, 2001, Ranson, 2003). Indeed, the main focus is on means to achieve aims (standards, performance levels). The judgment of the curriculum by experts indicates, of course, a more substantial rationality, but this is only a minor part of the overall strategy. An instrumental rationality could be regarded as a main dimension of current neoliberal forms of accountability practices where the focus is on 'efficiency and effectiveness of the process, not about what the process is to bring about' (Biesta, 2009, p. 653). Furthermore, this instrumental rationality is linked up with a specific disposition. Evaluation and an orientation towards quality have to become a permanent need for the actors involved.

Based on the characteristics identified for each of the dimensions of accountability practices, we conclude with an exploration of the kind of accountability regime taking shape in Ecuadorian education. The term *regime* refers to a social institution that governs practices through a set of principles. Based on the analysis, it should be evident that some principles aligned with professionalism – and expert judgment – guide the practices of accountability. An example of these professional principles is the form of internal accountability promoted in the evaluation of teachers and/or school authorities, or the evaluation of the pertinence of the curriculum based on expert judgments. The assumption of these principles shows a trust of or reliance on professional



judgment (SER, 2008). However, our analysis indicates that it is mainly principles of performance control and reporting and (financial) incentives that guide the new practices of accountability. This is in line with what authors have identified as a regime of 'performance accountability' (Ranson, 2003), a 'performativity regime' (Ball, 2003) or a 'regime of surveillance' (Webb, 2005). The defining characteristic of these regimes is the emphasis on external specification, measurement, forms of motivation (incentives) and regulation where educational actors must produce evidence that accounts for the quality of their work (Olssen, 1996).

## **Discussion**

Although further research is needed in view of the way the system of evaluation is actually enacted, we consider it to be important to conclude with an exploration of possible tensions that might emerge in the accountability regime that stresses performativity. Based on a review of relevant literature, tensions at three levels will be discussed – namely, the type of relationships, the assumptions, and challenges for professional identities.

Instead of promoting relationships of genuine trust, the new regime could be regarded as creating a context where specification, evaluation and control are to dominate interactions and hence where distrust is always the point of departure. By introducing mechanisms to enhance transparency, what counts is what can be measured, and what cannot be measured cannot be trusted. Promoting relationships of accountability that embrace dialogic interactions in more qualitative and reflexive terms instead has the potential to create opportunities for new kinds of trust. It is a kind of trust that emerges out of the shared understandings of actors (Ranson, 2003; Vidovich, 2009). Closely related to the issue of trust, the performative regime of accountability also transforms relationships of responsibility. External motivation induced by incentives can erode internal commitment. Here, educational actors are likely to act in response to regulations and standards rather than taking up a responsibility in view of professional and ethical judgment (Ball, 2003). And finally, on the part of students and parents, a change in the type of relationships can occur when they are empowered as customers to evaluate professional practices in terms of satisfaction. This can result in conflictive interactions and, moreover, could lead to the disappearance of education as a context for mutual responsibilities (Biesta, 2009).

Another field of tension becomes visible in the movement away from a conception of evaluation in terms of professional judgment towards an emphasis on the performance measurements and related standards. Ball (2003, pp. 221-226) observes that 'professional judgment is subordinated to the requirements of performativity', and he notices a 'potential split' between teachers' judgment of good education and the imposed criteria of quality determined through levels of performance. This can result in a reduced conception of professional autonomy (Fitzsimons, 1999) where professional practices are governed by the dictates of performance measures and standards (see Levison, 2011, p. 130). Further tensions within this field of professionalism could emerge between the beliefs of actors and the required representation, and between authenticity and inauthenticity (Ball, 2003, p. 223; Ranson, 2003). When the object of evaluation is compliance with expected levels of performance, actors must take care that their practices are consistent with expectations. For example, when there is a strong focus on student evaluations of teachers, the interactions are likely to be shaped by the need of teachers to present themselves in good terms. This can seduce teachers into a kind of inauthentic behaviour that, although it moves them away from their professional beliefs/commitments, can satisfy evaluative criteria. The requirements to meet specific standards or to verify performance levels can result in expectations being fulfilled, but at the expense of authentic practices motivated by professional or even personal commitment.

In line with these possible tensions, we think it is important to embrace with caution the aims and strategy of the new evaluation and accountability system in education. A major challenge will be to prevent these and other tensions from developing, and moreover to continue the development of forms of accountability that do justice to the field of education. In that regard, it does not make sense to dream of a return to the golden age of professional autonomy and related forms of professional accountability – if it ever existed. It remains important to look for the development of alternative ways of understanding and organising accountability. Indeed, some

authors have proposed democratic forms of accountability as a complementary or alternative model where educational actors and society are called to engage in deliberative processes in order to arrive at shared understandings about quality (Thomas & Martin, 1996; Ranson, 2003, Vidovich, 2009). These forms of accountability imply a more substantial communicative rationality where giving an account does not replace the responsibility of teachers and schools. The analysis of these alternative models, and taking into account the particularities of the Ecuadorian context, might provide a point of departure for further research.

## Notes

- [1] The original version is in Spanish. Translation provided by the author.
- [2] Curriculum for general basic education (EGB) level updated in 1996. Initial-level curriculum updated in 2008 and in process of reform. EGB Curriculum of 1996 updated in 2010/2011. Unified general baccalaureate (BGU) currently being implemented - consists of 3 years after EGB.  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/vacio.html>
- [3] Supervision system created in 1994 and updated in 2003.
- [4] The original version of this document is in Spanish. Translations provided by the author.
- [5] The Decennial Plan (2006-2015) formulates the strategy to improve quality of education through the following eight policies: creation of the evaluation system; re-valorisation of teaching profession; improvement of infrastructure; increase of budget for education; universalisation of initial education; universalisation of general basic education; increase in baccalaureate population; and eradication of illiteracy.
- [6] See: <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/index.php/auditoria-educativa>
- [7] Officially presented to the public 14 November 2012. Online draft version:  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/generalidades-pes.html>
- [8] The following initiatives have been (partially) implemented by February 2013: management levels (31.02% implemented); establishment of Institute of Evaluation (officially created 26 November 2012); standards of quality (officially presented 14 November 2012).  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/transparencia/planificacion-institucional.html>
- [9] 93.46% implemented (updated 27 December 2012).
- [10] The original version of this document is in Spanish. Translations provided by the author.
- [11] Further research will study the implementation of these policies.
- [12] This could create a kind of free choice system; however, it is limited. The 50% quota for public schools works under an open enrolment system (for the best performers). For the other 50% (those performing at a lower level), a zoning system applies. This publication, however, could inform the whole of parent choices of private schools because parents can choose from the competitive choices of the market: <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/index.php/noticias/boletines-prensa.html>
- [13] The system of evaluation will be complemented by the new follow-up system which determines audits/monitoring processes. By 27 December 2012 79.65% has been implemented.  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/>
- [14] The system (SER, 2008) evaluates four components: management of the Ministry of Education and schools; teachers' performance; students' performance; and curriculum.
- [15] State Controllershship: technical agency of the state created to control resources and achievements of state institutions based on principles of ethics/transparency/quality/focus on results. See <http://www.contraloria.gob.ec/buscar.asp>
- [16] See note 12.
- [17] Officially created 26 November 2012.
- [18] Citizen Oversight Committee: part of the Body of Transparency and Social Control that empowers citizens to control public interest issues.  
<http://www.participacionycontrolsocial.gov.ec/web/guest/mision-vision-valores>

## References

- Acuerdo Ministerial 0025-09 (2009) [http://web.educacion.gob.ec/\\_upload/ACUERDO%20025-090002.pdf](http://web.educacion.gob.ec/_upload/ACUERDO%20025-090002.pdf)
- Acuerdo Ministerial 0320-10 (2010) [http://web.educacion.gob.ec/\\_upload/ACUERDO\\_320-10.pdf](http://web.educacion.gob.ec/_upload/ACUERDO_320-10.pdf)
- Ball, S. (1998) Big Policies/Small World: an introduction to international perspectives in education policy, *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 119-130. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050069828216>
- Ball, S. (2003) The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity, *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>
- Behn, R. (2003) Rethinking Accountability in Education: how should who hold whom accountable for what?, *International Public Management Journal*, 6(1), 47-73.
- Biesta, G. (2009) Education between Accountability and Responsibility, in M. Simons, M. Olssen & M. Peters (Eds) *Re-reading Education Policies: a handbook studying the policy agenda of the 21st century*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Bovens, M. (2010) Two Concepts of Accountability: accountability as a virtue and as a mechanism, *West European Politics*, 33(5), 946-967. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2010.486119>
- Codd, J. (1999) Educational Reform, Accountability and the Culture of Distrust, *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 34(1), 45-53.
- Devine, N. (2004) *Education and Public Choice: a critical account of the invisible hand on education*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Estandares de Calidad Educativa. Ministerio de Educacion (2011) <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/generalidades-pes.html>
- Fitzsimons, P. (1999) Managerialism and Education, in M. Peters, P. Ghiraldelli, B. Zarnic & A. Gibbons (Eds) *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Education*. <http://www.ffst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA>
- Glesson, D. & Husbands, C. (Eds) (2001) *The Performing School: managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hargreaves, A. (2000) Four Ages of Professionalism and Professional Learning, *Teachers and Teaching*, 6(2), 151-182. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713698714>
- Lauglo, J. (1995) Forms of Decentralisation and their Implications for Education, *Comparative Education*, 31(1), 5-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050069529182>
- Leithwood, K. & Earl, L. (2000) Educational Accountability Effects: an international perspective, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75(4), 1-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050069529182>
- Levinson, M. (2011) Democracy, Accountability, and Education, *Theory and Research in Education*, 9(2), 125-144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1477878511409622>
- Ley Organica de Educacion Intercultural (2011) <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/legislacion-educativa/loi.html>
- Ministerio de Educacion (2011) *Mas Educacion con Calidad, Equidad y Calidez*. <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/transparencia/regulacion-control.html>
- Mulgan, R. (2000) 'Accountability': an ever-expanding concept?, *Public Administration*, 78(3), 555-573. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00218>
- Newman, J. (1998) 'Managerialism and Social Welfare', in G. Hughes & G. Lewis (Eds) *Unsettling Welfare: the reconstruction of social policy*. London: Routledge.
- Olssen, M. (1996) In Defence of the Welfare State and of Publicly Provided Education, *Journal of Education Policy*, 11(3), 337-362. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0268093960110305>
- Olssen, M., Codd, J. & O'Neill A. (2004) *Education Policy: globalization, citizenship & democracy*. London: Sage.
- Olssen, M. & Peters, M. (2005) Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism, *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313-345. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930500108718>
- Peters, M. (2001) Education, Enterprise Culture and the Entrepreneurial Self: a Foucauldian perspective, *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 2(2), 58-71.
- Plan Decenal de Educacion 2006-2015 (2008) <http://www.educacion.gob.ec/plan-decenal-de-educacion.html>
- Ranson, S. (2003) Public Accountability in the Age of Neo-liberal Governance, *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(5), 459-480. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0268093032000124848>
- Ranson, S. (2008) The Changing Governance of Education, *Educational Management Administration Leadership*, 36(2), 201-219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143207087773>

- Reglamento del Sistema de Supervision Educativa y sus Reformas (2003)  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/home/documentos-legales.html>
- Rizvi, F. (2004) Theorizing the Global Convergence of Educational Restructuring, in S. Lindblad & T. Popkewitz (Eds) *Educational Restructuring: international perspectives on travelling policies*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Sistema Nacional de Evaluacion y Rendicion Social de Cuentas (SER) (2008)  
<http://www.educacion.gob.ec/base-legal.html>
- Thomas, H. & Martin, J. (1996) *Managing Resources for School Improvement*. London: Routledge.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203434383>
- Tolofari, S. (2005) New Public Management and Education, *Policy Futures in Education*, 3, 75-89.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2005.3.1.11>
- Torres, A. (2009) Introduction, in M. Martinez, *La educacion en America Latina: entre la calidad y la equidad*, pp. 9-11. Barcelona: Octaedro.
- Vidovich, L. (2006) Travelling Policy: contesting 'global' policy trends in educational accountability, in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Australian Sociological Association*, pp. 1-10.  
<http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers06/papers/Education,%20Work,%20Stratificati%20and%20Class/Vidovich.pdf>
- Vidovich, L. (2009) You Don't Fatten the Pig by Weighing it: contradictory tensions in the 'policy pandemic' of accountability, in M. Simons, M. Olssen & M. Peters (Eds) *Re-reading Education Policies: a handbook studying the policy agenda of the 21st century*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Webb, T. (2005) The Anatomy of Accountability, *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(2), 189-208.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0268093052000341395>
- Young, O. (1983) Regime Dynamics: the rise and fall of international regimes, in S. Krasner (Ed.) *International Regimes*, Wisconsin: Cornell University Press.

---

**ENMA CAMPOZANO AVILES** a PhD student at the Laboratory of Education and Society in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. She is currently working on a study of the implementation of Ecuadorian policy reforms and its implications for teachers and teacher education.

Correspondence: [enma.campozano@ppw.kuleuven.be](mailto:enma.campozano@ppw.kuleuven.be)

**MAARTEN SIMONS** is a professor of educational theory and policy at the Laboratory of Education and Society in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. His research interests are educational policy and theory, with special attention to new modes of governing and the public role of (higher) education.  
Correspondence: [maarten.simons@ppw.kuleuven.be](mailto:maarten.simons@ppw.kuleuven.be)