Educational Accountability
Professional Voices From the Field

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In an age when responses to accountability regimes in education range from hysteria to cynicism, this volume reframes accountability in narratives of collective, participatory responsibility that leave one feeling inspired and ready to act. The authors, all scholar-practitioners speaking from contexts spanning leadership, policy, literacy, indigenous education, and diversity, explore ways to navigate accountability discourses with wisdom, courage and hope.

– Tara Fenwick, PhD, Head, Dept. of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia.

In this collection, the preoccupation of educational institutions with accountability is critically examined by writers who work in the field. They consider the impact of accountability regimes on professional practice and the learning agenda, challenge current policies and call for a rethinking of accountability. The skills and knowledge associated with this work is what we should hold schools accountable to. It is, as you see from reading these contributions, time for change. – Stephen Murgatroyd, PhD, Chief Scout, The Innovation Expedition Inc.

About the Book
From their diverse perspectives, nine educational practitioners discuss current educational accountability policies and how these affect students, educators, learning and teaching in a variety of settings, from K-12 schools to post-secondary institutions and government agencies. The authors combine theory, research and their day-to-day experiences to reflect on the challenges posed by realities such as outcomes-based curricula, high-stakes testing, standardized reporting and management by objectives. By examining current accountability initiatives and their effects in relation to core values of public education such as equity, diversity, democracy and opportunity, this book offers educators a range of insights for thinking about and doing education differently.
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*Professional Voices from the Field*

*Edited by*

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Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.

–Albert Einstein
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda L. Spencer and J-C Couture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning First: School Accountability for a Sustainable Society</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasi Sahlberg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Accountability in First Nations Education: Kwāyāsk Etōtamihk</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing it Right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley Willier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. School Choice and Accountability in Alberta</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy Davies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Accountability and the Individual Program Plan</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Gervais</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alleviating Teacher Alienation: Sustainable, Distributed Leadership</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Capacity for Putting Accountability into Perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather Kennedy-Plant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Alberta’s Distributed Learning Strategy and Implementation Plan</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Conceptions of Learning and Education Delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alanna Crawford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Literacy, Accountability and Inclusive Education: Possibilities</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Re-framing Alberta’s Literacy Framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelli Ewasiuk and Brenda L. Spencer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The superintendency: Building Cultures of Trust Through “Intelligent Accountability”</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Hetherington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Approaches to Accountability: Possibilities for an Alternative</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren Krasowski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in these chapters are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of their employers.
FOREWORD

We live in an age of accountability, of outcomes and indicators, of measures and scores, as well as in an age with a surfeit of media eagerly waiting to report “the findings” that are generated. This is the result of the scientific revolution, which promoted systems and mathematical thinking about the natural world and later about business processes in the economic world. Thinking in this way, in turn, generated rich information that has made both our understanding of the natural world and the productivity of our businesses much greater than they were in the past. Thus, it should come as no surprise that successful ways of thinking in these areas would be seen as the key to success in the human services area. But it is possible that this logical attempt to move ways of thinking from science and business to areas of human services may actually prove to be harmful, perhaps even impossible.

What is needed, of course, is brisk argument to help us understand the possibilities of and barriers to moving ideas across cultures, domains and fields of endeavour. That is what makes this book so timely and important. It questions the accountability systems being applied in Alberta, Canada, and by doing so, raises issues important to the entire world. It would be good if this book could start the dialogue needed to design sensible accountability systems.

There is nothing inherently Canadian about wanting to improve education; it is a goal of all democratic nations. And there is nothing Canadian about trying to build accountability schemes for monitoring the productivity and efficiency of a nation’s educational system. Most of the costs of education, in most nations, are paid for by the public, and so most nations want and deserve some account of how their money is spent. What does seem uniquely Canadian to this American is the articulate opposition and passion of those who see the faults of many modern systems of school accountability. This is a book prodding us to think about the nature of education, its purposes and processes, and the effects contemporary systems of accountability have on curriculum, instruction and the lives of our students and teachers. The chapter authors have made me think more deeply about issues with which I thought I was already conversant.

One crucial issue raised in this book, in more than one place, is perhaps the oldest and most important one in education: What should be taught to our students? That is, what knowledge is of most worth? In the days when Canada and the USA had many people making a living from agriculture, hunting, mining and forestry, most people got by on low levels of literacy. When children followed their parents into the tailoring or the grocery business, the schools had a simple task, since the future was not hard to divine. But now all of us, youth in particular, face a VUCA world: a future that is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. It’s the nature of postmodern life and globalization. What knowledge is of most worth in such a world? After a full measure of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge is taught in our schools, what else is needed to succeed in a VUCA world?

Does a province or a state, through the design of its own assessments, have an answer to that question? They had better! Because we know that if the assessments
are consequential, as they are in Alberta and throughout the U.S., then those assessments determine the curriculum enacted in our schools. Teachers and schools teach what is on tests that are consequential, and this often turns out to be the kind of knowledge that is divorced from precisely those skills that might be useful to individuals and governments in the near future. The chapters in this book make plain that the kinds of skills that might be useful in a VUCA world are not tapped by the assessments used, despite wonderful rhetoric to the contrary. Cheap and quick testing systems, common across North America, simply do not allow for the measurement of problem identification skills or skill in genuine problem solving; they fail to adequately measure creativity and critical media literacy; and they do not measure student skills in collaborative work. These tests rarely assess moral thinking and the skills needed for citizenship, yet every teacher in every school in North America will attest that those domains are a central part of their teaching mission.

These authors all want to see deep and broad learning in their schools, as do the provincial designers of the accountability system. But this book makes clear from the experience of other states and nations that this will not happen when high-stakes testing is the basis of an accountability system. The curriculum is always narrowed when teachers and schools are assessed by means of high-stakes testing. Depth of learning in the tested areas is sacrificed for breadth of coverage and whole topics and areas of the curriculum not covered on the tests are jettisoned form the curriculum so test scores will go up.

These authors also want to see an educational system that treats teachers as professionals, whose thoughts about curriculum and instruction are heard and respected. But experience in the U.S., England and many Asian countries, in particular, demonstrates that when high stakes assessments are used together with narrow assessment systems, teachers become pawns in a system of education that serves people and purposes they may not want to serve. The authors remind us that accountability systems are frequently based on a complete lack of trust in teachers. Teachers’ judgments about children and ideas about curriculum are generally ignored in high-stakes testing environments Teachers are not treated in a democratic fashion, as a community of professionals whose opinions matter. This state of affairs was remarked upon by John Dewey, many years ago. His comment is relevant to what these authors are about. Dewey (1903) said:

Until the public school system is organized in such a way that every teacher has some regular and representative way in which he or she can register judgment upon matters of educational importance, with the assurance that this judgment will somehow affect the school system, the assertion that the present system is not … democratic seems to be justified …. What does democracy mean, save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work…? (pp. 195–197)

Dewey and the authors of this book remind us that the design of assessment systems needs to be about furthering democracy, as well as about improving performance, that it needs to be about the fullness of children’s lives, as well as
about the scores that they yield, and that it should be about depth of learning, and learning across a broad spectrum of human endeavours, not just about the kind of learning that prepares a student for a test. Readers will find chapters in this book to enrich a dialogue about assessment, for that is what is needed across the western world. In many provinces, states and nations there has been a loss of trust between professional educators and those in industry and government. This needs to be acknowledged and repaired, and that process begins with conversations about issues addressed in this book.

David C. Berliner
Phoenix, AZ
January, 2009

REFERENCE

PREFACE

IN PRAISE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Critical of the ways that accountability is applied and enforced in public sector schools and classrooms, the writers in this book, along with other educators, might strike some readers as being against accountability in general and in all its manifestations. Is the book arguing that teachers, principals and professors should just be given the money and left alone to get on with the job? Far from it. The accountability agenda is much more complex than that.

Shouldn’t all of us be accountable and be called to account from time to time in our lives and in our practices? Members of most religions believe that they will be called to account in an afterlife and this affects how they choose to live their lives here on Earth. The problem, of course, is that not all people are always right or good—not even teachers—and accountability belongs in their world as much as it does in any other.

The answer to excessive or ineffective accountability, therefore, can and should never be no accountability—a world in which there is only unrestricted and unregulated professional autonomy. When bridges and tunnels collapse because of insufficient diligence in engineering design, when patients die of hospital infections because physicians fail to fill out procedural checklists or even wash their hands, and when teachers are sarcastic to their students or slip out early from professional development sessions, the public is right to call professionals to account. The purpose of accountability, however, is not only to confront malpractice or even to prevent harm in the first place. It is also to improve performance by examining its impact, measuring quality and results and spurring people on to achieve even higher standards and greater improvement in the future. These things become possible when people, with others, have access to and are pressed to act on relevant information and data about their effectiveness.

I have seen much of this in a large-scale study I am conducting with Professor Alma Harris about organizations that perform beyond expectations in education, health, business and sports. Part of the study involves a local authority (school district) in a London borough with a predominantly Bangladeshi population. The authority was the worst performing in Britain in 1997 but now performs at or above the national average. In standardized achievement tests, examination results and rates of students going on to university, it now ranks as the most improved local authority in Britain. It has also significantly reduced achievement gaps in relation to children with special educational needs, those from cultural minorities and those on free school meals. The instigation of this dramatic turnaround occurred as a result of the visionary leadership of a new director (superintendent) who believed that “poverty is not an excuse for failure,” that aspirations should be extremely high and that the effort to meet these aspirations should be pursued relentlessly, with a sense of great urgency. The data discussed above kept people focused and maintained and also inspired the sense of urgency. So far, the evidence seems to point to the advocates of accountability being right: that in industry,
sports and public sector organizations alike, accountability, at its best, stimulates improvement, increases quality and promotes openness and transparency. No more will the professions be, as George Bernard Shaw once put it, “conspiracies against the laity.”

QUESTIONING ACCOUNTABILITY

The educationally high-achieving Nordic countries have no word of their own for accountability. In an evaluation for the OECD of Finland’s top-performing educational system and its approaches to leadership, my colleagues and I found that much of its effectiveness was explained by highly qualified teachers committed to a common educational and social mission, working together in cultures of what they called trust, cooperation and responsibility. Teachers directed this commitment towards all students their actions could potentially affect, not just towards those in their own classes or even in their own schools (Hargreaves, Halász & Pont, 2007).

If by accountability we mean responsibility, then we should call it exactly that; however, accountability usually means more. It often means, for example, answering to an external public or higher authority in order to prevent or deal with slacking off or wrongdoing. In this sense, accountability becomes a device to prevent people we do not trust from doing bad things, rather than a device that enables people we do trust to do good things. Accountability is sometimes a synonym for responsibility, but more often it is a substitute for it. Accountability is the remainder that is left when responsibility has been subtracted. It is a valuable and necessary remainder, but a remainder all the same.

A second meaning of accountability is transparency or openness. Consider the professions, for example, which, by nature, have tried to retain their status by securing a monopoly over exclusive and esoteric knowledge, sometimes by hiding it from or making it mysterious to the general public. This often occurs; try reading your medical diagnosis or a standards rubric produced by your child’s school, for example.

So the call for more transparency is a good thing, and making test scores, examination results and even school inspection reports available to the public is often advocated in the interest of transparency. I have seen transparency go further than this, however, in an evaluation of a network of schools in England that showed how two thirds of the schools improved at twice the rate of the national average. This occurred partly because the schools’ performance results were made transparent to each other and partly because the schools were willing to seek help from each other regarding the commitment and urgency I mentioned above. In this way, individual schools were transparent to their peers in the network.

Problems can arise, however, when rich processes of transparency such as this are replaced or reduced to the shallow transparency of reporting test results in fragmented systems of competitive market choice. They can also arise when transparency runs in only one direction, as when governments and corporations are not prepared to be transparent as well. In this sense, it is interesting that economically and educationally high performing Finland also ranks high on
international scores of corporate transparency. Reciprocal transparency is integral to democracy. One-way transparency is just top-down surveillance.

A third interpretation of accountability is simple “countability,” as it is referred to in competitive performance rankings. The systems of comparative, numerical performance scores that include standardized test results are meant to inform choice, increase inter-school competition, lift educational standards and promote eventual economic competitiveness.

Remember, though, that in best business practice, the things that are counted as quality indicators authentically represent what the company and its staff are trying to achieve through common agreement. In public schools influenced by business-style metrics of quality, standards and targets, however, there is no such agreement about, nor confidence in, the validity of the metrics. The system then focuses more on “countability”—what can be easily measured—at the expense of other vital goals and purposes, for which no appropriate metrics have been developed at all.

Understand also that in the best businesses and national sports organizations that my colleagues and I are researching, the unit of win-lose competition is other similar businesses, national sporting teams or market sectors; it is not the different units, departments or brands within the organizations, with the exception of motivational instances of friendly, win-win rivalry.

In this vein, following best business practice, the appropriate unit of educational competition is not the neighbouring teacher or nearby school; it is other nations and education systems. When departments compete with departments in a company or schools compete for clients in a community, overall value is not increased. It is merely redistributed, with one unit rising at the expense of another and without common gains accruing overall.

Finally, when businesses test their products for quality control, they typically do not test every item but select a sample that is statistically large enough to generalize to the entire product population. Testing everything is, in business terms, inefficient, imprudent and a fatal cost to competitiveness and profitability. But the business-driven philosophy applied to public education is to test everyone by census rather than by sample. This is equally unnecessary statistically and profoundly wasteful financially. Over-testing in education is as profligate and imprudent as it is in business.

The chapters in this important and timely book offer thoughtful critiques of educational accountability from a multiplicity of professional perspectives, exposing, time after time, how the sincere pursuit of the loftier goals of public education is often overshadowed by performances that are easily counted. Together, they suggest that is neither time to retreat to the individual autonomy, professional self-interest and protectionism of the 1960s and 1970s nor to adopt the models and myths of corporate accountability that do not themselves reflect the actual practices of the very best businesses.

Let’s put responsibility and transparency first and use accountability as a backup to check, in sampling terms, whether we truly achieve the quality we claim. Let’s not attack or abandon criteria or indicators, but develop better and broader ones that reflect the rightful goals of public education and that help secure agreement among the highly qualified professionals who work so diligently
towards them. Let’s learn to let go a little politically in order to lift everyone’s game professionally. There can be few better places to start than by reading this critical yet highly constructive book.

Andy Hargreaves
Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education
Boston College
February, 2009

REFERENCE

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This book would not have been possible without the contributions and support of many individuals.

The authors, most of whom are full-time teachers and school leaders, carved out time from their busy schedules to work with us in preparing their manuscripts. Their enthusiasm and commitment to the book was greatly appreciated, and we learned immensely from our experiences with them during this collaborative project.

We would also like to thank all of the students of the University of Alberta’s Spring 2008 graduate course, Leadership in Educational Accountability: Sustaining Professional Learning and Innovation and the many participants of the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s Spring 2008 Symposium for the contributions, discussions and debates that were so instrumental in the generation of ideas that are developed in this book’s chapters. We are especially appreciative of the opportunities the authors had to interact with Drs. Andy Hargreaves, Stephen Murgatroyd and Pasi Sahlberg during the course of the Symposium weekend and the project.

In so many ways, the Alberta Teachers’ Association and the Department of Educational Policies Studies at the University of Alberta were supportive of both the contributors’ work and our efforts in moving the book forward. We are particularly grateful to our colleagues who acknowledge the importance of publishing a compilation representing professionals in the “field,” whose perspectives and insights reflect the real work of educational accountability.

We also want to acknowledge the enormous contribution that our Co-Editor, Kenneth Gariepy, made to this project. His superb organizational and communication skills, his amazing technology, reference and information expertise, his care and understanding in working with individual authors and in keeping us all on track, his writing and editing prowess, his guidance through the publishing process, his many thoughtful words along the way and his sense of humour – not to mention the hours and hours of time spent – were way over and above what we expected. We would not have been able to see this project through had it not been for his unrelenting patience and commitment.

Brenda L. Spencer and J-C Couture
INTRODUCTION

Transcending ideological and political boundaries, demands for public sector accountability have increased significantly over the past 25 years. At local, national, and international levels, accountability has become a key principle for policy development in Western, industrialized nations. As is the case in other public sectors, the pursuit of accountability in education has intensified. For more than two decades now, public education reforms have been based on the premise that accountability will improve efficiency and effectiveness and, to a great extent, changes occurring in today’s educational institutions are changes initiated and driven by accountability policies.

Facilitating a range of localized responses to the increasing pressures of competing in the global economy and the legacy of the supposedly failed progressive public education systems of the 1960s and 1970s, new modes of accountability have become the means of restoring public trust. This is to be accomplished through a range of policies for:

- decentralized control of education to the school level for the purpose of promoting autonomy, responsiveness to local needs, choice and “market accountability” through competition
- increased central control over measures for monitoring effectiveness and ensuring “quality” education, such as programs for common curricula focusing on core subject areas and established levels and objectives for measuring competency
- standardized achievement and large-scale testing programs and, in some cases, the publication of the results of these high-stakes assessments
- heightened focus on standards for the training, qualification, supervision and evaluation of educators

This is the case in our own province, Alberta, where the current approach to educational accountability was introduced 15 years ago, during a time of restructuring, downsizing and funding cutbacks and where programs are now being reviewed for present or continuing effectiveness and future viability. In Alberta’s education system, accountability policies have introduced another dimension of complexity to circumstances that have always been inherently challenging and are that are now increasingly complicated by the pressures of globalization. In the current context of an impending economic crisis which, in Alberta, follows hard on the heels of a period of unprecedented growth, educators at all levels and in all sites work to meet the needs of a diversity of students, to constantly adjust curriculum, teaching and learning objectives and pedagogical strategies and to fulfill the demands of decentralized administrative roles, all while facing the challenges related to the ever-increasing expectations of implementing, evaluating
and sustaining myriad accountability policies. These demands are the concern of educators, researchers, and Alberta’s Education Partners.¹

Alberta’s current school jurisdiction performance annual reporting processes are determined by the government’s ‘accountability pillar’. According to the Ministry of Education, the pillar information demonstrates how well each district is doing in realizing expected outcomes and which areas require additional work. It also allows school boards to assess their achievement compared to provincial standards and to see how they have improved compared to their previous performance. (Alberta Education, 2009b)

The quantitative data gathered for and reported in the pillar results is what we would call an “empirical narrative”—a story about human intentions and consequences told with numbers. District pillar “report cards” attempt to illustrate a relationship between district data collected each year (i.e., annual survey results, student performance on government examinations, high school drop-out and completion rates) and the degree of relative success achieved in terms of meeting the learning needs of students. Yet, like all story-telling, these narratives, commonly referred to as “score cards,” include and exclude particular ways of seeing life in Alberta schools. Never mind that, as the pre-eminent educational scholar, Linda McNeil (1986), has pointed out, “measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning” (p. 18).

According to education experts, the province of Alberta has the dubious distinction as one of the most robust examples of a command- and-control approach to educational accountability in Canada (Lessard & Brassard, 2005). Further, one of the overriding limitations of the government’s current approach to accountability is that it is largely a story told to the public without much context. Report cards are published annually to provide an account of measures of achievement according to numerical value ranges that are colour-coded: red (very low), orange (low), yellow (intermediate), green (high), blue (very high). Invoking the all-too-familiar green/yellow/red metaphor is an attempt to signal meaning and significance. Yet these score cards confuse data with information, information with knowledge and knowledge with wisdom.

Focused on life in schools, our own policy research tells an “accountability story” that is much different from the narrative conveyed by the accountability pillar. Our concerns about the power that the “official” pillar seems to have in providing the account of how things are going in Alberta schools led to our early ideas for a collaborative project. The plan was to provide a space for educators to think outside or beyond prevailing discourses and, thus, to make space for alternative accountability narratives. The result was a graduate course, offered through the Department of Educational Policies Studies at the University of Alberta and held in conjunction with the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s spring 2008 symposium, Leadership in Educational Accountability: Sustaining Professional Learning and Innovation in Alberta Schools.
Most of the students in the course were K-12 school leaders enrolled in the Department’s educational administration and leadership specialization, but students from across the Department’s specializations in adult education, Indigenous Peoples education and theoretical, cultural and international studies in education, and from the Faculty of Education’s master of educational studies, also participated.

Through engaging with the symposium speakers, representatives of the province’s various education partners and the course readings and discussions, students integrated ideas into their own examinations, analyses and critiques of a range of accountability issues and policies. Students wrote final papers that were thoughtful and insightful. Together, they represented the much needed context that was missing in the huge amount of literature written on the topic of educational accountability— the insights and reflections of the practitioner, as presented and interpreted by the practitioner.

Realizing that we could not include all of the students’ papers, we had to make some difficult decisions about which would be selected. We read and reread the papers, as an editorial group, to discern which would “hang together” to relate the experiences of accountability from a range of positions and perspectives. The result is the present collection. This book is meant for all audiences interested in educational policy and a fresh take on what is happening in local sites in the name of accountability. Although written from particular locations, positions and perspectives, each chapter presents valuable insights into how prevailing notions about accountability have been interpreted and put into practice.

During the course’s pre-symposium workshop and the Symposium, we had the good fortune and privilege of learning from Dr. Pasi Sahlberg, educator and school improvement activist. Pasi agreed to take the impressions and understandings that he gathered during his time with us and relate them to his own understandings and broad expertise about and experiences of educational accountability to write a chapter that could be included in this volume. As a result, we are pleased to have Pasi’s chapter, Learning First: School Accountability for a Sustainable Society set the stage for our collection. Pasi explains that current accountability practices that place emphasis on standardized testing are not what is necessary for improving education. He cites evidence that high-stakes testing restricts creativity and innovation and, using Finland as an example, he offers suggestions for education policies that promote trust and collective responsibility in schools. Concluding with a discussion of the importance of intelligent accountability, Pasi provides ways to think about a kind of educational accountability that will contribute to a sustainable society.

In chapter 2, Shelley Willier argues that discussions of accountability in First Nations education cannot take place without knowing the educational legacy of the experiences, perspectives, hopes and disappointments of First Nations people. Through relating the information shared in oral histories of pre-contact conceptions of education and in the narratives of first-hand experiences of residential schools, Shelley provides the necessary background for appreciating the current landscape of First Nation education in many communities. By focusing on issues related to Alberta’s new First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), accountability pillar policies
and federal, provincial and First Nations involvement in educational provision, Shelley points to the contradictions that are apparent in projects meant to serve First Nations students. She argues that the Cree understandings of responsibility, relationship and community provide alternatives to current conceptions of accountability that might be more appropriate for transforming public education to meet the needs and goals of First Nations and all Albertans.

In Chapter 3, School Choice and Accountability: Alberta’s Problematic Combination, Troy Davies argues that, in Alberta, policies for school choice and accountability work in concert to produce quasi-market effects. Specifically, he draws on research conducted in our province that suggests that, because school leaders are accountable in significant ways for increasing standardized test results and for attracting students, in at least one urban centre they endeavour to build the reputation of their schools through marketing strategies. Because the research asserts that it is not evident that these efforts increase student achievement or improve teaching and learning, Troy concludes with questions about whether the potential benefits of choice programs have become undermined by the ways in which accountability is tied to funding, and he reflects on how the school choice-accountability combination may be operating to distract us from some of the moral and democratic purposes of public education.

Patricia Gervais begins her chapter 4, Accountability and the Individual Program Plan, with an description of how the professional expertise, commitment and the high costs associated with the education of students with special needs results in a push and pull between the ethical-professional and economic-bureaucratic demands of educational accountability. Drawing on the history of inclusive education and the Individual Program Plan (IPP) in Alberta and on the findings of a recent research study that examined educators’ understandings of the IPP, Patricia reveals why the IPP is a source of tension for teachers with special needs students in their classrooms. She suggests that, while teachers are more concerned with the ethical-professional dimensions of accountability, they spend a great deal of time attending to the economic-bureaucratic demands of accountability related to completing the IPP. In this sense, the IPP functions more as an accountability tool than it does as a learning document and it may be more of a distraction than it is a benefit to the education of children with exceptional needs.

In chapter 5, Alleviating Teacher Alienation: Sustainable, Distributed Leadership and Capacity for Putting Accountability into Perspective, Heather Kennedy-Plant points to alienation as a negative consequence of the pressures teachers experience while working within government-mandated accountability regimes. To define teacher alienation, she draws on the literature that describes the effects of a performance culture that is the product of recent educational reforms. She argues that decreased professional autonomy and intensification leave teachers feeling disconnected from what they value in their work. She argues that sustainable, distributed leadership offers the potential to alleviate teacher alienation through the development of both individual and organization capacity at the school level. This, she suggests, also strengthens possibilities for student learning and success.
Alanna Crawford begins her chapter 6, *Alberta’s Distributed Learning Strategy and Implementation Plan: Impact on Learning, Student Support and Assessment* by outlining a framework that incorporates four “pillars” for answering the question, what is education? She employs this framework to examine Alberta’s *Distributed Learning Strategy* as it relates to effective student support practices and partnerships among various educational stakeholders. Her chapter identifies some discrepancies between the *Strategy* and the principles of the four pillars of education. Alanna concludes by offering some considerations for meaningful implementation of innovative assessment practices for distributed learning.

In chapter 7, *Literacy, Accountability and Inclusive Education: Possibilities for Re-framing Alberta’s Literacy Framework* Kelli Ewasiuk and Brenda L. Spencer focus on a pair of key policy documents that constitute the draft of a framework for literacy education in Alberta. Their detailed analysis reveals how policy alignment and policy coherence establish strong conceptions of both literacy education and accountability. Discourses of shared responsibility and accountability and for standardization and coherence promote “external coherence” and “top-down” accountability, which are at cross-purposes with the documents’ other recommendations for process-oriented approaches to literacy education. Kelli and Brenda draw on some of the critiques of externally driven, results-oriented approaches to literacy learning, teaching and assessment to conclude with some suggestions for “internal coherence” and “holistic accountability” that might serve as alternative ideas for how literacy and accountability could be framed.

In chapter 8, Randy Hetherington makes the case that public education systems must operate on the basis of trust. He examines key relationships of Alberta’s organizational structure to illustrate their complexity. He describes the position and role of the superintendent as pivotal to building cultures of trust and, therefore, to facilitating and mediating the accountability tensions that emerge the different organizational groups connect and their functions intersect. While the needs and demands of organizational and stakeholder groups are increasingly pressing, Randy argues that the superintendent must negotiate the paradox of the position – asserting authority and building trust. He draws on Pasi Sahlberg’s (this volume; 2008) ideas about “intelligent accountability” to forward his argument that a strong culture of trust can support positive change in public education systems.

Finally, Darren Krasowski, in chapter 9, *Product-centred and Process-centre Approaches, and Possibilities for an Alternative Accountability Framework*, argues that the challenges related to the implementation of various accountability models and programs for public education originate in the tensions between what he refers to as product-centred and process-centred approaches to accountability. Darren describes these approaches in detail, highlighting the ways in which they are employed together even though they are often contradictory. He analyzes Alberta’s current accountability framework and argues that it places too much weight on a product-centred approach. He suggests a compromise between the product- and process-centred approaches and, by drawing on Pasi Sahlberg’s work (this volume; 2007; 2008), he proposes a model similar to the one upon which the Finnish K-12 education system is based. He offers recommendations for a new conceptualization of an accountability framework that encourages the appropriate use of summative
assessment data and that recognizes the importance of the professional judgement of classroom teachers.

Together, the chapters of this book offer insights into the complexity and difficulty of achieving the goals of accountability policies and programs while, at the same time, attending to the often-competing purposes and aims of public education. Moreover, these chapters are narratives of the kind that do not get told by the “empirical stories” presented in the form of “score cards” of and for accountability that seemingly dominate our own educational context. Indeed, they offer a comprehensive set of ideas for thinking about, discussing and debating issues of accountability—what it means, what it does, and what it ought to look like in public education settings. We think you’ll find the collection both interesting and provocative!

NOTES

1 For example, the Key Partners on Educational Accountability in Alberta working group was established in 2006 by the Alberta Teachers’ Association for the purpose of examining the province’s accountability framework and making recommendations to the Ministry of Education. The group included members of various provincial organizations representing trustees, superintendents, faculties of education and school councils. We served on this committee as the representatives of the University of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

REFERENCES

GLOBAL INFECTIONS AND RANDOM CURES

Most countries, among them those on the top of the international educational rankings, are reforming their education systems to provide their citizens with knowledge and skills that enable them to engage actively in democratic societies and dynamic, knowledge-based economies. These initiatives are further driven by recent educational reviews that show how some cities, provinces and countries have better education than others. For example, Singapore, Alberta, Finland and Cuba have been mentioned among those jurisdictions where students do better on tests, are more likely to complete their education on time and tend to stay in formal education longer than their peers elsewhere (Carnoy, 2007; OECD, 2007b; Sahlberg, 2007; Schleicher, 2006). Interestingly, these educational systems have used different policies, and sometimes even contrary reforms, to achieve good educational performance.

Rather than shifting emphasis towards standardized knowledge of content and mastery of routine skills, some advanced education systems are focusing on flexibility, risk-taking, creativity and problem solving through modern methods of teaching, such as co-operative learning, and through the use of multilateral clusters, community networks and ICT in teaching. The number of examples is increasing, including China, a burgeoning economic power that is loosening its standardized control on education by making a school-based curriculum a national policy priority. Japan and Singapore are adopting the idea of “less is more” in teaching in order to make room for creativity and innovation. Even in England, the most test-intensive region in the world, the government is putting an end to all standardized testing in secondary schools. As a reaction to the overemphasis on knowledge-based teaching and test-based accountability, authorities in Japan, Singapore and some countries of the European Union are developing more dynamic forms of curriculum, introducing more intelligent forms of assessment and accountability and enhancing sustainable leadership in education in order to find alternative instructional approaches that promote the productive learning required in knowledge economies. Instead of focusing on single institutions, education reforms are beginning to encourage clustering of schools and communities. At the core of this idea is complementarity, i.e. co-operation between and striving for better learning in the cluster. Clustering and networking also
appear to be core factors in nations’ economic competitiveness and efforts to cope with globalization.

Indeed, globalization is a cultural paradox: it simultaneously unifies and diversifies people and cultures. It unifies national education policies by integrating them with broader global trends. Because problems and challenges are similar from one education system to the next, solutions and education reform agendas are also becoming similar. Due to international benchmarking of education systems by using common indicators and the international comparisons of student achievement, the distinguishing features of different education systems are becoming more visible. For example, the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has mobilized scores of education experts to visit other countries in order to learn how to redefine their own education policies. However, globalization has also accelerated international collaboration, exchange of ideas and transfer of education policies between education systems (Carnoy, 1999; Levin, 2001). Analyzing global policy developments and education reforms has become a common practice in many ministries of education, development agencies and regional administrations. Therefore, the world’s education systems inevitably share some core values, functions and structures. The question arises whether increased global interaction among policy-makers and educators, especially benchmarking of education systems through agreed indicators and borrowing and lending educational policies, has promoted common approaches to education reform throughout the world.

Although improvement of education systems is a global phenomenon, there is no reliable, recent comparative analysis about how education reforms in different countries have been designed and implemented. However, the professional literature indicates that the focus on educational development has shifted from structural reforms to improving the quality and relevance of education (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Sahlberg, 2007). As a result, curriculum development, student assessment, teacher evaluation, integration of information and communication technologies into teaching and learning, proficiency in basic competencies (i.e., reading and writing) and mathematical and scientific literacy have become common priorities in education reforms around the world (Hargreaves & Shirley, in press). I have called this the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM).

The inspiration for the emergence of the GERM comes from three primary sources. The first is the new paradigm of learning that became dominant in the 1980s. The breakthrough of cognitive and constructivist approaches to learning gradually shifted the focus of education reforms from teaching to learning. According to this paradigm, intended outcomes of schooling emphasize greater conceptual understanding, problem-solving, emotional and multiple intelligences and interpersonal skills, rather than the memorization of facts or the mastery of irrelevant skills. At the same time, however, the need for proficiency in literacy and numeracy has also become a prime target of education reforms. The second inspiration is the public demand for guaranteed, effective learning for all pupils. Inclusive education arrangements and the introduction of common learning standards for all have been offered as means to promote the ideal of education for all. The third inspiration is the accountability movement in education that has
accompanied the global wave of decentralization of public services. Making schools and teachers accountable for their work has led to the introduction of education standards, indicators and benchmarks for teaching and learning, aligned assessments and testing and prescribed curricula. As Popham (2007) has noted, various forms of test-based accountability have emerged where school performance and raising the quality of education are closely tied to the processes of accreditation, promotion, sanctions and financing.

The GERM has had significant consequences for teachers’ work and students’ learning in schools. Because this agenda promises significant gains in efficiency and quality of education, it has been widely accepted as a basic ideology of change, both politically and professionally. Table 1 describes some effects that the GERM has had and is having in schools, especially on teaching and learning (Hargreaves 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; Sahlberg, 2006; 2007). It also identifies alternative reform principles that have been adopted in places such as the Nordic countries.

Table 1. Some global features of education development and their alternatives since the early 1980s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Policies and Reform Principles</th>
<th>Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)</th>
<th>Alternative Reform Movement (ARM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strict Standards</strong></td>
<td>Setting clear, high, centrally prescribed performance standards for all schools, teachers and students to improve the quality and equity of outcomes.</td>
<td>Setting clear but flexible national framework for school-based curriculum planning. Encouraging local solutions to national goals in order to find best ways to create optimal learning opportunities for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on Literacy and Numeracy</strong></td>
<td>Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics and the natural sciences serve as prime targets of education reform.</td>
<td>Teaching and learning focus on deep, broad learning, giving equal value to all aspects of the growth of an individual’s personality, moral character, creativity, knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching for Predetermined Results</strong></td>
<td>Reaching higher standards as criterion for school-based and teacher-owned curricula success and good performance; minimizes educational risk-taking; narrows teaching content and use of methods beneficial to attaining preset results.</td>
<td>Encouraging risk-taking and creativity: School-based and teacher-owned curricula facilitate finding novel approaches to teaching and learning, hence encouraging risk-taking and uncertainty in leadership, teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transferring External Innovations for Educational Revolutions

Sources of educational change are external innovations brought to schools and teachers through legislation or national programs. These often replace existing improvement strategies. Teaching honours traditional pedagogical values, such as teacher’s role and relationship with students. Main sources of school improvement are proven good practices from the past.

Test-based Accountability

School performance and raising student achievement are closely tied to processes of promotion, inspection and ultimately values teacher and principal professionalism rewarding schools and teachers. Winners in judging what is best for students and in normally gain fiscal rewards whereas reporting their learning progress. Targeting struggling schools and individuals are resources and support to schools and students punished.

Responsibility and Trust

Gradual building of a culture of responsibility and trust within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students and in reporting their learning progress. Targeting resources and support to schools and students who are at risk to fail or to be left behind.

The GERM emphasizes some fundamental new orientations to learning and educational administration. It suggests three strong directions to improve quality, equity and effectiveness of education: putting priority on learning, aiming at good learning achievement for all students and making assessment an integral part of the teaching and learning process. However, it also strengthens market-like logic and procedures in education. First and most importantly, the GERM assumes that external performance standards, describing what teachers should teach and what students should do and learn, lead to better learning for all. By concentrating on the basics and defining explicit learning targets for students and teachers, such standards place strong emphasis on mastering the core skills of reading, writing, mathematical and scientific literacy. Second, the GERM assumes that the most effective way to improve education systems is to bring well-developed innovations to schools and classrooms. Systematic training of teachers and staff is an essential element of this approach. Third, the GERM relies on an assumption that competition between schools, teachers and students is the most productive way to raise the quality of education. This requires that parents can choose schools for their children, that schools have enough autonomy and that schools and teachers are held accountable for their students’ learning.

A sustainable society is grounded upon the power to think, learn and innovate. It depends equally on individual and collective ways of doing these things. Learning to think, to learn and to innovate requires more than orderly implementation of externally mandated regulations. Learning together, creating new ideas and learning to live with other people peacefully, all high-demand features of modern schooling, best occur in an environment decidedly different from what some of our schools offer young people and their teachers today. Furthermore, treating ingenuity and diversity simultaneously in classrooms is a challenge for teachers. Schools will not be able to meet these expectations to educate their students for a sustainable society unless they have:
internal conditions that respect their professional intuition, knowledge and skills to craft the best learning environments for their students;

– social context and necessary social capital in their communities that provide encouraging and supportive conditions for learning; and

– adequate external norms and expectations that rely on responsibility and internal accountability to reach good learning for all students.

The purpose of this chapter is to stress the distinction between intelligent and non-intelligent education policies—especially those addressing learning and accountability—and how they direct teachers and students toward learning differently. The primary assumption is that students and teachers should have clear responsibilities regarding their work in schools. In other words, certain school accountability is needed but it should be designed and put into practice wisely. Due to the failure to do that, schools in many countries have an emerging educational dilemma: How to deal with external productivity demands and teaching for a sustainable society with moral purpose, simultaneously?

THE COEXISTENCE DILEMMA: COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

Competitive pressures in the forms of higher productivity, better efficiency and system-wide excellence are affecting schools and teachers. Competition over students and financial resources are shifting schools’ modi operandi from those based on moral purpose to those based on productivity and efficiency, i.e. measurable outcomes, higher test scores and better positions in school league tables. Indeed, increasing public-sector productivity is changing small, personalised schools into larger institutions characterized by opportunity and choice, but rarely by personal care and collective social and human responsibility. Market-like efficiency measures have brought standards, testing and the race for higher achievement, as measured by tests, to the centre of teachers’ and students’ lives, both inside and outside school. All these are a threat to social capital in schools and communities. Indeed, schools are viewed as necessary elements for exponential economic growth in the service of wealth accumulation in the knowledge economy. Many education strategies of today seem to take for granted that the new educational order, through standards and test-based accountability, will best serve this purpose; however, what the world and its people need is not unbridled wealth accumulation and a population programmed by schools to want it. Rather, we need education that critically examines the implications of this phase of history, which Rees (2003) sees as the last for retaining an ecosystem in sustainable balance and which Sachs (2008) argues requires a new form of international cooperation. Education has a key role to play in accomplishing both of these. Therefore, teaching in a sustainable society must be wisely balanced between the different expectations described here.

Teaching is a profession that is typically driven by ethical motives or intrinsic desire, just as nursing, the performing arts and humanitarian services. Most teachers, therefore, expect to teach in congruence with their moral purpose, i.e. so that students can understand and learn to promote their personal development and growth, not just for favourable exam scores or other externally set conditions of
progress. Helping other people, and thereby one’s own community and society, is the basic element of moral purpose associated with the teaching profession. Teachers are, by their nature, important facilitators in building social capital within their communities and nations. Therefore, teachers historically have a broader professional work focus than just academic learning or technical skill development, as reported by Lortie (1975) and Hargreaves (2008), for example. Increased emphasis on knowledge testing and competition has left many teachers “hugging the middle,” as Cuban (2007) puts it. Teachers try to balance their work between the moral purpose of student-centred pedagogy within education as a public right on one hand, and the drive for higher standards through the perceived efficiency of the presentation-recitation mode of instruction within the perspective of education as a private good, on the other.

In this chapter, I argue that test-based accountability policies have put teachers between schooling for moral purpose with student-centred pedagogy and worthwhile learning on one side, and efficiency-driven education with teacher-centred instruction and achievement on the other. Students, as the main recipients of schooling, must balance fulfilling their own aspirations with external demands for performance that are often not only conflicting, but also unethical and contradictory.

Steering education systems towards producing intended outcomes requires congruence between teaching for the knowledge economy and what education reforms are expecting from teachers and students. In some cases, however, what schools are explicitly or implicitly assumed to do to improve their performance within ongoing education reforms contradicts what is needed from schools to support economic competitiveness. Comparison of these two change forces at the level of education systems, schools and classroom indicates some difficult incompatibilities and controversies. At the macro level, economic competitiveness demands an education system flexible enough to be able to react to weak signals and to produce a coordinated and collaborative response. Such a reaction and response is made possible by sustainable leadership. An education system’s flexibility is promoted by freedom of choice, decentralized management and a culture of trust in professional communities, i.e. teachers and educational leaders. At the same time, education reforms are equipping education systems with standards and regulations that set the criteria and targets for success and measurement. These education standards aim at raising the expectations of teaching and learning by specifying what every student should know and be able to do. At the school level, economic competitiveness needs the organization of work to enable alternative scheduling, integration of subjects and increased teacher collaboration. Creativity is promoted by using a wide spectrum of teaching methods, such as co-operative learning, simulations, role-play and group investigation, and building bridges between the school and the community. Due to global education reforms, however, work in schools is influenced by prescribed curricula that are often used to determine the performance level and, mistakenly, the quality of schools. Teachers tend to rely on traditional teaching arrangements and methods in order to minimize the risk of failure. Finally, teaching and learning for more competitive economies requires teachers and students to work together in safe and stimulating learning environments that focus on broad learning objectives,
encourage everyone to participate and use alternative approaches to achieve goals. Risk-taking in teaching and learning is promoted by co-operative cultures, mutual trust and feedback that recognize students’ efforts as well as attainment. Dream or vision is a source of emotional energy that is a necessary driver of change.

![Figure 1. Key factors of economic competitiveness and education reform (Sahlberg, 2006)]

As a result of typical education reforms, however, teaching and learning are often characterized by stress and fear as the focus is on being successful in achieving the predetermined learning standards. Therefore, students primarily learn alone rather than co-operatively in small groups, in order to minimize personal risks. Open and alternative teaching methods and task designs are not favoured. Figure 1 summarizes the comparison of sustainability and competitiveness vis-a-vis the global education reform movement mentioned above. It also calls for coexistence of collaboration and competition.

**TEST-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY AND BROKEN DREAMS OF LEARNING**

The GERM approach to educational change is based on a belief in competition and information as the key drivers of educational improvement. This approach combines two traditions in public education that have previously been only loosely connected, namely, public accountability and student testing. During the past twenty years, test-based accountability has held schools, teachers and students increasingly accountable for learning as measured by knowledge tests (Carnoy, Elmore & Siskin, 2003; Hamilton, Stecher & Klein, 2002; Ben Jaafar & Anderson,

- The belief that competition in the economy as a whole drives efficiency and improvement could be applied to schools as well, so that competition among schools would lead to better outcomes for students.
- In order for schools to compete, individual schools would require much more autonomy.
- Parents would need to be able to choose the schools their children attended.
- In order to choose, parents and the public would require comparable measures of student achievement and education quality for all schools, based on a single national curriculum. (pp. 289-290)

The incentive-based educational reform movement has stimulated enormous debates between and within education and policy-making communities during the last two decades. Research-generated evidence on school accountability is rather difficult to interpret. The key question is: “Do students perform better in competition-based school systems that have choice, autonomy and accountability measures in place?” Proponents of greater accountability contend that competition improves student learning by heightening incentives for teachers and students to try harder and do better. Accountability systems typically combine clear performance standards, external monitoring and testing of results, and consequential rewards and sanctions to promote competition between schools and individuals. Therefore, accountability advocates argue that by generating better information on student performance, such systems indirectly benefit students, teachers and principals in their efforts to achieve the best possible outcomes. Moreover, proponents claim that school autonomy, often an element of accountability systems, replaces the rigidity and bureaucracy of centralized governance with creativity and efficiency of local leadership (Wössmann, Lüdemann, Schütz & West, 2007). Competition among students due to free choice of schools, supporters say, releases energy and promotes school improvement as financial resources follow the students.

Some of the recent studies also suggest that with respect to accountability, “students perform better where policies are in place that aim at students (external exit exams), teachers (monitoring of lessons), and schools (assessment-based comparisons)” (Wössmann et al., 2007, p. 4). A study by Carnoy and Loeb (2002) of the effects of external accountability on student outcomes in the 50 states of the USA revealed that “students in high-accountability states averaged significantly greater gains on the NAEP 8th-grade math test than students in states in little or no state measures to improve student performance” (p. 305). Furthermore, their study concludes that students in high-accountability states do not display significantly higher retention or lower high school completion rates. A 2006 OECD PISA study covering 57 nations also indicates that accountability, autonomy and choice are positively associated with the level of student achievement across nations (OECD, 2007a). This study, however, does not discuss the types of accountability policies in participating education systems.

Competition as an approach to raising the quality and improving equity of education has indeed a lot of common sense: the most important justification for
success of the school is, and should be, whether students have learned what they were expected to learn. The expansion of the global educational testing industry has brought along optimism suggesting that it is possible to find out, with sufficient precision, what students have learned by testing them. “Unfortunately,” Popham writes, “the tests currently being used as the centrepiece of the test-based accountability are the wrong ones” (Popham, 2007, p. 166). Today’s accountability tests do not measure what teachers taught to students; instead, they measure “what those students brought to schools” (Popham, 2007, p. 167). Test-based accountability policies that rely on flawed tests can harm schools, rather than help them to improve. Other critical researchers (Au, 2008; McNeil, 2000; Sacks, 2001) add that the cost of test-based accountability systems is too high and the tools currently used too weak to justify permanent change or promote worthwhile learning in schools. The problem, actually, is not necessarily holding students, teachers and schools accountable per se, but rather how accountability is arranged and practiced. Whenever educational accountability relies chiefly on low quality knowledge tests, it can be made to work better by employing more appropriate tests and other assessment models that complement the information gathered through such tests.

Part of the opposition to test-based accountability comes from individuals and institutions who fear that the business-like management of education, with its in-built high-stakes testing and consequential accountability, will eventually harm the quality, equity and overall viability of public education as it is today (Au, 2008; Hargreaves, 2008; Ladd & Fiske, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Popham, 2007; Sacks, 2001). Others contend that the accountability movement, with increased competition, will not improve quality of schools and learning. Indeed, it is creating adverse effects, such as narrowing of learning, demoralizing teachers, increasing student drop-outs and loosening integrity among school administrators, teachers and students (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan & Vasquez Heilig, 2008). High-stakes testing systems are, according to a growing number of researchers, including Au (2007), Berry and Sahlberg (2006), Nichols and Berliner (2007), Loeb, Knapp and Elfers (2008), and Shirley (2008), narrowing curricula, increasing the practice of presentation-recitation instructional modes, stifling creativity and undermining student engagement in schools. This has led to acts of civil disobedience. Recently, for example, a science teacher in Seattle was suspended for refusing to administer a state-mandated test in his classroom. He crystallized his motive by saying that “all we have to do is have faith in these kids and work as hard as we can with these kids and their families and they’re going to do fine” (“Teacher Suspended for Refusing to Give State Test,” 2008).

In an international review for the OECD, Wössmann et al. (2007) stressed that according to some critics, “choice and competition in schooling will hurt the most disadvantaged, thereby weaken[ing] social cohesion” (p. 10). Good schools in open, competition-driven educational markets will only accept the best students, leaving behind those who are most in need of attention and care. Nichols and Berliner (2007) offer an even gloomier view of education as a consequence of strengthened, test-based accountability. With reference to Campbell’s law, which states that “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will
be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor,” they report that over-reliance on high-stakes testing exerts serious, negative repercussions at every level of the public school system. Excluding weaker students from tests, cheating by students and administrators and systemic corruption are already found in many schools and districts as “survival responses” to increased testing and the race for resources and fame.

An emerging concern is that current, externally-mandated, test-based accountability structures in public education have become increasingly narrowed, and as mentioned earlier, focusing almost solely on standardized knowledge tests and the publishing of results. Testing-driven systems often ignore the moral purposes of schooling and thereby fail to consider such antecedents as curriculum development, school and classroom leadership and school-community contexts. As Tschannen-Moran (2007) points out, the challenges associated with achieving new and higher social expectations of learning and equity in schools have led to suspicion of teachers and schools. Higher standards and greater accountability, she says, “have fostered conditions of distrust and blame” (p. 100). The presence of trust does not guarantee improved educational performance, but its absence signals failure.

THE EMERGENCE OF SCHOOL-FRIENDLY ACCOUNTABILITY

Rather than insisting on abolishing school accountability systems, there is a need for a new type of accountability policy that balances qualitative and quantitative measures, and that builds on mutual accountability, professional responsibility and trust. This is often termed intelligent accountability (Sahlberg, 2007; Secondary School Heads Association, 2003). This framework ensures that schools work effectively and efficiently toward both the public good and the development of students. Intelligent accountability utilizes a wide variety of data that gives genuine expression to strengths and weaknesses of a particular school in meeting its goals. It combines internal accountability, consisting of school processes, self-evaluations, critical reflection and school-community interaction, with levels of external accountability that build on monitoring, sample-based student assessment and thematic evaluations appropriate to the status of development of each individual school.

Intelligent accountability respects the complexity of human and organizational learning. It also stresses the principle of mutual responsibility. This means that accountability dynamics can be regarded as a two-way arrow. On one hand, schools should be held accountable to decision makers and the community for the overall outcomes of schooling. These outcomes, collectively defined by the school and their community stakeholders, go far beyond student achievement results that remain the focus of external, standardized tests. Expected outcomes include non-cognitive areas, such as social skills, moral values and aspects of personality not assessed by current tests. On the other hand, decision makers, authorities and school boards should also be held accountable for providing schools and their students, teachers and principals with the resources, conditions and opportunities needed to attain jointly agreed-upon educational goals.
School, as a social organization, many have argued, has traditionally been a place for cultivating and caring for trust and responsible behaviours (Hargreaves, 2003; Sharan and Chin Tan, 2008). Learning to be responsible for one’s own and others’ well-being and growth is a tacit goal of schools. Societies with high social capital often also have higher mutual trust in other people. In such societies, as Hargreaves (2008) suggests, responsibility precedes accountability; in other words, accountability is the remainder that is left when responsibility is subtracted. Responsibility grows from trust. Institutional cultures based on trust also spread responsibility across their people. One may also note that when trust disappears, so does an individual’s sense of accountability, or responsibility – and vice versa. Therefore, building trust within schools and especially among schools and their communities, is a crucial step toward intelligent accountability and stronger mutual responsibility for our school systems. Unfortunately, in many schools, external policies have replaced responsibility and trust with accountability, which has left them stuck in the middle when reaching out for their moral purpose and material rewards.

Part of the challenge to transform current accountability policies into more intelligent ones is the narrow and flawed ways of collecting information that are used in accountability judgements. The most commonly used instruments are data from standardized tests and examinations, which typically focus on knowledge rather than meta-cognitive skills, and which often try to cover too many aspects of curriculum, rather than concentrating on the essentials. Alternative systems of accountability, as suggested by Nichols and Berliner (2007) and Popham (2007), for example, should shift the focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning, and employ different methods of assessment, including performance tests (e.g. portfolios and projects evaluated by judges). This, of course, is closely related to the level of trust: Can we rely also on teachers’ judgment about how their students are learning, just like we normally trust the verdict of a court judge or diagnosis of a medical doctor?

Currently, data are normally collected through a comprehensive census applied to all schools and all students of the age cohort. This is both expensive and not the most appropriate strategy to learn how educational systems are progressing. Census-based, external assessments also often ignore the peculiarities and profiles that individual schools have as a result of their own curricula. As in many other cases, it is not necessary to ensure school accountability through a census. Alternatively, it can be achieved more easily and equally reliably through a statistical sample. The logic of using samples rather than a census is simple: In health checks, it is quite enough to use samples of blood that appear to be adequate to inform both the physician and the patient of state of health! The physician does not need to check all the blood to make her diagnosis. Many governments, however, rely on educational accountability by census, although it has evident drawbacks: it is expensive, shifts focus away from worthwhile learning and is subject to widespread, immoral abuse and collateral damage (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Sacks, 2001). Currently used knowledge tests, as Popham (2007) eloquently claims, are not good enough to allow teachers to use them to improve their teaching. The high-stakes, test-based
accountability systems implemented in many nations create, therefore, a conflict between a spirit of risk-taking and creativity – essential elements of teaching and learning for the knowledge society – and normative pedagogies determined by the reach for better test scores.

THE FINNISH MODEL: QUALITY, EQUITY AND TRUST – ALL AT REASONABLE COST

In this chapter, I have so far conveyed my concern that tightened, test-based accountability for schools, teachers and students may jeopardize schools’ efforts to teach for the knowledge society and a sustainable future, and is not, therefore, the best way to improve learning in schools. Finland is an example of a nation that has demonstrated both steady educational progress since early 1970s and built an equitable educational system operating in good congruence with a competitive knowledge economy (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006; Hargreaves, Halasz & Pont, 2008; Sahlberg, 2007; 2009). It is therefore reasonable to look at how Finland has addressed the global demand for stronger, test-based accountability in its educational system.

Interestingly, the term accountability cannot be found in Finnish educational policy discourse. Educational reform principles since early 1990s, when much of public sector administration went through decentralization, have relied on building professional responsibilities within schools, rather than applying external accountability structures and encouraging lateral capacity building among schools. Therefore, sample-based testing, thematic assessments, reflective self-evaluations and putting learning first have established a culture of mutual responsibilities and trust. For example, before the end of upper-secondary school (or grade 12), no external, high-stakes tests are employed. Moreover, there is no inspection of teachers and only loose external standards steering the schools. This leaves teachers with good opportunities, as well as the professional responsibility, to focus on learning with their students, rather than being concerned about frequent testing and public rankings of their schools. Some policy makers predicted in the mid-1990s that Finland would follow the school accountability policies carried out by the global educational reform movement; however, in a review of policy development in Finland ten years later, test-based accountability is not even mentioned (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Laukkanen, 1998; 2008).

As Finland attracts global attention due to its high-performing education system, it is worth asking about progress made since the 1980s. If progress can be reliably identified, then the question becomes: What factors might be behind successful education reform? In my recent analysis of educational reform policies in Finland (Sahlberg, 2007), I describe how Finland changed its traditional education system, with little to celebrate in terms of international comparisons, into a model of a modern, publicly financed education system with widespread equity, good quality and large participation, all at a reasonable cost (OECD, 2007b; Sahlberg, 2007; Schleicher, 2006). What is significant from this analysis is the steady progress made during the past three decades in four main domains: (1) increased levels of educational attainment of the adult population, (2) widespread equity, (3) a good
level of student learning, and (4) moderate overall spending, almost solely from public sources. Before describing the educational changes since the 1970s, I will briefly summarize the main elements determining the level of Finnish educational system performance.

First, there has been a steady growth in participation in all levels of education in Finland since 1970. The growth was especially rapid in the upper-secondary education sector in the 1980s and, then, within the tertiary and adult education sectors in the 1990s, up to the present. Education policies that have driven Finnish reform since 1970 have prioritized creating equal opportunities, raising quality and increasing participation in all educational levels across Finnish society. More than 99% of the age cohort successfully complete compulsory basic education, about 95% continue their education in upper secondary schools or in the 10th grade of basic school (some 3%) immediately after graduation, and 90% of those starting upper secondary school eventually receive their school leaving certification, providing access to tertiary education (Statistics Finland, 2007). Two thirds of those enrol either in academic universities or professionally oriented polytechnics. Finally, over 50% of the Finnish adult population participates in adult-education programs. What is significant in this expansion of participation in education is that it has taken place without shifting the burden of costs to students or their parents. According to recent global education indicators, only 2% of Finnish expenditure on educational institutions is from private sources, compared to an OECD average of 13% (OECD, 2007b). Overall progress since 1970 in educational attainment by the Finnish adult population (15 years and older) is shown in Figure 2. The current situation is congruent with a typical profile of the human capital pyramid in advanced knowledge economies.

Second, education opportunities and, therefore, good learning outcomes, have spread rather evenly across Finland. There was a visible achievement gap among young adults at the start of comprehensive school in the early 1970s due to very
different educational orientations associated with the old parallel system (Aho et al., 2006). This knowledge gap strongly corresponded with the socio-economic divide within Finnish society at that time. Although students’ learning outcomes began to even out by the mid-1980s, streaming through ability grouping in mathematics and foreign languages kept the achievement gap relatively wide. After abolishing streaming in comprehensive school in the mid-1980s and making learning expectations similar for all students, the achievement gap between low and high achievers began to decrease. First evidence of this came from the OECD’s PISA survey in 2000. Finland had one of the smallest performance variations between schools: less than one tenth of that variation in Japan, in OECD’s PISA survey in 2000. Finland had one of the smallest performance variations between schools: less than one tenth of that variation in Japan, in reading literacy between schools of all OECD nations. A similar trend continued in the 2003 PISA cycle in mathematics and was strengthened in 2006 (OECD, 2001; 2004; 2007a). Figure 3 illustrates performance variance within and between schools in different OECD nations as assessed by the science scale in the 2006 PISA survey.

Figure 3. National variance within and between schools in student science performance in the 2006 PISA cycle (OECD, 2007a).

According to Figure 3, Finland has less than 5% between-school variance on the PISA science scale, whereas the average between-school variance in other OECD nations is about 33%. The fact that almost all Finnish inequality is within schools, as shown in Figure 3, means that the remaining differences are probably mostly due to variation in students’ natural talent. Accordingly, variation between schools mostly relates to social inequality. Since this is a small source of variation in
Finland, it suggests that schools successfully deal with social inequality. This also indicates, as Grubb (2007) observed, that Finnish educational reform has succeeded in building an equitable education system in a relatively short time, a main objective of Finland’s education reform agenda set in the early 1970s.

Third, Finnish students’ learning is at a high international level, as determined by recent comparative student achievement studies. Although it is difficult to compare students’ learning outcomes today with those of 1980, some evidence can be offered using International Educational Assessment (IEA) and OECD PISA surveys since the 1980s (Kupari & Väljärvi, 2005; Martin, Mullis, Gonzales, Gregory, Smith, Chrostowski, Garden & O’Connor, 2000; OECD, 2001; Robitaille & Garden, 1989). Based on these data, I reported elsewhere a summary of Finnish students’ mathematics performance since 1981 compared to their peers in other countries (Sahlberg, 2007). The studies used include the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) in 1981 (8th grade, 20 nations), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS-R) in 1999 (8th grade, 38 nations) and the OECD PISA survey in 2000 (15-year olds, all 30 OECD member countries). These are the international student assessments surveys in which Finland participated since 1980. Since the nations participating in each international survey are not the same and the methodology of IEA and OECD surveys is different, the international average as a benchmarking value does not always provide a fully comparable or coherent picture.

Figure 4 shows another divergence in Finnish students’ learning performance trends, as measured by the OECD PISA mathematics scale and in comparison to some OECD countries, over time. It is remarkable that student achievement in mathematics shows progress in Finland, contrary to many other education superpowers. There is an increasing debate over what these international tests really measure, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss those issues or the

The OECD’s PISA is increasingly being adopted as a global measure to benchmark nations’ student achievement at the end of compulsory education. In 2006, the third cycle of this global survey was conducted in all 30 OECD member countries and in 27 other countries. It focuses on young people’s ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. This orientation reflects a change in the goals and objectives of curricula themselves, which are increasingly concerned with what students can do with what they learn at school and not merely with whether they have mastered specific curricular content. (OECD 2007a, p. 16).

In the 2006 PISA survey, Finland maintained its high performance in all assessed areas of student achievement. In science, the main focus of the survey, Finnish students outperformed their peers in all 56 countries. Furthermore, the first three PISA survey cycles since 2000 also indicate that Finnish educational performance is consistent over all assessed educational domains, and that Finnish students, on average, score highly in every survey across all subjects – in mathematics, science and reading literacy.

It seems that Finland has been able to reform its education system by increasing participation at all levels, making good education achievable to a large proportion of its population, and attaining comparatively high learning outcomes in most schools throughout the nation. All of this has been accomplished by financing education, including tertiary and adult education, almost exclusively from public sources. One more question regarding good educational performance remains to be addressed: How much does it cost the Finnish taxpayers?

In OECD nations for which data on comparable trends are available for all educational levels combined, public and private investment in Finnish education increased 34% from 1995 to 2004 in real terms, while the OECD average for the same period was 42%. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP in Finland is at the OECD average, 6.1% in 2004 (OECD, 2007b). Less than 2% of total Finnish expenditure on education institutions comes from private sources. Figure 5 summarizes students’ mean performance on the PISA science scale in relation to educational spending per student in 2006. These data indicate that good educational performance in Finland has been attained at reasonable cost.

Finnish educational success has encouraged people to search for causes of such favourable international performance. Most visitors to Finland discover elegant school buildings filled with calm children and highly educated teachers. They also recognise the broad autonomy that schools enjoy, the lack of interference from central education administration in schools’ everyday activities, the systematic methods used to address problems in the lives of students, and the targeted, professional help available for those in need. Much of this may be helpful to visitors in benchmarking their own country’s practice in relation to a leading education nation such as Finland. However, much of the secret of Finland’s
educational success remains undiscovered: What has the educational change process been like? What was done behind the scenes when key decisions were made to make that success possible? How much did Finnish educators take note of global education reform movements in creating their own approaches? What is the role of other public sector policies in making education system work so well?

Figure 5. Student performance on the PISA science scale and spending per student in USD converted to purchasing power parities (OECD 2007a).

In such an educational environment, the collectively accepted conception of learning extends far beyond the one that is typical to common knowledge tests. Finnish students, teachers and principals experience great degrees of autonomy and choice, but they also understand related responsibilities and expectations. I argued elsewhere that a significant proportion of the good success of Finnish schools is attributed to the fact that worthwhile learning and mutual caring about youth in schools is first, followed by responding to accountability demands in intelligent ways (Sahlberg, 2007; 2009). Although, as noted earlier, test-based accountability is not part of educational discourse in Finland, collective responsibility became more important due to systematic trust-building and cooperation endorsed by education administrations in the 1990s (Aho et al., 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2008). Specific strategies for building trust included, among other things, raising the professional status of teachers, enhancing school leadership and building professional learning communities in schools.

The main message of this chapter is that schools in market-driven education environments have been left stuck in the middle of a tough educational dilemma. The current culture of accountability in the public sector often threatens school and
community social capital and damages trust, rather than supporting it. As a consequence, teachers and school leaders are no longer trusted; this decline of trust is a crisis of suspicion, as O’Neill (2002) has observed. Although the pursuit of accountability provides parents and politicians with more information, as it is employed in many places, it also builds suspicion, low morale and professional cynicism. Instead, intelligent accountability systems must be developed in order to put worthwhile learning first, and to minimize the negative effects that externally mandated, test-based accountability systems may have on teachers’ work.

Today, Finland is often used as a model of successful educational change. “As societies move beyond the age of low-skill standardisation,” write Hargreaves et al. (2008), “Finland contains essential lessons for nations that aspire, educationally and economically, to be successful and sustainable knowledge societies” (p. 92). However, reform ideas and policy principles that have been employed in Finland since the 1970s will not necessarily work in other cultural or social contexts. For example, Finns, like other Nordic people, exhibit higher levels of mutual trust in others and in their educational systems, when compared to people in other countries (OECD, 2008). Similarly, other socio-cultural factors come into play, as mentioned by external observers such as Grubb (2007), Hargreaves et al. (2008) and Schleicher (2006): social capital, ethnic homogeneity and high professional status of teachers. These factors may prove important when the transferability of education policies is considered.

SO WHAT?

The main message of this chapter is that schools in test-based accountability cultures and competition-driven educational environments are struggling with the expectations to teach for creativity, social justice and ecological sustainability, as I have argued elsewhere (Sahlberg, in press). Both current accountability cultures and business-like education management damage trust, rather than support it. As a consequence, teachers and school leaders are no longer trusted. The current crisis of trust in schools is a source of suspicion and fear. Although the pursuit of accountability provides parents and politicians with more information, it builds apathy, low morale and professional cynicism. Empirical evidence clearly shows that strengthening school and teacher accountability is not the best way to build sustainable knowledge societies. Alternative forms of accountability, or rather mutual responsibility and trust, is what our education systems need. One condition comes before anything else: such an accountability system must put worthwhile learning first and minimize the negative effects that externally mandated accountability systems may have on teachers’ work.

Is more accountability in schools a way towards better quality education? After two decades of high-stakes and test-based accountability policies in England, the United States, parts of Canada and other countries, the gap between proponents and opponents in the education community is widening. The unintended consequences of high-stakes testing are becoming more evident, as presented earlier and in later chapters of this book. On the other side, accumulated testing data is used to prove that stronger school and teacher accountabilities are improving
learning, closing the achievement gap and decreasing the number of early school leavers. International student assessment studies, such as the OECD PISA, also suggest that school autonomy, parental choice and accountability structures that hold schools, teachers and students accountable for determined results positively correlate with educational performance at the national level. The challenge is how to establish accountability systems that would support worthwhile learning, increase social capital and thereby help schools to be active players in developing our societies.

We are living in uncertain and insecure times. Conventional modes of schooling are becoming less and less able to provide good opportunities for learning to support sustainable societies. What we need now are more people who are able to think in new ways, work in complex situations and understand how different elements in our lives are connected. Competition is driving schools towards narrower curriculum, unified teaching and restricted creativity. At the same time, the global economic crisis, climate change and the widening gaps between rich and poor require more dynamic and responsive education systems. Schools and other educational institutions should cultivate the attitudes, cultures and skills needed in creative and collaborative learning environments.

Creativity will not flourish and be sustained in schools unless people feel secure enough to take risks and explore the unknown. Moreover, working with and understanding innovation require creative and risk-intensive learning contexts. In short, a sustainable learning society that also helps us to understand how to keep the planet’s ecosystem in balance and that attempts to combat declining social capital and increasing structural indifference in many Western societies can be best promoted by developing safe and caring schools. The fear-free school is a place where students are not afraid to try new ideas and ways of thinking. Equally importantly, in the fear-free school, teachers and principals can willingly step beyond their conventional territories of thinking and doing. Often, these are conditions necessary for making substantive differences in students’ learning and schools’ performance. In the sustainable learning society, schools need to focus more on cultivating humanity and building social capital, rather than on becoming marketplaces where success is determined by cost-efficiency and material competition for measurable, private profit. That is our dream: genuinely caring and creative schools for all our children.

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2. ACCOUNTABILITY IN FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

Kwâyâsk Etôtamihk (Doing it Right)

OSKAC (INTRODUCTION)

Almost a decade ago, Waite, Boone, and McGhee (2001) found that the term accountability “so deeply…infiltrated public dialogue [in education] that its meanings, connotations, and ramifications remain largely unquestioned” (p. 183). Because educational accountability has come to shape public schooling, it is important that caution is exercised when critiquing accountability initiatives, since “accountability” is often value-laden and can be understood in various ways. As Waite et al. point out, “when people write or speak of accountability…the meaning is often ambiguous…and there is no consensus regarding all the variables that should/would constitute [the term’s concepts or domains]” (p. 183). Since there have always been competing narratives about what education is and how it ought to be delivered to First Nations people, it stands to reason that the values related to the idea of accountability will be controversial as well.

In this chapter, I present an historical overview of First Nations education to provide the background necessary for understanding my critique of current accountability policies as they relate to First Nations schools and communities in Alberta. Next, using Alberta’s new First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) and accountability pillar policies as an example, I point out the contradiction that often exist in initiatives that are meant to serve First Nations students. I also discuss the tensions that are inherent in the federal, provincial, and First Nations involvement in educational provision, using accountability as an example of how unique and often conflicting positions continue to undermine First Nations education. I then argue that the Cree ideas of responsibility, relationship and community could be used to develop an understanding that provides an alternative to current conceptions of accountability and that is more appropriate for transforming public education to meet the needs and goals of First Nations people.

PIMOHTEWIN (THE JOURNEY): TRADITIONAL TO CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

First Nations epistemology (i.e., ways of knowing) has been maintained from generation to generation through structures of language (Battiste, 1998), modeling, practice and experience. When asked for his understanding of traditional Aboriginal education, a Sucker Creek First Nation Elder shared:
Indian education was geared for survival. We hunted moose to live. We ate the meat and used the hide to keep us warm. The family worked together to live and learn. The family was the center of everything. The adults passed knowledge through language on to the kids so they would live. They also showed the kids what to do by doing. (P. Willier, personal communication, July, 2005)

This Elder’s narrative reveals that traditional education centered on the child and that everyone lived the ideal of *miyo-wîchîwîn*, (helping each other in a good way). Language was imperative in the process of expressing meaning, value, and culture. Our *nehiyaw-itâpisiniwîn*, or Cree place of sight (viewpoint), was shared through the way we were and the way we spoke.

A review of the research about traditional Aboriginal education reflects the sentiments above and identifies the following values:

– Through Indian tradition each adult was personally responsible for each child, to see that he learned all he needed to know in order to live a good life (National Indian Brotherhood [NIB], 1973).
– Each person was responsible for keeping the self (mind, body, spirit, emotion) healthy. To achieve that goal, the self interacted with the family, these interacted with the community, and these three spheres interacted with society (Assembly of First Nations Language and Literacy Secretariat, 1994).
– “Indigenous pedagogical principles were holistic, connected, valid, culturally-based, value-based, thematic and experiential. They promoted and rewarded cooperative learning and the unified co-operation of learners and teachers. Indigenous pedagogical principles, unlike Western paradigms, recognized the important role of non-verbal communication in the learning-teaching process” (“Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Education,” 1999).
– Traditional Aboriginal education focuses on knowledge that is shared through language and culture, and relationships are a natural and integral part of teaching and learning. Learners are related to their teachers and teachers to their learners—the circle is complete. Nothing is learned in isolation.

In Canada, treaties between First Nations and the federal government changed the face of education for First Nations people. When Treaty No. 8 was signed in 1899, for example, several promises were made to First Nations people, one being the right to a “new” form of education. The vision of our Elders at the signing of the Treaty was to enable member First Nations to be enriched by a new knowledge system that would *supplement* traditional knowledge (Henderson, 1995). Unfortunately, this vision never came to fruition. Under the authority of the Indian Act, the Crown, presuming to have superior knowledge, chose to impose an education system that exalted Western knowledge, attitudes, skills and values over those of First Nations people. By dismissing the importance of First Nations traditions, knowledge, culture, language and lifestyles and by denying First Nations people access to their traditional education system, the Crown effectively established a system of education which oppressed and exploited First Nations people. A process of assimilation and cultural genocide began with the explicit goal of “Kill the Indian, save the child” (Thompson, 2001). As one Cree elder reflects,
The government decided to assimilate Indians at the time of residential schools. They educated by taking away. The older people thought that school was good because they were brainwashed by the priests into believing their kids were being cared for. They didn’t see the abuse. They didn’t see the priests steal our language and culture…they robbed us of who we were. They tried to beat the language out of us. We used to get strapped on our upper arms because it was tenderer there. We all had deep purple welts…a sign that we did something very wrong. (P. Willier, personal communication, July, 2005)

This experience of guilt and shame left a legacy of broken spirits and suppression of identity, but the task of assimilating First Nations people did not stop at robbing children of their language, culture, and identity. When one culture dominates another that is perceived as inferior, the control of education and its delivery is imperative to establishing and maintaining power through limiting educational opportunities, which are directly linked to livelihood and economic status. In First Nations education, curriculum focused only on those basic skills deemed relevant to the Indian who would return to the reservation (Hutchings, n.d.). This education was not to be questioned, interpreted, or reflected upon by the learner and was based upon a foreign value system. As Bolotin (2000) points out, this approach works as a hidden curriculum, a kind of socialization that covertly shapes the morals and values of those being taught.

MEKWĀĆ KĀ ISPAYIK (THE WAY IT IS): CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMES, GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING IN FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

Although there have been initiatives to address the dominant, Western assumptions of education and the resulting oppression and inequity, the urgent need for improving educational opportunities and completion rates for First Nations continues to be paramount. If schools are indeed to be a reflection of society, then the philosophy of fairness and equity that Canada embraces should be reflected in the funding, principles, policies, and guidelines that govern First Nations schools. Presently, this is sorely lacking. One example in response to this situation is Alberta Learning’s (2002) FNMI. Promising practices have resulted from this framework and data collected through two case studies reveal Aboriginal learner success (Alberta Education, 2008b). However, although FNMI programming demonstrates Alberta Education’s leadership in First Nations education, it should be noted that many of the province’s First Nations students do not benefit from the FNMI initiatives because they attend band-operated schools outside of Alberta Education’s jurisdiction. Moreover, while the framework has brought attention to First Nations issues and has introduced FNMI perspectives, curriculum, programming and approaches, these new initiatives are ultimately subject to Alberta’s overall accountability framework. This framework remains rooted in dominant, Western notions about assessment and student achievement and includes accountability pillar policies (e.g., large-scale standardized testing and outcomes-
based reporting) that mandate results that are measurable and comparable in terms of province-wide standards (Alberta Education, 2008a).

Here it must be noted that, by the standards stipulated by the **accountability pillar**, aggregate results show that Alberta’s First Nations schools do not do well, even while the policies and strategies are meant to close the gap between standards and achievement. Research that has investigated other such accountability frameworks (e.g., the *No Child Left Behind* policies in the U.S.) and their success in “closing the gap” for minority students provides important insights. For example, the assumptions and contradictions inherent in the attempts to remedy the “problem” of under-achieving students by imposing standards that focus attention on educational *outcomes* rather than on *process* can actually be detrimental to those whose interests the policies are meant to serve (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2004; Waite et al., 2001). Specifically, lessons about culturally biased tests, the problems of “one size fits all” standards and the unintended effects of large-scale testing (e.g., “teaching to the test” and students who choose to drop out rather than fail) should be heeded before claims are made that Alberta’s accountability framework serves *all* of Alberta’s students. This could be the subject of a review.

As the Alberta Teachers’ Association (2005) points out, since its implementation, the accountability pillar itself has never been through a process of assessment and evaluation.

In addition to the accountability contradictions related to curriculum and programming are contradictions related to funding and governance. In 1973, the NIB authored the ground-breaking paper *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The NIB’s primary recommendation was the decentralization of First Nations education, which it argued would provide “opportunities for local people to have a say in school governance, [restoring] to them the feeling that they are not powerless, and that they are in control of their destinies” (Agbo, 2002, p. 283). The federal government’s response to the paper was that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) would continue its funding of education for First Nations students and would support the creation of band-operated schools. This inter-agency involvement contributed to disorder and misunderstanding. This situation, as Brady (1995) argues, “leaves Native governments in the unenviable position of being responsible for delivering a variety of services without having complete control over many parameters directly affecting delivery…” (p. 357). As Wilson (2007) suggests, the jurisdictional complexity related to federal, provincial and band involvement in First Nations schools has resulted in a “gray zone” where power struggles keep First Nations mired in the political language of self-governance, sovereignty, accountability and cultural survival (p. 248). An example of this “gray zone” as it relates to accountability is as follows.

First, accountability measures for First Nations education at the federal level are linked to the transfer of education dollars from the federal government to First Nations authorities via funding transfers set up by INAC. Carr-Stewart (2006) found that INAC’s funding supports the maintenance of minimum levels of education provision. Second, at the same time, band-operated schools are obligated to complete a “School Declaration of Program” process, an accountability measure designed to “ensure [that] Band-operated Schools [comply] with government
ACCOUNTABILITY IN FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

requirements” (Alberta Education Budget and Fiscal Analysis Branch, 2008). Third, band-operated schools, like public schools, must also adhere to Alberta Education’s accountability pillar, which “provides a … way for school authorities to measure success, assess their progress and share results (Alberta Education, 2008a). In reality, these three accountability measures, which conflict, do not help ensure that First Nations students are provided with the high quality education desired for all Albertans. This reinforces the historical inequities that have plagued First Nations people.

As suggested by this example, without true devolution of power through self-governance, First Nations communities do not have authority to make informed decisions and to “get things done,” let alone address the inequities that are the effects of a contentious accountability context. As Agbo (2002) points out, “few would deny that First Nations schools should be accountable. However, this is an empty assertion unless we also state clearly the form, extent, and character of their accountability” (p. 294). If the ideal of First Nations self-governance were upheld, First Nations themselves would possess the power to develop their own processes of determining goals, assessing achievement and defining student success. They would develop their own accountability framework.

EWI-AYIMAHK (IT’S GOING TO BE DIFFICULT): CHALLENGING THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Leithwood and Earl (2000) offer the following questions to assist in understanding accountability: What level of accountability is to be provided? Who is expected to provide this account? To whom is the account owed? What is to be accounted for? What are the consequences of providing the account? (p. 2). These questions can be helpful in providing direction for developing accountability policies. However, from a First Nations perspective, they centre on ontological and epistemological notions that are, in the first place, Eurocentric. In addition, in current contexts, such as Alberta, they have come to take on definitions of accountability that are highly influenced by neoliberal assumptions about standards, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and the importance of competition in a market economy (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007)—values that are not held by all. What these questions lack is sufficient attention to whose conceptions of accountability are privileged. The consideration of who potentially creates space for understanding that accountability is not a universal, neutral concept.

OTE NIKAN (IN THE FUTURE): LOOKING AT THEORY IN EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

It may be helpful to examine current thinking about educational change when considering the future of First Nations education and the accountability policies and practices that might shape it. For example, Hargreaves (2009) advocates for a change-in-action theory that focuses on shared partnerships with a “bold and inclusive vision that unites and energizes people” (An Inspiring and Inclusive Vision section, para. 1). He argues for education systems that rely on trust and
relationship building, characterized by “a compelling and inclusive moral purpose steering [the] system, binding [it] together and drawing [the] best people to work in it” (An Inspiring and Inclusive Vision section, para. 4). Discussions surrounding transformation in First Nations education can draw upon Hargreaves’s idea that “…accountability is the remainder that is left when responsibility has been subtracted…” (Responsibility Before Accountability section, para. 1). This resonates with traditional First Nations cultural values and practices. For example, because roles are clearly defined in First Nations communities, if I, as a First Nations woman, take on my roles of daughter, mother, sister, aunt, friend, teacher and learner, and “do right” by them, I will naturally perform these roles with responsibility because responsibility is inextricably linked to relationships in my community.

Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern’s (2002) discuss the importance of relationships in their “Circle of Courage,” which consists of the following ideals: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Paramount among these is belonging, because being valued, welcomed, and comforted within a group of family, friends, and community is fundamental to human development (pp. 43-57). The Cree belief that every child has many mothers (P. Willier, personal communication, July 2005), epitomizes this ideal. In First Nations communities, treating each other as though we are relatives is a “core social value that transforms relationships. Drawing [others] into one’s circle motivate[s] one to show respect and concern, and [to] live with a minimum of friction and a maximum of good will” (p. 47). Kwayask nîna wîkowâhk ohpikihitowak, or feeling like you belong, is the basis of being.

KWAYASK NIINA WIKOWAHK OHPIKIHITOWAK, or feeling like you belong,

is the basis of being.

AWINA MĂKA KIYA (WHO IS IT THAT YOU REALLY ARE?):
IDENTITY IN EDUCATION

When thinking about roles, responsibilities and establishing a sense of belonging in First Nations education, we must see identity as central because it holds our ways of knowing and seeing the world. Identity is also key in establishing laws, principles, and guidelines which lead to doing what is right for our people. In 2005, I conducted a very informal interview with my father, meant to inquire about the state of change in First Nations education. One specific question I asked him was: Is identity important to education? I did not receive a yes or no answer; what I received was an answer embedded in the following oration:

Identity. What is identity? Do you actually think you can find it? That is the biggest excuse I ever heard: “I’m going to find myself, I don’t know who I am.” It’s an excuse…to be lazy. We knew who we were long ago. Peter was born Peter. My mother, my father, my sisters and brothers...they all knew who Peter was.

Peter became Peter because of my family. I didn’t have to go find him. I knew who he was when I went to school and when I went to work because he is, was me. You guys ignore who you are, not because you don’t know, but
because knowing is too hard. That is what the world has done to you. It has made you lazy. (P. Willier, personal communication, July 2005)

My father holds the belief that a person is born with an identity already intact. Identity is inherent, not something that is created or taken away. This statement might appear to be contrary to what my father said when he spoke, “Peter became Peter because of my family,” but it is not. Peter did not become Peter because his family created him; rather, he became Peter through the relationships he had with them, the values they instilled in him and the language and culture that surrounded him. His family provided a support system that unearthed what was already there. They provided an environment conducive for Peter to be.

My father expressed words of wisdom. The message is simple: you cannot go outside yourself to find yourself because you are already there. Unearthing knowledge about your self is a continuous, never-ending process that leads to an ever-increasing understanding as you grow with time, age, experience, and relationships. It is the process of seeking and living truth. In order for truth to “be,” you must live it. Once truth becomes lived, you are walking in an honest manner. This is a difficult task and is what my father referred to when he spoke of being “lazy.” The importance of walking in an honest manner is why he warns against denying truth, letting externals persuade us that we do not know who we are and taking on a foreign identity. This is a lesson of the history of First Nations education, especially in light of the legacy of residential schools.

One’s identity is also related to methods of learning. As Cardinal (2005) explains, First Nations people are of four worlds, and these inherent worlds connect us as family, community, people, learners and teachers:

Many years ago a Cree Elder asked me a question: Awina maga kiya- who is it that you really are? I replied in Cree – Neehiyow neyah – at that time, I thought I was saying “I am Indian.” The Cree Elder then asked in Cree: Ta ni ki maga “Nee hiyow” Kee tig a wee yin? Tansi ee twee maga? Why is it that you are called “Neehiyow” – what does the word mean? When the Elder realized that I did not fully understand the meaning of the word, the Elder proceeded to explain.

The word “Ni hi yow” comes from two words in our language: 1) Neewoo-four and 2) Yow-body [world]. In the context in which I use the term, it means: Four bodies…we believe that knowledge [is placed] in each of the four worlds. When we say that “I am a Ni Hi Yow” what I am really saying is that I come from “the people who seek the knowledge of the four worlds.” In short when I apply the word “Ni Hi Yow” to myself, what I am saying is that “I am a seeker of knowledge.”

Cardinal acknowledges that Indigenous people seek knowledge of all things, including identity (self), but it was through the Elder that he came to understand the full truth of who he really is: that of four worlds. These worlds (i.e., ways of knowing), are mind, body, spirit, and emotion. This is the holistic concept of self.
The stories of my father and the Cree Elder are very powerful. Both men state that learning first comes from within one’s self and that this learning is enhanced through relationships with others. Relationship building should therefore be of the utmost importance in contemporary schools, since “schooling is more than a set of technical or organizational arrangements. It is also an interpersonal and moral enterprise, because it involves social relationships and seeks to regulate and [enhance] character or personality” (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 31). In First Nations education, character and personality are understood as identity, and the enhancement of identity must be based on Indigenous natural laws. Makokis (as cited in Steinhauer, 2002) describes the laws this way:

- Love/Kindness-Kiseywatisowin, which basically tells us that before we can be humble, we have to be kind, and that we must feel with our heart, not just our mind.
- Honesty-Kweyaskatesown. Kwesask is the root word and refers to being aligned and straight. Itatisowin is the verb and implies characteristics or a trait of being in life. We are to lead honest lives. For whatever we do, we must do it in complete honesty with ourselves and others. This keeps our heart, mind, and spirit full of integrity.
- Sharing-Wichihtowin. This word stems from wichih, to help, towin makes the root work into a noun and refers to having everybody involved.
- Strength-Sohkisowin. This word refers to strength and determination in the body, and sohkeyihtamowin is the strength. (p. 79)

Living by these natural laws is our way of “thinking right,” which is necessary before we can “do right.” “Doing right” means acting in an ethical and responsible manner. Who I am (my identity) determines how I act. Western understandings of education are not devoid of some of these ideas. For example, Starratt’s (2004) research into responsibility reveals that “in a given role, one will perform as a morally responsible agent” (p. 47). Following this, decisions made in education would not be arbitrary but could take “due deliberation on circumstances and the values that apply to the situation as well as caring for the persons who will be affected by the decision” (p. 47). Specific to educational leadership, Starratt argues that educational leaders must have knowledge of who they are as leaders and what they are responsible for. He advocates that once a “right way of thinking” about identity and responsibility has been established, a “right way of doing” things will emerge and will potentially lead to new understandings of accountability.

SŌHKISOWIN (IT IS POWERFUL): RE-FRAMING ACCOUNTABILITY

When discussing accountability from a First Nations Cree point of view, difficulty arises in the fact that there is no direct translation for “accountability” within our language structure (F. Badger, Personal Communication, August, 2008). As discussed above, our tongue speaks of roles, responsibilities and doing things right: kwāyāsk etōtamihk. Therefore, from a Cree perspective, it is responsibility, not accountability, that ensures that we “do the right thing.” The concept of kwāyāsk etōtamihk works within the principles of wāhkōhtowin (a coming together of people; a state of relationship building) and wicichtowin (the sharing of everything...
and everyone). Working within these concepts in K-12 First Nations education would help render current accountability policies and practices unnecessary. Through māmawi wīhkōhtowin ekwa māmawimōwin (pulling together and sharing), the Elders’ vision at the signing of our treaties, of a new knowledge system complimenting traditional knowledge, could be realized. These principles and ideals could also allow First Nations leaders to establish a culture of belonging in their schools and educational systems, since First Nations ontology and epistemology would be the foundation of knowledge creation and program delivery. When examining the concept of responsibility in First Nations education (i.e., relationships and belonging, identity and thinking and doing right), it is important to remember that:

Aboriginal philosophies of education were based on the assumptions that education is life-long and that teaching should prepare young people to participate fully in the spiritual, cultural, physical, and emotional life of the society. In an educational context like this, the concepts of “failure” and “pass” are irrelevant. (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 63)

With these beliefs in mind, First Nations education must focus on more than high standards and competition, which seem to permeate mainstream understandings of educational accountability. More emphasis needs to be placed on the concepts of nihiyaw and pimachihowin, which stress the importance of seeking knowledge within four worlds and making a living. In this way, First Nations education might better provide our people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to improve their quality of life.

MĀCIKA OMISI KĀ KĪ ISPAYIK (SUMMATION)

Although education should be a means of fulfilling hopes and dreams, for First Nations it has often been a way of keeping a group of people in a state of continuous disadvantage. The issue of transforming First Nations education is a pressing problem. Attempting to incorporate First Nations values while struggling with accountability contradictions, jurisdictional tensions and political inertia and the differences in the language and meaning of accountability is the challenge that we face. In order for educational partners to work together to improve education for First Nations people, educational policies and practices must reflect the values of all participants. In order for First Nations people to walk successfully in both worlds, guidance needs to come from the best of traditional First Nations education. Educational leaders must also model the willingness to do what is right for First Nations students. By placing learners first and centering the values of responsibility and relationships, a right way of thinking may be established, and issues in First Nations education concerning appropriate curriculum and programming and funding and governance could be better addressed, since the focus would be on the “right thing to do.”
In conclusion, I would like to foreground the following Cree teachings as possible ways to focus on responsibility and to guide alternative understandings of educational accountability in First Nations education.

**Kwayask Māmawī Wikhōhtowin Ekwa Māmawimōwin** (the process of pulling together and sharing in a right way): In regards to relationship building, positive and relevant family and community engagement in the education process of First Nations learners is essential for enhancing First Nations identity and establishing a sense of belonging.

**Kwayask Nīma Wîkowâhk Ohpîkîhitowak** (the process of establishing a sense of belonging): Establishing a “sense of belonging” in schools and school systems is the basis of a positive school culture. A positive school culture for First Nations learners is one that instills pride in being First Nations and instills confidence to be a successful life-long learner.

**Nitokiskisiwin** (the process of reflecting on how actions, thoughts and feelings impact ourselves and others): Reflection is a way of determining whether roles and responsibilities within a system are being met and a way of determining what changes, if any, are needed to support teaching and learning.

**Awina Māka Kiya** (the process of showing who you really are): It is important that First Nations educators answer the following questions in personal growth plans: Who am I as a professional in First Nations education? What is my role? What responsibilities are associated with my current role? What responsibilities do I perform well? What responsibilities are my areas of focus? As plans are reviewed, an approach to educational development that benefits both teacher and learner can be taken.

**Kwayask Kiskinohamākewin** (or excellence in education): Because teacher-learner relationships are symbiotic, it follows that the best of our teachers bring out the best in our students. Excellent teachers do not support learners alone. They work collegially with peers, family, and community, and they employ a variety of pedagogical strategies to enhance learner strengths and meet their needs.

**Kwayask Enikānapīt** (or quality leadership in education): Educational leadership is a relationship that exists between leader, teacher and learner wherein knowledge, skills and attitudes are shared and acquired by all. Leadership affects the delivery of programming in the school, the sharing of knowledge in the classroom and the environment in which teaching and learning take place.

**Kîksway Kâ Kakwe Kiskiyihtaman** (the processes of trying to know, gathering knowledge and answering the question *What are you trying to learn?): Acknowledging students’ unique positions and experiences, their sense of identity and their specific learning goals.

**Kwayask Ōma Kâ Ispayik** (the process of honouring what is right): Schools would celebrate language and culture, Elder leadership, traditional character development (respect, love/kindness, honour, humility, truth/honesty, courage, and wisdom) and relationships (parent/community engagement) in ways that would compliment academics.

**Ote Nikān** (the process of looking ahead into the future): This allows First Nations to determine the direction they are moving in, what their relationships will be within the global society and the responsibilities they will have in the future.
ACCOUNTABILITY IN FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

NOTES

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REFERENCES


