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Policy Trends and Tensions in Accountability for Educational Management and Services in Canada

Accountability structures and processes have become such an integral part of education policy development and implementation that Ranson (2003) argues, "accountability is no longer merely an important instrument or component within the system, but constitutes the system itself" (p. 459). This argument is supported by the growth of an orientation in public education reforms toward the premise that more accountable schools are better schools. Canada fits the global trend that levers educational reforms through accountability measures.

Les structures et les procédures de responsabilité sont devenues une partie tellement intégrante du développement et de la mise en oeuvre des politiques en matière d'éducation que Ranson (2003) maintient que la responsabilité n'est plus simplement une composante importante du système, mais elle constitue le système même (p.459, traduction). Les réformes dans l'éducation publique, de plus en plus orientées par l'idée qu'une école responsable, c'est une meilleure école, viennent appuyer cette affirmation. Le Canada s'inscrit dans cette tendance globale qui font passer les réformes en éducation par des mécanismes de responsabilité.

In this article we examine educational accountability policy trends across Canada's 13 jurisdictions (provinces and territories) from 1990 to 2003. We argue that policy developments in educational accountability in Canada are characterized by the coexistence of two accountability paradigms, economic-bureaucratic accountability and ethical-professional accountability (Spencer, 2004). We further argue that policy instruments associated with accountability (e.g., curriculum standards, standardized testing, school improvement planning, school choice) can only create a policy scaffolding through which alternative and potentially competing ideologies of accountability can be enacted in the process of implementation. Finally, we suggest that the patterns of account-

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ability policies emerging about education management contrast with those about education programs.

Educational accountability policies permeate the management, financial, instructional, professional, curriculum, and learning domains of the educational system. The diversity of these interactions creates an environment conducive to policy inconsistency and potentially incoherence. Public policy consistency has been argued to contribute significantly to effective policy implementation. Fuhrman (1993) and colleagues characterized the attempt to develop and enact coordinated policies focused on a common agenda for improvement and change as "systemic reform." Adams and Kirst (1999) offer similar arguments for coherence across the multiple domains of educational accountability policies.

> Internal consistency in accountability designs, such that the alignment among incentives, accountability mechanisms, principal-agent relationships, and the like is logically reinforcing. Misalignment among design factors, such as tight supervisory control over professionals, introduces internal contradictions that draw attention away from accountability goals. (p. 473)

Research in education reinforces the image of a coherent system as one in which a common framework aligns efforts toward shared goals, which in turn lead to school improvements (Leithwood, Fullan, & Watson, 2003). This consistency is often described as achieved through centralized control, but it can also be achieved as a dynamic outcome of collective dialog and decision-making among stakeholders in the education system (Ranson, 2003).

We conducted a logical policy analysis focused on the internal and horizontal consistency (Pal, 1997) of educational accountability policies. *Internal* consistency refers to the fit between three elements that characterize policy: the definition of a problem, the goals to be achieved, and the instruments adopted to resolve the problem and attain the goal. *Horizontal* consistency considers alignment across policy fields as a reflection of the underlying philosophy of a government as the principle agent of policy formation. *Vertical* consistency, which refers to the congruence of policy and practice, the traditional focus of policy implementation research, is being examined in a separate strand of the larger research study from which these data were drawn (http://crifpe.scedu.umontreal.ca:16080/gtrc/).

The data for this article were collected as part of a five-year pan-Canadian investigation of the work lives of public school teachers and principals and the policy and social conditions that are influencing their work. Policies were defined as official texts articulating the intentions of central authorities to guide the actions of participants in the educational system (Bascia, Cumming, Datnow, Leithwood, & Livingstone, 2005; Pal, 1997).

We divide our discussion into three major sections. First, we describe the conceptual framework for understanding educational accountability. Second, we report findings from our investigation in four themes: standards, locus of responsibility, measurement and reporting, and consequences and supports. Third, we discuss the state of educational accountability policy in Canada with special consideration to issues of policy coherence. Our intent is to contribute to the conceptual understanding of contemporary education accountability.

We do not attempt to explain the specific sociopolitical origins of the policy trends identified.

Conceptualizing Accountability

Accountability as a concept is seldom defined in the policy documents that guide its practice (Earl, 2001; Kuchapski, 1998; Ouston, Fidler, & Earley, 1998). It is often operationalized without an understanding of what it means or evidence of its effect on various parts of the system (Wagner, 1989). Definitional vagueness notwithstanding, accountability is consistently valued as a key element of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and choice in contemporary public policy discourse (Stein, 2001). Hence its advocates promote the benefits despite limited agreement on its fundamental purposes and practical applications (Earl, 2001). Consensus on the importance of accountability in public education masks the lack of consensus and competing agendas regarding the substance and form of accountability.

The concept of accountability seems clear in commonsense use. Someone accounts for his or her actions or the results of these actions to another agent. This process implies the production and communication of information relevant to the focus of the account. It also implies that those demanding the account will evaluate actions or results against some set of expectations (e.g., professional standards and public policy goals). Finally, depending on this judgment, consequences will ensue.

Accountability in public policy is not as straightforward. It requires specification of who will be accountable to whom in a particular policy sector, how that accountability process will be accomplished, and to what end. In public policy, these are political decisions that lead to alternative accountability policies and practices within and across sociopolitical contexts over time. There is no single way to operationalize accountability in public education or in any other public policy sector.

Confronted with an array of accountability policies and practices, analysts have attempted to bring conceptual order to the discussion by developing schemes for describing and classifying various manifestations of accountability. Several policy analysts describe and compare alternative approaches with accountability in terms of how they address a common set of basic questions (Leithwood & Earl, 2000; Ranson, 2003; Spencer, 2004; Wagner, 1989): Who is accountable? To whom is the account owed? What are being accounted for? What is the process and the purpose of the account? What are the consequences of the account? Responses to these questions draw attention to the participants and the policy instruments associated with varied accountability approaches.

Accountability policies and practices in education cluster into several conceptually and strategically distinct approaches (Leithwood & Earl, 2000; Levin, 2001; Ranson, 2003). For example, Leithwood and Earl and Leithwood, Edge, and Jantzi (1999) define four accountability approaches: management, decentralized or devolution, market, or professional. Ranson describes five "structures and codes of accountability," three of which are familiar in the public education sphere: professional (reliance on professional credentials and public trust); consumer (creating consumer choice in a competitive market of schools); and performative accountability (establishing external performance

standards for schools and students and mechanisms for monitoring, measuring, and reporting on results).

In addition to these descriptive typologies and frameworks for understanding and comparing alternative accountability approaches and practices, philosophical and political orientations have been employed to characterize the various approaches and tools (Blackmore, 1988; Kuchapski, 1998; Stein, 2001; Wagner, 1989). For example, Ranson (2003) argues that the most contemporary approaches to education accountability are manifestations of neo-liberal political thought embedded in a corporate mentality of institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Because philosophical orientations like neo-liberalism may transcend political affiliations, discussions of ideological foundations can be confounding. We submit that exploring policy approaches and instruments through which a philosophy is actually enacted in a jurisdiction will yield a better understanding of what is actually meant when accountability is described in those political terms.

There is a tendency in the contemporary discourse about education accountability (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Goodlad, 1997) to frame the discussion as a debate and conflict between two opposing political perspectives, one that emphasizes *capitalist imperatives* and the other *democratic imperatives* (Spencer, 2004). Although dichotomizing the alternatives to accountability may facilitate debate, it does not accurately portray the practice of educational accountability systems. Our analysis of accountability trends across Canada will show that these areas of vagueness provide opportunity for alternative accountability approaches to coexist in relation to varied dimensions of the education system, and sometimes intersect unpredictably on the same components of the system. The policy instruments that are implemented can be mobilized in various ways such that the same policy instrument, like teaching standards, might be employed in ways that reflect alternate poles of the policy debate. Nonetheless, classification is useful in helping to conceptualize, describe, and analyze accountability policies and practices in education, as long as we do not treat the conceptual frameworks as evidence of actual accountability systems at work. For our analysis we adopted a conceptual framework developed by Spencer (2004) as a lens through which to explore the world of education accountability polices across Canada.

Building on the work of Stein (2001) and Wagner (1989), Spencer (2004) proposes an analytical framework that encompasses the basic concepts underlying alternative philosophies or approaches to accountability. The framework is "intended to frame some of the ways in which policy research might be conceptualized and against which empirical data might be analyzed" (p. 30). Spencer further develops two accountability orientations originally proposed by Blackmore (1988), Economic-Bureaucratic Accountability (EBA) and Ethical-Professional Accountability (EPA), with the understanding that accountability in practice does not pristinely conform to either model. The dichotomy (see Figure 1) does not account for the contradictions embedded in the enactment of educational accountability (Kuchapski, 1998). Hence the distinction of each orientation must be considered at the conceptual level with the explicit understanding that some accountability practices can and do fit into both

Accountability	Ethical-Professional	Economic-Bureaucratic
Focus	Means-based	Results-based
Foundation	Public democratic discourse	Private economic discourse
Emphasis	Accountable FOR a process	Accountable TO an external party
Responsibility	Moral professional collective	Individuals are explicitly identified
Professional Knowledge	Individual and shared part of process	Compartmentalized as part of individual responsibility

Figure 1. Accountability dichotomy.

orientations and that it is both the purposes and the uses of these practices that determine their relation to this dichotomy.

EBA assumes a private principle where an economic discourse exists for the collective good. This accountability orientation reflects a business metaphor that emphasizes a consumer-producer relationship and the delineation of responsibility for action. Blackmore (1988) explains that the "primary concern for economic accountability is not process but outcome. It is driven by utilitarian goals regarding the maximizing of benefits with limited resources" (p. 35). This is a results-based accountability where defined responsible individuals are accountable to an audience. The motivation underpinning the responsibility is placed in a reaction to the evidence, that is, the perception of performance given the results. The important characteristic of EBA is that the account is provided to an external stakeholder, be it in a hierarchal bureaucracy or to a client base. The results are what matters, and the process is validated only by performance.

EPA assumes a public principle where a democratic discourse exists for the collective good. This orientation is a process-based accountability where the means are emphasized over the ends of schooling (Davis, 1998). Hence unlike EBA, responsibility is not delineated to individuals, but is considered a moral professional obligation of all stakeholders. EPA emphasizes giving an account of ongoing practices (e.g., efforts to maintain safe schools) and conditions (e.g., professional credentials) that are collectively recognized as important and necessary to the accomplishment of consensually defined ends or goals. It assumes that relevant stakeholders will engage in shared processes both to define and to contribute toward common purposes established with reference to shared ethical-moral principles. The professional standards that embody this ethical foundation call for collective responsibility and mutual accountability in addition to individual accountability.

These two orientations are not mutually exclusive as their purposes and mechanisms overlap in practice. They address the same educational phenomena from different points of reference, placing value on different points and people in the system—EBA on output and EPA on process. This dichotomy should not be conceptualized as polarized extremes, rather as coterminous ideological orientations to the same educational accountability field that coexist in a more fluid and dynamic state of differentiation and interaction consistent with the notion "that education and schooling are complex, multi-

dimensional, and contradictory endeavours" (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 212). We employed Spencer's (2004) framework of these two models to examine pan-Canadian trends in educational accountability policies from 1990 to 2003 and found that the results were best described using the four thematic policy trends that organize the following sections of this article.

Standards

Standards are required for performance-based accountability systems because performance requires a benchmark against which to be judged (Leithwood, 2004). Standardization trends across Canadian educational jurisdictions include core curriculum, images of teacher quality, and targets for student achievement. We defer discussion of standards for student achievement to the subsection on measurement and reporting.

Curriculum Standards

In the 1970s provincial education agencies produced curriculum guidelines, expecting educators to use them to develop local scope and sequences of learning objectives and subject content by grade or division level. Since the early 1980s, the general trend has been toward a centralized outcomes-based core curriculum. Common learning outcomes for each grade level in each subject are prescribed in provincially mandated curriculum documents, and latitude for students' choice of courses is more limited. The argument for both these extremes is the same, equity. The rationale for a decentralized curriculum is to increase the relevance of education to the local context. A curriculum that focuses on local priorities is reasoned to be more equitable than one that is developed elsewhere and superimposed. Conversely, the rationale for a top-down core curriculum to which teachers across the jurisdiction are required to adhere is that it promotes equity while ensuring quality. All students, irrespective of their location in the region, should receive the same education if the same curriculum is taught, which theoretically allows for equal opportunities and outcomes. This rationale extends into regionalism in Western and Atlantic Canada, where jurisdictions have united into consortia and developed standardized learning outcomes for their region. Curriculum standardization enables government authorities to claim that their core curriculum is of equal quality to that offered elsewhere Canada. Notwithstanding participation in regional curriculum consortia, some jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan and the Yukon maintain a strong commitment to local modification of centrally defined curriculum expectations.

Standards for the Teaching Profession

Standards for the teaching profession have been developed over the past decade in several provinces. The development of professional standards is linked to, but not contingent on, the establishment of professional governing bodies for teachers. The governments of British Columbia and Ontario each established a College of Teachers empowered to certify teachers, to accredit teacher education programs, to handle issues of professional conduct, and to develop standards of practice for teachers. In BC the College of Teachers developed *Standards for the Competence, Education and Professional Responsibility of Educators*. In Ontario the College of Teachers developed *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. In

Alberta there is no professional college. However, the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards developed and publicizes the *Standards* of teaching practice for Alberta. These examples reflect an increasing emphasis on more explicit definitions of teacher professionalism in terms of professional knowledge and skills, not just in terms of credentials acquired through completing teacher education programs. Standards of practice for teachers create expectations for how teachers should perform their responsibilities in schools. In one case (Ontario) the *Standards of Practice* have been incorporated into the accreditation process for teacher education programs and into a provincially standardized teacher appraisal process. Although the provincial governments support the development of professional standards for the teachers, the authority to enforce the standards remains unclear. Here a split emerges between standards that apply to the professional knowledge and expertise required for competent practice, and those that apply to professional conduct in relations with students and colleagues. Disciplinary procedures and consequences exist to handle allegations of professional misconduct; however, policies to assess and act on judgments of individual teacher professional competence in relation to centralized professional standards of practice are less evident at this time.

The development and enforcement of standards of professional practice may follow an EPA orientation to the extent that control over the content and use of these standards rests with the profession. The professional standards embody shared value beliefs and practices that merge individual professional accountability with a shared accountability. The standards of practice set benchmarks that in principle serve as a point of reference by which educators can self-reflect and measure their own thinking and practice. EPA expects them to do this because they identify with the profession as represented by their professional body that endorses the standards. The standards emphasize professional behaviors and knowledge, and not indicators and measures of the results of teachers' individual or collective professional actions in the classroom and schools as would be the case in EBA. The construction of standards of practice, however, also resonates with EBA if the locus of responsibility and accountability remains focused on the individual and if control over the use of the standards as a measure of teaching competence resides with sources other than teachers and their professional agencies.

Locus of Responsibility

Accountability policies and practices construct relations between various agents in the education system. At a minimum these involve relations of space (i.e., between organizational entities and people at varying levels of the system), status (i.e., who is demanding the account and who is providing it), and time (i.e., is it an account of what will be done, or an account of what has been accomplished?). In this section we consider shifts in the locus of responsibility for accountability from the perspective of those who *owe* accountability and from those to whom accountability is *owed*. We take up questions of the *what* and *means* more fully in the subsequent section on measurement and reporting.

The directionality and locus of responsibility are explicit in the descriptions of accountability policies operating in an EBA-oriented bureaucratic hierarchy and market models. For example, in bureaucratic models the responsibility is to higher levels, whereas for market models it is the provider to the consumer.

In EPA there are multiple directions reflecting the emphasis on collective accountability. Collective responsibility means individuals hold one another to account because of their interdependence and links in the system, the outcomes of which are contingent on the interconnected contributions of various agents in that system. This shared accounting process allows one individual to identify other individuals who are not fulfilling their responsibility, theoretically producing a collective accountability between hierarchical levels and roles of the system and a reciprocal one between them.

Collective accountability assumes that all individuals share an ethic of practice in their approach to work that results in two actions. First, they will self-account; and second, they will stimulate others working in the system to engage in the same ethic of practice. This assumption of collective responsibility that serves as the foundation of EPA is susceptible to individual indifference and is consequently the most vulnerable part of this accountability model. We organize our discussion of pan-Canadian policy shifts in the locus of responsibility for education provision and accountability under four subtopics: centralization of governance, funding and the administration-education divide, central support versus quality control, and the school as a unit of accountability.

Centralization of Governance
In the 1990s all the Canadian provinces reduced the number of school districts, centralizing the governance of schools (except Prince Edward Island, which had only three school districts). For example, Ontario amalgamated 129 school boards into 72 district school boards, and in Alberta the number of boards was reduced from 141 to 71. The common rationale for amalgamation was to increase efficiency and reduce costs by combining administrative and support services, by closing underused facilities and maximizing the use of others, and by distributing the delivery of expensive programs (e.g., special education) over wider jurisdictions. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan government efforts to mandate amalgamation were slowed by strong political support for local governance at the community level. The provincial governments opted for voluntary, albeit government-supported, amalgamation of school boards over time. For example, in November 2001 the new NDP government announced a forced amalgamation of school divisions from 54 to 37 divisions through Bill 14, the Public Schools Modernization Act (http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/schools/amalgamation/). The amalgamation trend is not evident in the territories, where the numbers and configuration of school boards are quite different and where local control remains a strong philosophy of the central governments as well as in the communities.

Concurrent with the trend toward centralization of school district administration and services through the creation of larger administrative units, all provinces and territories have mandated the establishment of local school advisory councils. Unlike the traditional parent-teacher associations, school councils are formally required, constituted, and regulated under provincial or territorial legislation and authority. Parents and local community representatives dominate council membership, with minority and/or nonvoting representation of school personnel representatives. In Canada the school council phenomenon emerged amid a policy discourse that emphasized site-based

management and greater local parent/community involvement in school decision-making, albeit in the context of centrally mandated standards and outcomes. Mechanisms and authority for site-based management in the context of externally/centrally prescribed standards, resources, and results-oriented accountability requirements are in principle compatible with centralized governance and an EBA model. The notion of site-based management, however, dissipated when it became apparent that councils in most jurisdictions were granted only advisory powers and had no real decision-making authority over policies mandated at the government and district levels, nor over plans and decisions required of school personnel at their level (school councils in the Yukon and Quebec have more authority in school decisions). It can be argued that the establishment of school councils is a policy instrument to make school personnel more accountable to their customers at the local level for school decisions in externally prescribed parameters, for school results using externally defined student performance indicators, and school goals and plans, regardless of whether the input/advice of council members has any real influence on school plans. The extent to which school councils actually communicate with and represent some broader school constituency of parents, taxpayers, businesses, and so on, however, is debatable.

Funding

In the 1980s and early 1990s school districts in most jurisdictions were authorized to raise local taxes in order to supplement the monies allocated from the Ministry of Education. School boards had greater resources and flexibility to mount local initiatives in response to local interests and needs. A consequence of this type of funding model is that it leads to real and perceived disparities in per capita funding between districts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s several governments repealed the powers of locally determined taxation in an effort to standardize per-pupil financial inputs for education, whereas others like Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Quebec continued to enable generation of local school district revenue through local property tax levies. In addition to ensuring a more standardized per-pupil funding policy, regulations on the use of special-purpose grants were also delineated. The provincial governments increasingly prescribe education budgets. At least two provinces, BC and Alberta, however, have since reversed these centralized policy directions and have reintroduced local taxation powers and more discretion at the school district level over the use of education funds.

The rationale for a funding model where districts and schools receive equivalent per-pupil funding is to promote equity in programs and services irrespective of the location and property wealth of the school and district. In provinces like Nova Scotia, where school boards still have the power to raise funds through local taxation, criticism persists that the system creates disparity. Conversely, control over funding at the local and district level is also argued on equity grounds, because meeting the needs of the students may involve varying costs depending on varying demographies, geographies, and the conditions of school facilities.

These shifts in the locus of responsibility for education governance and funding draw attention to something we characterize as the administration-education divide. The trend is toward differentiation between responsibility for

management of the financial and administrative functions of public education and for the delivery of education programs. On the management side, governments and education agencies are in principle responsible for providing adequate funding for the delivery of public education programs and services. Funding policies are typically embellished by commitments to *equity* in financial support for students regardless of school location and students' characteristics, and *efficiency* in the allocation of available financial resources. However, the kinds of accountability processes associated with education budgets and expenditures in recent years across the country have emphasized the efficiency goals over the equity goals for funding. Ministries and departments of education in some provinces (e.g., Ontario, Alberta) are required to produce annual financial "report cards" that publicly declare expenditures in accordance with provincially approved budgets and funding categories. Universally, districts and schools are now being required to prepare annual public financial reports that detail their expenditures in prescribed budget amounts and lines. The general trend, apart from public reporting, is that the locus of responsibility for determining the amount and use of education funds at the district and school levels has become more centralized, although local taxation to supplement provincial funding remains or has been reinstated in most provinces. The responsibility of school system authorities is reduced mainly to accounting for the allocation of fiscal resources, not to decisions about the local distribution and use of funds. This is clearly an EBA approach to fiscal accountability. Failure to comply with provincially mandated budgets and spending guidelines has been coupled with government intervention whereby ministries of education appoint government agents temporarily (Ontario) or indefinitely (Nova Scotia) to take over responsibility for managing district finances and operations. These individuals report to the government instead of to the boards or district administrators.

Accountability mechanisms linked to education funding equity and quality goals are less evident across the country. At the provincial level the most common mechanism takes the form of occasional provincial task forces or commissions whose mission is to review the state of education funding through public consultation (e.g., the Rozinski Report in Ontario, the Funding Review Workgroup in Nova Scotia). The absence of systematic accountability mechanisms for these aspects of funding have led to highly publicized and politicized challenges to provincial authority and funding provisions by some districts, which argue that funding levels are insufficient to meet the special needs of the communities they serve (e.g., public school boards in Toronto, Hamilton, and Ottawa). An interesting alternative approach to public accountability for equity and results of funding for education has evolved through the actions of a non-governmental parent-community organization in Ontario. People for Education, which arose as a grass-roots education lobby group in response to massive funding cuts to education by the Conservative government in the 1990s, now publicly reports on their annual provincial survey of elementary and secondary schools regarding the status and funding of programs, staffing, and resources at the school level. Thus accountability for funding outcomes, particularly in regard to government commitments to edu-

cation quality and to equity in resources, continues primarily to occur through the political process, and less through the bureaucratic process.

Central Support Versus Quality Control

A third dimension of change in patterns of responsibility for education provisions across Canada relates to ideological shifts and variations in how provincial governments define their role vis-à-vis the roles of local school system authorities and the communities they serve. Increasing centralization of governance, curriculum, and more prescriptive education financing has cast most central education authorities into the role of quality-control agents responsible for setting policy, goals, and performance standards and for monitoring local compliance and performance in reference to centrally determined criteria. It is not that professional support is not provided, but rather that it occurs mainly in the interests of provincially defined and/or aligned goals and standards. The responsibility of district and school agents in this scenario is primarily to carry out external policies and to achieve externally aligned goals and standards of performance.

Although this centralizing trend in responsibility is pervasive across Canadian jurisdictions, deep commitments to a more service-oriented government role in support of local district/school and community autonomy, interests, and needs remains active in some regions. The government of the Northwest Territories, for example, has been committed to a philosophy of locally controlled, community and culture-based education since the 1980s. The Saskatchewan provincial government similarly has a long history of support for a community-based educational policy that promotes flexibility in the content of provincially mandated curriculum to respect local conditions. Periodic proposals from the government, as well as some district officials, to centralize and standardize governance, education programming, and the assessment and reporting of student outcomes have been resisted by education bureaucrats, professionals, and the public. Government commitments to local autonomy and locally relevant education programming are linked to particular geographic, social, economic, and political realities. The settlement of Aboriginal land claims, Aboriginal community rights to self-governance, and desires for cultural and linguistic survival and development, for example, restrict possibilities for standardization and centralization tendencies in jurisdictions with substantial Aboriginal populations. Government efforts to diversify and develop sustainable local employment opportunities in isolated and often remote rural communities, and to stem the migration of rural residents to urban centers, also contribute to the government's emphasis on responsiveness to local interests and community-based delivery of education. The various orientations to the responsibility of the central government in these jurisdictions position them as potentially accountable for the flexibility and support they provide to local education authorities and communities to ensure that education programs and services fit with local needs. The mechanisms through which government accountability for more decentralized authority, programming, and support services is achieved are less clear. Representation of community stakeholder interests on policy and program development work groups are examples of the participatory structures that resonate with an EPA accountability orientation.

Those governments that have historically been strongly committed to local variability and support for local adaptations in education are nonetheless responding to the pan-Canadian trends toward universal standards and results-oriented approaches to education accountability. For example, these governments use the official adoption of external curriculum frameworks and standards to demonstrate to their citizens that provincially mandated core education programs are as good as those offered elsewhere in Canada in coordination with locally determined programming variations. In some of these jurisdictions government authorities encourage, if not impose, an overlay of EBA-type management systems on existing local decision-making structures and processes. Further study is needed to understand better how the tensions between these two policy directions and accountability models are being negotiated in distinct jurisdictions.

Schools as the Units of Accountability
The emergence of schools and districts as units of accountability localize responsibility to those institutions. Although education acts and regulations may have defined the professional responsibilities of individualized roles (e.g., boards, trustees, superintendents, principals, and teachers), they did not necessarily define the organizational responsibilities with expectations for accountability of the primary units of public education delivery: districts and schools. One of the significant trends that has accompanied the shift toward centralization and the specification of common standards for education provision and outcomes (i.e., student performance) is accountability mechanisms that designate and hold schools and districts publicly responsible for the performance of students and educators in their jurisdictions. Governments mandate the production of school and district plans with performance-based goals, targets, timelines, monitoring procedures, and expectations for regular status reports on progress. The centralization of governance and articulation of common standards has created a political and organizational structure in which there is a logical tendency for central governments to regard intermediary organizational units such as districts and schools as more explicitly accountable than before. The logic is both practical and ideological. It addresses realities like the government cannot solely manage accountability at the individual educator level, and that student performance is not a consequence of individual teachers' efforts, but more correlated with school level goal consensus and collective effort (Rosenholtz, 1989). Although a similar logic can be extended for districts, as noted above, the trend across the country has been to emphasize district-level accountability for fiscal responsibility, not for evidence of education quality.

The trend positioning schools and districts as units of accountability is pervasive across Canada, with some exceptions. The Saskatchewan Department of Education has steadfastly resisted calls from some stakeholder interests, including districts, to disaggregate and publish student test results at the school and district levels. The argument is that this would promote inappropriate school and district comparison and ranking by the public on the narrow basis of student test results. Alternatively, such data are used to inform local decisions about directions for improvement and not for evaluative judgments about quality. In effect, the argument is that schools and districts should

be held accountable for evidence of efforts to improve, not for results per se, an EPA orientation. It follows that Saskatchewan education authorities have invested in professional development to assist local educators and communities to interpret test data and other performance indicators for planning improvement over publicizing results.

Measurement and Reporting

Measurement and reporting refers to the policy means by which certain education stakeholders make accounts to others. This is a key component of accountability mechanisms because it can reflect both EBA and EPA orientations in the system. Here we comment briefly on pan-Canadian education accountability measurement and reporting trends and patterns in four areas: standardized testing (a standard test that is administered across the province); strategic planning and reporting by education authorities at all levels; participation as an accountability strategy; and the measurement and reporting of teacher quality.

Standardized Testing

Over the last decade, almost all Canadian provinces and territories have adopted standardized testing. The newest territory, Nunavut, is still working out its assessment strategy and PEI does not administer provincial tests. The tests are aligned to provincial curricula and are administered to students to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge and skills as prescribed in the standardized curriculum (Ben Jaafar & Earl, in press). The results of the tests are intended to serve as a measure of the quality of education and as a key indicator that can be used in reporting on the performance of students and teachers.

The use of test results as performance indicators aligns with the EBA orientation. It fits with an accountability system that focuses on the outcomes of the system while allowing local flexibility with the process. The process described by factors such as the adequacy of resources, school capacity, teacher capacity, situation, student motivation, and physical plant are not targeted as relevant in measuring and reporting success. Standardized testing orients accountability only to outcomes that can be conveniently measured and diverts attention from other purposes and goals for education such as good citizenship, social skills, technological competence, and preparation for employment.

Performance Planning and Reporting by Education Authorities

The accountability trends in Canadian education echo similar trends that are pervading all spheres of public policy, institutions, and services. This is most evident in jurisdictions where provincial governments have adopted omnibus legislation requiring the development and implementation of new accountability procedures in all government departments and agencies. BC's Budget Transparency and Accountability Act (2001), for example, legislated three-year service performance plans and annual progress reports from all government ministries. In accordance with Alberta's Government Accountability Act (1993), Alberta Education produces three-year business plans and annual progress reports on the status and directions for education. Requirements for these accountability plans typically include the specification of measurable goals, action plans with timelines, performance measures, procedures for

monitoring and evaluation progress and results, costs alignment, and public reports. Similar government-wide legislation exists or has been proposed in other jurisdictions (e.g., the Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador). One implication of this trend is that central education authorities are increasingly becoming objects of accountability reporting to provincial political authorities, and not simply the source of accountability demands at lower levels of the education system. Symbolically at least, this represents another shift in the locus of responsibility in education. It signifies that provincial governments no longer rely simply on their trust in the expertise and professionalism of education civil servants to satisfy provincial and public education expectations. The purposes and the form of these government mandated planning, monitoring, and reporting requirements are more aligned with an EBA orientation. Provincial expectations for performance planning, monitoring, and reporting are echoed throughout the education system at lower levels such as district, school, and teacher level (e.g., personnel appraisal in some jurisdictions). However, not all governments have enacted accountability legislation that transcends public education.

Accountability Through Stakeholders' Participation
A common way governments attempt to make education policy, programs, and services at all levels accountable to the public is through representative participation of key stakeholder groups in policy and program development, implementation, planning, decision-making, and monitoring. Conventional political and organizational strategies for enabling this form of accountability include locally elected school boards; the formation of multi-constituency committees, task forces, and commissions (e.g., to advise or report on policy); and the use of consultation processes (e.g., hearings and soliciting input on draft policies) to elicit public input. In terms of accountability, the premise is that government accountability is accomplished by setting up structures and processes that enable the input from multiple interest groups to inform education policies. This form of political accountability allows the government to demonstrate, at least symbolically, that it is being attentive and responsive to all constituent interests, an EPA orientation. It is not about accountability for the results of policy implementation per se.

Several trends can be noted in regard to the strategy of accountability through participation. Some of these rely on participation as the key strategy for public accountability such as establishing school councils, marginalizing teachers' unions, systemic inclusion of targeted community constituencies (e.g., First Nations), and multi-agency partnerships such as in Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, where efforts have been made to develop school facilities as sites for integrated education, health, social services, cultural, and recreational services and activities.

Quality of Teachers
The growing presence of standards for the teaching profession, both in regard to professional conduct/competence and in regard to teacher training and certification, is accompanied by new forms of measurement and reporting in some jurisdictions across the country. In Ontario, for example, one of the first major accomplishments of the Ontario College of Teachers (established 1996)

was to develop a set of *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. The *Standards* are organized under five broad headings, each subcategorized to describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers are expected to have in each domain. Initially, the *Standards* were free-floating, with no processes directly associated with them. The *Standards* have since been employed by the College as a framework for accreditation in teacher education programs, thus requiring all faculties of education to provide documentary evidence of how they address, although not necessarily attain, the *Standards* in their initial teacher training. In 2001 Ontario passed legislation colloquially referred to as teacher testing. The qualifying test for initial teacher certification following the completion of an accredited teacher education program was only one component of this legislation. The Ontario qualifying test for new teachers was introduced as a quality assurance device exemplifying a new form of measuring and reporting on teacher quality in Canada. In 2003 the new government ended the initial teacher certification test in the light of the costs, the lack of evidence demonstrating that the test screened out incompetent teacher candidates, and a general absence of support for the test.

This legislation also introduced a mandatory recertification cycle for teachers, requiring evidence of completion of a certain number of hours of accredited professional development activities. The College of Teachers was authorized to administer the recertification process. In December 2004, under the leadership of the Liberal government, legislation repealing the teacher test was passed and the recertification programs were terminated. Both initiatives were deemed disrespectful of teachers' professionalism.

Professional development recertification mechanisms support an EPA version of quality control, because they do not focus on evidence of professional performance, but rather on evidence of ongoing professional learning through activities that have been certified as consistent with the professional *Standards of Practice*. The teachers' federations fought this policy, and the faculties of education did not participate in accreditation for this continuing education process. Eventually, the Professional Learning Program (PLP) was repealed. A final component of the teacher accountability legislation was the introduction of a standardized teacher appraisal system for practicing teachers. Implementation of the new appraisal process began in the 2003-2004 school year. It required all teachers to undergo a formal appraisal by school administrators that includes a regular cycle of classroom observations. Significantly, the indicators or criteria for appraisal are linked to the *Standards of Practice*. How this will play out over time and how the data from the teacher appraisals will be used remains to be seen. Unlike the professional development policy, the teacher appraisal policy is more clearly focused on evidence of performance and competence, which reflects an EBA orientation. Responsibility for conducting the assessments and applying any consequences rests with employers and management, not with teachers or their professional organizations. The policy developments in Ontario about the measurement and reporting on teacher quality do not represent a pan-Canadian trend at present, although they are symptomatic of the more general push for greater accountability.

Consequences

The effect of accountability policies on educators and other participants in the education system is linked to the kinds of consequences, positive and negative, associated with the enactment of these policies. Consequences include shame or pride associated with the publication of school test results and formal labeling of schools (e.g., exemplary or failing), firing principals, closing and "reconstituting" schools, and financial rewards for "successful" schools and targeted assistance for struggling schools. In this section we further elucidate the division between accountability for management and finances and for the provision of education services in terms of consequences.

Management

Some provincial governments have introduced consequences attached to the management of education such as the threat of punitive measures for school boards who "mismanage" funds. Mismanagement is defined as failing to adhere to budgetary limits set by the Ministry of Education. In BC and Ontario, intervention by the Ministry includes audits of district finances and the appointment of provincial supervisors who temporarily assume financial and management control of a school district. In Nova Scotia, the province took over the management of one board indefinitely and has threatened to take over another. These are bureaucratic tools that emphasize EBA-type efficiency with a focus on compliance related to the delivery of education services, and not on performance outcomes.

Educational Services

The consequences attached to educational services are not salient in the Canadian educational context. Increasingly, schools and districts are required by provincial authorities to produce and submit annual improvement plans that are justified partly in terms of school results on provincially mandated tests. Mandated improvement plans create an opportunity for schools to define their own problems and solutions in relation to prescribed indicators of performance. This consequence can be viewed as the documentation of actions locally undertaken to improve student and school performance. At the time of writing, no provinces or territories had accountability policies in place mandating explicit sanctions or supports directly associated with the failure of schools to meet the goals set in these plans, or with their success. The dependence on the internal professionalism of local educators feeds the expectation that educators will take action to address perceived needs as established through dialogs on the results. Although the required reports of performance on provincially prescribed indicators fall in an EBA orientation, the consequences currently operate under an EPA orientation. Local educators are held responsible for considering the current situation and for making appropriate changes with no externally imposed consequences for success or failure in the enactment of their plans.

New provincial policies that enable greater school choice and the consequences or rewards associated with the choice have cropped up in a few provinces. The government of BC, for example, relaxed boundary restrictions on student attendance as a way of increasing choice, at least in urban areas. The Alberta and Quebec governments subsidize private schools (e.g., provision of

up to 60% of per-pupil funding given to public schools in Alberta). Because the allocation of funds to a school or district is on a per-pupil basis, losing students translates into lost revenue for the school or district. Conversely, the school or district receiving more students is rewarded with more funding. Experimentation with charter schools is restricted to Alberta, but only a limited basis (about a dozen schools), with no significant effect on public school enrollment (Bosetti, 2001). These market approaches to accountability, theoretically driven by client satisfaction with school performance and school-school competition for students, exemplify an EBA orientation. Although policies enabling parent/student choice between schools, districts, and school systems (public, private) exist in varying forms across Canada, accountability mechanisms like market-oriented choice policies are not presently well developed in Canadian education (Community-University Partnership [CUP] for the Study of Children, 2003). Historically, choice between public school systems across Canada has been institutionalized along denominational (secular and Catholic) and linguistic lines (English and French medium), whereas choice in particular school systems has been created through program alternatives rather than by stressing competition based on educational performance. Choice in these circumstances operates more in terms of parent/student prerogatives about the type of educational experience they prefer than in terms of evidence of differences in school performance. The marketplace of school choice can serve to support a system reflecting an EBA/EPA hybrid. Schools compete for students in a marketplace, which reflects an EBA orientation. But the accountability reports may tend to emphasize the kind of education services they deliver (and their fit with community interests), which reflects an EPA orientation where more than indicators of performance effectiveness are valued. This balance may change if provincial governments, districts, and schools continue actively to publicize and link student results on standardized tests to choice policy mechanisms.

Although there are few consequences for educators, schools, or districts for the quality of their performance in the delivery of educational services, there are consequences for students linked to their performance under provincial learning standards. In most jurisdictions the requirements for high school graduation now include some form of provincial examinations. The consequence for students of doing poorly on these exit examinations vary from not graduating as in the case of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, or of substantially reducing their final passing grade for their final course as in the case of Alberta's grade 12 graduation examinations. Supports in place for failing to pass these exit exams include such interventions as the opportunity to retake the exams, assistance in preparing for exams, and even a special course in lieu of the exam for students who fail the exam multiple times. The high stakes for students in these systems do not fit neatly into the EBA or EPA models of accountability.

The ambiguity of how the consequences for students are interpreted is not simply a semantic issue. The rationales for adopting various policies are not grounded in a single accountability model, which leads to confusion when attempting to understand the system. When individuals in the system have given conceptions of their responsibilities and how these fit into the larger

context, there are implications when they work with other individuals and organizations in the system whose conceptions are rooted in a separate model. Educators will behave differently in schools if they consider the high stakes attached to student performance to be a quality control mechanism that reflects their teaching, as opposed to believing that it is a mechanism to hold students responsible for their own learning.

Canadian Educational Accountability: A Hybrid Model

In our analysis of trends in education accountability policies and practices across Canada, we highlight four major themes: (a) standardization; (b) shifts in the locus and direction of responsibility; (c) new requirements for measurement and reporting; and (d) the emergence of consequences linked to the substance of accountability reports. Government efforts to centralize control by consolidating districts, exerting greater control over education funding, requiring more standardized curricula, and even setting standards for teaching practice and pupil achievement do not dictate the accountability system. They create a policy scaffolding in which alternative accountability approaches can be operationalized. The true character of the accountability system manifests itself through what is measured and reported, by whom, to whom, and the consequences attached to these accounts. In our analysis we sought to demonstrate how two approaches to education accountability have evolved together across Canada over the past decade in this emerging education policy scaffolding.

We provide evidence to support an overall trend toward a results-oriented EBA approach with EPA process-oriented operational features. One key conclusion from our analysis is that the application of the EBA model penetrates more deeply in some domains of the education system than in others, where the rhetoric and even the reporting of results is displaced in practice by the parallel, and in certain respects competing EPA model. By the same token, the emergence of new organizational forms and policies (e.g., colleges of teachers, standards of practice) that could lead to the development and enactment of more robust and powerful EPA practices has yet to be realized despite the existence of the organizational and policy scaffoldings.

Although the EBA model currently dominates the accountability policy discourse, our analysis illuminates how the two accountability models coexist, particularly in regard to accountability for education management and for professional services. In the late 1990s and early 21st century, Canadian jurisdictions have increasingly differentiated between the service of education at the local level for which school educators are responsible, and the management of the district's finances and resources for which district and administrators are responsible. The trend in Canada is in flux with respect to the locus of responsibility for management of funding and resources. In some jurisdictions districts or boards are accountable for respecting and reporting on prescribed budget line items. Explicit consequences for failure to comply with provincial requirements governing the management of education funding are being invoked. In other jurisdictions districts have greater fiscal flexibility, with increased emphasis on accountability for the expenditures to the central governments. Both trends fit in the EBA model where predetermined budgets are allocated, and schools, boards, or districts are responsible for reporting to

the hierarchy that these budgets and guidelines governing the allocation of resources are respected.

Given that fiscal accountability is rooted in an EBA framework and administratively compartmentalized as distinct from education services in the system, we can consider accountability for education services separately. The split between management and education services and the tension between an EBA approach and an EPA approach surfaces when we attend to the consequences attached to the accountability mechanisms for management and education services. As noted above, current accountability policies for education services across Canada focus strongly on the measurement and public reporting of standardized assessments of student performance on tests linked to centrally mandated curriculum expectations. However, there are few, if any, direct consequences associated with the level of performance reported for individual teachers, schools, or districts. In effect, what appears to be a scaffolding for an EBA approach focused on results actually shifts into a system reliance on the professionalism of local teachers, principals, and district personnel to react to the needs identified by the results-oriented accountability measures, which is an EPA approach.

The forms of accountability currently emphasized about the quality of teacher practice provide further evidence for the dominance of the EPA model for accountability of education services. Notwithstanding the development and adoption of professional standards of practice in several Canadian provinces, accountability for teachers' professional competence is primarily defined in terms of procedures for certifying teacher quality through the accreditation of initial and continuing teacher education programs and documentation of teachers' participation in ongoing professional development. Teachers' professional accountability remains situated firmly in the EPA paradigm and not in a results-oriented EBA approach for teacher quality. This is nowhere more apparent than in the application of high-stakes consequences for students who fail, with few or no consequences for the teachers who fail them. Although this fact points to current limits of the EBA model in teaching practice, it also speaks to the absence of formalized collective responsibility in EPA genuinely to ensure professional competence in practice, not only on paper. The (con)fusion of the two models in a given system is problematic for service providers who need to understand and function in a system and for the service recipients who need to appreciate and understand their role in the system.

Our examination of internal and horizontal policy cohesiveness identifies a marked division between the policies governing Canadian educational accountability. The centralization of governance, standardization of curriculum and professional expectations, construction of hierarchical responsibility, and the measurement and reporting of specific outputs and the consequences all fit in an EBA model. But the professional expectations, construction of responsibility for services, and support for improvement fit in an EPA model. It would be naïve to think that either the EBA or the EPA models will or should be the all-encompassing and solitary approach to accountability. The two models represent competing philosophical and political alternatives. We expect that both will continue to coexist in a dynamic relationship in policy rhetoric and practice in varying patterns in whatever domains of the education system

become targets for scrutiny and active accountability. The effectiveness, advantages, and disadvantages of any accountability policies and practices, however, should not be taken for granted. Given the amount of talk, money, and energy expended on accountability in education in our current era, assumptions about how accountability policies operate in practice need to be systematically questioned and analyzed both theoretically and empirically.

The empirical data for the analysis presented in this article are a set of 25- to 60-page narratives of educational policy change at the government level, one for each of the 13 provinces and territories that comprise Canada. The policy narratives cover the period 1990-2003 for each jurisdiction. The narratives were constructed by four research teams representing six universities from regions of the country, with each team taking responsibility for three to four provinces or territories. The policy narratives were developed primarily from current and historical documentary data available through archives and Web sites of ministries of education and related government education units, provincial professional organizations, and public interest groups (teachers' federations, trustees' associations), academic research in universities, and the news media. In this article we take a pan-Canadian look at policy trends associated with accountability using the policy narratives as our database. Accountability was one of 10 pan-Canadian policy themes identified in an initial analysis of common focuses of policy debate and change over the period covered. Methodologically, we undertook the following steps. First, we reviewed all the policy narratives to gain a sense of the whole. From this initial review we identified four major policy trends across the country: the emergence of standards (e.g., for curriculum, for the teaching profession); shifts in the locus of responsibility for education provision and accountability (e.g., centralization of governance, control over education finances, quality control versus support functions of central administration); change in measurement and reporting mechanisms (e.g., standardized testing, district/school strategic plans and performance reports, stakeholder participation); and consequences and support linked to accountability expectations, measures, and reports. We revisited the policy narratives and developed analytical memos that qualitatively summarized the empirical findings for each province in these four areas, and this included interpretive commentaries linked to the conceptual framework. In this article we highlight key findings from our analysis in each of the four areas—standards, locus of responsibility, measurement and reporting, consequences and support—and provide an integrated discussion of these findings in relation to the conceptual framework of ethical-professional and economic-bureaucratic approaches to accountability.

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