2 Accountability in US educational research and the travels of governance

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Since the end of the nineteenth century, educational research in the USA has been linked to the political rationalities of liberal-democratic assumptions about society and the nature of social control, order and responsibility (Popkewitz 1991, 1998). Beyond the overt management of researchers' activities through professional associations, trends in the availability of funding and mechanisms such as Institutional Review Boards, the governing that travels through US educational research is inscribed in the principles that divide and order the actions and objects of schooling. Educational research has inscribed a particular idea of progress in which the salvation of the individual can be delivered by saving or rescuing the child/student. Though an elusive science' in terms of its normative development (Lagemann 2000), the science of education in its many guises has historically tended to embody notions of redemption. Science was to rescue modern society from its unique predicaments. As Popkewitz (1998) has argued, it has been conventionally assumed since the nineteenth century that 'scientific knowledge' serves democratic ideals. This can be seen to occur as scientific inquiry brings a coherence and a rationalisation to the activities of governments, and as it equips a democratic populace with the tools and knowledge necessary for effective public participation and responsibility.

Such assumptions about the democratizing and liberalizing potential of social science research have formed the backdrop to much of what has been problematized in a way that links it to the social administration of the individual and the design of salvational collective narratives. 'Accountability' - viewed both as the defining characteristic of an era (e.g. the 'age of accountability') and as an empirically researchable object - is currently one of the central concerns travelling through US educational research and in this chapter I focus on the governing that occurs as notions of accountability help to order the reason of individuals and communities.

As for other contributions to this volume, a key analytic point of this chapter is the intersection of research and policy making. In looking at the interplay between 'research-based policy' and 'policy effects on research', the question that I tackle is not whether the tail-wags-the-dog or the dog-its-tail but the question of how certain objects of reflection, action and intervention are fabricated across the domains of educational
Accountability in US educational research

The centrality of ‘accountability’ on the contemporary American educational research landscape is underscored by its appearance in the themes of recent annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), with the theme of the 2003 meeting ‘Accountability for Educational Quality: Shaped Responsibility’ and the 2005 meeting focusing on ‘Demography and Democracy in the Era of Accountability’. With this last – the notion of the ‘Era of Accountability’ – it has achieved the level of a proposed label for our times, the chief defining characteristic of the times in which we live. In this section I discuss travelling strategies of governance within US educational research by looking at the notion that accountability is an appropriate label for the era. However, to begin with, it is worth noting that US education and research on it are not alone in appearing presently to reside in an accountability time. Homologous discussions about accountability as our ‘new era’ can be found across multiple domains, notably within business and industry where this new epoch also appears to be acutely felt.

In 2002 the US Congress passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, officially titled the ‘Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act’, legislation that restated securities and corporate governance regulations on a scale not seen since the New Deal of the 1930s (Cohen and Quinn-Maqs 2005). Coming on the heels of the Enron and WorldCom scandals, the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation requires increased public disclosure requirements, notably of the activities by corporate boards of directors. These new regulations were advanced in the name of increasing accountability and have certain implications in other areas, for example in the management of US-based non-profit organizations to which some of the audit and disclosure provisions apply. As in the spheres of education and educational research, accountability in these circuits is being increasingly viewed as a key feature ‘of the times’. Accountability has created a ‘brave new era’, an article in Business Week magazine recently declared, in which ‘professionals can no longer automatically sanitize everything they do – nor can they barricade themselves behind a wall of ignorance’ (France et al. 2004). The teleology of this periodisation, particularly the suggestion of an era without accountability, suggests that academics ought not unquestioningly to accept such political slogans and concepts as the critical tools and analytic frames of scholarship. In the ‘new climate',
the "peer-invent" world of which Sarbanes-Oxley is only one part, declarations of accountability-time are frequently seen to represent a progressive evolution of the social, cultural (and financial/commercial) arrangements we inhabit. To bastardise a familiar Kantian formulation—but hopefully to capture in logic—it could be said that while we may not live in an accountable age, if we are in an age of accountability that we live in, we are one step closer to freeing ourselves from our self-imposed immaturity.

Nonetheless, while caution is warranted with regard to both triumphant and despairing declarations of accountability-time, there are noteworthy features of the current state of cultural arrangements in the USA that accountability-related notions seem accurately to describe. Increased reporting requirements are the main contributions that Sarbanes-Oxley has made to the "era of accountability"; however, what we are witnessing is much more than a restructuring of the legal provisions that apply to corporate government. There is a larger social governance at play: a governance which means that the reporting/dissemination and consumption of educational research assumes new imperatives and configurations. It is not only corporate executives who are no longer permitted to burkicade themselves behind walls of ignorance. The responsibility to take responsibility for disclosing and being disclosed is becoming ever more widely dispersed.

The governing strategies that are connected with accountability, reporting and disclosure come into high resolution when we examine how this plays out with regard to community notification statues, laws which in the USA are often collectively discussed as "Megan's Law." This first appeared as 1994 New Jersey legislation requiring community notification when individuals identified by the state as potential sexual predators moved into an area. Such provisions have since been enacted as federal legislation (signed into law by President Clinton) and continue to generate attention in national and local politics. On the one hand, community notification provisions make governments "accountable" in new ways to their citizens, yet with these statutes it can be argued that there is a net transfer of responsibility for ensuring public safety away from governments and onto individuals and their communities—a conundrum that nicely demonstrates how even within an accountability-time, what makes for "accountability" is anything but straightforward. For a time, it was argued that "Megan's Law" disclosure provisions create a "preventative state" that can be shielded from criticism on the basis of having undertaken risk management measures by deploying an actuarial expertise that is then translated into community-level actions. The dissemination of information by the state becomes central to a community's ability to protect and manage itself; it necessitates that community members act and not act in certain ways. Similar forms of what Nik Rose and others have termed "compliance" (Rose 1999) are now appearing in the mechanisms that the US government is presently employing when it comes to disseminating and shaping the use of educational research.

In the spring of 2002 the US Congress passed the Educational Sciences Reform Act (H.R. 3801), a bill which overhauled the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and created in its place the Institute of Education Sciences within the federal Department of Education. Other features connected with these legislative changes, specifically an increased emphasis on "evidence" and "scientifically valid research" can be explored as strategies of governance traveling through US educational research in similar manner as the present examination of accountability (see e.g. Luther 2004, Popkewitz 2004). In terms of the government's role in the diffusion of educational research, H.R. 3801 is significant for helping bring the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) into existence. As an education research dissemination vehicle, the WWC operates along many of the same lines as community-notification statutes. The clearinghouse presents itself as a "decision making tool" that "helps the education community locate and recognize credible and reliable evidence to make informed decisions." Similar to the government's actuarial computations that assign certain individuals to accuses/predator risk pools, the WWC uses an evaluative calculus that is designed to provide a community (the "education community") with reliable resources for managing itself. As of late spring 2003 WWC had presented its reviews of only middle school math research—bestowing a green light double-checkmark upon a study that "Meets Evidence Standards," a yellow light single-checkmark on research that "Meets Evidence Standards with Reservations"; and a red light "X" on research that "Does Not Meet Evidence Screen. Particular "interventions" are not endorsed by the WWC, rather information is coded according to these "reliability" ratings and is transmitted for the purposes of informed decision making and the differentiation of, in their words, "high-quality research from weaker research and promotional claims." As the notion of meeting "evidence screens" clearly suggests, the WWC is operating in an actuarial world of risk-level and confidence-level assessments. Despite the ambition of being as cut-and-dry "trusted source of scientific evidence," the organisation's own statements hint at the probabilistic nature of these reviews and the research they present: "Making evidence clear and reliable is not as simple as making scientific evidence more clear and reliable. It is something in which, it could be argued, that comes with the territory of any such endeavour, yet what is of special significance for present purposes is that these strategies for disseminating and structuring the use of education research constitute forms of social governance that reflect the responsibilities we see in all occurring across other domains in the accountability-time of our present. What Works constructs an "educational community" that can putatively demonstrate its "responsibility" by basing its decisions on research findings that have been established to present less risk. (As a rule, qualitative research fails to pass the WWC evidence screen as allegedly being epistemologically impermissible with the outcome evaluation). The WWC's traffic-light icons fabricate a "common sense" around its procedures, for who in their right mind would run a red light? These become the new accountability provisions that govern educational research. The responsibility for equitable, quality educational provision is shifted over to the responsibilities of researchers and decision makers who must conduct themselves with prudence and be ever-mindful of the contractual expertise that the preventative state provides in the course of discharging its duties. Researchers play a key role in this governance to quote the president of the 2003 AERA President, 'researchers too need to share responsibility' (Linn 2003). Walls of ignorance are no longer to escape an exemplary barricade, which is course something that can be welcomed for a host of reasons. However, we note that in advancing the spread of enlightened reason (thanks in part to the tri-colored illumination of the traffic signal), the accountability of our time is bringing a certain high stake logic to US educational research itself and widely follows from the responsibilities for managing successful educational provision. What Works works into a collective survival narrative that has been recent to include actuarial expertise, disclosure and reporting as the keys to social hope.
Accountability as an empirical object

To say that within our accountability-time 'accountability' exists as a thing in the world is not the redundancy that it might seem on first blush. My thesis here is to discuss how an analytic and theoretical concept can be transcribed into an apparent empirical reality—how accountability has become an object that is resided about in particular ways, as well as acted upon, and how educational research is drawn into this transformation. From the previous section it should be clear that the 'accountability' presently under examination pertains to much more than a pattern of relations between 'the state' and 'the people'. We are dealing with a phenomenon of governance much more expansive and diffuse than the Federalist Papers style of concern for designing the democratic systems of government best able to be held 'accountable' to constituents. This notion of designing appropriate systems is, however, relevant, for it is common to find accountability analyised in education research literature as a systems-management problem, e.g. in terms of 'accountability in management'. Other constraining approaches are to conduct research on 'accountability policies' (Spillane, Diamond, et al. 2002), e.g. in terms of mechanisms or initiatives sharing certain family resemblances. A focus on management systems and policy implementation might appear to skirt the notion of accountability as an empirical reality, however we will see that the sciences of education research themselves help to call this accountability-entity into existence. As a thing in the world, accountability takes a place on the landscape, affecting the social positions of subjects and structuring the social administration of the individual.

Forms of accountability have appeared in various landscapes for some time now—the as the above reference to the Federalist Papers testifies to. In many of these instances, the emphasis has been on a relationship, a someone/something being 'accountable' to or for another someone/something. The social research literature from the early 1970s evidences a burst of interest in accountability. Notable in this respect is the work of Leon Lessinger (Lessinger 1970, Lessinger and Tiler 1971, Lessinger and Sabine 1973), as well as a progressive vision of the connection to the flows of data and information ('reporting' and 'disclosure', to use the terms I discussed in the previous section). Pointing to an historical instance in which 'accountability' processes and systems make up part of our reality: they structure how individuals become positioned in relation to flows of data and information ('reporting' and 'disclosure', to use the terms I discussed in the previous section). Pointing to an historical instance in which 'accountability' processes and systems make up part of our reality: they structure how individuals become positioned in relation to flows of data and information ('reporting' and 'disclosure', to use the terms I discussed in the previous section). Pointing to an historical instance in which 'accountability' processes and systems make up part of our reality: they structure how individuals become positioned in relation to flows of data and information ('reporting' and 'disclosure', to use the terms I discussed in the previous section). Pointing to an historical instance in which 'accountability' processes and systems make up part of our reality: they structure how individuals become positioned in relation to flows of data and information ('reporting' and 'disclosure', to use the terms I discussed in the previous section).
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Conclusion

Accountability, as it moves within US educational research both as a thing in the world and as the defining characteristic of our era embodies strategies for the social administration of the individual. The common understanding of accountability as a problem of educational research, I have maintained, furthers a general social trend of increased responsibility that requires education professionals to act in accordance with a set of norms of reasonableness. As an empirical object, accountability can be seen as "too little" or "too much" present, part of the apparent reality that researchers and policymakers grapple with. We can note, for example, that "Standards, testing and accountability" (as one thread) are among the research topics others are "School reform," "Teacher retention" that the Harvard Education Letter includes when summarizing the latest education research and synthesizing it with practical suggestions you can put to daily use in your classrooms and schools. As we have seen above, accountability travels not in isolation but commonly in conjunction with "standards and testing." In US educational research, "accountability" has, to considerable extent, come to represent the reification of flaws of information and their management. While such bureaucraticisation and technicalisation takes us some distance from accountability as a description of the qualities of a relationship between the governed and the governing, there is still a liberal-democratic political rationality embedded in the strategy of governance we have been examining here. Similar to "Megan's Law" community notification statutes, educational accountability generates a "proper" social control. Government and its representatives are prevented from being overly intrusive, true to liberal spirit and in their stead, the maintenance of social order is entrusted to individuals as members of communities. The social science knowledge that educational researchers produce furthers this arrangement through studies of "accountability-driven reforms" that rationalize and bring a coherence to the actions of governments. The social science knowledge the educational researchers produce also supports individuals as members of communities by giving them "accountability data" to use in their decision making. "Accountability" thus offers a salvation narrative for our times in which the property informed (and properly reasoning) individual becomes proof of science's democratising potential and become the agent of a progress that offers social hope for redemption. This social redemption of the early twenty-first century is not the late nineteenth-century secularised saving of a soul but a redemption that rights past wrongs through the attainment of educational equity with no child no longer left behind.

Notes

1. Often referred to an IRA, there are university committees charged with ensuring the ethical treatment of human subject.
5. An analogous argument about social objects and subject positions could also be elaborated along the lines suggested by Arjun Appadurai's work on "scapes" (Appadurai 1996).

References


3 Crossing borders

The European dimension in educational and social science research

Angelos Agalanos

Introduction

Europe is confronted by major societal challenges and opportunities such as social and regional cohesion, unemployment, migration, interactions between different cultures, poverty and inequalities, enlargement, demographic change, security and global interdependence. There is a need or the part of society in general and policy makers in particular for a deeper knowledge and understanding of such issues, of their driving forces and consequences, and of how best to tackle them. A need for significantly improved understanding of how social, economic and environmental objectives might be successfully combined, of how the key social, political, cultural and economic issues in an enlarged EU can be faced.

Generating in-depth, shared understanding of such complex challenges and providing an improved knowledge base for decisions on relevant strategies and policies, requires a strong collaborative research effort across the social and human sciences in all their strength and variety across Europe. The social and human sciences do not only contribute to current social, economic, political and cultural development processes, but also build the intellectual foundations and resources for dealing with future challenges, forested as well as unexpected. A vibrant research scene in the social and human sciences is an essential component of a dynamic Europe.

The activities of the European Commission in this field aim to provide a coherent and interlinked understanding of the challenges contemporary European societies are faced with and to support policy, thereby enabling Europe better to understand itself and face its future. This essentially descriptive chapter argues that these activities provide a new exciting arena where new interpretations and new practices of research have been generated that foster the interaction of policy relevance, transnationality and multidisciplinarity and stimulate innovative social and educational research. The argument of this chapter is that, especially after 1995, European social science research programmes have become a powerful way of beginning to draw together and understand the complex dimensions of contemporary social and educational change in Europe and beyond.

The chapter provides an insider’s account of the development of educational research supported by the Directorate-General for Research of the European Commission since 1995. When and how did EU-supported educational research begin? What is its wider research policy context? What are some landmarks in its development? What are the key players involved? Why support educational research at a European level? What kind of
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