School Accountability And School Reform

“You should be held ‘accountable.’” Surely, that word has been thrown around by somebody at any given time. It is typically meant in sense where that person should be held accountability for their specific actions—good or bad. “Accountable” is an adjective that could simply mean explicable or understandable. However, most people use it for its other basic meaning. Merriam-Webster defines this meaning as a person, organization, or even institution that is required, or at least expected, to justify whatever actions they took or their decisions. That they should be a willingness to be responsible for another party even. Accountability is not a one-time thing; it requires several callbacks and checking it. It requires it to be an all the time thing. And accountability is not a single person job—it makes a point to ask everyone not to play favourites and looks at everyone equally. Most people do not want to accept accountability if they know they are to fail, however, it one wants them to accept then the question is to ask if they have everything they need to success when it comes to their accountability. If they do not have then it something to be looked for and something to work at, and then finally one will see an impact on performance and results. This is nearly the same definition when it comes to school accountability.

But, what should accountability mean in terms of education? For now, school accountability means “the process of evaluating school performance on the basis of student performance measures” as defined by Susanna Loeb and David Figlio per the Handbook of the Economics of Education. It should also be noted the teachers and administrators would be measured in the manner as the students. The student performance can be measure in a many number of ways: variations across programs, scores, and yearly improved status. This literally a policy of education where administrators down to the students are giving an accurate account of the progress for the sake of continuing to fund a particular school with Title 1 funds. Like with all things, there are rewards for well done performances and limitations for the establishments that do poorly in their performance. Typically, this proof of accountability is done over the course of three years and when the three years comes to an end those who have not proved themselves “are subject to ‘corrective action,’ including the loss of funds, reconstitution of the staff, and the transfer of students” (NRC, 1999). These can be positive motivators towards school accountability, and also has been suggested in the preponderance of evidence in the 1990s and the 2000s, however, long-term outcomes are too difficult to judge (Loeb & Figlio, 2011). When there are positive outcomes there can also be negative outcomes to school accountability if not nurtured correctly which can render the method to be counterproductive, and in many cases it has.

School accountability works in a way that it is supposed inspire teachers and staff to work together for the improve of the students as well as the institution and giving some friendly competition between neighbouring schools. However, since accountability is working at the school level that means it can mask some problems and vital information. Because accountability only looks at overall results from the school’s variation from inside the schools are missed. Willms from the National Research Council was finding that they were a, “variation in student performance within schools was greater than the variations among schools” and that since this was based on overall results that the variation did not come into account this could cause misleading information (Willms, 1998). Firstly, because variation within inside the school

meant that there were some teachers that were preforming their duties and some of the teachers were simply not keeping up accountability. If that is the issue from inside then it would be easy to miss that information because of the states looking at overall results, and not being able to fix an exact problem within the schools that were not showing good accountability.

Another problem with school accountability is that it sometimes can miss the most important part which is the students. With teachers, there is already a pretty good reason to raise performance to keep their jobs and school funding. However, when it comes to students, they do not realize why they should care about raising their scores for any other reason than many getting yelled at by their parents at home. On the school level they have no reason to care because there is not incentive to. This leads to low motivation and low performance from the students which can hide the consequence of not being able to move onto the next grade or even finding a job in the long-term future. Policy makers have tried to change this fact by trying to make performance reliant on whether or not a student moves towards the next grade or even is allowed to graduate. However, there is still a flaw to this logic. If the students already have low motivation and do get held back a grade there are in fact still receiving the same education that failed them in the first place. There is nothing new being done to move the student forward.

So, new problem is that the students are being faced with scheduled testing whether they feel prepared or not, and then their performance on that test measures every ounce of knowledge they have and base it on how well the teachers are teaching the students. For that reason, the term school accountability can be “a broad and problematic term that could be addressed in many ways” (Kim, 2018). I have stressed the part of the school accountability that measures performance but that is not the only goal of this concept. In recent educational reform, these standardized tests are aimed to increase student achievement, or at least seek movements that expect students to achieve. If they do not achieve the goal is then imposed as a responsibility of the school as a result. However, to talk about the way it is now there is a need to know how the United States was before accountability or how it led to accountability.

About a hundred years ago, the United States had focused on a social efficiency movement for their education. A lot of the main characteristics from the social efficiency movement has rolled over onto current education, which included: “seeking observable tasks, learning outcomes, measurable outputs, performances, and a managerial approach to labourers and students” (Kim, 2018). And because the United States has always been looking solely for achievement within school performance has led to continually struggle for schooling institutions. School accountability is based on a dated system.

Kliebard was the one to introduce this concept of “social efficiency” he was a scholar that studied education and curriculum history in his book titled, The Struggle for the American Curriculum. He states that there are four different interest groups, “the humanists, the developmentalists, the social efficiency educators, and the social meliorists” and this caused a struggle with school curriculum because the United States was facing differences in their ideals and interests (Kilebard, 2004). During this time of social efficiency in the late twentieth century, and there was a boom of industry and immigrants that would indirectly cause a growing population in schools. Now this is important because social efficiency was a seemingly practical base for our education system and curriculum to stand upon because it was a way to subtly control schooling and manage society, namely the newly introduced immigrants. Management and control were the core idea of the social efficiency movement because the United States felt there was a threat to their “social progress” as their school began to grow bigger than they

could handle at the time.

And since there had been a such strong impact in the early twentieth century, previous educators of social efficiency being Franklin Bobbitt, David Snedden, and Ross Finney added a new layer to the system: scientific management. Scientific management was way to “prepare students as future citizens and thereby to create a stable and well-functioning society” (Kim, 2018). Because the schools were dealing with so much growth during that time it started a decline in efficient education and then were experiencing financial troubles and administrative difficulties. That is when Bobbitt highly suggested that schools be managed and controlled “scientifically” to answer the problems the school system had been having. In his article, The Elimination of Waste in Education, Bobbitt outlines the ways these institutions should be improved scientifically: rigorous daily scheduling and strict timetables, to reduce the number of people working in schoolwork, and finally, to eliminate waste through the use of specialized budgets (Bobbitt, 1912). It was during this time, of the nineteen-thirties, that scientific management was the starting foundation of standardized assessments. And these standardized assessments were introduced as a way of measuring the main achievements of several schooling establishments. Edward Thorndike had the argument that students should be measured by the student’s characteristics, and this included their intelligence and the results from their actual testing (Thorndike, 1914). This measurement sounds like mighty familiar to the method to a system we have in place now. Current society has always been built upon the past and there is no surprise that the United State’s education would be built the same way.

However, there were several criticisms of social efficiency when the nineteen-sixes hit, and a couple of the criticisms were that the government was using schools as a way to have social control and maximizing productivity in factors. These criticisms came when there began to a demand for democratic labour in the United States. A good reason to bring up our old method of the education is so there is a better understanding of our current system, which is nearly a mould of the old system with some minor adjustments. Some scholars would even call our school accountability and high stakes testing the new social efficiency, or even that the main ideas had reproduced for the sake of the new main idea: school accountability.