

Vernacular Globalisations: Neo-statist Accountability Policies in
France and Quebec Education

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Vernacular Globalisations: Neo-statist Accountability Policies in France and Quebec Education

The article argues that there is no single globalisation of education systems, but rather multiple globalisations of each system taken in its individual context. We propose three explanatory factors to account for these vernacular globalisation processes, that is, for individual policy trajectories in each national context: path dependence on earlier policy choices and institutions, education policy making through bricolage, and, finally, the translation, by national actors, of international-level ideas or tools as a function of the debate, institutions, or national power dynamics in question.

The research design is based on the study of a most-likely case: accountability policy in two school systems – France and Quebec – which show strong variations. Document analyses and semi-structured interviews were conducted in both cases.

In the two countries, distinct vernacular globalisations are at work leading to different neo-statist accountability policies. In Quebec, the reinforcement of state power through a growing vertical accountability and the systematic development of regulation tools between policy actors and levels lead to a “centralisation by institutional linkage”. In France, we rather witness a “globalisation by discursive internalisation” in which transnational imperatives are integrated in official discourses on the regulation of the education system, but without radically questioning the mainstays of this regulation.

Keywords: Globalisation; accountability policy; New Public Management; policy trajectory; France; Quebec

Given the abundance of research on the topic (e. g. Dale & Robertson, 2008), it is nearly a truism to say that we are witnessing the globalisation of education and its modes of governance. We have even reached the point where some feel the globalisation of education scholars' imaginative power is also necessary.¹ Strongly encouraged by influential international organisations (Henry et al., 2001; Jakobi, 2009; Grek, 2010, Robertson et al. 2012) and fuelled by transnational doctrines such as New Public Management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004), globalisation is embodied in networks of international experts (Normand, 2010; Grek, 2013) which promote, in particular, new tools for measuring and evaluating policy created to improve education quality (Ozga et al., 2011), the efficiency of public administrations, and tools used for accountability (Maroy, 2013). For some, this leads to “global panopticism” (Lingard et al., 2013), not only within each educational system, but also on an international scale, since comparison with other education systems appears to be turning into a prerequisite for reform (Martens, 2007). The consequence of this globalisation process is not only that education policy is being redefined – the notion of education is progressively being replaced by that of learning throughout life (Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002; Jakobi, 2012) – but also that relations between the state and its citizens are being transformed (Robertson, 2011) as we circumvent the borders of the nation-states.

When these characteristics are placed side by side, and particularly when they get simplified in the analysis, they tend to provide a uniform vision of the globalisation process. In this view, the process is a cognitive, instrumental, and normative activity which, once it has reached a transnational level, is imposed “from above” upon the traditional authoritative bodies in education policy, thereby redefining their role and weakening their regulatory capacity. This conception of globalisation is visible in research which insists, sometimes unilaterally, on neoliberal globalisation and on the growing privatisation of school systems. Such a conception is also sometimes present implicitly in research which concludes that public action is rescaled under the effects of globalised accountability (Lingard et al. 2013). The conception is strengthened by the use

¹ See for example Issue 2, Volume 4 of the journal *Globalisation, Societies and Education* (July 2006).

of reformatory discourse, very similar across several countries, often studied as “turns” in education governance.² The conception is also sometimes fuelled by activist research on the “new global educational order”; this research is carried out by sector professionals such as teacher unions wishing to identify the process and the actors they should target in their fight against it (Laval & Weber, 2002).

This article aims to examine these analyses of globalisation. It is based on a study of the trajectory (Ball, 1994, 1997) of accountability policy in France and in Quebec. In education, accountability is associated with policies promoting new forms of regulation for decentralized organisations (districts, schools etc.), expected to give accounts of results and outputs based on targets (e.g. qualification rate, performances at external exams) and standards (curriculum or evaluation) defined at the central level.

Decentralized organizations are accountable either to the chain of command (intermediate bodies or state) or to parents.

This article argues that there is not one single globalisation of these two educational systems that would lead to a gradual, homogenising convergence on a shared mode of accountability, but rather two distinct globalisations, one for each system taken in its individual context. As such, globalisation is a source of modification, to varying degrees, of the long trajectories of education policy unique to each national context. This article also proposes three explanatory factors to account for these vernacular globalisation processes³ (Appadurai, 1996, Lingard, 2006), factors which are still lacking in the

² The “shift” to a “performance evaluation nexus” (Clarke, 2004), the “move” from “regulative” to “inquisitive” and “meditative” practices (Jacobsson, 2006), the “comparative turn” (Martens, 2007), the “quality turn” (Segerholm, 2009), the “topological turn” (Lury et al., 2012) etc.

³ Following Arjun Appadurai (1996), we adopt the definition of vernacular globalisation proposed by Bob Lingard: “*the ways in which local sites and their histories, cultures, politics and pedagogies mediated to greater or lesser extent the effects of top-down globalisation. This is the outcome of relations and tensions between the context productive and context generative effects of globalisation; some local sites are more able to be context generative and mediate global effects*” (Lingard, 2006, 290). Defined as such, vernacular globalisation cannot be understood from an analytical standpoint as mere “counter-

literature on the subject⁴: path dependence on earlier policy choices and institutions, education policy making through bricolage, and, finally, the translation, by national actors, of international-level ideas or tools as a function of the debate, institutions, or national power dynamics in question.

In this paper, we argue that these processes result in two particular vernacular globalisations as, in each case, the very composite elements of the New Public Management (NPM) transnational discourse ⁵ (Bezes, 2005) have been selected, interpreted, enacted and combined with existing institutional arrangements or discourses. In both cases, the result is the predominance of a neostatist version of NPM rather than a neoliberal one. This distinction is borrowed from Clark (Clark, 2002, p 772), who argues “there is no single model of public service reform associated with neoliberal ideological realignment” (Clark, 2002, p 772). He claims that beyond a general reference to NPM, “it is possible to identify two conceptually distinct variants reflecting underlying differences

globalisation” or “bottom-up globalisation”, signs of resistance to dominant top-down globalisation, even if, empirically, they may sometimes appear in this form.

4 Arjun Appadurai (1996) stresses the cognitive factors at the origin of this vernacular globalisation (new uses of the collective imagination, creation of original collective identities, localised reinventions of traditions), Bob Lingard and Thanh Minh Ngo (2006) rather stress the micro-politics of implementation, with the following explanatory variables: size, intra-organizational relations, commitment of actors, capacity and institutional complexity. Bob Lingard, Wayne Martino and Goli Rezai-Rashti (2013) stress the importance of existing policy structures.

⁵ New Public Management (NPM) may be considered as “a set of heterogeneous axioms derived from economic theories, prescriptions related to managerial sciences, descriptions of practices put in place by reforms (particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries) and doctrinal rationalisations made by transnational organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank” (Bezes, 2005, p. 28, our translation). NPM reforms are often characterized by changes of Public Service into corporatized units organised by products; contract-based and competitive provision of public service; emphasis on private-sector like styles of management practices; importance given to discipline and frugality in resource use; visible hands-on top management ; measurable standards and measures of performance and success; greater emphasis on output controls (Hood, 1995, p. 96)

in the political philosophy inspiring the reform”, the neoliberal variant and the neo-statist one ⁶.

The research design⁷ is based on the study of a most-likely case: accountability policy in two school systems – France and Quebec – which are strongly varied (Lijphart, 1971). While accountability policy can be seen as an example of education policy promoted by transnational organisations⁸, observing vernacular globalisation in cases where we are likely to see convergent effects will test our argument that the unique effects of globalisation processes must be observed on the basis of each policy’s individual trajectory. In addition, most research investigates cases such as the US, England or Chile, where accountability systems are highly developed (Figlio & Loeb, 2011, p. 385) and are equated with performance-based accountability (Maroy, 2013; Ranson, 2003). Our paper adds to this literature by studying cases where accountability is, by contrast, a low stakes issue, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the range of accountability policies (Maroy, 2015). Last, we compare policy in two different national contexts in terms of political foundations, structures, potential exposure to international influence

⁶ “This categorization between two broad types of programmatic response to public service change and innovation (...) rests upon more fine-grained distinctions between the different streams of NPM ideas that influence public service reformers (...). Of particular importance in this respect is the distinction between generic management, which imports into public bureaucracies the techniques, values and practices of private sector organizations, and public choice theory. The latter draws from principal-agent theory in micro-economics and focuses on the principles of contestability and competition in public service delivery and the need to reassert political control over the state apparatus, with respect to both budgets and policy” (Clark, 2002, 773)

⁷ *NewAge (New Accountability and Governance in Education, 2012-2015)* is financed by the National Agency for French Research (ANR- 11-FRQU-001 01) and by the *Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture du Québec* (2012-QF-163746).

⁸ Based on its PISA study, the OECD holds that the most efficient education systems are those which associate school autonomy and accountability (OECD, 2011).

and dominant regulatory modes. The French education system is characterized by a high degree of administrative centralization, an emphasis and reliance on circulars as a mode of inter-departmental communication and regulation and a resistance towards external influence, especially towards new public management (Bezes, 2009). By contrast, in Quebec, while the main administrative, curricular and pedagogic guidelines have been centralized at the state level more recently (1960), the local bodies of governance (school boards) have been at the inception of the educational initiative and have always had room for manoeuvre. Quebec society emphasizes education as a tool for individual and collective development, which is related to the objective to sustain a distinct society within Canada (Rocher, 2004). This is also linked to the aim to reinforce the state in education by comparison with other Canadian provinces⁹. However, there is no such a thing as a resistance to transnational “public management” discourse within Quebec public administration (Dufour, 2012). The variations between these two cases will allow us to test the explanatory capacity of the three factors we propose to account for the production of vernacular globalisation in education.

The article is organised in the following manner: the first section discusses the notion of policy trajectories, as well as the explanatory variables for vernacular globalisations – that is, path dependence, bricolage and translation. Section two presents the methodology of the study on which the article is based. The following sections document the empirical cases. The third section is dedicated to the Quebec case, centred on “results-based management” (“*gestion axée sur les résultats*”) and section four discusses the French case of “results-based steering” (“*pilotage par les résultats*”). The conclusion compares the empirical results, paying particular attention to the

⁹ In Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction. A comparison of the French case and another Canadian province would have introduced variation on some of the dimensions that structures the comparative design. For instance, in comparison to Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia promoted parental choice and privatisation as key regulatory modes (Davidson-Harden & Majhanovich, 2006). As a consequence, we expect that the empirical identification of policy trajectories would vary in the Canadian case. Yet, we expect the explanatory factors to hold, and the main claim about vernacular globalizations to be verified in others contexts.

reinforcement, in both cases, of public authorities further to the development of accountability policy. The conclusion also deals with the article's analytic implications.

1. Policy trajectories and vernacular globalisations

Our analysis of the globalisation process of education rests on the notion of education policy trajectories (Ball, 1994, 1997). This approach aims to grasp the various processes and mechanisms by which networks of national and transnational actors piece together and reconstruct, selectively and each time anew, institutional and practical principles from the national repertory. Along with these principles, they may also choose elements from the transnational repertory of ideas and public action tools, such as the “quasi-market” and “new public management” (Hood, 1991). From a methodological point of view, this public policy trajectory approach “trace(s) through the development, formation and realisation of those policies from the context of influence, through policy text production, to practices and outcomes” (Ball, 1997, 266). The trajectory of public policy is thus observed within a given political context and school system, increasingly transnational in scope (Dale, 2006). But a trajectory is also made up of effective policy orientations, from the policy's gestation period to its daily, local implementation. These orientations are the product of multiple recontextualisations of the policy's “text” by actors situated on several levels of action. The policy's trajectory is therefore tied to its successive interpretations, and to its outcomes, particularly in terms of social justice and equality.

We hold that a policy's trajectory depends on the combination of three processes, often tangled empirically but separate from an analytical standpoint: 1) path dependence on earlier choices, due not only to the viscosity of institutions (Pierson, 1994, 2001), but also to actor mobilisations (Pierson, 1994 ; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010); 2) bricolage, whereby education action is developed in the context of negotiations and struggles among actors, and 3) the translation, by certain national actors, of policy ideas and instruments circulating on a transnational level. These three factors help to explain the singularity of education policy at a time of globalisation and transnational circulation.

First, public action in education is linked to specific, evolving domestic problematization and to sedimentation of tools that may have various sources, and are

part of long-term transformations. As in other policy sectors, education policy construction is shaped by existing institutions: formal rules and shared norms, but also ideas and cognitive categories (Scott, 1995). Paul Pierson's ground-breaking 1994 research showed that the initial choices made when policy is introduced restrict the breadth of choices available later on, making marginal or incremental changes more likely to take place than radical ones. This auto-reinforcement of initial choices, or policy lock-in, results from institutional locks such as formal decision-making tools or vetoes capable of blocking the decision-making process, which may anticipate the change. In addition to the powers of formal institutions, the political costs of change are another obstacle to its realisation. It has been documented that voters are more sensitive to the costs of a given policy change – that is, to the losses that a change may lead to – than to a policy's potential benefits. In this sense, politicians are more often dissuaded electorally from introducing policy change than the reverse. Finally, policy lock-in is also tied to actions of those in favour of conserving the *status quo* (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). These actors are diverse in nature, coming from inside administrations as well as outside: users, beneficiaries, union representatives, etc. In sum, if public policy may be characterised by change, then choices made in the initial period of its implementation are likely to influence the definition of change trajectories, and will play a role in shaping them (Pierson, 2001).

Next, when we look closely at development and change in public action, it becomes clear that domestic policymaking is often a continuous process of bricolage. Public action is a dynamic assembly of heterogeneous elements in their natural or evolving state; such elements are not necessarily designed to be tied together. Examples include existing institutional arrangements, institutional change incited by certain actors, new managerial tools, discursive formalisations, competing policy narratives, ideas taken from repertoires and transnational reference sources. This composite construction is related to the strictly political process of struggle and negotiation inside different arenas (political, scientific, administrative) or social spaces within civil society. In these spaces, public problems are defined and elaborated on, and policy is meant to deal with them and offer “solutions.” Theories of change and guidelines for public action are developed, and these ideas are translated into actual policy instruments. Actors from the political,

institutional, and academic fields – or other “stakeholders” in the education sphere – hold sway in these forums (Fouilleux, 2000). Finally, this bricolage may involve a kind of innovation whereby existing elements are combined inventively on the basis of tools, practices, discourse or institutional principles, and are oriented by an instrumental logic of efficiency and/or by a symbolic search for legitimacy and social acceptance (Campbell, 2004). Bricolage may thus be cognitive, institutional or political, depending on the elements it incorporates and assembles.

Lastly, in an increasingly transnational context, bricolage is not based on exclusively national repertoires of ideas, tools, or objectives. It is also based on the translation¹⁰ of ideas, narratives, instruments and approaches discussed or introduced elsewhere, and which lead to redefinitions or re-articulations in light of rules, values, conventions and practices which have already been institutionalised (Callon, 1986, Campbell, 2004, Dale, 2006). These elements may be used voluntarily by certain national actors in a bilateral borrowing process or by learning (Dale, 1999), but other processes may also be at work given growing transnational interdependence.¹¹ Recontextualisations

¹⁰ From the moment it incorporates external elements, bricolage implies a complementary process of translation: “(...) new ideas are combined with already existing institutional practices, and therefore, are *translated* into local practice in varying degrees and in ways that involve a process very similar to bricolage. The difference is that translation involves the combination of *new* externally given elements received through diffusion as well as old locally given ones inherited from the past” (Campbell, 2004, 80).

¹¹ These processes and mechanisms with transnational influence, to a greater or lesser degree suffered, voluntary and conscious, range from imposition (for example, conditions placed upon the World Bank’s financial interventions) to “soft” harmonization (via accepted convergences and via adhesion to a political process such as the Bologna Process), and including the diffusion/dissemination of institutions that are “institutional scripts” for certain Western values and models from the Enlightenment, spread via mimicry and the search for isomorphism (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). Still yet there may be a process of cognitive framing of certain tools such as analytical or statistical categories, indicators and conceptual definitions (Dale, 2005) or the formally “argued”, “objective” promotion of a political agenda and the definition of problems to confront which an “expert” international organisation such as the OECD is capable of producing,

and translations of these tools and models may lead to “hybridisation” (Van Zanten, 2002) tied to the trajectory of public action and, more largely speaking, to existing institutions (rules, norms, cognitive categories).

Public policy is thus made up of compromises and “assemblages” – more or less stable arrangements that have been reworked, tweaked, and pieced together in the wake of complex processes of political actions, writing, dissemination and translation, which end up in practice as something new (Ball, 1998). The trajectory of education policy – here, accountability policy – is thus the product of empirically tangled dynamics of path dependence, bricolage, and translation. The combination of change mechanisms and inertia which result makes way for trajectories which may lead to gradual but significant change, or trajectories which tend toward marginal change (Streek & Thelen, 2005). More rarely, the trajectory may also be marked by a decisive turn. The rest of the article uses this theoretical framework to answer our main research question: *do globalized policy arrangements, institutions, tools and ideas centring on accountability lead to converging policies at the domestic level?* We also build on this theoretical framework to develop a secondary research question revolving around the explanation of policy change: *how can a policy trajectory and its changes be explained?*

2. Methodology

This article is based on comparative research dealing with accountability policy in France and in Quebec. The research was strongly integrated analytically, but differences in the fields under study led to variations in the research’s empirical strategy.

For Quebec, the analysis was focused on the development and creation of results-based management (*Gestion axée sur les résultats; RBM*) in teaching. The RBM policy underwent a legislative update in the 2000s with Laws 82 (2000), 124, (2002) and 88 (2007). The policy implements new tools (planning, contractualisation, and accountability) intended to better align school objectives and functioning. Objectives were set contractually at “superior” levels of action, that is, on the level of the school

particularly in making known its comparative analyses of school system results. PISA is an example of this (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006).

boards (*Commissions scolaires*) and the Education Ministry level. The development of this policy was studied from 1988-2010¹² because the creation of the RBM was based on pre-2000s elements: legislative texts, mechanisms for local participation, skill distribution structures, control tools, education goals, laws and even statistical indicators. The analysis of the pre-2000 period is based mainly on 23 references, research reports, scientific and professional journal articles. The 2000-2012 analysis is based on legal texts, but also and especially on an analysis of debate content and “reports” handed to various sociopolitical actors during meetings of the National Assembly Committee on Education¹³. (Maroy, Mathou, Vaillancourt, & Voisin, 2013)

The French team analysed a group of 621 dispatches on questions of governance by results. The dispatches were published by a press agency specialised in education (AEF) between March 1998 and July 2012. In addition, a group of 493 articles published in ministerial and professional journals¹⁴ was also studied. These were selected based on three criteria: their status, their role in rendering visible certain problems connected to our subject and the characteristics of their readership. We also examined a corpus of official

¹² The somewhat arbitrary year 1988 was chosen because it coincides with the beginning of a social demand for Estates General on Education (*États généraux sur l'éducation*), which became a reality in 1995-96. These Estates General were the key element in several of Quebec's policy actions (namely the development of a “success for all” goal and decentralisation policy).

¹³ 1) Corpus: samples from 15 *mémoires*, samples from parliamentary debates based on speakers, for each bill: a) Ministry of Education; b) parliamentary leaders from the opposition party on education issues, c) if there was no opposition party, a deputy discussing the question. 2) Method: content analysis using the Nvivo software, coding based on an analysis of the causal narrative structure used by the actors (issues/problems identified; recognized consequences; actions and solutions proposed or rejected).

¹⁴ The articles came from the following publications: *L'éducation nationale* (1945-1968), *L'éducation* (1968-1980), *Les amis de Sèvres* (1949-1988). *Courrier de l'éducation* (1975-1981), *Administration et éducation* (1979-2012), *L'éducation Hebdo* (1980-1982), *Cahiers de l'Éducation nationale* (1982-1986), *Éducation et pédagogies* (1989-1993), *Éducation et management* (1989-2009), *Nouveaux regards* (1994-2012) and the *Revue internationale d'éducation de Sèvres* (1994-2012).

texts from the French national education Ministry, part of which (the circulars issued at the start of the new school year) was analysed using lexicometry (with *Lexico* software). Finally a dozen in-depth interviews were carried out with national and academic actors on the question of results-based steering. These actors were identified in the corpus. This material also allowed for an analysis of the trajectory of results-based steering in France, and made it possible to examine its implementation through a case study: the implementation of a contract between the National education Ministry's central administration and the "rectorates" (state authorities at the regional level). Three academies¹⁵ (Créteil, Lyon and Versailles) were studied on the basis of two criteria: the variability of student results on national evaluations (examinations and tests) and the speed of their entry into contracts (for a detailed presentation of the material's collection and exploitation, see Dupuy & Pons, 2013). These methodological differences may be explained by the fact that the reconfigurations we are interested in are visible at different moments in each education policy cycle. In Quebec, the RBM is a highly formalised policy based on several legislative texts. Thus it is logical that a significant portion of our methodology be centered on the origin and political life of these laws. In France, as we will see, results-based steering leads to a less concentrated, more widely spread public action. Studying it implies going back and examining the origin of various instruments and ideas, but also means measuring the empirical effectiveness beyond the different types of discourse, among which there are varying degrees of institutional grounding. These differences lead to targeted explorations which are sometimes unbalanced from one case to another, but which match the study of trajectories in public action in the education sector.

3. The Trajectory of Results-based management (RBM) in Quebec

This section analyses the trajectory of results-based management (RBM) in Quebec's education system. In the first section, we will present several institutions and issues in

¹⁵ France's education system is made up of "academies." These are regional territories (though not the same as the Regions of France as territorial units) with, as leaders, representatives from the central state and ministry, rectors, and, within the region, Academic directors for National education services.

Quebec's education policy over the past few decades which were used in the *bricolage* of laws 124 and 88, discussed throughout the 2000s. Next we will analyse the translation of the principles of New Public Management within the Quebecois context. Results-based management in education is more of a “neo-statist” variant on new public management than a “neoliberal” variant (Clark, 2002). This translation goes hand in hand with different types of bricolage: the cognitive bricolage by parties in power, which connect old education system challenges with results-based management as a way of getting past these challenges, as well as the political and institutional bricolage of legal regulatory systems according to negotiations and transactions taking place between political or social actors. Finally, we will show that the origin of results-based management is also a result of dependence on existing institutional arrangements and tools, partially transformed by mechanisms of institutional layering, drift, or conversion.

3.1. Institutional components and key issues in education policy

In Quebec, education was historically in the care of faith-based organisations (Catholic or Protestant) in the form of school boards organised through local territorial elections and linked to religious hierarchies. Education was brought definitively into the hands of the state in the wake of the Quiet Revolution and the *Commission Parent* (1963). Aside from the key formal structures of the current education system (creation of the Education ministry, development of public primary and secondary schools with relatively unified curricula and pedagogical systems), this change brought about two widely shared societal conventions: promoting the aim of modernising Quebecois society via “national” education policy, and rendering education accessible to all (Corbo, 1994). As school access was extended, the ideal of education for all replaced progressively, during the 1980s and 1990s, the notion of “educational success.” The ideal of education for all was preponderant during the Estates General of education in 1996, another key moment in the education debate in Quebec (Deniger, 2012). From then on, equal education was no longer seen only as equality of chances for “accessing” school (free education and an equal distribution of schooling), but was also seen as equality of chances for “succeeding.” The reform resulting from the Estates General formulated this as “success for all” (*réussite pour tous*). Another significant policy issue was the debate surrounding

school autonomy and “decentralisation”, which emerged during the 1970s and 80s in the wake of internal criticism of excessive centralisation brought upon by the new Education ministry, but also in the context of growing international models in favour of “school-based management” (Brassard, 2007). Several laws consolidated and secularised the *school boards* (there were 800 of them in 1971/72, and only 157 in 1997/98, with 72 language school boards in 1998/99). But the question of school autonomy was raised at several junctures and, with it, the revalorisation of local education steering, in keeping with the long tradition of local school democracy in Quebec. Law 180, which resulted from the Estates General, explicitly aimed to “reinforce the role of local actors, and reinforce community involvement in education governance” (Dembélé, Goulet, Lapointe, & Deniger, 2013), 59). The law gives more institutional autonomy to individual schools; in addition, parents’ roles were reinforced with the creation of a school council (*conseil d’établissement*) tasked with defining an education plan for each school. While, during the Estates General, there appeared rising concern with the “accountability” of schools to parents (Brassard, 2007), it was not until the 2000s that the objectives of higher success rates and better “results” were explicitly tied to the desire to create more “overall consistency” in the education system and more bottom-up accountability. The decentralisation movement was counterbalanced by a general public administration reform.

In 2000, Law 82¹⁶ implemented the foundations of “results-based management”¹⁷. With the law, each ministry would define a strategic plan, lasting several years, including aims, goals, and an annual management report – the basis for accountability to the parliament. The law rendered concrete a “policy statement” made by the Treasury Board intending to reform governmental management on the whole (Quebec government, 1999). The law was part of a larger climate of public service reform in Canada throughout the 1990s (Clark, 2002) but also took place during a period when high-

¹⁶ Law on Public administration modernisation, 2001, L.R.Q. c.-A-6.01

¹⁷ “Results-based management is a management approach based on measurable results responding to goals and targets defined in advance, depending on the services being provided. It is practiced in a context of transparency, accountability and flexibility with regards to the means used to achieve the targeted objectives.” *Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor* (2002, 9).

ranking Quebecois officials visited Great Britain on the subject of the implementation of administration reform (Bourgault, 2004). For the Education ministry's central administration, Law 82 meant the introduction of a strategic plan and indicators used to measure statistically the education system's performance rates (Doray, Prévost, Delavictoire, Moulin, & Beaud, 2011).

The extension of this management reform for the Quebecois public network of education was influenced by a forum on youth (*Sommet du Québec et de la Jeunesse*, 1999-2000), which proposed that the Ministry encourage schools to develop "success plans" (Dembélé et al., 2013). At the same time, through the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada (CMEC), Canadian influence was exercised (Lessard, 2006). In 1999, the CMEC released the Victoria declaration, in which ministers were called to collaborate in order to promote "quality education" as a way of dealing with the "challenges posed by the rapid transformation of our world: youth unemployment, the creation of a knowledge economy, globalisation and the rise of technology" (Council of Ministers of Education in Canada-CMEC, 1999). All the while respecting the provinces' policies and school administration at the local level, this initiative underscored the importance of adopting a "collective approach to finding solutions" to the above mentioned challenges. In its corresponding plan of action, the priority would be given to "education results" and "accountability."¹⁸

In 2002, the *Parti québécois* (PQ) held a vote on Law 124¹⁹, which extended the results-based management approach to the public education network, making obligatory a strategic planning process within the school boards (SB) and requiring schools to define success plans intended to "operationalize" their education plans. The schools would create annual management reports and were to be held accountable to local democratic

¹⁸ The other priorities were "education quality, accessibility, mobility, needs-based responses."

The CMEC was to manage the Canadian participation in the PISA program, and would collect statistical data on the results of the educational systems in the different Canadian provinces (Lessard, 2006).

¹⁹ Law to amend the Law on the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation and the Loi sur l'instruction publique, 2002, L.R.Q., c.-I-13.3.

bodies (councils of elected commissioners or school councils). Law 88²⁰, adopted six years later, went further, requiring that accountability from lower to higher levels be based on results compared with previously-determined “measurable objectives.” The law also added contractualisation (“partnership agreements” between the ministry and the school boards, and “management and educational success agreements” between the school boards and schools. From then on, the school boards and then the schools have targets to reach and plans aligned with the ministry’s performance objective. This was a powerful recentralisation mechanism. The local level’s leeway was thus considerably reduced, despite the paradoxical institutional autonomy given to schools. However, in the law, there are neither explicit awards (financial bonus) nor sanctions for ‘failing’ schools or SBs, as in the US high stake accountability systems (for example, to fire or transfer the higher officers or principals) ²¹.

3.2. Translation of New Public Management, and the bricolage of this approach in Quebec

Results-based management in Quebec developed around the idea of a “neo-statist” or “managerial” translation of New Public Management rather than a more “doctrinaire” variant aiming at a neoliberal promotion of competition in public service offers (Clark,

²⁰ Law to amend the Loi sur l’instruction publique et d’autres dispositions législatives, 2008, L.R.Q., c.-I-13.3.

²¹ There are only ‘moderate stakes’ of RBM in Quebec: 1) in case of SB’s recurrent poor performance (related to the targets), the ministry *might* impose some actions to the SB (no example reported) 2) due to its hierarchical power, the SB *might* also take into account the school performance to evaluate and manage the school’s principals career, while there are no direct and explicit sanctions possible for teachers who are protected by collective agreements. Since 1999 schools’ reports and rankings are published by the media, that is, even before the enactment of the laws 124 and 88), and parents could thus make a pressure on “bad” public schools and SB by choosing the private sector (Desjardins, Lessard, & Blais, 2011).

2002). Insofar as results-based management policy in Quebec public schools is concerned, the translation process was built around a three-faceted bricolage.

First, there was a selection and translation of New Public Management tools, presented as solutions to major shared problems within the school network. More precisely, the process was manifested in the policy narrative (Radaelli, 1999) used by governments in order to justify successive laws (the centre left wing party *Parti québécois* government for Law 124, the centre-right wing Liberal Party for Law 88²²). This narrative does not only reveal a political paradigm²³, but also reveals cognitive bricolage, which allows for an association of certain key problems (success and school democracy), certain existing tools and structures, and new “solutions”, brought in selectively from the repertory of New Public Management (contracts, plans, evaluations, accountability...)

This narrative emphasises two types of problems the Quebecois school system had to deal with: first, dropouts and failures, which had been considered as central problems in Quebecois education policy since the Estates General; second, faulty school democracy in need of revitalisation and revalorisation (another of the States general’s issues). As results-based management was being developed, the discourse of the ruling officials connected these problems to a lack of efficiency and legitimacy in the existing structures. The rulers’ narrative emphasised a lack of coordination and consistency in

²² In Quebec, political parties are to be distinguished based on their stance on socio-economic issues, but also on the national question. The *Parti québécois* is a centre left wing party in favor of the independance of Quebec, just like the *Alliance démocratique du Québec* which is right leaning in terms of economics. The liberal party (PLQ) is “federalist” and centre-right wing on socio-economic issues.

²³ Campbell (2004) describes them as ideas that are behind debates and political decisions. They concern “the elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful programmes available to politicians, corporate leaders and other decision makers” (p. 94), and are “outcome-oriented” in the sense that they are oriented toward the means necessary to achieve a certain result.

actions at various levels of the system, and pointed to the population's disengagement with regards to school elections. From this resulted a theory of the right public action to implement: a theory based on improving organisational efficiency and transparency for existing structures, clearly brought in from New Public Management discourse. The solutions proposed involved maintaining the system's three tiers (the Ministry, school boards, and schools), but also involved improving action alignment and coordination (by the "contractualisation" and "planning" tools, already mentioned, in Laws 124 and 88). Moreover, this theory underscored the need for better accountability from local bodies to superior levels and to the population. This theory also suggested such accountability should be based on target figures and used at all levels of the system (the Ministry, school boards, and schools).

To cure the "ills" of the Quebecois education school, this narrative thus translates ideas from New Public Management, or rather from the composite doctrine that makes up NPM (Bezes, 2005). It clearly favours using private-sector managerial tools in public administration (strategic plans, "contracts", evaluations based on measurable results, results-based accountability, development of monitoring indicators). These elements may be referred to as the "managerial" dimension of New Public Management, already present in Law 82 on public administration modernisation. On the other hand, other tools available in the NPM repertory, such as valorising choice and competition with regards to service providers, or direct user/consumer information on service provider quality, are much less present in the argument put forth²⁴.

However, discourse held mainly by an opposition party (the right wing *Action démocratique du Québec, ADQ*), but also by an association of school directors, proposed dealing with the same problems by emphasising tools that would mix market competition and local parent participation. Like the first narrative, this "alternative" narrative featured the elements of success and school democracy, but with a more alarmist approach. It

²⁴ However, choice (and competition) between public and private (tuition-based) schools had existed since the Quiet Revolution and partially (since 1998) between public schools. Parents' "choice" (limited by financial capacity) between schools is nevertheless not explicitly featured as market-oriented policy. The different governments have in fact tolerated this "clandestine market" and the inequality of its consequences.

argued that the loss of user confidence implied a crisis of confidence in the public school system, caused mainly by a deficient middle tier in the education system – that is, the school boards. The resultant public action theory called for a re-examination of these structures. School autonomy must be reinforced, along with the decentralisation of resources and management capacities. Giving individual schools local responsibilities and holding them accountable with regards to results, to local users and to the Ministry, would strengthen performance and user needs responses. Users could communicate as easily through the local school democracy as through their choice of school. This alternative narrative was closest to a neoliberal version of New Public Management, because it brought in more elements from a logic of “marketisation.” However, it was destined to forever remain opposition-party discourse. The second element of the bricolage we are describing here is political in the sense that the trajectory of results-based management and the content of the laws were both conditioned by the political climate, including calculations and coalitions. We have observed that between Law 124 (a *Parti québécois* law voted in 2002) and Law 88 (a Liberal Party law voted in 2008), there was a growing emphasis on performance-based accountability. During the discussion of Law 124, the centre left wing party *Parti québécois*, in power at the time, made significant concessions to teachers’ unions. In amending its initial bill and accepting accountability on the basis of “creating and realising a success plan” (that is, on the means used) rather than on the basis of results compared to the target figures, the PQ also made an important concession to teacher’s trade unions, but also to high-level school officers. Once the centre-right wing Liberal Party came back into power, however, this option was proposed in Bill 88. Law 88 calls for accountability on the basis of figures established in the “partnership agreements” and in the management and educational success agreements (Maroy & Mathou, 2014).

Our interpretation of this reform development, which tends towards accountability with regards to target figures, is that the pre-electoral context of discussion surrounding Bill 88 and the rise of the right wing ADQ party in the polls (ADQ was one of the parties defending the alternative narrative), led the Liberal Party (without clear opposition from

the *Parti québécois*²⁵) to strengthen Bill 88's neo-managerial leanings at the expense of compromising and mixing with more "communitarian and participative" approaches to regulatory logic and accountability and "the spirit behind Law 180" (dating back from the States general) taken more significantly into account during Bill 124 discussions.

Finally, we present the third kind of cognitive and political bricolage. It is possible to hypothesise that there was during the development of results-based management a sort of alliance (or at least a partial consensus), both explicit and silent, between the actors behind the ruling officials' discourse and the unions. This consensus was built "against" the alternative, neoliberal narrative discussed earlier. An analysis of the controversy between actors holding different policy narratives with regards to Bills 124 and 88 reveals a number of convergence points²⁶ between a third narrative – that of the unions – and that of the ruling officials: this is a partial convergence on the question of "problems to solve" (success and school democracy) and on the proposed means of doing so (strengthening the state's strategic role, the necessity of maintaining and better supporting the school boards). This cognitive convergence is intensified by interests shared between unions and "rulers" (governmental parties and school boards) around the idea of maintaining the school boards and giving the state power to strengthen its control.

This partial convergence of interests and visions of education policy does not in any way mean that results-based management was, or is, fully accepted in Quebec. Teacher unions express strong concern about the potential effects of results-based

²⁵ André Brassard (Brassard, 2008) points to the particular climate in 2008, which authorised the Liberal Party – though a minority party – to propose more managerial solutions, accepted with only a limited number of amendments by the second opposition party (*Parti québécois*). It would have been difficult to get these solutions adopted at another time. The *Parti québécois* would not have wanted to oppose the government because, among other reasons, the Liberal Party's rejection may have led to Assembly dissolution. The ADQ had become the official opposition party since the 2007 elections (41 deputies). By the end of 2008 (the period of Law 88's adoption process), elections were probable in the near future.

²⁶ Some of these convergence points are explicit elsewhere. For example, unions explicitly stressed the importance of the school boards several months beforehand, during the *Forum sur la démocratie et la gouvernance des commissions scolaires* (2008).

management's tools (targets, accountability for results) in schools, to the extent that, in their eyes, these tools threaten teachers' professional autonomy. They are also seen as a threat to the educational goals that unions stand behind: an educational model at the service of students, providing equal chances for success to the largest number of students within a public education system (Maroy & Vaillancourt, 2013).

3.3. Dependence on existing institutions and gradual mechanisms for institutional change

The institutional process of path dependence may also be used in order to understand the trajectory of results-based management and the maintenance of the middle tier – the school boards – in Quebec. The school boards were significantly transformed over the past several decades (cf. The 1998 consolidation and separation from faith-based organisations), but they remained the intermediary regulatory bodies, with schools enjoying heightened power in light of results-based management. In other words, actors in favour of eliminating the school boards (mainly, ADQ) would not see their wish come true. One interpretation of this state of things is policy path dependence with regards to this structure, and to its symbolic weight. The Quebecois governments throughout the 2000s (the *Parti québécois* and the Liberal Party) preferred an “alignment” model, with more consistency between the middle tiers, rather than the idea of getting rid of them altogether (see the rulers' narrative). For a government, the advantage of this option is that it avoids obstacles that would arise if the state tried to eliminate or replace them. These obstacles are all together economic, legal and socio-normative. As such, “dismantling” the school boards would imply an economic cost. The school boards deal with services (student transportation, managing building labor and maintenance, training and professional support for school personnel) that cannot all be transferred to the level of the schools. It would be necessary to create a new entity with new missions, statuses and functioning which would take care of these functions. Such an operation is not neutral from a budgetary standpoint. From a legal perspective, it could lead to disputes in court on the subject of constitutional protection for linguistic minorities (Anglophones) in education policy, particularly in school-management issues. In addition, path dependence is formed by strong normative weight of “school democracy” as a value. Though the

majority of actors (government parties, school boards, unions) recognize “school democracy” as being “ill” or even in a state of crisis, they also identify it as a value and a democratic tradition to uphold. “School democracy” thus still serves as a resource for justification in the context of debates. This no doubt served to bolster the minorisation of the alternative narrative, strengthen the dominant one, and justify the actual policy.

However, the school boards were not maintained exactly as they were: they went through a process of institutional conversion (Streek & Thelen, 2005). Though the school boards retained their old, official function as “representing a community” (via elections and school democracy), this function seemed increasingly dominated by the task of efficient management of educational resources (support for schools). Other new tasks were to serve as relays and vectors for the central Ministry’s objectives via their positioning as pivots in the vertical logic of results-based management; this re-orientation had begun earlier (Brassard, 2007). This functional conversion of school boards can be linked to incremental mechanisms of institutional change, simultaneously linked to a *layering* (Streek & Thelen, 2005) of tools for public action and to the slow *drift* and loss of effective hold on some of them, thus favouring the vertical logic of accountability.

Furthermore, with Law 124, “strategic plans” and “success plans” were put in place, while tools already in existence were used to organise “participation” and local school democracy (“education projects”, for example). With Law 88, these first two generations of tools were combined with “agreements” (partnerships and management and educational success agreements) which organised accountability more formally and aligned objectives for the different system tiers. Current empirical research on this local level shows us that this layering process works in favour of vertical logic “oriented toward measurable objectives” over the horizontal logic of “accountability to the community”. Indeed, the agreements and their quantitative targets, implemented from the central level to the schools in a cascading effect, have been taking precedence over other, more “participative” instruments such as the “education project”, the purpose of which is, increasingly, to display an image and values without a true hold on the orientations of the school boards or the schools.

In summary, we presented how the introduction of result-based management in Quebec is the result of a long lasting trajectory: a neo-statist translation of NPM has been

combined with a cognitive, political and institutional bricolage of the policy ends and tools along the discussion of laws 124 and 88 in the years 2000. By cognitive and institutional bricolage, we mean a combination of old issues within the new accountability mind-set resulting in the sedimentation of communitarian tools and a new set of contracts and targets, while strengthening hierarchical accountability. This process has been the result of political games and transactions in policy making, framed by path dependency to the SB structure and key values associated with education in Quebec. Policy trajectory has led to the reinforcement of a vertical institutional linkage between the layers of the system at the expense of more decentralized, parents-based, regulation of schools. As a result, the strategic role of the state is enhanced and there is a gradual conversion of the SB as a relay for top-down regulation from the state.

4. The trajectory of “results-based steering” in education in France

Since the early 1980s, France’s education system has gone through several important structural transformations, from the massification of the upper-secondary level to successive changes in the school map and the introduction of priority education²⁷. Other issues have included the decentralisation of certain aspects of education policy, the strengthening of devolved state services and Europeanization. The school system and its regulations have since been characterised by a complex entanglement of responsibilities among the central state, its territorial administrations (Dupuy and Pollard, 2014) and its partners, first of which are the subnational governments (Dupuy, 2012, 2014). Concerns tied to accountability are part of the recent changes in French education policy regulation.

²⁷ The generic expression "priority education" designates both the policies of compensation which have been implemented in education since 1981 and the zones, networks and schools which were targetted by these policies and which progressively constituted a differenciaded system within the entire school system.

In the early 2000s, the European Union and the Lisbon Strategy were involved in putting this question on the agenda²⁸. But European recommendations were translated in the French context, where governmental right wing actors were the main representatives. This translation led, on one hand, to strong opposition from the education sector and, on the other, was met with efforts (begun much earlier) on the part of national education administrators to define mechanisms for accountability. Moreover, in this context, the definition and development of these mechanisms were marked by several processes of bricolage: first, between government initiatives on the right wing, which favoured the consideration of results in education regulation, and opponents of the right wing. The second bricolage process centred around a parallel process of state management reform and implementation – the *Loi organique relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF) aimed, in the early 2000s, at restructuring the state budget for objectives and performance indicators. Finally, these processes were tied to path dependence and sedimentation, not only with regards to the ways accountability was conceived of in the administrative sphere, but also to the ways in which administrative actors' practices and education resources allocation were imagined at that time. The resultant accountability policy assigned a dominant role to the central state in developing instruments to monitor the

²⁸ The so-called Lisbon strategy starts at the Lisbon European Council meeting in march 2000, where the EU member states agreed on a new strategic goal “ to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion ” (European Parliament (2000), Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 march 2000, Presidency Conclusions, retrieved from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm). This strategy will lead to various measures to modernize economy, social security, and also education and training. Through a « new open method of coordination », common European benchmarks and monitoring mechanisms have also been defined and regularly updated through various work programmes like Education and Training 2010 and 2020 (Ozga et al., 2011, Grek & Lawn, 2012).

activities of devolved administrations and their schools. These instruments were not, however, tied to mechanisms for emitting sanctions or allocating resources.

4.1. The policy translation of the Lisbon Strategy dictates in France

On a European level, 2003 was marked by accelerated debates surrounding the Lisbon strategy adopted in March 2000. In March 2003, the European Commission was concerned that the benchmark identification process had not made ampler progress. Two months later, the European Council, made up of chiefs of state and government, had identified five benchmarks. In November 2003, the Commission emitted an initial estimation of the degree to which each of the member States had reached these target figures. The Commission expressed concern that national governments seemed to place little importance on the Europe-level engagements they had made, and pressured France and other member States to implement reforms that would explicitly target these objectives (Pépin, 2006).

Nationally speaking, a political debate gradually grew around the question of performance requirements. Two sides clearly emerged. On one hand, the governmental right wing (RPR²⁹) had been preparing its school policy program since before the 2002 presidential elections. This group created a link between actor/structure autonomy and increased performance requirements; a regularly-evaluated contract would be required. This plan, often coupled with discourse around drops in student performance levels and a necessary return to the basics (Robert, 2010), was quickly met with approval by entities such as the PEEP³⁰ and the *Commissariat général au Plan*, and even by certain intellectuals. On the opposing side was not the governmental left (nearly silent on the matter throughout the period), but rather various left-leaning groups such as teachers' unions and the FCPE³¹ as well as academics such as Philippe Meirieu (e.g. Meirieu,

²⁹ The *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) was created in 1976 by Jacques Chirac, but broke up in 2002 into the UMP (the *Union pour un mouvement populaire*) and, earlier this year, into *Les républicains*.

³⁰ *Fédération des Parents d'Elèves de l'Enseignement Public*, close to the right-wing movement.

³¹ *Fédération des conseils de parents d'élèves*.

2008, 2009). These actors repeatedly denounced the tendencies toward consumerism and neoliberalism. If adopted, performance requirements would be a manifestation of these tendencies. This political debate reached its height in 2003 when the government announced its first job cuts and began retirement reform, which led to strong mobilisation on the part of teacher unions (Robert, 2010).

4.2. Dependence on existing administration reflections and the sedimentation of conceptions of accountability

In the early 2000s, the French right wing's translation of the Lisbon strategy for the education field and the opposition this engendered did not occur in a vacuum, but rather in a context of non-linear, inconclusive reflections which emerged in the 1970s and centred on defining and solving the problem of accountability in the education system. Administrators largely attempted this definition process. General inspectors and high civil servants, for instance from the Department of evaluation of the ministry, often argued in favour of a necessary growing "culture of evaluation" within the system. In 2003, a relatively stabilised outcome emerged in the form of "results-based steering", conceived essentially by high-level public officials, members of the *Association française des administrateurs de l'éducation* (AFAE). This "results-based steering" is often presented in professional and institutional journals as a combination of three policy instruments intended to make up a virtuous feedback loop: project, contract, evaluation. This triptych was developed at several levels and for several parts of the school system. For example, the creation of a school project, which is supposed to formalise national policy in a specific local context, must lead to a contract between the school and state regional or subregional authority. This contract should formalise and prioritise goals and actions. The results of these goals and actions are then to be evaluated in several ways (performance indicators, inspections) and this evaluation should steer the next school project. Conceptually speaking, this triptych both rationalises and simplifies several decades' worth of reflection by actors, developed according to a process of institutional sedimentation (Dupuy & Pons, 2013). Figure 1 shows the sedimentation process, including policy instruments (gradual appearance of the project and contract with the

initial evaluation reflections), main arguments (to the classic arguments calling for better awareness of the school system, an argument concerning efficiency is added), policy narratives (developing discourse on globalisation and accountability on the basis of older arguments surrounding the gigantism of the French school system), and finally successive formalisations of accountability relations, in Mark Bovens' sense of the term (2010).

Though "results-based steering" is the direct product of watchwords from the previous period ("steering" and "performance requirements"), it is also connected to older concerns about improving information and knowledge of the school system, and about finding a regulatory mode which will help exit the crisis of school reform, reform which has been traditional, centralised, top-down and relatively uniform. Results-based steering is also the product of a specific climate in which discourse on public service efficiency is on the rise. Discourse on the new finance law and its supposed effects was also multiplying, along with discourse on the accountability-centred experiments conducted abroad, and, in the other direction, on the risks and possible drifts tied to this approach.

Figure 1: Outcomes-Based Steering as a Sedimentation Process

[Insert Figure 1]

This triptych was worked into certain instruments, but the cyclical logic was never seen through to the end, just as in the first contractualisation phase in 1998 between the central administration and state regional authorities. The contract took the form of a several-page document in which academic services described the situation in a given academy, setting objectives (the project) which were commented on by the Ministry's central services.

They then detailed the help they would offer in the realisation of the contract: according to some of our interviewees, the extent of this help was "enthusiasm" and "moral support." The objectives were often very general, and, when they were tied to performance indicators, the measures were not true performance indicators. The contracts were also not legally binding for any of the parties, and the central services had not set up any system for monitoring, sanctioning, or evaluating the situation. In addition, each academy's evaluations, carried out during general inspections several years after the contract signature, indicated that the contracts were at most marginal with regards to the overall actions within the academies. The first contractualisation policy was therefore

terminated in 2004. This experience is a good illustration of the tendencies identified in other research on school projects (Combaz, 2002) and on evaluation mechanisms (Pons, 2011) implemented during the same period: some of these tendencies include an absence of sanctions tied explicitly to the evaluation procedure, privilege given to incitation rather than to institutional constraint, and favouring professional dialogue over codified procedures.

4.3. A three-dimensional policy bricolage

From translation of European recommendations in the policy sphere in a context where accountability had been conceived of and partly implemented in the administrative sector (the early 2000s), there emerged a three-dimensional bricolage, fuelled by three distinct processes. The first process is a group of initiatives adopted from January 2004 to the summer of 2007 by the right-wing government. The government clearly promoted the idea of a necessary development of the results-based steering approach for education. This view was observed in a series of public interventions, such as the opening of the national debate on schools, delivered by President Chirac on the 20th of November, 2003³², or Nicolas Sarkozy's address, then Minister of Economy, Finances, and Industry, in April 2004, on the necessity of a "results-oriented culture."³³ Several measures announced during the same period display the same orientation. Such is the case for the 2005 contractualisation policy revival between the central administration and state regional authorities. It is also the case with regards to emphasis placed on "results-based steering and policy evaluation" in the plan for personnel training as announced by the *Direction de l'encadrement du ministère* in January 2005. Finally, we can also point to a wave of modernisation audits emitted by the *Éducation nationale* between April 2005 and April 2007, and to the publication of a "Steering practices charter" for secondary

³² Chirac declared: "Let us engage ourselves, here and everywhere, in this culture of goals and contracts, with results and evaluations worthy of their name."

³³ We also note similar declarations close to Ministers Gilles de Robien and Dominique de Villepin made to Ministry officials during the summer of 2006, such as at that of Pierre-André Périissol (UMP), during the UMP program presentation during the 2007 Presidential elections.

schools in the *Bulletin officiel* on the 22nd of February 2007, which encouraged schools to be more aware of their results and to take care of relationships with families, etc. The 2003 circulars also clearly illustrate the change in tone. It is now necessary to involve “more systematically the administration councils” in secondary schools and to render systematic the creation and signing of contracts³⁴. It is also crucial to “develop a strategic approach at every level of education policy steering” in keeping with the Lisbon strategy, defining precise goals at every level and making diagnostic and self-evaluation tools available to actors, generalising contractualisation and enriching available performance indicators.³⁵

The adoption of several official texts confirming this orientation indicate path dependence on cognitive categories developed in the administrative sector from the 1970s on in order to deal with accountability in French education policy. The project and the evaluation – recognised by the 1989 *Loi d'orientation*³⁶ in force until the 22nd of April 2005 – were confirmed by the new 2005 *Loi d'orientation*³⁷. This new law favoured contractualisation, stipulating the use of contracts between secondary schools and state regional authorities. These contracts would state objectives and resources. It is interesting to remark that this law claims to respond to the Lisbon Strategy orientations. The report included in the law's annex speaks of a “new order” in matters of steering, and proposes target figures for various actions.

The policy implemented during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency (2007-2012) was built around the same action levers. Repeated governmental communications called for a results-based culture and better accountability (see the President's 19th of September 2007 speech on public function reform, the presentation of primary school education reform in October 2007, etc.); commitments on principle³⁸; “reportology”³⁹; calls for

³⁴ Bulletin n°2003-050 from 28-3-2003.

³⁵ Bulletin n°2004-015 from 27-1-2004.

³⁶ Law n°89-486, 10 July 1989.

³⁷ Law n°2005-380, 23 April 2005.

³⁸ On 11 May 2010, France adhered to the conclusions made by the *Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation européens à Bruxelles* according to which schools must be held more accountable to society.

change published in circulars (particularly in 2007 and 2010) and technical equipment and rules affecting relations between the central administration and the academies (implementation of new computer applications, academic governance reforms via a January 2012 decree, etc.) The main difference is that this policy was carried out in a context characterised by a strong desire to reduce public spending, and shifted progressively from the question of results to that of overall school performance and public administration performance⁴⁰. Though several actors from the public debate supported the idea of better results-based steering⁴¹, governmental policy was also met with strong, cohesive and long-term opposition from education professionals (teacher unions and sometimes inspectors).

Discussions surrounding the *Loi organique relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF), followed by its implementation, are the second process fuelling French accountability policy bricolage over the last decade. In force since the 1st of January 2006, this law reforms the French state budget's architecture, submitting all public policy financing (defined within "missions") to target figures set for each plan of action. Like the other

³⁹ This neologism, inspired by that of "comittology", often used to describe the functioning of some European policies, is used here to mean an organised succession of public reports intended to prepare scheduled reforms. In France, it is a question of parliamentary and inspection reports from the Finance Ministry, the Court of Auditors, and audit reports (see the *Révision générale des politiques publiques* begun in July 2007), etc.

⁴⁰ The new government policy (government active since spring 2012) clearly breaks with the former in terms of discourse (there is weak governmental communication on the subject of results evaluation; the 2013 and 2014 bulletins use much less managerial discourse) and in terms of managing means; the new government is apparently placing more weight on savings in other sectors.

⁴¹ Actors supporting the idea were cross-ministerial actors (Court of Auditors, Strategic analysis council, Economic and social council, think tanks generally situated on the political right such as the *Fondation pour l'innovation politique* and the *Institut Montaigne*, international entities such as the OECD or supranational organisms such as the European Commission. Also included were certain actors from within the school systems (the main student-teacher associations), some scholars (François Dubet and Denis Meuret), high central councils or an association called *Créer son école* (Creating one's school).

Ministries, the National education ministry is concerned: “school education” groups together six different programs. At the national and academic levels, a strategic plan is defined in keeping with each program’s operational budget. The regional state services are responsible for developing a budget for each program, separate for each academy. What makes the LOLF different is thus that central services rely on state regional authorities to attain budgetary goals. This may be observed particularly in the case of the re-working of the finance law preparation procedure, where central services begin budgetary negotiations (“management” dialogue) before the Finance Law vote so that chances are higher that the national education budget that has been voted will end up being respected. The central services gradually developed sets of formalised applications and procedures for monitoring and controlling state regional authorities’ budgetary activities.

In reality, the Ministry actors’ concerns deal principally with the program divisions and the trustworthiness of the changes in budgetary nomenclature (including its being understood correctly). This is at the detriment of a more strategic approach to determining targets and expected results. In addition, the circulars remain vague on the question of changes to implement (actual responsibility is often given to state regional authorities in the form of sentences beginning with “(it is in the academies’ purview to...” and on the question of what will happen if they are not introduced. These bulletins aim to provide “guidance”, “references”, and “framework” principles. Discourse surrounding the LOLF became increasingly more severe, with certain unions denouncing the “war machine” working to cut jobs, and, on the other hand, majority deputies (primarily from the UMP) criticising the National Assembly or the Senate for “school education’s” singular destiny.

Finally, the third process which has been fuelling French accountability policy in the recent period is that of path dependence, not only with regards to cognitive categories used to conceive of it, but also with regards to education practices. In several studies carried out at the school level, we notice that school projects, contracts, and evaluations (or school evaluations more generally speaking) remained unequal from period to period and from area to area. This shows the limitations of legal injunctions on these matters (e.g. Buisson-Fenet & Pons, 2014). Moreover, an analysis of the implementation of

contractualisation between the central administration and state regional authorities shows that though this policy may be more formalised⁴², the negotiation phase and contract itself exclude resources, which continue to be allocated on the basis of needs, traditionally measured by student headcounts. Moreover, the indicators included in the contracts are not tied to mechanisms for sanctioning, regardless of the type of sanction or evaluation in question. The interviewees in charge of contractualisation point to an explicit disconnect in regards to the contract between the central services and the academies and the idea of performance and the allocation of resources on the basis of performance. Some even insist on the incompatibility of this mode of resource allocation with the very principles of the French education system (Dupuy & Pons, 2013).

The trajectory of French accountability policy thus shows that throughout the 2003-2012 period, there were a significant number of discourses – administrative and professional, and then political and governmental – on “results-based steering.” These discourses were found in official texts and in the formal regulation of the French education system, and served as the basis for several measures and bureaucratic calls for change (via bulletins, for example). Nevertheless, throughout this period, there was an intense political debate surrounding the political, regulatory, and axiological legitimacy of results-based steering, and the transformative effects of the regulatory instruments that were implemented. In addition, no exogenous force, such as Pisa or inter-ministerial reforms, seemed to alter this trajectory.

⁴² After a brief introduction by the academy and the central administration, the document we analysed is split into two parts. The first includes a number of indicators for characterising the academic situation from socio-economic and academic perspectives. These indicators are “performance radars” which, represented graphically, show the value of several indicators compared to the national average. For example, for success indicators: the percentage of students having repeated a grade level, the rate of secondary school entry into different programs, the proportion of students having left the system without a sufficient diploma or the rate of bachelors pursuing their education at the university level. The second part presents the academy’s strategy and the central administration’s observations on the subject.

In theory, this strong discursive dimension could lead to the conclusion that the French state is weak in matters of education, incapable of inciting action or implementing a constitutive institutional reform. However, in reality, we are rather witnessing a continuous, even powerful strengthening of the central state at an essentially cognitive level. “Results-based steering” is indeed, at the origin, a policy category conceived by and disseminated by state elites (general inspectors, rectors, central administration directors). This policy imagines mainly state-oriented accountability (government and administrative hierarchies). Analysing the effective implementation of certain steering instruments such as contractualisation between the central administration and the academies reveals that one of the first tangible effects of this instrumentation was to improve the internal functioning of ministerial administrations (tools for communication between generally separate services) and to improve these administrations’ knowledge of the academies’ territories and policy (new computer applications, improvement and extension of the administrative data and statistics produced, regular and better-equipped dialogue). Other research has shown that the implementation of these new policy instruments allows even the administrative elite to transform and rationalise their state science (Pons, 2010). Finally, it is striking to consider that the implementation of this steering approach merges particularly well with the classical governance of the French school system. This governance uses state regulation that is all together centralised and personified, top-down and bureaucratic, and in constant negotiation with sector professionals (Maroy, 2006; van Zanten, 2008).

Overall, we see that the process through which accountability instruments were introduced in the French case of education policy not only is based on the translation of European guidelines by partisan actors, but also was shaped by long on-going and home-grown discussions among administrators regarding conceptions and instruments of accountability. This resulted in a multidimensional bricolage whereby results-based steering was embedded in a broader reform of budgeting at the level of the French state and was strongly path-dependent to ways of conceiving accountability inherited from an earlier period, as well to ways of regulating the French school system.

5. Conclusion

The comparison of accountability policy trajectories in France and in Quebec illustrates two main conclusions. First, both education systems are indeed exposed to the requirements of transnational doctrines such as New Public Management and, particularly, to accountability. But examining trajectories shows that these requirements are translated on the basis of the specific contexts and problematizations of domestic public action. In this sense, we are witnessing two distinct vernacular globalisations both in France and in Quebec: they are made different through institutional processes characterised by path dependence, policy bricolage, and by the translation of globalised doctrines to the national sphere.

In Quebec, the translation of New Public Management favours the introduction of new tools for managing school organisations. These tools are intended to better rationalise and improve organisational efficiency within schools and school boards. A neo-statist version of new public management is being implemented via the strengthening of the vertical mechanisms of contractualisation and accountability. Vernacular globalisation uses cognitive bricolage (adopting accountability as the remedy to old problems in matters of education policy: dropout, failure, autonomy and local democracy), political bricolage (conflicts of interest, alliances among various actors and stakeholders), but also institutional mechanisms of path dependence (persistence of the middle level, rhetorical importance of preserving school democracy, importance of the shared objective of ‘success for all’). At the same time, this creates various sedimentation effects with regards to tools and institutional mechanisms which do not guarantee local consistency, all the while favouring gradual change (the school boards become representatives for ministerial policy).

It is difficult, in France, to ignore the volume of discourse on results-based steering which buttressed government action for ten years, and which can now claim legal existence. In this sense, there is indeed a gradual institutionalisation of the logics of accountability. This logic, however, leads primarily to calls for change in discourse and official texts: these injunctions are made at the central national level and are meant to be applied from the top down, but they are contested by a number of sector professionals, which fuels a deeply-seated public debate throughout the entire period. This gradual

institutionalisation also leads to the implementation of new policy instruments with limited transformative power. In this way, discursive results-based steering fits particularly well in traditional, bureaucratic and corporatist regulatory modes for education in France, all the while making for a singular French kind of accountability.

Second, having recourse to a comparison of most-different cases highlights a common characteristic of the introduction and implementation of accountability mechanisms: the strengthening of public authorities and the development of a neostatist version of NPM.

In Quebec, the translation of new public management fuels a heightened strengthening of public authorities of Quebec school system governance. A “neo-statist” trajectory means strengthened state power and a stronger hold on the school system’s components. The vertical accountability mechanisms (school boards accountable to the ministry, or schools to the school boards) are favoured over horizontal anchoring mechanisms in communities and reinforced accountability to parents and community representatives. The state is more powerful because it is in a position to impose “ministerial goals” on the school boards, to expand its control and expand accountability with regards to the “results” produced by the school boards, all the while maintaining (or reinforcing) its usual budgetary or regulatory pressure. The vertical bureaucratic administration therefore ends up stronger. The state’s power reinforcement happens, however, without a strong challenging of either the middle tier or school democracy. The sedimentation of discourse and management/accountability mechanisms tends to obfuscate and also legitimize, the growing weight of the state political orientations.

In France, we are witnessing an essentially cognitive strengthening of the state whereby the state’s power to frame future institutional reforms is increased, and as a consequence its power to control potentially fundamental changes is also strengthened. This evolution toward a neostatist version of NPM results from two main processes. First, the incorporation of NPM principles was more “managerial” than “doctrinaire” (Jobert, 1994). Senior civil servants were overall convinced that management tools inspired by the private sector should be introduced in education, they did not promote a neoliberal approach of administrative reforms or system regulation that would advocate for competition between units within the schoolsystem. The bulk of policy makers backed up

this understanding . Second this incorporation allowed the central state to increase its “infrastructural power” (Mann, 1986), more precisely its ability to act on the education system (Dupuy & Pollard, 2014) through the administrative restructuring and the improvement of state administrations’ knowledge on actual education policy and outputs.

In the end, two different logics of vernacularisation are at work. In Quebec we might talk about a “centralisation by institutional linkage” to designate two intertwined processes: the reinforcement of state power through a growing vertical accountability and the systematic development of regulation tools between various policy actors and levels within the system. In France, vernacularisation moves rather through a “globalisation by discursive internalisation”. Transnational imperatives on accountability are indeed integrated in the formal regulation of the education system, but mainly through official discourses and traditional top-down claims for change. If the latter allow to reformulate some pre-existing administrative reflexions supported by administrative elites, they make neither the policy debate nor the traditional mainstays of system regulation radically evolve. Yet, in both cases, vernacular globalisations gave rise to government-based accountability systems⁴³, where the role of markets remains minor and more subterranean than in cases where competition among schools and market-based accountability are more central (as in England or Alberta).

⁴³ *Government-based accountability* corresponds to ‘government efforts to measure the outcomes of students and schools, especially on the basis of student test scores, and to provide explicit rewards and punishments based on these measures’ (Harris & Herrington, 2006, p. 217). Secondly, *market-based accountability* corresponds to policies providing parents with greater school choice.

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