

# Evaluation policies and accountability in education — subsidies for an Ibero-American debate

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**ABSTRACT:**

This text is developed around three essential aspects: a concise presentation and discussion of the concept of accountability and associated concepts; a debate on the application and transposition from the theoretical-conceptual ideas to a set of legal regulations, which are relatively recent to education in Portugal; and finally, a brief look at the problem of accountability backed up by debates and work focusing on the educational reality of some Latin American countries.

**KEYWORDS:**

Education policies, Evaluation policies, Accountability in education.

The accountability policies in education, which have been in place for a relatively long time in countries such as the USA, have involved in many other contexts oscillations to a greater or lesser extent, which are tied in with the political regimes, the nature of the governments and the dynamism emerging from the national and transnational civil societies. In these processes it is unsurprising that there are weaknesses in terms of the construction and consolidation of a social and political culture of answerability and responsabilization. These weaknesses have, however, been faced up to and gradually overcome over recent decades (above all after the restoration of democracy in many Ibero-American countries). As a consequence of this new democratic wave — based on values and social movements of active and critical citizenship, but also simultaneously involving contradictory pressures in the redefinition of the role of the State, of timid and ambiguous administrative decentralisation, of expanding quasi-market ideas and retraction of social rights, and of growing centrality of the large-scale comparative evaluation processes (national and international) — the demands for greater participation, transparency, answerability and responsabilization, especially in relation to public sector institutions and also as regards the so-called tertiary sector organisation, have become ever more consistent and mature, and merit analysis. For now, however, the intention is no more than to take a small step to draw up this problem and stimulate a more in-depth debate. As

such, this paper is written around three essential aspects: a concise presentation and discussion of the concepts, based on which we shall draw up a framework of analysis that intends to bring to the fore what are considered the three structural pillars of a model of accountability (evaluation, answerability and responsabilization) and, within these, looking at some of their dimensions; in a second moment a debate on the application of the theoretical-conceptual premises that have paved the way for a set of relatively recent regulations in legislation concerning education in Portugal; and, finally, a brief look at the problem of accountability, as presented in academic texts and recent debates, focusing on the educational reality of some Latin American countries.

#### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Although often translated as a synonym of *answerability*, the word *accountability* presents a degree of semantic instability because it corresponds to a concept with several meanings and amplitudes. Discussed from a variety of approaches and perspectives, some more simple, others more complex, it embraces a wide range of policies, systems, models, dimensions, agencies, practices and actors, giving the idea that it remains “a concept in expansion” (cf. Mulgan, 2000), and in this mesh of uses and interpretations that do not

always coincide, we may lose ourselves in what somebody has already referred to as the “Byzantine complexity” of the accountability concept (cf. Lindberg, 2009). To avoid some traps as regards a concept that needs more reflection, and which, without doubt, can constitute an object of great theoretical-conceptual interest, I shall overcome this complexity and make the contextualization of the concept of accountability more accessible. In order to do so, I opt to closely follow, initially, one of Schedler’s most referenced texts (albeit introducing certain more personal aspects of interpretation).

According to Schedler (1999), accountability has three structural dimensions: *information*, *justification* and *imposition* or sanction. In a more basic understanding, answerability can be the pillar that serves as the grounds of the first two dimensions: the right to ask for information and to demand justifications, whereby in order to undertake both tasks it is socially expected that there be an obligation or duty (translated into legal regulations or not) to attend to what is requested. To inform and to justify are therefore two dimensions of answerability, which may, hence, be defined in the restricted sense, as an obligation or duty to respond to the inquiries or requests (*answerability*)<sup>1</sup>. These inquiries and subsequent responses should be guided by transparency, in line with the right to information and taking into consideration other legal and ethical principles entailed in each specific situation, such that the only procedures implemented should be ones that are as objective as possible in collecting reliable facts, impartial information and valid reasons. Answerability, therefore, in Schedler’s opinion, contains “the informational dimension of accountability” and “the argumentative dimension of accountability”, and can, to a certain extent, be conceived as a communicational or discursive activity because it presupposes a relation of critical dialogue and the possibility to develop an in-depth public debate. However, as the same author adds, answerability, as an obligation or duty to give answers, is not only a discursive activity, benevolent to a greater or lesser extent, which finishes with the information and justification; it also contains an imposition, coercion or sanction (enforcement), which can be integrated,

in my opinion, into what can be called a pillar of responsabilization. On the other hand, given the huge variety of possible situations, these three dimensions (information, justification and sanction) may not be present, but even if one or two of them are missing we may legitimately speak of acts of accountability. However, in my opinion these “acts of accountability”, although they make sense separately, only gain density if integrated and articulated in a broader model that is something similar to what Schedler himself calls a prototypical category of accountability (1999, pp. 17-18). But, even in this case, maybe we can enlarge the heuristic capacity of a model of accountability if we add the pillar of *evaluation* to the pillars of *responsibilization*, establishing a more complex space of new interactions and interfaces. An attempt to do this is shown in Table I<sup>2</sup>.

Answerability boils down to the “informational dimension” and the “argumentative dimension”. On the other hand, the pillar of *responsibilization* (Schedler’s “enforcement”) sums up other dimensions: not only those referring to the imputation of responsibilities and the imposition of punitive sanctions, but also those that in my understanding can be added, e.g. the autonomous acceptance of responsibilities for acts practiced; persuasion, informal recognition of merit; the evoking of deontological codes and rules; the attribution of material or symbolic rewards, or other legitimate forms of (induction of) responsabilization<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, what I call the pillar of evaluation concerns the process of collection and processing of different information and data, theoretically and methodologically oriented, in order to produce judgements about a given reality or situation. In this case, when one deems it justified or necessary, the evaluation can precede the answerability (*ex-ante* evaluation); it may occur subsequently, between the answerability phase and the responsabilization phase (*ex-post* evaluation); or it may be carried out automatically through studies or reports drawn up by internal and/or external entities, thus becoming a structural accountability tool (that can be integrated or not into a broader accountability model or system).

TABLE I — DIMENSIONS OF AN ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

ACCOUNTABILITY	<i>Ex-ante</i> evaluation	
	<i>Answerability</i>	• Provide information
		• Give justifications
		• Draw up and Publicise evaluation reports
<i>Ex-post</i> evaluation		
<i>Responsibilization</i>	• Imputation of responsibilities and/or imposition of punitive sanctions ( <i>enforcement</i> )	
	• Autonomous acceptance of responsibilities	
	• Persuasion	
	• Attribution of material or symbolic materials	
	• Evoking of deontological codes	
	• Other legitimate forms of responsabilization	

### PARTIAL FORMS AND MODELS ARISING FROM ACCOUNTABILITY IN PUBLIC EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

I shall delve a little deeper into what I have just stated, taking as an example some *partial forms of accountability* emerging from the field of public education in Portugal. To do so, I define *partial forms of accountability* as the actions or procedures that are linked only to some of the dimensions of *answerability* or *responsibilization* (“acts of accountability” to use Schedler’s language), which do not constitute, as such, a model or integrated structure. On the other hand, I name a more complex structure the *model of accountability*, which is preferably adaptable, open and dynamic, in which different dimensions or partial forms of accountability present congruent relationships and intersections, making sense as a whole. Finally, I consider an *accountability system* an articulated set of models and partial forms of accountability that, in presenting specificities and able to maintain different degrees of relative autonomy, constitute a logical structure within the framework of policies (public or of public interest) based on values and principles of the *common good*, democraticity, participation, duty to inform and the right to be informed, argumentation and contradiction, transparency, responsabilization, active citizenship, and empowerment, among others.

Based on the previous definitions, we can say that we do not currently have any public (*formal*)

*system of accountability* in education in Portugal, although some *models* are being built, and above all, it is possible to identify emerging *partial forms of accountability*, which are legally consecrated or induced, which go beyond those deriving from internal rational-bureaucratic rules, or which always existed in a non-formal or informal guise. In an attempt to sustain this hypothesis (and considering only non higher-education in the public sector), I take the following examples: i) evaluation of teachers’ performance; ii) the results of the standard exams and tests (national and international) and the school rankings; iii) the school autonomy and management regime; and iv) the external assessment of schools programme.

With regard to the evaluation of teachers’ performance, it is not yet possible (or desirable) to draw conclusions about its design, as there have been oscillations and tensions around its negotiation and legal regulation. The conditions needed for its stabilisation and lasting implementation are not yet completely established, although some schools are undergoing this experience grounded on the legislation in place, which has a direct or indirect impact on the alterations to the Teaching Career Statutes. In any event, the data currently available seems to indicate that the evaluation of the teachers comprises a process restricted to the established aim (i.e. professional assessment), whereby it may have connections, albeit indirect, with *partial aspects of accountability*, possibly integrated into the

*model of accountability*. Maybe it is not a mere rhetorical question that in the regulations that define the make-up and the functioning of the Scientific Council for the Evaluation of Teachers it states that its aim “is to contribute to the strengthening, in the schools, of a culture of evaluation, responsabilization and answerability, in autonomous contexts”. These connections, indeed, are to a certain extent outlined in the Teaching Career Statutes (updated through Decree-Law no. 15/2007) when it says that evaluation will have “effective consequences” for career development, enabling, namely, the “identification, promotion and rewarding of merit”. Indeed a stipulation is in place for a “monetary reward for performance”, whereby teachers who obtain a qualitative mention equal to or higher than *very good*, in two consecutive evaluations are entitled to it<sup>4</sup>. The Teaching Career Statutes also accentuate, among other aspects, that the assessment of performance “aims to improve the school results of the pupils”, and therefore there is a relationship between these two factors (teachers’ performance and pupils’ results). This last aspect, which is nothing new in other countries, was included in the initial regulatory stipulations of the Teaching Career Statutes, although in a later phase it was (provisionally) put to one side<sup>5</sup>. However, an evaluation of the teachers’ performance related, even indirectly, to the results of the external national exams is to a certain extent implicit when, for example, in the current external assessment of the schools one of the factors taken into account is a comparison between the results of the internal assessment of the pupils and the external assessment of the pupils, and also when one considers that the percentage of *excellent* and *very good* mentions is dependant on the results of this external assessment of the schools.

As for the external exams and standardised tests (national or international), although often viewed as comprising (or able to comprise) the basis of a model or system of accountability, they have not actually constituted more than one dimension of answerability, i.e. an act or a *partial form of accountability* (cf. Darling-Hammond, 2004)<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, we can consider the school rankings, which result from the national exams, as also being a *partial form of accountability* (in this case, on the initiative of civil society and the market), driven forward, decisively

in the Portuguese case, by some big media outlets (private) and by politically conservative sectors (cf. Afonso, 2009). The rankings are, indeed, a controversial question that have been the object of analysis of several studies by Portuguese authors (Melo, 2007a, 2007b; Neto-Mendes *et al.*, 2003; Resende, 2006; Sá & Antunes, 2007; Santiago *et al.*, 2004; Vieira, 2003).

Furthermore, the new autonomy and management regime of public schools should also be taken into account, which frequently make reference to answerability and other congruent principles (cf. Decree-Law no. 75/2008). The regime functions “on the principle of the State’s responsibility and answerability as well as all the other agents or intervening parties”. It is also emphasised that participation and intervention in the “strategic management” of the establishments or school groups, by families, teachers and other agents of the community, “constitutes an initial, more direct and immediate level, of the answerability of the school in relation to the people it serves”. Further on it is reiterated that autonomy “supposes answerability, namely through self-evaluation procedures and external assessment”. It is also pointed out that possible consequences may result from the inspection and external assessment action that may, for example, serve as the grounds to dissolve the governing and management bodies. In other words, this management model (which should not be confused with an accountability model) seems, in several dimensions, to implicitly include it, not only through the aforementioned citations, but also because forms of co-responsibilization are present between the State, the groups and the schools, above all as regards the *autonomy contracts*. Moreover, one also has to consider that the “general council”, as a new “strategic management” body, is an especially propitious entity as regards answerability, involving the school and local community in the processes of information, dialogue, grouping and justification. However, these principles may be difficult to implement outside the action of the (new) manager, given that this body will play a major role in the life of a *grouping* or a non-grouped school. Knowing that there may be some technocratic influence deriving from the implementation of this new regulation — reinforced by a greater stratification and more rigid functional

and professional hierarchy, and increased by the effect of pressure for the production of measurable results, added to the fact that the manager “intervenes in terms of the law in the performance evaluation of the teaching staff” — it is not unlikely that tensions will arise between the leadership styles (or the actual management practice) and the *partial forms of accountability* deriving from this new autonomy regime of the schools.

Finally, another example chosen to try and test my initial hypothesis concerns the external evaluation programme of the schools. This process is under the responsibility of the Inspector-General of Education and counts on the collaboration of invited external specialists who comprise the respective evaluation teams. Before starting the programme, it was tested in a pilot phase in a sample made up of schools that had some experience in self-evaluation processes. Among other aspects, in the final report of this *task force* the authors point out a “concern regarding answerability”, not so much in relation to the provision of data or information, but above all as the “response grounded on the demands made by the different partners on the authorities who draw up the school policies about their educational performance”. Further on it is also stated that the “public disclosure of the assessment results is a form of answerability both of the schools and the evaluators” (Oliveira *et al.*, 2006, p. 8 and p. 10). Taking into account these statements, it seems that dimensions of accountability are present and are valued such as information, argumentation and justification, i.e. there seems to be some emphasis on the pillar of answerability, mirroring the intentions expressed in the Programme of the 17<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Government (cf. Portugal, 2005). The programme states, for example, that one of the “ambitions for the government mandate” is to “bring about in all aspects of the education and training system the culture and practice of evaluation and answerability” (p. 43). With regard to schools, it is considered desirable to create conditions for greater autonomy, which means “greater responsibility, regular answerability and evaluation of performance and results” (p. 44). This is the background for the planned launch of evaluation in primary and secondary schools, in which “the evaluation will have consequences, both to reward good schools, making them

benchmarks for the whole network, and to support, in their improvement plans, schools that are experiencing more difficulties” (p. 44). Further on it is restated that “the schools shall have their organisation and management capacities reinforced within a framework of greater responsabilization and evaluation of processes and results” (p. 48). Finally, emphasis is given to the idea of greater demands and rigour in the functioning of the education system, implying “transparency and responsabilization of the various services” and the consolidation of a “system of updated and credible information” that provides data and information requested by international entities and other interested parties (p. 49). As such, one can state that the Government Programme is geared up not only towards the pillar of evaluation and the pillar of answerability, but also towards the pillar of responsabilization, i.e. towards a *model of accountability*. Comparing the Government Programme with the external evaluation programme of the schools, one can see that the latter comes up a little short, above all in relation to the consequences of the evaluation. Possibly, as mentioned in the document produced by the Inspection-General of Education (IGE, 2009), because the consequences transcend the scope of the external evaluation programme and are more in line with the functions of the “education authorities”. In any event, the pillar of responsabilization is extremely controversial, as many authors have pointed out (see, among others, Ranson, 2003; Corvalán, 2006). The National Education Council itself (CNE, 2008) acknowledges as much when it states that “the fear that the external evaluation may lead to negative consequences for the schools and its agents may result in the school community adopting a defensive attitude, skirting problems that should be tackled head on...” Addressing this concern, the IGE adopts a very enlightening position, stating that “monitoring, support and demands in relation to schools with an *Insufficient* classification is essential to make sure the evaluation is viewed as an opportunity to bring about improvement and not a risk of penalisation”. It adds that “the education authorities have the challenge of finding the most suitable methods of monitoring the schools”. In the same document it is also recognised that “the relationship between evaluation and the organisational develop-

ment measures, such as the development and autonomy contracts, increases the possibility of a (con)sequence arising from the evaluation and makes the responsibility more visible” (IGE, 2009, p. 66). In my opinion, the finding that there is lack of a clear definition as regards the pillar of responsabilization is also backed up in the statement from the National Education Council, pointing out the following scenarios in relation to the *contestation*: “If in this school evaluation model the training perspective predominates — supporting the evolution of the institution — as we advocate, the current method of response from the evaluation to the contestation, with changes in the means of disclosure in line with our plans, seems suitable. If, on the contrary, a regulatory orientation prevails, entailing rewards and punishments, there will be the need to institute an appeal mechanism to an independent entity, whereby the results of its action are equally publicised”. And, further on, the statement concludes: “It is not recommended, at least at this phase, to have any connection between the results of the school evaluation and the punishments or rewards of its individual agents, namely the quota of teachers and the attribution of higher categories in the evaluation of the teachers”. To sum up, the current external evaluation model of the schools plans for an initial phase of collection and systematisation of information, by the groupings of schools or ungrouped schools, which translates, among other aspects, into the production of a self-evaluation report (*ex-ante* evaluation). There then follows a second phase in which the various documents produced by the schools are made available and analysed by the external evaluation team with the aim of suitably preparing visits to the education and teaching establishments. In a third phase, during the visit from the external evaluation team (comprising two IGE inspectors and an evaluation expert), different interviews shall be carried out by a panel, which will hear members and representatives from all sectors of the school and educational community (members of the management entity, teachers, employees, students, parents, representatives from the council and other local institutions or associations...). These interviews aim to clarify and deepen aspects outlined in documents and reports drawn up initially by the schools and or deriving from statistical data supplied

by the Ministry of Education, therefore consisting of opportunities for dialogue, justification and argumentation, where pertinent information is gathered and compared to describe the “domains” selected as priorities in this school external evaluation model (“results, rendering of educational services, school organisation and management, leadership and capacity for self-regulation and improvement”), as well as, within each of these domains, pertinent information to describe the respective “factors” (“academic success, civic participation and development, behaviour and discipline, enrichment and impact of the learning, articulation and consequence, monitoring of the teaching practice in the classroom, differentiation of support, scope of the curriculum and enrichment of knowledge, learning, conception, planning and development of the activity, human resources management, material and financial resources management, participation of parents and other members of the educational community, equality and justice, vision and strategy, motivation and endeavour, openness to innovation, partners, protocols and projects, self-evaluation and sustainability of progress”). One can therefore consider this whole process as the *internal answerability* phase. In the next phase (*ex-post* evaluation), the external evaluation team will ponder the information and data gathered, attributing a classification to each of the domains (very good, good, sufficient and insufficient), pointing out what it considers to be the strong points and weak points of the school visited, and a report shall be drawn up and sent, some time later, to the respective schools or *groupings*. Upon receiving this report, the schools or *groupings* who deem it necessary shall write the *contestation*. Finally, the report from the external evaluation team shall be publicised on the Internet, on the IGE site (<http://www.ige.min-edu.pt>), as well as the respective *contestation* (if there is one). Hence, this last step (the publicising of the evaluation *ex-post* reports and the *contestation*) can be considered the *public answerability* phase. To sum up, if we applied the draft model shown in Table I to try and understand how the current external evaluation of schools is carried out in Portugal, we can reaffirm some conclusions pointed out earlier: that is, there is essentially a noticeable lack (or insufficient clarification) of the responsabilization pillar. Furthermore,

it is obvious that the pillar of answerability plays a major role (where the production of information, arguments and justifications play a structural role) and the pillar of evaluation is also present, in two distinct moments: during the self-evaluation process (or *ex-ante* evaluation) and during the external evaluation process (*ex-post* evaluation). Therefore, with regard to the external evaluation programme of schools, we can conclude that it also does not coincide with the accountability model proposed in the theoretical-conceptual framework, although it does contain, in its specific make-up, different *partial forms of accountability* which may, possibly, be better articulated and evolve towards a more complete and complex *model* or structure.

## ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA: BRIEF NOTES

As happens in Europe and the USA, the question of consequences or responsabilization also arises in Latin America as the main sticking point in the debates and proposals based on the models or systems of accountability. As emphasised in the bulletin for the Programme of Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL, 2003), “it is difficult and almost always controversial to establish answerability systems” (an expression which here, and in many Latin American documents, is used as a synonym of accountability). This same bulletin also lists four conditions required to implement an accountability system: definition of *standard norms* (or educational standards); use of a wide range of *information* processes (especially through the external evaluation results); decision on the *consequences* (rewards or sanctions); and mechanisms for exercising power or *authority*. As such, in this document it is stated, albeit without the definition or specification of clear standards, that the schools cannot be held responsible for their work, and this includes conditions such as teacher training and performance, availability of human, material, didactic-pedagogical and curriculum content resources, among others. In spite of this, until very recently, no Latin American country had managed to “establish, disseminate and apply educational standards at national level that fixed high expectations for all the pupils”. Some

only established minimum standards. On the other hand, with regard to information, it is considered that “the foremost priority is a solid system of national exams in mathematics, science and languages, and other areas of competencies that each country deems crucial”, the results of which should be widely disclosed. It is thought equally indispensable to “periodically evaluate the teachers and give public recognition to the best performing ones”. However, according to PREAL, “no country periodically evaluates all the teachers” and, as for the pupils, “most of them are given performance exams, but the results are not disclosed properly or, inclusive, are not made available to the public”. It is also argued that the schools, local communities and parents should have authority to make decisions and bring about change, given that “without this it makes little sense to make them responsible”. Finally, in order for the answerability to be effective, “the fulfilment (or non-fulfilment) of the aims should have consequences”. This means there should be greater rewards for good teachers and others should be identified as needing help. Likewise, the best schools should be known and serve as an example, whereas the others “should be subject to corrective measures”. It is also advocated that the very “certificates or titles should be retained until the pupils show they have complied with the agreed national educational standards”. As the schools of the region do not appear to work in this way, PREAL concludes that “success and failure in schools does not have consequences” (PREAL, 2003, pp. 1-4).

As I mentioned earlier, this is a central issue in many accountability models, namely owing to the fact that there are social representations and professional stances that are critical or sceptical about the use of rewards and sanctions. In this study, “the component of the consequences in the accountability processes is clearly one of the areas that has progressed and been debated least in the discussion about Latin American education policy” (Corvalán, 2006, p. 13). For example, public basic education in this region “has few elements of accountability” and, in most cases, does not yet define clear educational standards, although in some countries there is a steady move towards this (Puryear, 2006, p. 126).

Looking at the situation on the ground in other countries, such as the USA, some authors argue



that the education systems have to define educational standards, so that the curriculum and the accountability mechanisms can be aligned with them. In other words, the evaluation system should be aligned with the curriculum, and in turn, “the accountability mechanisms have to supply incentives and sanctions in accordance with the success or failure in the pursuit of these standards” (cf. Carnoy & Loeb, 2002, pp. 306-307).

In a study that analyses the large-scale evaluation programmes and systems in Brazil, and in which the criteria chosen is some education policies in recent decades in the USA, namely the *No Child Left Behind* reform, one author states that some recent experiments have been carried out (within the scope of the Brazilian federal, state and municipal authorities) that have similarities with the school accountability policies. However, “in general, they do not incorporate a system of incentives in which the teachers/heads of the school are penalised or rewarded in line with the performance of their pupils”. As such, he concludes that “the school accountability policy is only effective when it incorporates such a system (Andrade, 2008, p. 452). This is, as one can gather, a relatively uncritical vision on the problem at hand. In effect, the author seems to take into account the Brazilian specificities, but, in undertaking a transposition based on (from a certain reading) the American reality, he does not carefully draw up the problems behind these specificities. Also in relation to the educational reality in Brazil, N. Brooke uses the expression “responsibilization policy” to refer to some measures and experiments that have “material or symbolic” consequences, which aim to improve the school results “measured” through the different evaluation procedures, at state and municipal level (Brooke, 2008, p. 94). This author recognises that “there are few formal responsibilization policies in Brazil”, many of which have suffered frequent alterations. Some “can be considered *high-stakes* systems”, i.e. they encompass “salary bonuses or monetary rewards”, while others are “*low-stakes* systems”, i.e. they supply pertinent information about evaluations and performance indicators, but “without explicit material consequences”. The example considered the most interesting was the *School Bulletin* of Paraná, through which there was an attempt to make an accountability model viable

based only on external comparative evaluations and census data, but which also encouraged participation and involvement of parents to monitor the pupils and apply pressure to improve the school results. For several reasons this experiment did not survive, although a similar tool adopted in Belo Horizonte seems to be having more success. Involving a degree of criticism of advocates of orthodox responsibilization methods based on external evaluations, the author concludes: “There is still no objective evidence of change, but it is easier to imagine the acceptance and use of *low-stakes* information to encourage discussion about the performance inside school than external evaluation exercises that immediately lose their capacity for diagnosis because of the overbearing importance of the benefits that are associated with them” (Brooke, 2008, p. 107; see also Brooke, 2005 and 2006).

Other analyses on the Latin American reality indicate, for example, that Cuba is one of the countries that presents an accountability model where a higher number of characteristics, identical to those already mentioned, seem to be present. On this point, we point out the existence of strict *educational standards* which are widely applied; there is a high amount of *information* about the students’ progress (both based on performance ascertainment tests<sup>7</sup>, and based on periodic observations of lessons); the teachers whose performance is not suitable, as a *consequence*, are submitted to further training or are removed from the profession; the students that do not achieve the aims are given specific individual attention; and there is a very strong system of *authority* that is highly present in the coordination and supervision of the education system (cf. Puryear, 2006, p. 127).

As well as the experiments summarised herein, many others have taken place, in other countries, which are impossible to relate at this opportunity. I shall only mention, to round off, one of the projects that is being revitalized in Mexico, and which assumes that the parents, school community and civil society in general should be the chief actors in the accountability processes in education. This is the so-called *Consejos de Participación Social en la Educación* (CPSE). However, analysing the most recent experiments in the light of Schedler’s categorisation (1999), i.e. considering the essential

details of information, justification and sanction, in the three Mexican states that were studied in greater detail, in none of them was it possible to conclude that an accountability system in its broadest sense was in place (Bordon, *et al.*, 2007, pp. 89-90), although, more recently, there has been a drive towards revitalising the *Consejos de Participación* through the *Programa Escuelas de Calidad*, namely as regards citizen participation. As such, these authors conclude that although “a process of transparency and answerability has already begun, its consolidation in the structure of the education system, from the authorities to the schools, continues to be a pending challenge” in the educational reality of Mexico (Bordon *et al.*, 2007, p. 103).

## FINAL COMMENTS

Judging by the examples presented in relation to Portugal and other countries, I want to start by pointing out that there is sufficient evidence to confirm that we are still in an initial phase of construction of accountability models and systems in education, given that in practically all cases there is a predominance of the dimensions referring to the pillar of answerability, i.e. the dimensions of justification and argumentation and, above all, of information. Likewise, there also seems to be insufficient debate regarding construction of accountability models (evaluation, answerability and responsabilization) that, as well as the methodological questions, incorporate effective concerns about issues

of ethics, justice and democracy. Indeed, it seems to be equally pertinent that we start to think about the possibility that the existing *models* and *partial forms of accountability* be integrated into broader policies and systems where these and other values and principles are structural. On the other hand one also has to study, in more depth and in a more systematised manner, the ongoing processes in the international and supranational arena, namely in the case of the European Union, which already constitute (or which may be integrated into) accountability evaluation systems, and which have important consequences and impacts at government level. I am referring especially to the assessment of policies and programmes and their consequences in terms of answerability and responsabilization. And it is also worth looking at other contexts, namely to the countries of Latin America, to understand how some ongoing models, experiments and debates continue to take as their reference point what has happened in central European countries or in the USA (main players of a global agenda), although it is certain, to the contrary (and just as well), that the problem of *answerability* and *responsibilization* (inside and outside the field of education) is also pushing away Eurocentric perspectives, and gaining renewed capacity to achieve greater social and political visibility in many Ibero-American countries. It is, indeed, in Latin America (and even in some Asian countries) that some of the more democratic, participatory and critical alternatives in this field are emerging<sup>8</sup>. But this is, for sure, another object of study for another reflection.

## ENDNOTES

1. The term *answerability* can be translated into Portuguese as *responsabilidade*, although some “state that the concept of “responsiveness consists of the explanation drawn from inquired facts. [...] Being responsive means responding to the questions formulated, providing clarifications” (cf. Mota, 2006, p. 57).

2. Inspired on Schedler’s work (1999), Table I does not intend to exclusively follow this author, as I have inserted personal additions and grafts (albeit exploratory). In it the word responsabilization was translated, in a more heterodoxical way, into *responsibilization* because *responsibility* does not seem to have exactly the same meaning that I intend to transmit here.

3. Although the term “enforcement” alludes, in most cases, to the aspects relative to sanctions and punishments, it also supposes connotations that are not necessarily negative, as can be seen from this extract from Schedler: “[...] we described the exercise of accountability essentially as a discursive activity, as a sort of benign inquiry, a friendly dialogue between accounting and accountable parties. Yet answerability, and the double quest for information and justification it implies, is not the whole story of accountability. [...] In addition to its informational dimension (asking what has been done or will be done) and its explanatory aspects (giving reasons and forming judgments), it also contains elements of enforcement (rewarding good and punishing bad behaviour)” (Schedler, 1999, p. 15).

4. As well as these rewards, the 17<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Government, through the Ministry of Education, also created a “National Teachers’ Award”, which shall be attributed on an annual basis, as well as various awards of merit, in different areas (career, integration, innovation and leadership).

5. With regard to this question, Regulatory Decree no. 1-A/2009 dictated that “in this academic year the criteria of the school results and drop-out rates shall be eliminated, taking into account the difficulties identified by the scientific council for the evaluation of teachers”. In effect, before the Regulatory Decree no. 2/2008, plans were in place such that: “In the evaluation carried out by the executive management body the classification indicators

encompassed the following: [...] “Progress of the expected school results for the pupils and reduction of the school drop-out rates, taking into account the socio-educational context [...]”.

6. As stated by Darling-Hammond, the tests are a source of information for an accountability system, but they are not, in themselves, this system: “This framework also suggests a more limited and appropriate role for test data as a component of accountability systems. Assessment data are helpful for creating more accountable systems to the extent that they provide relevant, valid, timely, and useful information about how individual students are doing and how schools are serving them. However, indicators such as test scores supply information for an accountability system; they are not the system itself” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, pp. 1080-1081). As another author writes, “las pruebas no son la única fuente de información y ni siquiera constituyen un ingrediente esencial para un sistema de *accountability*” (McMeekin, 2006, p. 25).

7. The results of the evaluation system through sampling are not sufficiently disclosed and only a small number of countries apply tests that involve all the pupils (“pruebas censales”), also concludes Puryear (2006, p. 127). For example, with regard to Brazil, “in 2005, the first national ascertainment assessment of Portuguese and Mathematics in primary education, called *Prova Brasil*, was carried out in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> series of all urban schools, both public and private” (Brooke, 2008, p. 95).

8. The public mechanism for answerability called “World Bank Inspection Panel” is a good example to “understand the nature of the transnational civil society that is emerging” (cf. Clark; Fox & Treacle, 2005, p. 21).

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