Improving accountability in education: The importance of structured democratic voice

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Introduction

Accountability is a cornerstone of contemporary education policy. Some consider it a 'virtuous practice' (MacIntyre, 1984); others view it as indistinguishable from 'good governance' and transparency (Bovens, 2006; Dubnick, 2014; Gorur, 2017; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). Widespread interest in accountability is reflected in research output, where the use of the term increased tenfold in research published between 1965 and 2000 (Dubnick, 2014). Accountability is also a buzzword in global education policy. For example, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, passed by UNESCO member states in November 2015, refers to accountability – in the forms of 'accountability', 'accountable', or 'to account for' – more than 20 times (UNESCO, 2016a). As Volante (2007) remarks: "[by] the early 21st century it was clear that the application of accountability systems was one of the most powerful trends in education policy" (p. 7).

The emergence and spread of accountability are attributable, in part, to five political and social trends. These global trends – namely, the massification, marketization, decentralization, standardization, and increased documentation of education -- reflect the increased importance of education in society (UNESCO, 2017). The massification of education is particularly important. As more and more students attend school, questions arise as to who is accountable for ensuring the quality of education provided. Primary school enrolment expanded in the latter half of the 20th century (Dorius, 2012), and grew even faster in the early 2000s with the impact of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All Goals. Although the global primary school age population increased by approximately 2% from 2000 to 2015, the number of primary age children out of school declined from 100.1 million to 61.0 million during the same period, resulting in an additional 52.5 million primary age children enrolled in school (Huebler, 2008; UNESCO, 2016b). However, with more children in primary school, international donors directed fewer resources to this schooling level, and aid to basic education fell steadily from its peak in 2011 (GCE, 2015; UNESCO, 2016c). Concurrently, domestic resources for basic education largely remained stagnant (Steer & Smith, 2015). As resources decreased and countries sought greater value from existing allocations, many argued that accountability systems could improve resource effectiveness (Murgatroyd & Sahlberg, 2016).

In this article we argue that many accountability reforms in education do not achieve the intended impact and that a critical condition for strengthening accountability in education is in providing different actors with an opportunity to articulate and represent their views as the accountability process enfolds.

We refer to this as the role of *structured democratic voice.*[1] By providing voice to citizens or their representatives, accountability approaches can be re-imagined and the policy enabling environment strengthened, resulting in increased policy ownership and more effective implementation. We start by examining two key characteristics of prevailing accountability systems: their reliance on external implementation and their focus on outcomes. This is followed by discussions of the link between structured democratic voice and strengthened accountability, with illustrative examples at the regional, national and local level. Themes in the current accountability literature are then revisited in light of these examples. Specifically, we discuss how the inclusion of structured democratic voice can help overcome shortcomings in dominant accountability approaches. The final section highlights several important implications of the arguments and evidence we review.

The global push to make education institutions accountable

In many respects this is the 'age of accountability' since accountability permeates all social services, including education (Hopmann, 2008). In practise this means that "the public has a right to expect that its resources are being used responsibly and that the public institutions are accountable for caretaking the public trust" (Supovitz, 2009, p. 215). Crisis narratives around education and learning, which have gained momentum in recent years, have undermined public trust and apportioned blame to schools and teachers, pushing governments to act, or at times simply reinforcing desired government actions. Increased references to the 'global learning crisis', in particular, suggest that earlier commitments to universalizing access to education were misguided. National and international policy makers should be focused on ensuring good quality education, as measured by increased student learning (Ansell, 2015). According to this prevailing narrative, it is incumbent on national education systems to allocate more resources to measuring and monitoring learning and to pay close attention to ineffective practices among education personnel, often portrayed as lazy or unmotivated (Alhamdan et al., 2014).

A typical response to this narrative is the elaboration of an accountability mechanism that involves two major aspects: first, the external monitoring of schools and teachers and second, a greater emphasis on outcomes or results. The growth of externally applied accountability is associated with the rise of managerialism, initially part of the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s (Hursh, 2005). Managerialism supports efforts by external evaluators to increase cost-cutting and define clear standards. It is assumed that those providing services – teachers and, to a lesser extent, school leaders – need to be managed and to "demonstrate publicly that they fulfil accountability requirements" (Larsen, 2005, p. 300). Managerialism today, sometimes called new managerialism (Biesta, 2004), is deeply rooted in an ethos of efficiency and performance. It creates a quasi-market in education, reinforcing the authority of managers over service providers and embracing a strong customer-orientation (Simkins, 2000).

The application of external accountability mechanisms, buttressed by managerialism, has eroded trust in the teaching profession in many countries (Fitzgerald, 2008). In Japan, for example, externally imposed accountability and the introduction of national testing in 2007 forced many teachers to reconsider their role and question the goals of teaching (Katsuno, 2012). In South Korea, following the 2008 election of President Myung-Bak, a new education policy implemented in a top down manner

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[1] Structured democratic voice involves the incorporation of organized opportunities for education stakeholders to articulate their views during the process of policy planning and evaluation in ways that their concerns are heard and valued.

with little input from teachers and students resulted in considerable pushback (Kang, 2012). This included protests by the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union:

> "Governmental policy makers wanted to show people the government's big efforts to bring innovative change among teachers, but it has resulted in no positive fruit. Rather, those policies have played a role in breaking a cooperative culture among teachers" (Comment by KTU, cited in Symeonidis, 2015)."

The proposed Korean policy to hold teachers accountable for their student test scores was similar to efforts in the United States under No Child Left Behind (Chung & Chea, 2016; Smith, 2014). Later, when a new leadership was in place and a report identified South Korean students as among the unhappiest students in OECD countries, the policy was marginally scaled back (Chung, 2017; Chung & Hong, 2015).

Accountability also entails a shift from a focus on educational inputs and enabling conditions to one on outputs, outcomes and results (Perie et al., 2007; Sahlberg, 2009), in which external actors place responsibility for improved outcomes on schools or teachers (Perie et al, 2007; Smith, 2014). With the unprecedented spread of international, regional, and national assessments (Smith, 2014; Kamens and Benavot, 2011), student test scores have become the preferred way to report on education outcomes, thereby establishing and legitimizing a 'global testing culture' (Smith, 2016a). Using information from standardized assessments, authorities develop mechanisms for sanctioning or rewarding teachers and schools (Sahlberg, 2010; Verger & Parcerisa, 2017).

Monitoring learning through student test scores, and using results to drive policy reform, are also practices supported by international organizations such as the World Bank, the OECD and, to a lesser extent, UNESCO (Benavot & Smith, 2019). For instance, an analysis of terms associated with a testing culture or accountability found that they increased fivefold from one World Bank education sector strategy to the next (Joshi & Smith, 2012). World Bank projects in education have increasingly included financing for learning assessments between 1998 and 2009 (Benavot & Smith, 2019). Among the most common policy solutions in the Bank's knowledge products is performance-based pay for teachers (Fontdevilla & Verger, 2015). The prominent role played by test scores to assess quality creates a reality in which "testing has become synonymous with accountability, which becomes synonymous with education quality" (Smith, 2016b, p. 7).

Structuring opportunities for all education stakeholders to be heard

Largely absent in discussions of quality or accountability are the voices and views of those who work, learn and teach in schools. Few spaces are available for education actors to articulate their concerns about policy initiatives or planned reforms. *Structured democratic voice* involves the provision of organized opportunities for educators to have "a voice in decision-making" (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007, p. 165). It involves both the inclusion of already established voices and those that are not regularly heard (Brown et al., 2015). We suggest that structured democratic voice is most effective when multiple stakeholders – including parents, teachers, students and other community members – are able to articulate their views in the policy planning and evaluation process in ways that their concerns are heard and valued. It can be *direct* democratic voice, for instance when citizens are invited to directly participate in policy planning through formal consultations or conferences, or it can be *representative* democratic voice, for instance some annual review processes include representatives to speak for different stakeholder groups. Structured democratic voice differs from less structured or

unstructured processes such as parent surveys or public protests, which tend to be more temporary and reactionary approaches, and thus less sustainable.

Other terms in the education and accountability literature are related to structured democratic voice. Smith and Rowland (2014) distinguish between tangential voice and infused voice. Tangential voice provides parents a one-time opportunity to voice their opinion to education decision makers who held complete authority. Infused voice involves input from parents who were able to "permeate every level of the educational process" (p. 101). Fox (2015) differentiates between tactical and strategic approaches to social accountability. Tactical approaches represent a single limited approach while strategic ones involve "citizen voice coordinated with government reforms that bolster public sector responsibility" (p. 352). The latter best resembles a diagonal accountability approach. A hybrid of vertical and horizontal accountability, this approach involves "direct citizen engagement with state institutions" (Fox, 2015, p. 347). Structured democratic voice then is most closed related to infused voice and strategic diagonal accountability in that it involves a coordinated approach to involving stakeholders in decision-making at multiple points in the policy development and evaluation process.

Structured democratic voice seems especially pertinent if the task is to achieve ambitious international goals in education, the responsibility for which does not rest with a single individual or institution or country. Regardless of the overarching aim -- whether to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education; or developing employability skills; or creating globally competent and culturally aware citizens -- education is best understood as a shared responsibility (UNESCO, 2017). Individuals should not be held solely accountable for shared responsibilities. When many actors and institutions have a role to play in achieving the overall vision, it is important to engage collectively in defining the desired aim and identifying individual responsibilities. Providing space for structured democratic voice highlights this shared responsibility and the interconnectedness of actors. It also recognizes that "accountability actions are part of a broader and longer process of engagement between actors and the state" (Dewachter et al., 2018, p. 168) and helps avoid incoherency across responsibilities while promoting ownership in the larger education goals (Fancy & Razzaq, 2017).

Trust is vital in this regard. It can influence the accountability approach chosen and its effectiveness. Trust in education can be seen as trust in the person, trust in the profession, and trust in the process (UNESCO, 2017). In education contexts trust in the person is generally widespread -- parents are often supportive of their child's teacher(s). Trust in the profession is more problematic and varies across countries. Just because parents (and others) value their local teachers does not mean teachers, as a profession, are viewed as capable and trustworthy. Finally, among those being held to account there must be trust that the process is fair and just. When people perceive the process to be unjust or corrupt, commitment to intended policy will be adversely affected. Structured democratic voice can improve trust in the profession by recognizing the value of educators and by including them in the decision-making process. Structured democratic voice can also improve trust in the process if teachers and other educators feel their views and concerns have been heard. Collaborative processes, where all parties listen to each other, "can both build trust and create incentives for more voice" (Fox, 2015, p. 356).

One avenue to increase trust involves the creation of shared aims and purposes. For example, higher education roundtables in the United States, supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts, brought government, business, civil society and education leaders together to discuss the aims and future agenda of higher education across the country (Burke, 2005; Nichols, 1995). In North Dakota, this led to a flexible accountability program with broad support among leaders in government, business and

the education community and an agreement to continue roundtable discussions to constructively address potentially conflicting views (North Dakota University System, 2003). In Finland, education reforms in the late 1970s, which resulted from extensive political consultations, led to greater school local autonomy. By the 1990s, a trust-based school culture had taken root in which "education authorities and political leaders believe that teachers, together with principals, parents and their communities, know how to provide the best possible education for their children and youth" (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 157). Trust in the teaching profession was reinforced, and teachers and principals were given opportunities to participate in curriculum development and policy reform (Sahlberg, 2007). The public lent support to the teaching profession and gave teachers the autonomy and discretion to deliver good quality education for the next generation. This abiding trust in teachers continues to be crucial trademark of the Finnish education model (Auren & Joshi, 2016).

By contrast, accountability systems that are externally imposed and sanction-oriented can lead to situations where educators feel threatened by elements beyond their control, reducing their willingness to take risks and undermining trust (Sahlberg, 2009; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). This can lead to a vicious cycle where low levels of trust result in more external, sanction-based accountability, which in turn further undermines trust.

Where there is trust, accountability improves

Trust is a kind of lubricant, a needed condition, in contexts where accountability operates. As seen in Figure 1, efforts of education actors are influenced by the amount of trust present, as well as the economic, political, and social context. The same accountability approach will not work in all contexts or at all times. Countries must consider their history and current situation in deciding on an appropriate approach to accountability. Within this context the challenge is getting various actors – government officials, teachers, school leaders, and others – to work toward a single goal for education, such as SDG 4. The interdependence of actors is illustrated in intersecting cogs or gears.

Figure 1: Preconditions for successful accountability in education
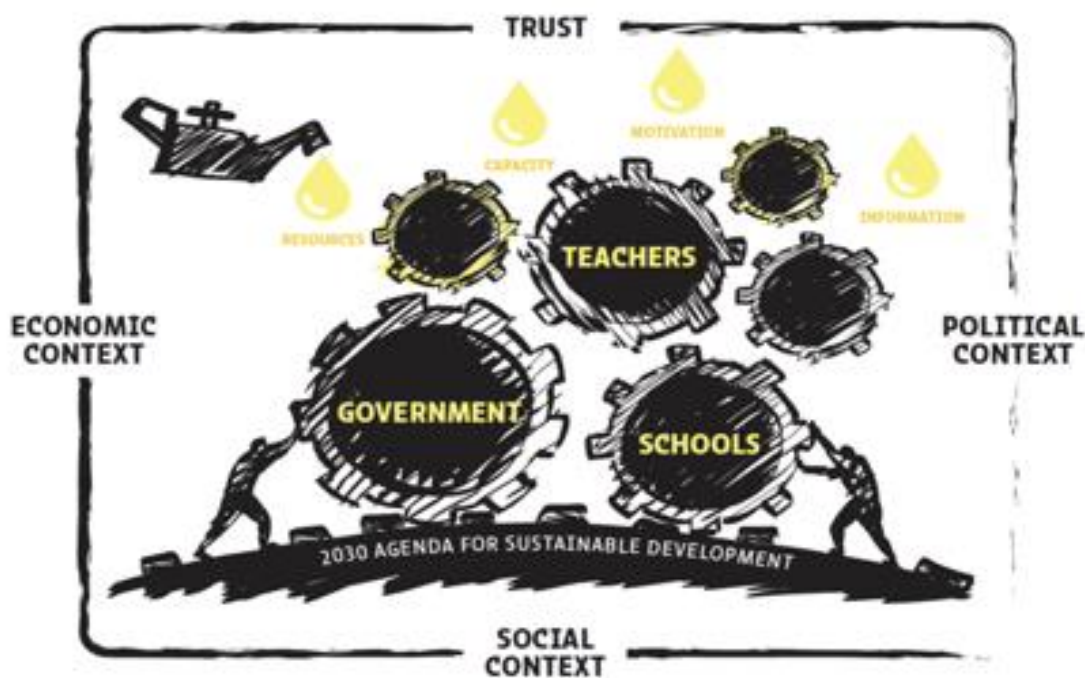
Source: UNESCO (2017)

UNESCO (2017) identified four aspects of the enabling environment, represented by oil drops in Figure 1. When the enabling environment goes unfulfilled, individual efforts will be stymied. The enabling environment consists of resources, capacity, motivation, and information. Regardless of the ingenuity of the accountability approach, if actors lack key conditions, no approach will be effective. For example, for teachers to be held accountable for the quality of their instruction (an individual responsibility), certain conditions are crucial. Teachers must have:

- pedagogical capacity (have they received the training and support to teach this group of students in this subject?),
- instructional resources (do they have all the necessary teaching materials and physical resources necessary to fully implement their pedagogical approach?),
- sustained motivation (do they feel their work is valued and appreciated?),
- access to clear information (do they know what their responsibilities are and how to give an account for their actions?).

Beyond strengthening trust in the process and teaching profession, structured democratic voice is likely to increase actor motivation and commitment. When actors are able to contribute to the development of accountability policies, they are more likely to embrace them (Salmi, 2009). Participation in such a process increases actors' sense of ownership, encourages them to view policies as legitimate and the evaluation of their efforts as fair.

Having a voice in policy planning and creation also contributes to the information component of the enabling environment. Direct participation in policy development allows actors to raise questions and concerns. It helps reduce confusion over individual responsibilities while minimizing overlapping or duplicate work activities. By having a fuller understanding of their and others' responsibilities, individuals are more likely to accurately report on the tasks they perform, and feel fairly treated (Cerna, 2014).

Structuring democratic voice in practice

While instances of structured democratic voice in accountability are relatively rare, this section outlines several notable examples from which lessons can be drawn. These insights are especially pertinent in East Asia and other regions where citizens increasingly clamour for greater authority in decision making (Welzel & Dalton, 2017). To begin, international organizations have increasingly encouraged democratic participation in education planning and evaluation. In the context of education sector planning, UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) suggests that government and non-government stakeholders be represented in joint steering committees with formal power to appraise and approve the sector plan (IIEP, 2010). The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has also supported civil society engagement through the creation of local education groups – in 2014 35 national coalitions reported engagement in such groups – and, more importantly, through the establishment of Joint Sector Reviews (JSRs).

Over the past two decades JSRs have been used in the health and education sectors, aiming to promote country ownership and mutual accountability. Ideally, JSRs are meant to bring together representatives of government agencies, donors, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, on a yearly basis, to discuss and evaluate sector-wide progress, culminating in an annual report. This version of structured democratic voice is not without challenges. A recent GPE commissioned

evaluation of 39 JSRs held between July 2014 and December 2015 highlights the fact that stakeholder participation is uneven (Martinez et al, 2017). The GPE report indicates that the Ministry of Finance was only present in about 53% of the reviews. Parents' associations were present in only one-third of the reviews; teachers' unions in less than half of JSRs.

Another challenge is converting the presence of difference actors into a discussion in which all voices are heard and valued. In practice JSRs tend to be donor driven initiatives, discussions often limited to the effectiveness of donor investment or donor reports to the government (Holvoet & Inberg, 2009). Other actors, including civil society representatives, tend to take a back seat, viewing themselves more as observers than participants. The lack of active participation of all parties and an over emphasis on donor issues work to undermine the JSRs aim of fostering mutual accountability. The strong donor orientation may also limit a more comprehensive review of the education plan or system. Of the 39 plans evaluated in the 2014-2015 period, only one-third of the JSRs adequately followed up on activities from the previous year (Martinez et al, 2017). If the national ownership of JSRs is to improve they need less focus on donor concerns and more on planning and implementation issues.

Some countries in Latin America have provided opportunities for structured democratic voice. Examples include Colombia's review of its National Development Plan (OECD, 2016) and Mexico's independent election administration (Avritzer, 2002). In Argentina, following a 2006 education law, The Confederation of Education Workers was formally included in the National Education Quality Council, thereby participating in efforts to plan policy and evaluate progress. In Uruguay, teachers overcame a traditionally, externally imposed policy by mobilizing teacher unions to place representatives on the central education board (Gindin & Finger, 2013). Unfortunately, teacher union participation in education decision making is quite rare -- not only in the region, but elsewhere. A recent survey of 70 unions across more than 50 countries found that approximately three in five were never or rarely consulted on issues related to teaching materials or pedagogical practices (Symeonidis, 2015).

Brazil is a well-established example of structured democratic voice in relation to education planning. The 1996 education law called on the ministry to quickly formulate a decennial education plan (Bodião, 2016; de Andrade Tosta and Coutinho, 2016). Beginning in 1997, the National Education Council, established by the National Congress on Education, opened up a series of consultations with civil society organizations, professional associations and specialists who helped develop national guidelines for education (Bodião, 2016: Federal Republic of Brazil, 2014). During this period, participants from unions, academic institutions, scientific and student organizations, as well as organized social movements, came together to establish the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools. This Forum led the democratic process of drafting a proposed education plan, which was submitted to the government in early 1998. The plan, which would run from 2001 to 2010, was endorsed by over 70 parliamentarians upon submission (Bodião, 2016).

Brazil's ministry or education learned from this process and took the lead in development of subsequent plans, including the creation of municipal, state, and national conferences (Bodião, 2016). These conferences encouraged dialogue between civil society organizations and the government. More than 3 million people were involved in the entire process, including over 450,000 delegates. Central to these consultations was the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, established in 1999, which currently includes over 200 groups, operating in 22 of 27 Brazilian states.

In 2010 the National Education Conference developed final amendments to the reference document circulated by the ministry and submitted the proposed plan to the House of Representatives (Bodião, 2016). The national conference, however, lacked actual authority allowing the House of Representatives to disregard some proposals and include others not discussed in the conference at all. The four years between submission of the plan and sign off by the President were marked by disagreements around public financing, specifically whether 7% or 10% of GDP should be allocated to education. In the year immediately following the plan's submission, civil society groups took advantage of the call for amendments and submitted more than 2,900 for consideration. Groups were further brought together through a media campaign titled PNE for Real, where members gave interviews, wrote articles and held media events. This pressure was outlined in a technical note, 'Why 7% of GDP for education is not enough: Calculation of investments need for the new PNE to ensure a minimum quality standard'. The note concluded that an additional 5.4% of GDP was necessary, well above the government's estimate of 1.9% (Bodião, 2016). The civil society campaign was partially successful as target 20 of the 2014/2023 PNE identified 10% of GDP as the investment goal by the end of the plan (Federal Republic of Brazil, 2014).

In Africa, communities in Ethiopia and Malawi provide noteworthy examples of a partnership model, which builds government capacity while including community members in the problem identification and evaluation process. Supported by a Civil Society Organization (CSO), the model is centered around a school performance appraisal meeting, which works within the government's monitoring schedule to improve the capacity of those already tasked with data collection through targeted training. At a school progress meeting, local authorities are trained on an integrated information system that provides input into electronic school report cards. The report cards then act as the primary prompt during the school performance appraisal meeting and are presented visually to ensure participation from those with lower literacy skills. The discussion culminates in a school action plan which articulates how each actor can contribute to reaching the jointly identified goals (Visser et al., 2017).

In Wolaita Zone Ethiopia, the final product included a Gender Action Plan with clearly delegated responsibilities for all, including the Girls' Club Coordinator. Evaluations of the project found positive gains on girls' attendance and their attitudes toward education (Link Community Development, 2017). An external, post-project evaluation found significant gains in achievement with decreased gender disparity. Additionally, parents were more likely to encourage their daughters to attend and teachers improved their gender sensitive instruction over the project (Visser et al., 2017). Importantly, this was not a one-time CSO intervention. The sustainability of the approach is demonstrated in the continuation of school performance appraisal meetings in many participating schools. Still, complimenting government efforts does not make then immune to fluctuations in funding. In Ethiopia, lack of financial resources was identified as the greatest threat to its longevity (Visser et al., 2017).

Dominant models of accountability and their critics

Two important implications emerge from these examples of structuring more democratic discussions of education policy and planning. First, to reach ambitious international education targets such as increased learning or reduced gaps in outcomes there needs to be coherence across actors and policies. This requires input from diverse actors at different levels in meaningful ways. Individuals who have clearly identified responsibilities should be an integral part of the process of converting policy intentions into practice and subsequent evaluation. Second, the inclusion of structured democratic voice in the formal policy and planning process reduces duplication of efforts that could lead to

fractured accountability. Fractured accountability can occur when an individual is held accountable for multiple tasks, pulling them in opposing directions, and diminishing their ability to fully complete any single responsibility.

To what extent has the dominant discourse around accountability in education incorporated these ideas and principles? Arguably, the most influential framework for accountability in education is the one advanced in the World Bank's 2004 *World Development Report* (WDR). The 2004 WDR emphasized the importance of public services responding to the demands of local end users, advocated for greater decentralization and control – and more accountability (World Bank, 2003). The WDR accountability framework details relationships between clients, providers, and policy makers (Lateef, 2016), and consists of two paths to accountability: the long route and the short route. The long route includes citizens influencing policymakers who would then have oversight authority over service providers. Providers would give an account of the action, not directly to the clients but to the policy makers. The World Bank made clear that this was the less desirable option. The large bureaucracy, and embedded politics, was expected to ground progress to a halt, making the government largely unresponsive to citizen demands (Edwards, 2012). Even in a well-functioning system, the long route was seen as weak (Lateef, 2016).

The desired short route was considered easier as it gave direct authority to clients, allowing them voice and choice in providers (Lateef, 2016). A key underlying assumption of the short route was that "transparency (access to information) combined with participation would lead to more accountability, which in turn would improve service delivery" (Dewachter et al., 2018, p. 159). With information in hand, clients are expected to be conscientious consumers, rationally analysing the possibilities and switching providers when the analysis deems appropriate. The expectation that clients engage as consumers was confirmed ten years after the release of the 2004 WDR when the lead author of the report made clear the only option available in the short route, in their opinion, was market-based accountability (Lateef, 2016).

A presumed advantage of the short route was its ability to overcome the principal-agent problem (Lateef, 2016). The principal-agent problem examines the ability of the client or principal (in education often the parent) to have their needs met by the agent (in education this is most often understood as teachers). The agent is hired by the principal but misaligned interests and aims often lead to problems in efficiency (Smith, 2017). The direct relationship between principals and agents laid out in the short route improve information available to the principle, allowing for an evaluation of interests and potential sanction (perhaps in changing schools) in the event of misalignment. The expected result is the agent will correct their behaviour to maintain their relationship with the principal. Local control, as illustrated by the short route, has become a mantra in the accountability literature. Short route practices supported by the World Bank have influenced a range of international organizations including the Brookings Institution, GPE, UNESCO, and Save the Children (Edwards, 2016).

Prior critiques of the 2004 WDR have questioned the dichotomous presentation of seemingly mutually exclusive pathways. The short and long route to accountability should not be viewed in isolation because they are, in fact, intertwined (Dewachter et al., 2018). The short route "needs the 'long route' of responsive elected authorities to work" (Fox, 2015, p. 347) and as the effectiveness of accountability approaches are context dependent – "accountability approaches effective in some contexts and some aspects of education may be detrimental in others" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7) – adopting appropriate complimentary approaches typically leads to the best results (Dewachter et al. 2018).

When we highlight the importance of structured democratic voice, the shortcomings of both the short and long route become clear. As Dewachter and colleagues (2018) pointed out the short route considers a limited range of actors and these actors are expected to work individually and independently from one another, leading the approach to discount the power of larger civil society. The assumed independence of individual actors creates a situation where accountable parties are likely to be pulled in different directions, diminishing the time and quality of their efforts and leading to fractured accountability. In reviewing the principal-agent problem it is clear that what was originally seen as a two-party relationship has been stretched to include multiple principals (Fox, 2015). In education, the assumption that these multiple principles represent a homogeneous set of interests (Fox, 2015), and therefore have the same demands of educators, is violated. The multiple principles demand different tasks from the responsible party (Lateef, 2016), reducing the potential gains from accountability.

The long route to accountability advances a limited notion of who constitutes the government and, therefore, who has authority under this approach. The long route clearly separates the governed (clients) from those that govern (policymakers), with the latter holding full oversight authority. The long route fails to consider "other public 'checks and balances' institutions, such as legislatures, the judicial system, audit institutions, ombudsman agencies, or public information access reforms" (Fox, 2015, p. 347). The common examples of accountability through the long route -- namely, elections and protests (Lateef, 2016) -- are temporary in nature or limited to one-time, tangential voice (Smith & Rowland, 2014). With structured democratic voice the government cannot be clearly separated from the governed because the people are the government. With their voice included in policy planning and evaluation they have authority to help redirect the course of an education system in need of assistance.

Structured democratic voice is, therefore, best represented in Dewachter and colleagues' (2018) update of the long route. Recognizing the weaknesses in the long route as presented, the authors break the long route into three paths. First, the traditional view of the long route is laid out as political accountability, where authority remains in the hands of policymakers. Added to this path are citizen-led and civil society-led social accountability. Social accountability, although typically associated with the short route, is placed here as citizens are invited into governance space. Citizen-led social accountability decreases the distance between the governed and government, providing for direct interaction between citizens and policymakers. Civil society-led social accountability involves the "mediation of citizen demands through a civil society organization" (p. 160). In both situations, citizens hold on to some decision making authority. The former could be accomplished through a form of structured direct democratic voice while the latter would likely involve a form of structured representative democratic voice.

Concluding remarks

The introduction of externally driven, results-oriented accountability has fostered a competitive atmosphere and undermined trust in education. It has also been shown to be ineffective in raising learning levels and reducing disparities (Lingard et al., 2017; Smith, 2016c; UNESCO, 2017). And while creating and implementing internally focused accountability systems that reflect the shared responsibility and concerns of engaged education stakeholders is no easy task, such systems are more likely to contribute to real gains in education, including achieving ambitious targets in education (Fullan, 2011). This paper argues that structured democratic voice is a key component of effective

accountability. When multi-party deliberations are applied to education, their impact is palpable: better aligned and consensual aims, less reliance on temporary responses by strongly vested actors, and accountability which is less fractured – as demands on individual actors are more coherent – and more sustainable – as the structured nature of the practice makes it less susceptible to external shocks and political whims.

Structured democratic voice is nurtured in organized spaces where actors with intersecting interests in education overlap (see Figure 2). These spaces enable participants to channel their input and responses into all aspects of policy making and policy evaluation. Such a process of constructive deliberation differs from the dominant short and long route approaches to accountability, in which rigid boundaries among the three groups are maintained. Structured democratic voice, when properly applied, creates benefits for all involved. For example, parents, community members and other stakeholders, located outside of the school, are more confident that their voices are being respected and heard, which increases their trust in the process. Teachers and school leaders benefit since the enabling environment to fulfil their responsibilities improves. They have more detailed information as to their individual responsibilities and are more motivated to addressing the learning needs of the students. Additionally, by participating in decision making processes, teachers find that trust in the teaching profession improves –educators are seen as knowledgeable and committed. Trust in the process also improves since participation leads to a more fair and just education system. Finally, the government benefits through increased capacity as they are exposed to a variety of perspectives and learn from those on the front line of education, which ultimately leads to efficiency gains.

Figure 2: Collaboration for structured democratic voice
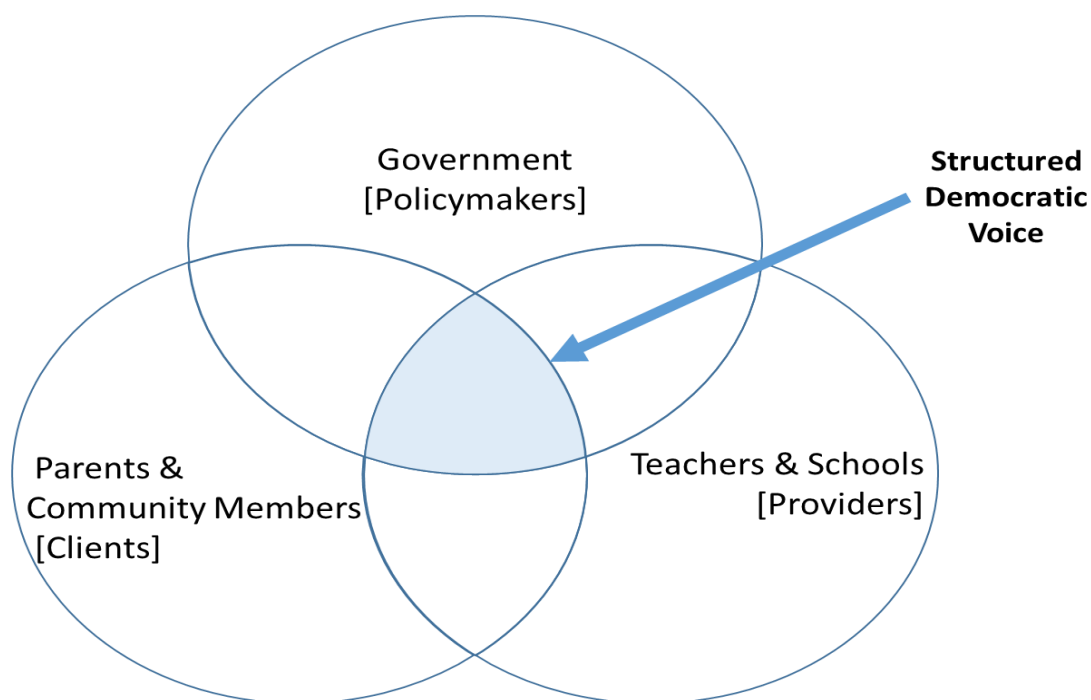
While research is needed to identify which conditions support the inclusion of structured democratic voice into the accountability system, several obstacles are clear. First, capacity among all stakeholders can be a concern. This can lead to situations where, despite the inclusion of multiple actors, participants may not contribute equally or effectively (Martinez et al., 2017). Second,

governments may be disinterested in incorporating other voices in the decision-making process. Some are yet to be convinced about the benefits of sustained multi-stakeholder engagement.

The long-time commitment to creating a truly rigorous participatory process may also dismay governments (IIEP, 2010). In order to push a plan or policy through quickly, government may limit decision making to a select few and avoid extended consultation. However, this builds little capacity within government and, perhaps more importantly, does not engender ownership or commitment from front line actors responsible for delivering education (Williams & Cummings, 2005).

Lastly, donors have a complex role to play in this process. On one hand, they are highly convinced of the value of accountability, they often support the dominant accountability models, which they embed in agreements between the donor and the government. On the other hand, they can dominate instances of structured democratic voice, pushing out weaker, less articulate voice who may feel intimidated in such spaces or whose inputs are viewed as less "evidence based" and anecdotal. Donors need to consider what is necessary to foster this type of truly collaborative, multi-stakeholder arrangement.

Creating opportunities for structured democratic voice may not be a simple task, but it is one worth pursuing. In addition to more reactionary movements from citizens and civil society, and instead of tokenistic pledges from government to provide one-time input into decision making, structured democratic voice provides a sustained presence across generations and changes in political leadership. Its collaborative potential provides a platform where a multitude of voices are heard and meaningfully deliberated, improving the chance that the ambitious goals of education are met.

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