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ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION: CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY?

Abstract

Accountability and evaluation have become an integral part of education systems and the day-to-day practice of educators in many countries around the world. The purpose of this presentation is to share an exploration of the links among evaluation, accountability and democracy which draws on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. It will be argued that evaluation and accountability intertwine not just as a condition for democracy and its improvement but also as a challenge for democracy. Firstly, the notion of evaluation and its relevance to accountability will be outlined. A more detailed outline of accountability will follow in order to present evaluation and accountability as “explanatory scheme” [Rancière 2010]; that is, an structure that primarily serves to explain and provide justification. To conclude, connections between accountability and democracy will be discussed and challenges posed by the former one to the latter one are explored.

Keywords: evaluation, accountability, democracy.

Introduction

Accountability and evaluation have become an integral part of education systems and the day-to-day practice of educators in many countries around the world. Practices, professionals and institutions concerned with assessment, scrutiny, audit and inspection continue to proliferate and the demand for them is widespread and mounting [Newman & Clarke 2009]. In this regard, schools are not different to other organizations and institutions today. Schools are also affected by this trend. The purpose of this presentation is to share an exploration of the links among evaluation, accountability and democracy which draws on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. It will be argued that evaluation and accountability intertwine not just as a condition for democracy and its improvement but, maybe, also as a challenge for democracy.

This article is divided into three parts. Firstly, the notion of evaluation and its relevance to accountability will be outlined in order to highlight resemblances to

accountability. An outline of accountability will follow. In this section, a number of core features will be emphasized in order to present evaluation and accountability as an “explanatory scheme” [Ranci re 2010]; that is, an structure that serves to make sense of, explain and, thus, provide justification. To conclude, connections between accountability and democracy will be discussed. After introducing the conventional account of the relationships between accountability and democracy, challenges posed by accountability to democracy are explored.

The relevance of evaluation to accountability

Accountability evokes evaluation and evaluation evokes accountability. Similarities and differences are not always made explicit, but, nevertheless, you will usually find both terms accompanying each other. Evaluation is usually assumed to serve different purposes. Accountability is often mentioned as one of them. It is not unusual to present accountability as a purpose or function of evaluation. In this view, evaluation would serve accountability and, in turn, fulfillment of this function would serve to justify evaluation [Perrin 2007]. For instance, evaluation is used to document what has been done and accomplished with the available resources in order to answer to those who fund or provide them [Mayne 2007]. If evaluation indeed serves to provide answers and justification through evidence, this use is likely to provide answers on “why evaluate” and justification to evaluation. In this way, evaluation supports accountability, although, if so, accountability will be supporting evaluation as well.

The accountability function of evaluation is fulfilled in the context of governance and policy-making [Hanberger 2011]. Usually, evaluation **for** accountability is deployed within this context. Therefore, accountability mechanisms may be considered to be a policy instrument [Spillane 2004] (for instance, like inducements). Evaluation constitutes a major accountability mechanism. Notice that it means that evaluation is subordinated to accountability and, hence, to policy-making and governance. Of course, this is not the sole function of evaluation in that context. Evaluation may be thought to serve other purposes such as policy improvement or legitimation. However, the fulfillment of the accountability function is likely to be related to the fulfillment of these other functions: for instance, the contribution of evaluation to accountability is likely to promote improvement or legitimation as well. In fact, the purpose of evaluation and accountability is often said to be improvement of teaching and learning [e.g. Reeves 2002].

Furthermore, it might be said that accountability and evaluation interweave dynamically and even overlap. Before concentrating on it, here is a brief introduction to accountability that will be of assistance in highlighting such connections between both notions:

First, decide what values we want individuals and organizations to uphold. Next, specify what it means to uphold these values by codifying them into very specific rules, procedures, and standards: Don’t do this. Do do that. Then create numerous reporting mechanisms

to demonstrate that these rules, procedures, and standards have been followed. Finally, give a separate organization the specific task of auditing these records to check whether the rules, procedures, and standards have been followed. And, if these auditors discover any failures, lapses, or discrepancies, they identify the culprits so that we can hold them accountable – so that we can punish them [Behn 2001: 7].

This is accountability.

And what is evaluation? An extensive analysis is beyond the scope of this article, but a minimal delineation of evaluation is provided now in order to highlight connections again. A standard conceptualization is used. Evaluation has been defined as “the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence, leading, as a part of the process to a judgement of value with a view to action” [Beeby 1978, in: Wolf 1990: 3]. According to Wolf [1990: 3–6], this definition embodies four core elements of evaluation: a) systematic collection of evidence, b) its interpretation, c) judgement of value and d) action.

- a) **Systematic collection of evidence** implies that information needs to be gathered. In addition, it is also implying that information needs to be acquired in a systematic way.
- b) **Interpretation of evidence** is highlighting that evaluation does not consist merely of collection of evidence and providing information which describes something. Collected evidence is to be analyzed and made sense of with great care. Systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of evidence provides a reporting mechanism required for accountability.
- c) The incorporation of the third element of the definition, **judgement of value**, reveals that evaluation neither is exhausted in description nor is mere interpretation of that being described. Evaluation also implies drawing judgements about the worth of something. A value judgement is a statement that ascribes value to something: when saying that something is good or is better, you are making a value judgement. The ascription of value depends not only upon the object itself but also upon the evaluating subjects [Kraft 1981: 131]. These judgements are to be drawn as reasonably and as carefully as possible, and a major basis for doing this should be the evidence that has been systematically gathered and interpreted. But this is not sufficient. To be sure, evidence cannot answer the question whether (or not) something is good or better. Subjects need to answer. But evidence can and must assist subjects in answering. There is an additional condition to be met: subjectivity need to be identified and defined in order to be neutralized or, at least, controlled. Therefore, some kind of normative references or standards are usually considered (certain goals or objectives, for instance). These are the standards embodying individual or institutional values which are required in accountability in order to state whether something is of value. Evidence will assist in demonstrating that such standards have been met.
- d) The fourth element, **orientation to action**, raises that the undertaking resulting in a judgment of value is deliberately tackled for the sake of future action and achievements. The decision on future action (for instan-

ce, punishment), taken in light of the judgement of that being evaluated, may be conceived of as another judgement of value because there will be a statement ascribing value to a choice. This second judgement is however usually within the scope of agents other than evaluators (for instance, policymakers).

But what is accountability?

Accountability will be the specific focus now. This notion is sometimes quite slippery and “constantly changing” [Behn 2001: 3]. Bovens [2007: 449] has suggested that, in contemporary discourse, it “often serves as a conceptual umbrella that covers various other distinct concepts”. In order to provide a more detailed outline, I will be referring to some key dimensions in what follows. They will be responsibility, documentation, performance, transparency and participation. Responsibility and documentation would have to do with what accountability itself consist of; performance and transparency are rather connected with the object of accountability, and participation points to the subjects of accountability. Of course, these are interrelated elements, and relationships will be emphasized as well.

Responsibility. Two meanings of the word “accountability” have been distinguished. In a broader sense, accountability is considered to be associated with responsibility “and carries connotations of ‘being answerable to’” [Biesta 2004: 234]. To be more accurate, it may be said that responsibility is implied by accountability but the reverse is not necessarily the case. At least in academic terms, responsibility is not exhausted in accountability and is often conceived of as encompassing more dimensions [Cane 2002; Bovens 1998: 24–26]. But there is a conventional conception of accountability and responsibility which virtually conflates both concepts [Raffoul 2010]. In her glossary of education terms, the influential scholar Diane Ravitch virtually equates accountability and responsibility. According to her, accountability is “the concept that individuals (e.g. students, teachers, or administrators) or organizations (e.g. schools, school districts, or state departments of education) should be held responsible for improving student achievement” [Ravitch 2007: 8].

Documentation. In a narrower sense, accountability refers to the duty to present auditable accounts of activities [Biesta 2004]. Historically, the concept of accountability is closely related to accounting in financial contexts. This logic would have simply been transposed to the managerial context, without much consideration of the extent to which it is appropriate for managerial purposes. As stated by Biesta [2004: 235], “rather than adapting the principles of the audit process to the specifics and requirements of a different context, (...) the culture of accountability has led to a situation in which practices had to adapt to the principles of the auditing process”. For him, this meaning and the former one are largely distinct and the link between them is quite weak. In his view, there would

be overlap between both meanings only insofar as it is legitimate to assume that the provision of auditable documentation is synonymous with responsible behavior [Charlton, in: Biesta 2004: 235]. However, both aspects are seemingly not so far from each other. A number of scholars find the core of responsibility “in the idea of having to answer for something, or of giving an account” [Cane 2002: 30]. Being a respondent has to do with one’s answering for things (for instance, successful performance) and justifying a position [Buchmann 1985: 2; Behn 2001: 4]. Being responsible has to do with having the capacity to be such a respondent. Moreover, it might be added that the responsible person is one “who is ‘likely to be in a position to give a satisfactory account of his conduct’ because he realizes “‘that an account of his conduct can be appropriately called for’ and acts accordingly” [Haydon 1978, in: Cane 2002: 33]. To be able to be such a respondent, one will need to support his/her answering. Evidence is likely to provide such support. Hence, it might be said that being responsible requires documentation. Accordingly, accountability in education usually requires “measurable proof” that relevant constituencies (teachers, schools, authorities) are teaching students efficiently and well [Ravitch 2007: 8].

Performance. A further point to be made on the relationships between both concepts (responsibility and accountability) is that, as suggested by the definition by Ravitch included above, accountability usually assumes that agents are to be held responsible for success. However, success would need to be understood in a broad sense to include the two following dimensions. On the one hand, effects and results are part of the focus of accountability. But accountability is focused not just on what agents actually accomplish (or do not accomplish) but also on how agents do what they do in order to reach such achievements [Behn 2001]. Hence, actions are, on the other hand, another part of the focus of accountability. In education, accountability is increasingly conceived of not merely as an analysis of effect variables (for instance, attendance rates or test scores) but rather as a deep and, probably, dynamic analysis of cause-and effect-variables which also include curriculum and teaching and leadership practices (and not only income, social background or ethnicity) as cause variables. In fact, what is particularly needed to know is not merely information on results but the causes of those results [Reeves 2002].

However, it may be said that what one can be held accountable for is not (causal) actions and effects themselves. Usually, one is rather held accountable for the extent to which actions and effects adhere to standards. Therefore, accountability is often equated to individual or collective responsibility to conform standards – either in form of achievements (for instance, a goal or an objective) or in form of performance (for instance, functions established in some way – by law, regulation or agreement) [Behn 2001]. Standards are set to hold somebody accountable. To be made accountable, actions and results (and the subjects themselves) need to be adhered to standards.

As already suggested, a belief underlying accountability is usually that actions (including the harmful ones) lead to the corresponding effects (including the harmful ones) and that, in turn, effects are traceable to actions. This traceabil-

ity is made possible by documenting events. Documentation will allow locating the barriers to expected actions and achievements “without getting caught up in confusing complexities involving interests, obscure motives, and political games of assigning blame” [Marres 2010]. Thus, pressure to develop standardization and evidence-based processes aiming at allegedly improving accountability is increasingly identifiable.

But there is also an expectation and even a remarkable certainty that punishment will be accompanying accountability; that is, something bad (and absence of anything good) is expected to happen to those who are accountable when they do something bad (namely, bad actions or results or, also, absence of good actions and results) [Raffoul 2010; see also Behn 2001: 3]. This is rooted to the usage in financial contexts, in which the purpose of auditing is often “to detect and deter incompetence and dishonesty in the handling of money” [Biesta 2004: 235]. Nevertheless, formal definitions usually do not even mention the word “punishment”, although people seeking to hold someone accountable usually envision some kind of punishment if failure happens or expected success is not achieved [Behn 2001: 4].

Transparency. In the end, accountability demands transparency. Accountability requires information and documentation able to trace an object or product. This leads to transparency; that is, to visibility [Newman & Clarke 2009]. But what is to be visible? “In a physical sense, transparency means that you can see through some medium to an object on the other side” [Oliver 2004: 3]. Because of transparency, something is rendered visible. In organizational and social contexts, transparency is “letting the truth be available for others” in order to see it “without trying to hide or shade the meaning, or altering the facts to put things in a better light” [Oliver 2004: 3].

(Empowered) participation. The word “accountability” goes back to Latin – to *computare*. This other word is the compound of ‘*com*’, which meant ‘together’ and ‘*putare*’, which meant ‘to count’ [Behn 2001: 6–7]. Up to this point, the focus has been on what is counted for accountability. Now the focus will be on who counts for accountability. Accountability affects and involves people relating to one another. It has been characterised as a social relationship (Bovens, 2007, p. 450). But who are those people? Virtually everybody is a tentative answer. There are indeed an increasing number of people concerned with and, at least in a some extent, involved in accountability. Evidence is seemingly available on “the public’s demand for accountability” [Moore & Gates, in: Behn 2001: 2]. It might be said, in particular, that “everyone wants people – often *other* people – to be held accountable” [Behn 2001: 2]. In turn, there is an increase of the number people held accountable. But this widespread concern with and involvement in accountability reveals, once again, that there are those who are accountable and those who hold them accountable.

The accountability holder can be a specific person or agency, but can also be a more virtual entity, as the public opinion [Bovens 2005]. Among the accountability holders, there are people whose sole or main task is holding other people accountable – regardless they are likely to be accountable to other people as

well, although sometimes they also come to believe that they are accountable to no one. But often they constitute a “forum” before which accounts and answers need to be provided [Bovens 1998]. This forum may come to be very comprehensive. There is a public accountability which involves the citizenry as a whole and makes this involvement public (namely, open or at least accessible to citizens), in contrast to other forms of internal accountability in which the membership of the forum is more restricted and the account giving is likely to be confidential or even secret [Bovens 2005]. In either case, it might be concluded that there is a remarkable degree of participation which empowers those involved to exercise control over what affects themselves [Bovens 2007].

Among those who are accountable, there are usually people who assume that they will need to give accounts to the former ones – regardless they are likely to be considered to be, in turn, included among those who are accountability holders, albeit in a broader sense. Behn [2001: 2] that “it’s great to be an accountability holder”, whilst “it’s not so much fun to be an accountability holdee”. However, the conflation of accountability and responsibility depicts a quite powerful agent playing a relevant role. Following Raffoul [2010] the accountability holdees can be understood in two senses:

- In a first sense, responsibility (conflated with accountability) refers to being responsible **for one’s actions** and, in the end, being responsible *for oneself*. It conveys the idea of “authorship over one’s actions and over oneself” [Raffoul 2010: 10]. In this view, the self constitutes the boundaries within which responsibility is contained. Interestingly, responsibility in this sense becomes “an act of appropriation” [Raffoul 2010: 11], because he or she controls and owns his/her actions and, furthermore, owns himself or herself – it might be said.
- In a second sense, responsibility designates being responsible **for the consequences** of one’s actions. There is no rupture but “an important addition” here [Raffoul 2010:11]. In the first instance, the emphasis is essentially on the past, as one is asked to answer for his or her past actions. But in this other instance, the focus is on consequences of his or her actions and, hence, one “is looking toward the future of the act. In this sense, responsibility is being accountable for the future, for what has not yet happened” or for “what is still coming” [Raffoul 2010: 11]. Note that one is still responsible for oneself, particularly if such a responsibility toward the future is conceived of as arising from the links between the actions and consequences, which, in turn, allow calculating the effects of one’s actions in the future.

Note that, in this view, being accountable is on condition of being considered as the cause of actions and its consequences through the freedom of the will and deliberate intention. In the view which assimilates responsibility to accountability, responsibility refers to “the capacity of an agent to be the cause and ground of its acts” [Raffoul 2010: 6], and accountability then presupposes an able and willful individual as cause. Following Raffoul [2010: 8–10], four tenets underpin this view:

- The belief that the human being is an agent or a subject and, hence, the reliance on subjectivity as foundation or ground of imputation.
- The notion that the subject is a voluntary agent and, thus, the reliance on the voluntary and so-called “free will”.
- The belief that responsibility is the cause of the act; that is, “to be the ,cause of’ and to be ,responsible for’ are conflated”. It means the reliance on causality of responsibility.
- The assumption that the responsible being is a rational subject. In other words, the basis for responsibility is rational agency.

This description of those who are responsible and accountable is likely to evoke an image of powerful and even sovereign subjects. If you are responsible, you allegedly decide and are in charge: you are in a position of power. However, this understanding is in sharp contrast to what follows. Those who are responsible are subject not only to stringent duties and expectations but also to be scrutinized with regard to fulfillment. Moreover, lack of adherence to these duties and expectations takes them to be tracked and sanctioned. In the end, the subject becomes the subjected [Raffoul 2010: 21].

Accountability for democracy?

Accountability is often regarded as a “hallmark of modern democratic governance” [Dubnick & Yang 2011: 171]. As in ancient Greece, direct democracy primarily consists of the gathering of citizens in public meetings and assemblies in order to discuss and to make decisions. In contrast to this model, citizens in modern representative democratic regimes have a very limited executive power, which is left to periodically elected deputies. Nevertheless, citizens exercise a controlling power over these representatives and indirectly through them in decision-making [Andersson 2008: 127].

In these regimes, the execution of political power is regarded as legitimated – moreover, as democratically legitimated – if it is accountable [Blühorn 2009]. Those with delegated authority are accountable for their actions and its consequences to the citizens: this is often referred to as political accountability [Day & Klein 1987: 27; Rhodes 1997]. They are accountable especially via elections. The controlling power of citizens is primarily exercised “in elections, in which the elected representatives are held accountable for their behavior in office” [Andersson 2008: 127]. But, as said, those holding political power need to have decisions executed and implemented, and, hence, they also need an efficient administration and experts. The first ones (that is, those with delegated authority) are answerable for carrying out agreed tasks according to agreed criteria of performance. Of course, administrative and agencies in charge of devising and implementing strategies and decisions are involved as well and they are, in turn, accountable to some external political authority [Meckstroth 2009].

This sensible structure resembles what French philosopher Jacques Rancière has referred to as “police”. What is “police”? Policemen are evoked by this term. Am I suggesting that those involved in accountability and evaluation might be like policemen? In a certain sense, the answer is yes. At least in many schools and other organizations, this answer might not sound surprising – although maybe some people would not be willing to expressing it. Nevertheless, it need to be qualified. “Police” indeed includes policemen, but “police” is not just a number of policemen. According to Rancière himself, the policemen are not but “a particular form” of police [Rancière 1997: 28]. In his view, “police” is a broader notion. It refers to “a more general order that arranges that tangible reality in which bodies are distributed in community” – he writes [Rancière 1997: 28]. Here are two other definitions by Rancière himself:

(...) the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution [1992: 28].

The police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party’s share or lack of it. But to define this, you first must define the configuration of the perceptible in which one or the other is inscribed. The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise [1999: 29].

As just stated, the police order indeed defines “the configuration of the perceptible”. This means that it “monopolizes the interpretation of sense” because it fills it with reality and meaning and “delimit[s] the boundaries of the perceptible, the thinkable, and the possible” [Tanke 2011: 45–46]. As such, it defines who is inscribed and who is not. In addition, the police order defines ways of being and ways of doing. Those who are inscribed and named are allocated to tasks and places. Consequently, it “defines a party’s share or lack of it” [Rancière 1999: 29]. The police order is an “order of distribution”, which derives from an “order of intelligibility” [Gunneflo & Selberg 2010]. It is worth to emphasize here that “police” is an order that determines what counts (as visible) and what does not count. Also, it determines what counts as an account of it and what does not count as such. Moreover, it determines who is to demand the account (and in which terms) and who is to give accounts (and in which terms).

Furthermore, the police order is indeed a totalizing order; that is, it combines into a total. Following Bingham and Biesta [2010: 34], it may be said that “police” is “all-inclusive”: it means that “everyone has a particular place, role or position in it”. Rancière himself writes that, in this “matching” of bodies, functions and shares, “there is no place for any void” [Rancière 2010b: 36]. There is an “intolerance for the void” [Rancière, in: Prozorov 2007: 88]. But in this order, there is not only “absence of void” there is also “absence of supplement” [Rancière 2010b: 36]. It means that there is no place for anything else different to that made visible and counted. Thus “all-inclusiveness” coalesces with “exclusion of what

‘there is not’” [Rancière 2010b: 36]. Paradoxically, this will-to-include comes at the expense of exclusion – maybe unconventional forms of exclusion [Labelle 2001: 93]. Moreover, it might be said that this order is “sustained by the exclusion of ‘what there is not’” [Prozorov 2007: 88]. This is related to what Rancière [2010: 36] has called “partition”, which – according to his own words – “should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, that which separates and excludes; on the other, that which allows participation”. For instance, children often participate in evaluation but in such a way that they are virtually separated and even excluded.

Finally, a third point is emphasized here on “police”: this totalizing configuration of the perceptible is consensual and, thus, the “police” can be conceptualized as “(...) the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution” [Rancière 1999: 28]. Rancière has written that “consensus is the reduction of politics to the police” and, thus, it means the “cancellation” of politics [Rancière 2010b: 42].

In Rancière’s view, most of what is normally understood as politics can be thought of as “the police”. However, he is also persuaded that there is a radical opposition between police and politics. In his own words, politics is “an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing” [Rancière 1999: 29]. Politics threatens police because the goal of policing is precisely that of avoiding or eliminating politics [May 2008].

Using Rancière’s words, politics refers to “the mode of acting that perturbs” the police order [2004c: 226] “by supplementing it with a part of those without part, identified with the whole of the community” [Rancière 2010b: 36]. First of all, it needs to be highlighted that politics is acting. It does not, however, mean that politics is in fact everywhere and, thus, everything is political, but rather that politics **can** be anywhere because it **can** manifest itself at any time in different contexts: politics is always a possibility [Davis 2010: 79]. Secondly, politics is an event. It is not a permanently functioning and self-improving system but rather exceptional moments coming and going. Rancière has written that it is “an activity that is always of the moment and provisional” [Rancière 2010b: 43] and occurs as an “accident” [Rancière 2010b: 35]. Thirdly, this exceptional and momentary action is disturbing. According to Rancière, “the essence of the political is dissensus” [2000: 124]. Dissensus is “the process of politics itself” [Tanke 2011: 61]. It is neither an opposition or conflict of interests, opinions or values [for instance Rancière 2004a: 304] nor “a quarrel over which solutions to apply to a situation but a dispute over the situation itself” [Rancière 2004b: 6]. He asserts that it is “a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given” [Rancière 2004a: 304]. It affects “the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given” [Rancière 2000: 124].

Furthermore, Rancière virtually equates politics with democracy because, according to him, democracy emerges from a “disagreement” (not consensus) between these two parts [Labelle 2001: 87]: on the one hand, the police order and,

on the other hand, the demos. But what is the demos? Who is the demos? Maybe everybody? He reminds us that democracy was “a term invented by its opponents, by all those who had an ‘entitlement’ to govern” – by virtue of a distinct and unequal seniority, birth, wealth, virtue or knowledge [Rancière 2010b: 32]. But, according to him, “before being the name of a community, the demos is the name of a part of the community” [Rancière 2010b: 32]. Who is this part? In his work, the demos is equated to “the part that has no part” [for instance May 2008]. In other words, they are “simply the people who *do not count*”: “to be of the demos is to be *outside of the count*” [Rancière 2010: 32; italics added]. It implies having “no entitlement to exercise the power of the *arkhe*, none for which they might be counted” [Rancière 2010b: 32]. They are those whose full existence is not considered to be relevant within the police order and, therefore, have no share (or an inferior share) in the decision-making process ordering their lives whilst coming to define themselves as being no part and having no part [Labelle 2001; May 2008; Davis 2010].

As stated earlier, politics or democracy is momentary and provisional; correspondingly, “its subjects are always precarious” [Rancière 2010: 39]. But when those who have no recognized part in the social order, who do not “count”, who are invisible or inaudible politically speaking, assert their egalitarian claim, they come into being as political subjects, and they do this through disagreement [Tanke 2011: 44]. In this way, disagreement creates political subjectivities. “Subjectivation” or “subjectification” is the term that Rancière chooses for this process of emancipation which consist of coming to be political subject by struggling for existence.

Conclusions

In a essay on education recently translated to English, Rancière [2010a: 19] links accountability in education with competition and privatization and highlights that many educational constituencies have embraced them “as solutions”, particularly “on the assumption that student underachievement will be remedied by the magic circle connecting these three points of hope”. The result is still incessant accountability incessantly awaiting for solutions. According to him, accountability is itself a mere “explanatory scheme” [Rancière 2010a: 21–22]. It is a part of the configuration of the reality that has been referred to as “police” – and, thus, it might be hindering democracy. And here lies the problem: in his own words, “explanations serve to cover up the fact that explanations are themselves the problem” [Rancière 2010a: 21].

As a part of it, those explanations sustain a permanently functioning order, not disagreement and rupture needed to make relevant changes. According to Rancière, “they explain [and sustain –let me add] the shape of the educational landscape rather than intervening in any way on educational practices” [Rancière 2010b: 22]. However, it has been suggested that education does not only contrib-

ute to qualification or socialization, which rather contribute to compliance with and, at least, adjustment to existing orders; education is also relevant to subjectification, which leads to be responsive to “ways of being that hint at independence from such orders” [Biesta 2004: 40], being this responsiveness open to challenge and disruption.

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