

# CREATE A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

EARCOS Monday 2 November 2009  
10:00 - 11:15  
Bambi Betts

Accountability is...

## The components of an accountability system

## WHY CONSIDER THE NOTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY?

1.

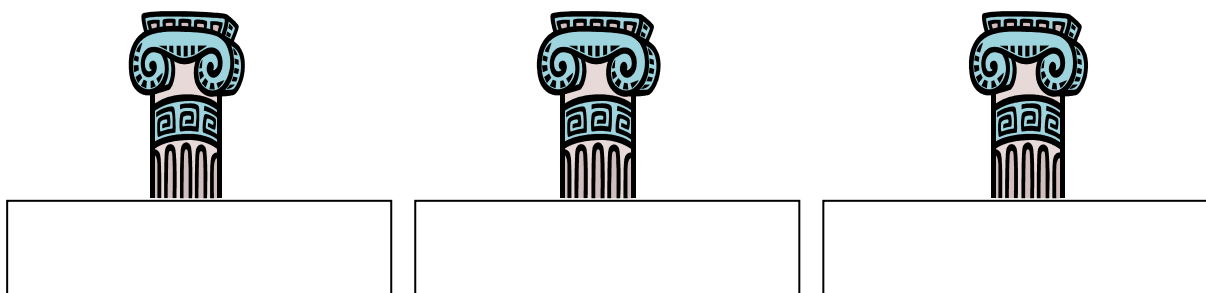
2.

# WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A 'PROFESSION'?

## A profession:

1. Has a particular and specific body of knowledge Which has practical application in society
2. And requires some level of 'exclusive' competence (e.g. too complicated to be routinely applied by 'lay' people).
3. Develops and transmits its own knowledge.
4. Maintains a service ethic.
5. Maintains and constantly upgrades standards for its members
6. Insists on a commitment to hold the interest of the 'client' as paramount.
7. Holds members accountable.

# WHAT ARE SCHOOL LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR?



## MYTHS, THOUGHTFUL PREMISES, DILEMMAS

	MYTH	THOUGHTFUL PREMISE	DILEMMA
1. We can tell if a school is effective by examining all the 'inputs' that it takes to create one, and can hold the school accountable only for those things.			
2. A school can claim it is effective if it can show substantial evidence that students are achieving the desired learning outcomes.			
3. It is not possible to collect valid and reliable evidence of ALL desired learning outcomes; we cannot be accountable for what we can't 'measure'.			
4. All valued learning outcomes can and should be taught and assessed, however challenging.			
5. Accountability is inherently a notion imposed by 'corporate-think', whose bottom line is very different and therefore has little or no application in education.			
6. Accountability has a place in schools. A school's bottom line is learning; learners benefit when the principles of accountability permeate the work of the school.			
7. 'Accountability' is the set of things we do to punish low performers (or those we don't agree with) and reward those who do.			
8. Accountability is the set of things we do to more honestly and transparently challenge our learning organization to produce what its mission claims.			
9. There are genuinely so many variables in the individual learning process that we are understandably confused about precisely what we can be accountable for.			
10. Determining precisely which individual or group is accountable remains a challenging issue.			

## DOES MY SCHOOL PROMOTE A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY?

	Yes	Sort of	No
1. There is regular review of student achievement results.			
2. Teachers share student work with each other in an attempt to better clarify what is meant by 'standards.'			
3. Students are provided with clear criteria for all assignments and assessments.			
4. Student self-assessment is a regular feature of the school.			
5. Teacher evaluation tools emphasize student results as an important data source for examining teacher effectiveness			
6. There is a systematic process for monitoring student achievement.			
7. School wide learning goals are set annually and monitored closely.			
8. When results of an assessment are poor, the first response of teachers is to examine where the teaching may need to be improved.			
9. There is a systematic process for monitoring how and to what extent the written curriculum is being implemented.			
10. The results of student assessments are regularly used to adjust teaching.			
11. Parent response to the curriculum and teaching is collected regularly, through surveys and/or other vehicles and is used as one of multiple sources of action.			
12. Student response to curriculum and teaching is collected regularly and used as one of multiple sources for action.			
13. In schools with more than one section of each grade level or course, common assessments are conducted regularly and their results used to help evaluate overall student achievement and appropriateness of standards.			
14. There is 360 degree evaluation.			
15. Learning standards or outcomes are clearly stated.			
16. Teachers systematically use the results of student assessments to adjust teaching.			
17. Principals utilize a systematic process for monitoring student achievement.			
18. There is a set of required, research-based learning strategies in place which is monitored regularly.			
19. Common assessments (vertical and horizontal) are conducted regularly and their results used to help evaluate overall student achievement and appropriateness of learning outcomes (standards).			

20. There is regular, systematic review of the potential gap between stated beliefs and practices.			
21. The school employs an accreditation agency which emphasizes student achievement results.			
22. The accreditation process is approached as a full school improvement process.			
23. All valued learning outcomes (not just the academic ones) are considered as criteria when making promotion and graduation decisions.			
24. There is an annual, public report of learning results.			
25. Rewards and sanctions are based primarily on learning results.			
26. There is a school-wide, comprehensive assessment scheme, mapping out learning targets and the types of assessment tools used to assess those targets.			
27. School leaders (head, principals, etc.) are evaluated regularly; criteria includes student learning results.			

**SUMMARY: OUR BIG UNDERSTANDINGS**

- 1) Accountability systems improve student \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) There are several \_\_\_\_\_ surrounding the notion of accountability which create real obstacles to implementing a system.
- 3) Our \_\_\_\_\_ is at risk without serious attention to accountability.
- 4) There are some key, essential \_\_\_\_\_ which are hallmarks of a school which values accountability.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ is central to effectively using an accountability process to improve learning.

## **Accountability: Myths and Dilemmas**

### **By Bambi Betts**

(Reprinted from The International Educator, December 2004)

Ready or not, the education profession is coming of age. Just as with all dynamic human endeavors, it has painfully spiraled through infancy and childhood, and is now making its way through adolescence toward maturity. And with all such endeavors that want to be considered true ‘professions’, that maturity comes with the notion of accountability – holding those who claim its name to some clear and worthy bottom lines.

The debate is now over on ‘if’ we in education should be held accountable. We should – if we want to be counted as a profession. The dialogue is now about accountability for what and to whom, and with what consequences.

While the ‘for what and to whom’ may be clear in some national education systems, in international schools we have had the luxury of basking in murky accountability waters. The very aspect of our schools that attracts many educators to international, independent schools – autonomy – has also become the nemesis for many. Autonomy to do what for whom at what cost? Freedom to define (or not) our own bottom line, without ever having had to take out malpractice insurance? I know of no any international school yet which has been shut down or even seriously compromised because some students didn’t learn.

Like some of our other practices in education, our approach to accountability seems rooted in a series of myths or mistaken beliefs, masquerading as legitimate premises. And, to be fair, in a couple of serious dilemmas yet unresolved, but unquestionably tied to our maturation as a profession.

#### **Myth #1: We can tell if a school is effective by examining all the ‘inputs’ that it takes to create one, and can hold the school accountable only for those things.**

Just like we know a cake is good by checking that all the right ‘ingredients’ were used to make it? This myth has led many a school to fail to create a comprehensive process for systematically collecting evidence of and analyzing the results of student learning. Rather it has left it primarily in the hands of individual teachers.

#### **A more thoughtful premise:**

A school can claim it is effective if it can show substantial evidence that students are achieving the desired learning outcomes.

A school basing its practice on this premise would:

- Have clearly stated learning outcomes
- Maintain a systematic assessment scheme, incorporating classroom, common and external data
- Teachers and principals highly skilled in analyzing learning results
- Spend professional development time and money on uncovering the link between learning results, instructional practice and related learning issues.

#### **Myth # 2: It is not possible to collect valid and reliable evidence of ALL the desired learning outcomes; we cannot be accountable for what we can’t ‘measure’.**

The result of this mistaken belief has been, among others, a noticeable gap between our mission statements and the kind of student emerging from our schools. Does your school regularly graduate academically able, but perhaps morally or ethically challenged students? Many international schools claim in their mission statements that if a child comes to their school, he should become more respectful, more global-minded, more ethical, etc., yet clearly value academic achievement over moral readiness. This myth has focused us on what is perhaps easiest to assess rather than most essential.

#### **A more thoughtful premise: All valued learning outcomes can and should be taught and assessed, however challenging.**

A school anchored in this premise might:

- Actively teach and assess the full range of ‘standards, including the values, attitudes and dispositions its mission claims.
- Record evidence of academic and affective learning standards separately
- Make decisions about individual learners programs (e.g. moving to the next grade) based equally on academic and affective standards

**Myth # 3: Accountability is inherently a notion imposed by ‘corporate-thinking’, whose bottom line is very different and therefore has little or no application in education.**

The assumption is made at many schools that, per se, any notion that is seems ‘corporate’ is automatically a mismatch for schools. Of course, that the notion of accountability was born in the corporate world is nonsense. But even it had been, do we throw out because of its origin? This wholesale mistaken belief has led us as a profession to lag far behind in creating dynamic, effective, purposeful learning organizations, missing out on some universal lessons about leadership and results. It is this myth that often keeps us from even attempting to build a culture of accountability.

**A more thoughtful premise:**

Accountability has a place in schools. A school’s bottom line is learning and learners benefit when the principles of accountability permeate the work of the school.

A school adhering to this premise might:

- Reorganize its schedule to incorporate regular opportunities to analyze student learning results
- Include ‘accountability for learning curricular outcomes’ in the list of standards or expectations for teachers
- Support teachers in their efforts to examine their own teaching with regard to specific student learning results

To be fair, the accountability gap does not begin and end with myths. We face some genuine dilemmas as well.

**Dilemma # 1: Accountable for what?**

There are genuinely so many variables in the individual learning process that we are understandably confused about precisely what we can be accountable for. Is there really such a thing as a ‘grade level standard’? Or is it a futile attempt to quantify the unquantifiable? Or perhaps we should just be accountable for ensuring that each student makes some progress, or at least MOST students. Or should we just be accountable for exposing learners to what’s in the curriculum? We certainly give the illusion through our standards- and criteria based curricula that we are clear about what we hope for, but at the same time acknowledge that learning does not begin and end at the classroom door. Definitely a dilemma.

**Dilemma # 2: Who should be held accountable?**

Assuming we could get around the ‘variables’ issue, the ‘who is accountable’ dilemma would remain. From the way most of our schools are organized, it would logically follow that the classroom teacher is the primary player to hold accountable. After all, it is in the classroom that the learner is supposedly engaged with the specific learning outlined in the curriculum. And that teacher is generally the only one in there. But what about the principal, and the school head or even the policy-makers? Do they bear any responsibility for the schools bottom line? Is there even perhaps a collective responsibility?

**Dilemma # 3: Our organizational model includes conditions do not easily cohabit with accountability.**

Unlike in most professions, in education a single person is responsible for nearly all the factors which will contribute to the ‘bottom line’. The teacher: defines what will be taught and how it will be taught, designs most of the tools for assessing the bottom line (learning), makes the final judgment on the extent to which learners have achieved the bottom line, and then makes key decisions that impact both the short and long term future learning opportunities for each student. It doesn’t get more insular than that. Where does accountability come in when it is essentially designed to be a one woman show?

So myths and dilemmas abound; what else is new. Our profession and its value are at risk if we do not embrace the notion of accountability more fully and with a greater sense of urgency.