

## 5 Educational Accountability and Global Governmentality

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This chapter examines the global diffusion of educational accountability policies and practices. I engage with the question of whether – or in what ways – we might consider accountability a form of global governmentality. This chapter does not report the results of an empirical study but rather is designed as a theorising/conceptualising piece. I argue that researchers should closely examine the preferences and behaviours that are normalised through educational accountability policies and practices. I also argue that researchers should examine the ways that educational accountability helps to constitute the global. In developing this argument I discuss a range of work from the field of comparative and international education. The chapter also draws on scholarship on accountability and globalisation from other academic fields. I begin, however, with two vignettes. My purpose is to set the stage and to use these two incidents to begin a discussion of what it means to talk about the global diffusion of educational accountability policies and practices.<sup>1</sup>

An education researcher who worked in a rapidly industrialising area of eastern China in the early 2000s has provided us with an illuminating account of a school inspection. One morning, as part of the process of determining which schools would be placed on the list of the ten best elementary schools in the province, a 70-member evaluation team showed up at one of the schools that had made the list of finalists. The inspectors arrived in a tour bus and six large black cars and spent approximately one hour at the school in question. First they listened to a series of short speeches and then dispersed around the building to observe students engaged in a variety of activities. From Andrew Kipnis (2008), the ethnographer who provides us with all this information, we learn that one common concern about top-tier Chinese elementary schools is that they fail to fully use their sports facilities, art studios and computer rooms, and instead devote all their time to test drills and preparation. Because of this concern, apparently, the regular class schedule was disrupted on the morning of the inspection. The best student athletes were sent to use the athletic facilities, the best chess players were in the chess room, the most competent computer users were in the computer room demonstrating their PowerPoint prowess, and so forth. Kipnis reports that afterwards he learned that the principal had three full-time staff members 'working year-round preparing for the paperwork demands and visits of various audit-conducting government officials' (2008: 278). For this particular one-hour inspection by the 70-member team the equivalent of a local farmer's annual

income (approximately 10,000 yuan or US\$1,250) had been spent to print brochures and provide bottled water to the visitors.

The second vignette comes from a researcher who spent a year, also in the early 2000s, conducting research in a US elementary school located in Washington state. The 360-student K-6 school he studied had been classified by local educational authorities as low performing, which meant that teachers and administrators were under considerable pressure to improve test scores – under the logic that the aggregation of individual achievement data correlated to the teaching and learning activities that occurred (or failed to occur) in this particular school building. The researcher, P. Taylor Webb (2005), describes the surveillance culture that developed among school staff as the school's scores were widely publicised and took on increasing consequence for the future of the school. However, rather than the emphasis placed on a school's test scores immediately prompting an increased reliance on tests as a diagnostic and instructional mechanism (i.e. a movement towards test-driven instruction as the most noteworthy response to a high stakes testing environment), Webb argues that in the case of this school, most consequential were shifts in the ways that teachers began to reflect on and adjust their own pedagogic practices in relation to new paradigms of visibility. A 'surveillance circulation', Webb writes, 'prompted teachers to develop their own sense of accountability' (2005: 201). Teachers reported feeling like they were being intensely observed and this guided many of the micro-elements of their teaching, such as how the bulletin boards outside their classrooms were arranged and how they supervised the transit of their students through the school hallways. (In regard to the latter, Webb usefully reminds us that it takes a certain leap of faith to accept as universal truth 'the normative logic that quiet students [equals] pedagogical competence' (2005: 201).)

There is much in common and much that is different in these two instances of elementary school audit-accountability-inspection practices, which occurred at roughly the same chronological moment but were geographically separated by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. One could argue, for example, that in one sense we are pointing to cultural practices that are so different that it is an untenable analytic move to lay them next to one another as I have done above. In commenting on the Chinese elementary school inspection, Kipnis (2008) makes a powerful argument that rather than this being an instance of the extension of neoliberal governance techniques, it speaks more to the continuation of a socialist audit culture that gained its contours and its traction through the complex modernisation that China underwent over the twentieth century. And this modernisation itself represents a distinct assemblage of various and varied elements. Citing Bian (2005), Kipnis (2008) notes that even if we restrict ourselves to discussing the way central planners attempted to manage the Chinese economy just in the decade of the 1950s, we find both cost-accounting systems similar to those found in the US at the time, as well as work-emulation campaigns of the sort common in the Soviet Union. A single hour-long inspection by an evaluating team that prompts an alteration to the school's normal morning routine is, arguably, radically different from the pervasive attention to appearances that was brought to a failing US elementary school over the course of an entire school year.

Alternatively, one could point out that these very different cultural occurrences share a similar *performative* element. The idea here would be that accountability,

from World Yearbook of Education 2012: Policy Borrowing & Leading in Education, Steve Khamisi & Waldow (Eds) Routledge, NY.

audits and inspections (concepts I will pull apart in a moment) intrinsically relate to how the work of educators (i.e. those who, in the common US parlance, are 'in the building') gets communicated outside – whether that be to policy makers and the education bureaucracy, to the general public, or to some amalgamation of the two. In both of the above vignettes students and staff appear to have exhibited widespread audit complicity even if this was, again in both instances, bracketed by conscious deception. On both sides of the Pacific, then, we witness forms of 'accountability choreography' (Webb 2006) where educational actions are shaped and take shape in relation to a society's expectations of what schools should accomplish. Seen from this angle, differences can be collapsed as variations on a common theme. In fact, the difference between a 'high-performing' Chinese elementary school and a 'low-performing' US school would seem to disintegrate further when we consider the ways that economic anxieties and considerations infiltrate both situations. Just as successful schooling and Chinese top-ten school lists are linked to individual and national success 'in the global economy', it is quite plausible to argue that the contemporary imperative to remedy low-performing US schools directly flows from ideas about competitiveness, again, 'in the global economy'. In fact, the tie between educational equity, economic inclusiveness and global competitiveness that one sees traces of in the George W. Bush administration's No Child Left Behind legislation, appears only to be gaining momentum in the Obama administration's current educational initiatives.

To some extent, the two positions I have sketched out above map onto debates in comparative and international education scholarship on differences between the *local* and the *global*. This is sometimes framed as the question of what is locally specific and historically path-dependent about a schooling system and what elements or features conform to institutional templates and cultural scripts that have, over the past two hundred years, become increasingly globally widespread and increasingly convergent. The remainder of this chapter explores, in connection with these questions, some of the ways researchers have studied the global diffusion of school accountability policies and practices. I also aim to offer suggestions on how future scholarship might productively approach this question. I do not aim to exhaustively review the academic literature on educational accountability, but rather to sketch out several important perspectives on how scholars conceptualise the transit of and presence of educational accountability mechanisms around the globe. As is suggested by the above vignettes, in many ways this issue is deeply linked to the ways one might conceptualise neoliberalism and approach the question of how neoliberal political rationalities figure into (or don't figure into) social, cultural and educational configurations the world over (see Ong 2006). In my conclusion I argue that even as one can accurately speak of broad-scale epistemic shifts, what is actualised in any given situation is a bundling together – a contingent and unstable assembling – of multiple, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting elements (Foucault and Gordon 1980; Agamben 2009). With accountability policies and practices, as with education policies and practices generally, it is the way that various elements are put into relation with one another that truly matters.

Accountability is an important concept to discuss in a volume that deals with transnational educational borrowing and lending. As noted, it can be viewed as a technology of governance closely tied to neoliberal political rationalities (Rose 1996;

Lindblad et al. 2002, Ranson 2003; Hursh 2005; Ozga 2009). In the UK, the features and consequences of an 'audit culture' have been the subject of scholarly examination since the mid-1990s (Power 1997; Shore and Wright 2000; Strathern 2000); however, the global diffusion of school accountability policies and practices has not yet received adequate research attention (c.f. Dickhaus 2010). As the two vignettes suggest, there is much to gain from examining the specific processes, actors and interests that are folded into accountability policies and practices in particular locations. And, as part and parcel of this, there is much to gain from examining how non-local references and trans-local pressures and enticements factor into the policies and practices that are actualised at any given moment.

Also worthy of further exploration is the question of the extent to which we are witnessing, at the start of the twenty-first century, a global trend toward increased self-organising reflexivity in the self-description and self-observation that school systems are required to engage in. In recent years some globalisation scholars have called for more detailed study of the specific mechanisms, techniques and apparatuses by which things are constituted as 'global' (Ong and Collier 2005; Tsing 2005; Stichweh 2008). This call stands in stark contrast to what a remarkable body of globalisation scholarship takes as an *a priori* assumption: the idea that there is something out there already existing that is 'global'. As Urs Stäheli (2003) insightfully points out, even those who exalt in the subversive power of 'the local' tend to reify 'the global' in their analyses by assuming a universalising global that is an expressive totality. Alhwa Ong and Stephen Collier (2005) make a powerful case that rather than examining 'the changes associated with globalization in terms of broad structural transformations or new configurations of society or culture', attention should be paid to 'the specific range of phenomena that articulate such shifts' (p. 3). In this vein, and analogous to my above argument that researchers need to be attentive to the contingent bundling together of heterogeneous elements, I will also argue in this piece that accountability practices need to be seen in relation to the ways that they are *constitutive of the global* and not an after-effect that is produced by those nebulous and putatively external forces of globalisation. Playing off Foucault's definition of governmentality as the conduct of conduct, I am proposing that accountability can be described as *the monitoring of monitoring*.<sup>2</sup> In this sense it can be considered one of the features of 'global governmentality' (Larner and Walters 2004), for the behaviours, preferences, habits, representations and forms of reflection that it normalises across multiple social levels, agents, institutions and political formations.

### Accountability Systems

In a *World Yearbook of Education* chapter from several years back (Sobe 2006) I argued that in US educational research the concept and practice of 'accountability' was linked to the social administration of the individual and to the design of salvational collective narratives. As part of an effort to unsettle the taken-for-grantedness of the early twenty-first century's 'age of accountability', I emphasised the fact that the US had experienced an accountability wave in the late 1960s and early 1970s where the accountability of federal, state and local governments was linked to social engineering and the employment of science to plan for the future. Illustrative of this

particular policy/engineering environment was the pattern of building a mandatory evaluation component into federal educational initiatives, such as the sprawling components of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as Title I and first authorised in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty). Notable in the US educational research literature from this period is the work of Leon Lessinger, who emphasised the importance of demonstrating educational results obtained from resources used (Lessinger 1970; Lessinger and Tyler 1971; Lessinger and Sabine 1973; see also Levin 1974). We even see that in 1971 the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) adopted a position statement on accountability that critiqued behaviourist evaluation paradigms and discussed the multi-directional accountability relations that bound teachers of English to their students, the parents, school administrators and the larger community, and vice versa.

The framing of educational accountability as a relationship (i.e. as someone/something being 'accountable' to or for another someone/something) has by no means disappeared from the modern educational lexicon (e.g. Ryan 2005). However, even in the midst of what was referred to as 'the current "accountability" craze' in a 1972 issue of the *Journal of Higher Education* (Cooper 1972), accountability seems to have been concurrently treated as a process. In this second guise accountability is cast predominantly as a technical undertaking. It indexes the production of data and information that, from a certain social engineering perspective, should properly be built into any public policy initiative. A peculiar transit occurs (Sobe 2006) as accountability increasingly comes simply to refer to the collecting and reporting of data. It moves from being a theoretical concept to being an object or set of material practices that occur in the world. One could add that there is then a third step where accountability transitions back into an analytic construct that describes *whether* measurements and data records are being produced. As an illustration of this, consider that in many settings today the question 'What kind of accountability is there?' would be immediately answered with a listing of what data are collected and no reference to relational obligations.

In the educational research literature of the early 2000s it is common to encounter the notion that policy makers, the educational bureaucracy and educational researchers need to join hands to better implement 'accountability systems'. In his 2003 American Educational Research Association (AERA) presidential address titled 'Accountability: Responsibility and Reasonable Expectations', Robert Linn noted that ideas of shared responsibility were too often ignored and that the question of 'who is accountable' was frequently answered too narrowly. Nonetheless, his address spoke at greatest length about broadening the range of outcome measures, together with data on contextual and process variables, that need to be incorporated into accountability systems. The approach I am taking here to an accountability *system* is different in that what concerns me are the ways that educational accountability systems work as social systems. My emphasis here is on social systems as distinctly patterned sets of cultural practices where technical apparatuses and mechanisms gain their meaning in cultural and social spheres of activity.

One of the inaugural approaches to conceptualising accountability as a social system comes from Michael Power (1994) who, in discussing the explosion of auditing practices in Britain, remarked that this entailed

the spread of a distinct mentality of administrative control, a pervasive logic which has a life over and above specific practices. One crucial aspect of this is that many more individuals and organizations are coming to think of themselves as subjects of audit.

(Power 1994: 3)

In Power's terms, auditing practices emerge 'when accountability can no longer be sustained by informal relations of trust alone but must be formalized, made visible and subject to independent validation' (pp. 9–10). In an anthropological mode, Power (1997: 123) also refers to auditing as a 'ritual of verification', a characterisation since taken up by many scholars. Shore and Wright (2000) propose that in the UK auditing has migrated across diverse domains much in the manner of what Raymond Williams would refer to as a *keyword*. It has become the 'centre of a new semantic cluster' (Shore and Wright 2000: 60) and exploded beyond its financial meaning to factor into the operations of a wide range of social institutions. As I am suggesting in this piece, in the US and in other settings it is *accountability* that is more popularly the master concept that describes and prescribes a particular mentality of administrative control. Though Power was speaking of auditing practices, the following seems to similarly describe the deeply reaching consequences of our current accountability craze:

Far from being passive, audit actively constructs the contexts in which it operates. The most influential dimension of the audit explosion is the process by which environments are made auditable, structured to the need to be monitored ex post.

(Power 1994: 7)

Power's key insight is that audit activities do not simply operate *within* a particular context. Rather, the cultural practice we are describing here is much more recursive: over time auditing begins to shape and re-shape the very context itself. Applied to educational accountability, this suggests that we ask whether schooling, learning and pedagogy are increasingly being designed to be monitorable and calculable (on this point, see Taubman 2009). What is particularly important is that auditing/accountability practices are not simply passive forms of observing but that they shape the standards of performance – and beyond this, that they construct the very contexts in which they operate.

Another way to approach accountability practices as a social system is suggested by Marilyn Strathern (2006) in a discussion of the (re)writing of university mission statements in relation to audit practices. Drawing on Power's work, she suggests that 'the whole audit apparatus in Britain amounts to a self-organizing "system"' (p. 192). Strathern points to Niklas Luhmann's theorisation of social systems as holding that systems are axiomatically self-referential, that they define their own boundaries, and that they position everything beyond themselves as their environment. These self-organising properties describe an audit system which

regenerate[s] itself through the auditable accounts it elicits. For it inspects the auditees' *own* auditing methods; auditees are thus turned into ethical

self-auditors—typically they do their own audit on themselves before the experts come in.

(Strathern 2006: 191, emphasis in original)

'Educational accountability' as a pure and simple desideratum might be seen as a system in this manner, as a social system that exists in a state of perpetual demand *vis-à-vis* the education sector (a social system in its own right). Accountability can be justly accused of simplifying the complexity of the entire business of education (see, e.g. Linn 2003, among countless others). However, in Luhmannian terms, the reduction of complexity describes the exact manner in which social systems translate information. As my opening vignettes suggest, a school might 'do accountability' for accountability's sake. This performance (or this creation of an *account*, i.e. a narrative that can be put into circulation/use) is — as we saw on both sides of the Pacific — potentially a distraction from what participants identify as the functional purposes around which the education system is organised.

The fact that accountability is often cloaked as virtuous and innocent makes it an even more important social system to be reckoned with. The difficulty of 'saying no' to accountability has been remarked upon by many educational researchers (e.g. Peterson and West 2003). In its self-description it is merely an 'enabling technology' (Strathern 2006: 192). As constantly evolving and constantly restless (in large part due to the notion that measurements can always be improved and fine-tuned) accountability can begin to define what it means to be an organisation. In education in particular, engaging in accountability practices is more than a means for communicating with other social systems. In certain settings this is one of the ways that a school performs as an organisation. From the point of view of the education system, however, this engagement with another social system is worked into its processes of boundary definition. Taking Luhmann's argument that systems produce the contexts within which they operate, it becomes quite understandable that an education system would relegate accountability to being a feature of the environment. This is not to say that all educators automatically consider accountability practices a nagging distraction or necessary evil. Rather, the point is that this might help us explain why schools seem to exhibit a tendency to externalise and place accountability mechanisms outside their boundaries, as pressure that comes in from the outside. This also helps explain why accountability reporting seems to be treated as a specialised form of communication.

However, as noted above, Strathern's argument suggests (to the social scientists observing all of this) that accountability ought to be considered a self-organising social system that regenerates itself and propels itself forwards. From this perspective, it appears important to understand the ways that accountability is a specialised set of cultural practices. And, accordingly, when we focus our attention on how the education systems interact with accountability systems, more thought needs to be given to 'how one system is mediated by others' (Munro cited in Strathern 2006: 193).

The notion that accountability might be changing the rules by which educational institutions organise themselves seems partially congruent with the reading offered by neo-institutional sociologists who study the global spread of world cultural models. In a recent article in the *Comparative Educational Review*, David Kamens and Connie McNeely (2010) propose that we can explain the growth of international educational

testing and national assessment by looking at key ideological forces within the world polity. Positing that it is possible to discuss culture in terms larger than states or nations, world polity analyses typically concentrate on the institutional features of transnational developments (Boli and Thomas 1997). The polity itself is conceptualised as a network of nation-states, international organisations and societies, all of which are in varying degrees informed by world cultural models. According to Kamens and McNeely (2010), three aspects of world culture explain the growth of national assessments and international testing.

First, there is, allegedly, an increasingly isomorphic world educational ideology under which schooling is seen to possess individual and collective benefits that are increasingly linked to concerns about democracy and equity (Fiala 2007). Widespread agreement internationally about the desired outcomes of education, according to Kamens and McNeely (2010), 'legitimises international efforts to make mass education more accountable to society' (p. 11). Second, one can also point to the hegemony of science as generating the notion that the world can be rationalised with the same kinds of cause-effect relations inhering in any place on the planet. It is this logic that underlies the concept of 'best practices'. And, it is this same logic that suggests that the management of an education system be principally concerned with the production and monitoring of achievement data to find out — in an idiom popularised by the US Department of Education — 'what works'. The third explanation, Kamens and McNeely argue, is the very idea that society is something that can be managed. However, rather than the central planning model that we saw in earlier eras, there is an apparent world cultural trend toward devolution and decentralisation. They argue that nowadays wide sectors of society are brought into this management project. Individuals and collective actors are empowered as agents, thus placing an emphasis on 'the ability of a wide variety of actors to make society accountable and effective in achieving socially desired goals' (p. 13). Though the Kamens and McNeely article deals with assessment instruments specifically, it is quite clear that from a neo-institutionalist world polity angle, measurement, testing and calculation consistently circle back to accountability issues and the cultural models that make accountability viable and desirable in the first place.

In my view, a critical and sometimes overlooked dimension of neo-institutionalist arguments is the assumption that the cultural models that propagate and 'succeed' do not necessarily do so for *functional* reasons (Sobe and Ortégón 2009). Rather, it is processes of emulation and coercion that explain the diffusion of institutional forms and world cultural scripts (Dimaggio and Powell 1983). To claim, then, that assessment circles back to issues of accountability is an analytic and not a normative claim. It may be true but it is not *necessarily* true that accountability mechanisms actually make educational institutions more faithfully and more effectively perform their missions. In fact the opposite may just as well be the case.

Across all the scholarly paradigms just discussed there would seem to be general agreement that the accountability systems that we encounter in the contemporary world are not passive mechanisms of observation but are imbued with mythic notions of virtue, collective salvation and promises of further rationalisation and control. However, the question of how the ideational and the sociological dimensions of accountability merge is still unresolved. To be sure, bridging thought and action — or

the epistemological and lived experience(s) – is no small task for social theory. Below I will have more to say on this. For now, let us note that Strathern's Luhmannian analysis does not elucidate the historical confluences that undergird accountability practices to the extent that neo-institutionalist accounts do. Yet at the same time, Strathern's approach does show the severe limitations of the neo-institutionalist reliance on the concept of *cultural models* or *cultural scripts* (specified in advance) to explain and predict what is happening in the world. It seems increasingly clear, as indicated by the two vignettes introduced at the beginning of this chapter, that in certain places around the globe today accountability becomes substantially more than a script-that-guides-action but has self-organising features, which means that the translation and simplification of complexities can take on a life of its own.

### The Diffusion of Accountability Policies and Practices

In a recent essay, Rudolph Stichweh (2008), working under the assumption that it is tenable to claim that we presently inhabit a world society, has proposed that researchers interested in globalisation direct their attention to the 'eigenstructures' of said world society. Stichweh draws from a concept that is widespread in the field of mathematics to describe characteristic structures that can change in some respects but not others (such as a vector that changes in magnitude but not direction). Under the heading *eigenstructure* he includes formal organisations (qua organisations), epistemic communities (such as Linux developers as a current example), global function systems (e.g. the world economy), as well as world events (such as the Olympics or 9/11). These eigenstructures and world society reciprocally intensify one another. According to Stichweh (2008), these various eigenstructures also produce diversity, conflict and inequality. Conceptualising social change not as the substitution of something new for the old, he proposes that 'new structures overlay old structures but do not extinguish them' (p. 135). Yet, importantly, the diversity that this produces is non-local diversity – it cannot be legitimately described or experienced as purely local. While it would be a rash move to claim that accountability policies and practices fit neatly into his schema, they do represent a structural pattern that is compatible with the emerging system of world society, and the two can reciprocally intensify one another. This is *not*, I would argue, because accountability lends itself to isomorphic inclinations but simply because accountability mechanisms are highly articulated to the global formations discussed previously and are thus privileged by them.

Numerous comparative and international education scholars have demonstrated that adaptation/modification/indigenisation constantly and consistently occur as educational policies and practices move globally. The same can certainly be said of educational accountability. Barbara Dickhaus (2010) has empirically demonstrated this with regard to 'accountability regimes' in her comparative study of recent quality assurance initiatives in the South African and Argentinian higher education sectors. She points in particular to the traditional mode of higher-education governance in each setting as helping to explain how new accreditation initiatives played out. Nonetheless, Dickhaus argues that quality assurance policies have become a hegemonic tool for reorganising the higher-education sector, in part because of the variety

of meanings that can be attached to them and the selectivity that goes into the contested process of appropriation and meaning creation.

The role that international organisations play in disseminating accountability techniques and practices is well described in UNESCO's own statements. A 1995 report on the outcome of a meeting related to its 'Monitoring Learning Achievement' initiative noted:

The Framework of Action that emanated from the Workshop constitutes some key orientations for the MLA Project in the years to come. A wider dissemination of the outcomes at national and at international levels is needed. Support towards the development of a *Monitoring Culture* can only be pursued through national capacity building programmes.

(UNESCO 1995: 4, emphasis in original)

On the one hand, this quote offers a good example of the ways that language and documents are employed in international governmental and non-governmental organisations to fashion normative imperatives (Riles 2000). It also speaks somewhat to the role that international organisations play as producers of world culture and not merely as its implementers (Resnik 2006). Particularly worthy of note is that the project of implementing assessment instruments and the mechanisms for monitoring achievement are discussed in cultural terms. It is no surprise, then, that numerous scholars find it appropriate to refer to accountability *regimes*, very much in the same sense that Foucault used the word to refer to the reigning systems and sensibilities under whose control human societies and cultures find themselves at various points in time.

If scholars of comparative and international education focus exclusively on where precisely this quality assurance mechanism or that assessment strategy was borrowed/lent from, there is great danger that we will lose the forest for the trees. The analytic task at hand is not to play a game of origins (Sobe 2005). Rather, if our quest is to better understand the cultural, political, social and epistemic configurations and conditions that shape the range of what are possible, impossible, desirable and undesirable options, then we need to ask more questions about how accountability 'works'.

### Accountability as Global Governmentality

If governmentality can be described in Foucault's oft-quoted terms as the 'conduct of conduct', then – as I proposed at the outset – in accountability policies and practices we have a similar meta-level operation that falls under the heading of the 'monitoring of monitoring'. As Hindess (2004) proposes, governmentality analyses allow us to better understand how domains that were previously subject to more direct forms of regulation are increasingly being regulated in seemingly less direct ways. Though goods such as individual choice, empowerment and markets are frequently presented as forms of freedom and as strategies for escaping heavy-handed regulation, there is a rich body of Foucault-inspired scholarship featuring scholars such as Nikolas Rose (1999) that argues that, while they are less 'direct' forms of control, the promotion of choice and markets are regulative projects through and

through. The political facets of accountability are not difficult to discern, and above we saw several versions of the argument that accountability, with its technical strategies of measurement, emerges in a social engineering context where progressive political futures are seen as able to be planned for and able to be realised. In a penetrating analysis of the increasingly widespread practice of benchmarking Wendy Larner and Richard Le Heron (2004) note that with the development of ISO standards in the 1980s and as this became coupled with Total Quality Management (TQM) notions, 'a technical device began to mutate into a managerial system' (p. 216). By contrast, accountability practices begin and end as managerial even though it can at times seem that the conversations are purely technical.

The monitoring of monitoring is increasingly being enacted in multiple sites by multiple actors. In the US, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) process for accrediting schools of education represents a massive audit undertaking that principally concerns itself with how the educational institutions concerned collect data, assess it and act upon it (Taubman 2009). NCATE does not define quality itself, nor does it dictate what objectives must be achieved. Rather, it holds schools of education accountable for formulating their own objectives, monitoring their success at achieving these objectives, and initiating 'data-driven change' to ensure fidelity to mission – less direct control perhaps but undeniably still a managerial and institutional steering endeavour. The same pattern holds in certain international domains. The year 2011 has been designated the 'International Year of Youth' by the United Nations, a ceremonial dedication designed to heighten awareness of and focus international attention on a chosen set of issues (on UN dedications generally, see Drori 2005; on the 2011 youth year, see Sobe forthcoming). The UN resolution announcing this declaration presents a veritable laundry list of tasks for governments, civil society, youth-led organisations, the private sector, etc. – such as to provide increased support for youth development, pay greater heed to the social and political rights of youth, and implement programmes designed to foster intergenerational solidarity. We will not be surprised to find that progress monitoring and the implementation of 'monitoring systems' features prominently on this list.

In a 2004 volume titled *Global Governmentality* Larner and Walters aptly note that governmentality scholarship has tended overwhelmingly to take the nation-state as its analytical locale (with the notable exception of studies of colonial governmentality). To speak of 'global governmentality' does not, however, mean that we are taking 'the global' as the extension of replacement of the nation-state. The term global governmentality might in fact index the very mobility, versatility and ability to be implemented by multiple actors that so integrally characterises Foucault's notion of governmentality in the first place. Ample are the spheres of human activity, regions of the world, and sectors of society that are completely untouched by accountability regimes. Where they do emerge, however, accountability practices and policies seem to exhibit coherent self-organising systemic properties and regulative dimensions that combine with multiple other elements to give accountability in any given place its actuality.

I opened this chapter with two vignettes and proposed that they might be viewed, on certain grounds, as very different cultural practices, or, on other grounds, as strikingly similar cultural practices. On both sides of the Pacific Ocean we saw the

business of schooling being altered for the purpose of communicating a certain set of information onward, outward and upward. Yet, the Potemkin quality of the Chinese inspection seemed notably different in its texture than the Washington state example I provided – noting, of course, that in the United States one could probably find ample recent examples where auditors are presented with a completely fabricated account of how a school conducts its operations. There is no question that the actual meaning of the top-school inspection visit and the failing-school surveillance culture is a local matter (in each setting) and one that is produced by local actors, with reverberations that most chiefly affect them. At the same time, it is fair to say that teachers, students, and administrators were enmeshed in an accountability regime in each setting. And, that the regnant systems and sensibilities were not strictly pre-specified and transferred in from outside, but rather took their form only as part of ongoing social processes. The regulative, managerial dimension of each of these sets of accountability practices emerges both as educational accountability continually unfolds, becomes improved and reinforces itself, and as it communicates information across different social spheres. In both respects, educational accountability may be said to lend itself to the constitution of *globe-level* social forms and interactions. Above I suggested that in these two instances educators and policy makers were struggling with ways to demonstrate educational performance in a manner that would reliably lead to success 'in the global economy'. In other settings it may well be a best-practices problematic that gives force to the lesson-learning-unencumbered-by-borders notions that educational accountability mechanisms portend and promise. Global governmentality is a project, mobile and heterogeneous. Educational accountability practices in eastern China and the Pacific Northwest suggest that this 'monitoring of monitoring' is an important, emerging form of global governmentality.

In discussing educational accountability as global governmentality, I am not proposing a unified theory for rethinking global-local issues. The focus on monitoring performance, self-description, self-observation and the translation of such to other domains and interests means that accountability is a special species of global governmentality. While perhaps not an eigenstructure of the world system in the strictest sense, accountability may be said to have globalising tendencies in the sense that it helps to produce global systems and, as reward for this service, seems increasingly to be favoured by them.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Iveta Silova, Sophia Rodriguez and Nicole Ortégón as well as the editors for reading earlier drafts of this essay and providing useful feedback.
- 2 Later in this chapter I draw on Marilyn Strathern's (2006) discussion of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, in which the concept of observing observations (*Beobachter des Beobachters*) plays a crucial epistemological role. However, my use of the concept of 'the monitoring of monitoring' is not intended to evoke a reference to Luhmann. It is instead an allusion, in a Foucauldian vein, to the ways in which systematic and systemic self-reflection and self-monitoring are themselves monitored and subjected to normative expectations and parameters.

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## 6 Webs of Borrowing and Lending Social Networks in Vocational Education in Republican China

Barbara Schulte

### The Importance of Being Social

Research on educational borrowing and lending has been largely concerned with transnational or transsectoral transfer of educational ideas, models and policies (see, e.g., Steiner-Khamsi 2004). Most often, the units between which borrowing and lending are seen to take place are those of the nation-state; but scholars have also looked at how, for example, educational reforms are implemented at the subnational level, after having gone through processes of negotiation, adaptation and, at times, hybridisation at various levels.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, scholars have also paid increasing attention to transnational or global communities in which educational knowledge is circulated, both in history and at present. Differently from players within nationally defined boundaries, these communities transgress national borders or circumvent them by linking up the local directly with the global.<sup>2</sup> It can be almost regarded a tradition within the field of comparative education not to dismiss unfaithful copies of original models and reforms as 'failures' or 'distortions', but to explore the cultural dynamics and rationale behind these sometimes unexpected transformations and side effects. The comparative view sharpens the sensibility for how, in different contexts, things are done in their 'own way', to borrow a phrase from one of the forefathers of comparative education, Michael Sadler, who pondered on the balancing act of borrowing from outside while at the same time maintaining the 'characteristic[s] of English life' (quoted in Waterkamp 2006: 22).

When things are done in their own way – who does them? For a long time different outcomes of transfer processes were either structurally explained or attributed to regional, cultural or even civilisational differences, but studies of recent decades have attempted to break up this cultural 'black box of education', where 'things happen, but we do not know how' (Hoffman 1999: 474). Local agency has been moved to the fore, to understand how actors make sense of, for example, educational reforms, and how their sense-making leads to certain action (or non-action). Two different perspectives prevail when looking at these actors: one can look at the categorical attributes they possess; or one can look at their interaction, their social relations.<sup>3</sup> Social network analysis is concerned with the latter.

'A social network is a set of actors (or points, or nodes, or agents) that may have relationships (or edges, or ties) with one another', reads the minimalist definition by Hanneman and Riddle (2005). Exploring social networks can yield important insights