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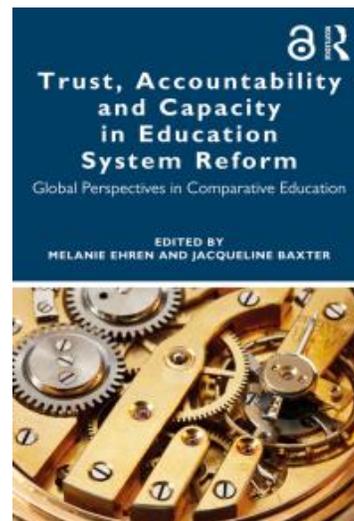
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Reviewed by Carlos Ornelas
Metropolitan Autonomous University Xochimilco
Mexico City

My main research interest is educational reform from a comparative and international perspective. Thus, I read books and essays that allow me to broaden my analysis and accumulate concepts – some new, others offering variants – for interpretation. Although some studies record the conditions for success, most of the literature focuses on chronicling failures, bureaucratic blunders, or the resistance that reforms provoke amongst teachers and parents.

For example, Torsten Husen (2007) argues that “the common problem of the school systems of modern industrial societies – and not so modern societies, I add – is the bureaucratic ‘cement cover’ which stifles initiative and the innovative spirit” (p. 5). He asserts that there are no universal paradigms for conducting educational reforms. The most common are initiated by national governments and follow a top-down path, usually more concerned with who rules the school systems. Others aim to change the dominant pedagogy or introduce new approaches (constructivism, competencies) in regimes where behaviorism predominates. Still, others emerge from grassroots settings, usually to reclaim cultural values or native languages.

However, for those reforms initiated by the ministers of education, Husen proposes a set of general rules that constitute a strategy that, if properly taken into consideration, is conducive to the success of the reforms. These “rules” entail that the reform effort requires time for implementation, cannot be executed overnight, needs many resources as well as grassroots participation in the reform process, and must include methods for conflict resolution.



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Husen and others who discuss educational reforms generally refer to government initiatives but do not distinguish, except in a few cases, school systems' specific forms of governance. In their recent edited volume, *Trust, Accountability and Capacity in Education System Reform: Global Perspectives in Comparative Education*, Melanie Ehren and Jacqueline Baxter also highlight why some educational reforms achieve considerable success but approach the topic from a governance perspective. In this volume, the authors look at the government labors of a country and how school systems manage themselves. They talk of building blocks for the attainment of educational system reform.

In a brief statement, the writers establish the connections amongst the three blocks: trust, capacity, and accountability.

Trust for example allows us to explain the interactions between stakeholders such as policymakers, school leaders, teachers and parents involved in providing high-quality education and why collaboration between some stakeholders is more successful in building capacity for improvement. Capacity of stakeholders (their knowledge, skills and decision-making power) is needed to provide a high standard of education and deliver on their (new) responsibilities (once agreed on), while accountability provides a set of incentives for improvement, as well as information to understand where improvement is needed.

Ehren and Baxter argue that the governance of an educational system consists of specific forms of coordination between instituted norms and enduring patterns of interaction. These modes range from self-regulation by elements of civil society (such as the resolution by families whether to send their children to schools) to decision-making by officials. Moreover, they include a scope between cooperation – and conflict – of governmental, private, and diverse collective actors, especially teachers' labor unions. Yet, the authors do not often focus on the role of educators' organizations, except in sections when they discuss the growth of distrusting cultures, and the role of corruption and nepotism, based on UNESCO's studies on mismanagement, including misconduct within teachers' unions.

Jaqueline Baxter poses the example of the South Africa School Governing Bodies, which possess more decision-making powers than almost anywhere in the world. Their capacities include (1) Setting and collecting school fees (although subject to parental approval). (2) Determining admissions policies. (3) Setting languages of teaching. (4) Deciding school development plans (collaborating with the principal). (5) Establishing a code of conduct. Yet the author argues that trust in these governing bodies by parents, teachers, and the community is often compromised through nepotism or corrupt practices. She asserts that most of the major unions recommend that their members stand for election to governing bodies – this includes officers of the association – which may lead to dubious outcomes: “Unfortunately, in some cases, unions effectively ‘capture’ governing bodies, exerting powerful and, in some cases, hegemonic influence on appointments processes. This influence is compounded if the principal is also a union member or officer”. This situation is similar to my own research on the leaders of the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de

Trabajadores de la Educación, or SNTE), who colonized the governance of the Mexican school system and are the hegemonic force in the associations for social participation in education (Ornelas, 2012).

The three main archetypes of governance of education systems that the editors of this volume define are (1) hierarchical, (2) market predominance, and (3) interaction networks. As in all Weberian typologies, these pure models are useful for analyzing political phenomena, but their elements come together in complex ways. Collectively, the contributing authors of this book examine how these governance epitomes generate trust, develop certain capacities, facilitate accountability (or fulfill their responsibility), or how they fail to do so or execute the reform with flaws.

In the first five chapters (of 14 total), the editors use conceptual and theoretical explanations to reason that trust, accountability, and capacity are the main elements for a fruitful reform of the governance system in education. Also, such foundations have favorable implications in teachers' classrooms, habits, and aptitudes. In addition, they discuss how teachers gain social support, especially from students' parents. The authors do not presume that any reform achieves perfection; no project has resounding results, just as not all of them fail.

In the following eight chapters of the book, with an impressive battery of data, Ehren and Baxter, along with contributing authors, analyze case studies of education systems in the Netherlands, Austria, Singapore, Kenya, Chile, Finland, South Africa, and the United States. Incidentally, the United States is probably the only case where the education system is not a governmental creation. On the contrary, it was a product of grassroots initiatives (mostly from and for white people) that David Tyack (1974) labeled as the one best system.

In Chapter 5, Ehren and Reinhard Bachmann explore education systems reforms in England and Germany tied to school inspections. In a systematic review of qualitative and quantitative studies, they found such reforms exhibited both positive and negative effects. In the case of the England Inspectorate, inspector reports led to constructive outcomes, such as school administrators' reflections on the quality of their school, implementation of specific improvements that adhered to inspection standards, and attempts to remedy failures reported. In contrast, "PISA shock" over the German PISA ranking in 2000 led many German states to institute large-scale assessments and school inspections, which resulted in a decline in student outcomes the following year.

The remaining compiled studies creatively harmonize the concepts of trust, accountability, and capacity with these modes of governance: hierarchies, markets, and networks. For example, in the case studies showing progress, public servants and teachers generated trust among students and families, even if partial. Thus, one may imply that the transparent political performance of the bureaucracy is key to achieving confidence. Also, teachers gain the trust of students and parents (social recognition) if they act with professionalism and have a strong motivation to perform, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. In this book, as in many others, the authors stress transparency and accountability involve clear and public disclosure

of information, rules, plans, processes, and actions by governments, private or social organizations, and persons.

However, the editors maintain that these two blocks – trust and accountability – are insufficient to accomplish goals if there is no solid and constantly evolving individual, institutional (norms and informal rules), system, and societal capacities. Still, they claim that other attributes beyond the basic blocks are crucial to building capacity: knowledge, motivation, independent judgment, autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The authors remark on specific achievements where two or all three blocks are combined, regardless of whether the modes of governance would be hierarchical or democratic. Nonetheless, countries whose educational systems evolved from a hierarchical type to network type of authority increased the chances for success. For example, hierarchical control dominated most postwar Western European education systems until the 1980s, when market-based types of coordination partly replaced it. But the growth of inequity with such a mode led to the emergence of the network governance archetype in the 1990s. In this case, interdependence, trust, and empathy were the principles for collaboration between schools, with Finland as the paradigmatic case.

The editors and various contributors also record the challenges faced by less developed countries that resort to advice from intergovernmental organizations and sometimes import difficulties in the absence of domestic capacities. Although in different words, they report that accountability often destroys trust when governments introduce high-stakes assessments as external control in a context of doubts in schools and teachers.

Although not overflowing with enthusiasm, the contents of *Trust, Accountability and Capacity in Education System Reform* offer optimistic visions to push for change, even in societies where distrust and pessimism reign. Ehren and Baxter do not debate much with other authors. However, they refute melancholic visions, such as Jacques Lesourne's (1993) assertion that educational systems are hyper-stable and contain routines that favor anonymity, independence, and the protection of bureaucratic strata. Therefore, according to Lesourne, when reforms trigger from the top of power, they often die before reaching the units where teachers, parents, and students participate.

The case studies of Austria and Singapore portrayed in this volume contradict such a harsh judgment. For example, Herbert Altrichter (chapter 7) documents the Central Ministry of Education of Austria's launch of the nationwide National Quality Framework in 2013 to implement the new quality management and monitoring strategy. Among other evaluation features, the mandate established the obligation of the national authorities to provide instruments for governance and (self) evaluation and support structures for schools. Although it was a reform ordered by the highest authorities, teachers and other actors welcomed it. In another example, Yue-Yi Hwa, in Chapter 11, asserts that Singapore has an extensive teacher performance management system incorporating detailed performance standards, regular formal appraisals, a career ladder, and competition-based salary bonuses. He argued, "In Singapore, public trust is

focused upon the Ministry of Education and its capacity to deliver good learning outcomes system-wide – hence the extensive, centrally steered system for managing the teachers’ performance.” Neither of those reforms died before reaching the school classrooms. They broke the bureaucratic cement cover.

In the last chapter, Ehren and Baxter wrap up the lessons learned from the various countries presented in their book, whether and how trust and accountability improve education systems, and how that depends on the institutional structures and the social and cultural context in which they operate. Finally, they reflect on how governments use trust and accountability to improve the capacities of the education systems to increase learning outcomes and enhance system-level performance and interpersonal relations. The triptych the authors develop to motivate changes for improvement may help analyze reforms in other countries. However, such an approach, I think, must consider the political context and the social struggles to control state apparatuses.

This volume also has the potential to open new avenues for analyzing educational reforms in other parts of the world. For example, it will support my examination into the school system reforms that the Mexican government undertook in 2013 and the current government’s counter-reform in December 2018. In both cases, scholars perceive the institutional perseverance of the education system, governed by group interests – especially of the leaders of the National Union of Education Workers – and the resilience of certain teacher traditions. Unfortunately, corruption among bureaucratic segments, union leaders, and rank-and-file teachers who inherited or bought their teaching posts is an encumbrance that breeds obstacles to change. In short, such a situation is a rickety rule of law; it is worse than the venality schemes that Baxter analyzes in Chapter 4, “Distrusting Contexts and Cultures and Capacity for System-Level Improvement.” Still, such corruption is not immovable. Based on the concepts of trust, accountability, and capacity, I can imagine alternative scenarios.

I will endeavor to incorporate these concepts of trust, accountability, and capacity into analytical proposals that I have worked on – and continue to work on – to envision effective ways of change in the Mexican educational system. As a guiding principle for reform, I believe that trust should build a narrative that harmonizes with the surrounding reality. Further, the reform must propose practical goals and work with and for teachers according to their professional identities, social status, knowledge, and values.

I welcome Ehren and Baxter’s collection as a valuable contribution to the study of educational reforms from a comparative lens focused on international similarities and differences. *Trust, Accountability and Capacity in Education System Reform* offers evidence that there are possibilities for change with a humanistic approach and to achieve goals of equity and inclusion, while making student learning a practical reality. If reformists cultivate trust in the context of governance through networks, create the block of accountability, and build capacities, the right to education for all would be an attractive and achievable proposition. Moreover, in a democratic ethos, such reform ambitions are likely to bear fruit in the medium and long term.

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About the Authors of the Book

Melanie Ehren is a professor in educational governance and the director of the research institute LEARN! at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and an honorary professor at the UCL Institute of Education. Her academic work focuses on the effectiveness of accountability and evaluation systems and aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the interplay between accountability and the broader education system in tackling inequality and improving student outcomes.

Jacqueline Baxter is an associate professor in public policy and management and the Director of the Centre for Research and Innovation in Online Business and Legal Education at The Open University, UK. Her research interests lie include public policy, accountability, and governance. She is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and the Editor-in-Chief of *Management in Education*.

About the Author of the Review

Carlos Ornelas is a professor of education and communications at the Metropolitan Autonomous University, Xochimilco, in Mexico City. His most recent edited book in English is *Politics of Education in Latin America: Reforms: Resistance and persistence* (Brill-Sense, 2019). Together with Karen Monkman and Zaira Navarrete, he also edited *Innovación e Inclusión en Educación: Políticas y Estrategias de Implementación* (Plaza y Valdés Editores-Sociedad Mexicana de Educación Comparada, 2021).



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