

# Schools in vulnerable contexts: Galapagos Islands' principals and accountability

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## Abstract

Rural and remote areas present challenges in the organization of schools, especially when implementing new practices. In this study, we examine the leadership challenges faced by principals in the Galapagos Islands, under the Ministry of Education in Ecuador. The purpose of this case is to examine the work of principals leading schools in this unique context observing the expectations and demands for principals under a newly implemented accountability system. Significant in this study is the examination of leadership in highly vulnerable contexts, including the remote islands of Galapagos, and leadership values respective to the success of schools and communities.

**Keywords:** Principalship; Accountability; Data-Driven Decision-Making; High-Need Schools.

## Resumen

### *Escuelas en contextos vulnerables: directores y accountability en las Islas Galápagos*

Las áreas rurales y remotas presentan desafíos en la organización educativa, especialmente cuando se implementan nuevas prácticas. En este estudio, examinamos los desafíos que enfrentan los directores en las Islas Galápagos en la gestión de las escuelas, bajo el Ministerio de Educación en Ecuador. Este caso examina el trabajo de los directores que gestionan escuelas en este contexto único, observando expectativas y demandas de los directores bajo un sistema de *accountability* recientemente implementado. Importante es el examen del liderazgo en contextos altamente vulnerables, incluyendo áreas remotas como las Islas Galápagos, donde la gestión educativa es importante en el éxito de las escuelas y las comunidades.

**Palabras clave:** Gestión Escolar; Liderazgo; Accountability; Toma de Decisiones con Base en Datos; Escuelas de Alta Necesidad.

## Resumo

### *Escolas em contextos vulneráveis: diretores e accountability nas Ilhas Galápagos*

As áreas rurais e remotas apresentam desafios em termos de organização escolar, principalmente na implementação de novas práticas. Neste estudo, investigamos os desafios enfrentados pelos diretores escolares nas Ilhas Galápagos, sob supervisão do Ministério de Educação no Equador. O objetivo é observar as expectativas e demandas ministeriais em relação aos diretores escolares em relação a um novo sistema de *accountability*. Importante neste estudo é a gestão de escolas em contextos altamente

vulneráveis, incluindo áreas remotas como as ilhas Galápagos, e a observação de uma liderança que valorize o sucesso de suas escolas e comunidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Gestão Escolar; Accountability; Tomada de Decisão Baseada em Dados; Escolas de Alta Necessidade.

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine school leadership in high-need contexts, observing the expectations and demands for principals under a newly implemented accountability system. Scholarship related to leadership in high-need schools increasingly has been represented in research studies, with scholars observing ways to generate school improvement in vulnerable contexts around the world (Baran, Berry, 2015; Barnett, Stevenson, 2015; Bryant, Cheng, Notman, 2014; Murakami, Gurr, Notman, 2019; Oliveira, Carvalho, 2019). We ask: What are the perceptions of principals in relation to expectations and demands of a newly implemented accountability system?

This article provides one case scenario composed by findings from a study of principals in 19 schools in the Galapagos archipelago. The scenario combines data collection artifacts as a means to provide the opportunity for insight into the experiences of principals in the Islands as they adopt a new understanding related to school performance and accountability. As a learning opportunity, the scenario offers three areas found relevant in this research's findings: (a) an analysis of the accountability enforcement in the Islands as a vulnerable context; (b) data-driven decision making and principals' training related to implementing changes required by the Ministry of Education, Ecuador; and (c) the principals and teachers' relationship based on governmental changes. In the discussion, an analysis of the scenario and additional principals' reflections are offered, as a way to engage practitioners and scholars in exploring the experiences of school leaders in vulnerable contexts.

## Rationale

Before addressing the significance of accountability systems, it is important to reflect on the effects of policy borrowing in education (Phillips, 2005; Pollock, Murakami, Swapp, 2015). Phillips (2005) provides insight on how policy borrowing can be traced in education as a way to improve different educational systems. Indeed, at a local level, we carry such behavior as educators where professional development or conferences bringing specialists are sought to learn about educational topics that

can improve home-based educational practices. Phillips continues and argues that policy borrowing is not just about a process of internationalization or globalization of education, but a purposeful or even deliberate influence or change.

Across countries, policy borrowing in education may be sparked by interest, and/or be enforced by governmental regulations. Phillips (2005) exemplified that at the aftermath of some countries political or economic change, other forms of changes occur, which may be influenced from outside: "Sometimes it will be welcomed, at least initially; sometimes it will be gradual and subtle in its effects; sometimes it will be resisted with varying degrees of rigor" (p. 25). Other scholars (Burdett, O'Donnell, 2016) posit that policy borrowing often gets lost in translation between "origin and destination" (p. 113). By *lost in translation*, these authors do not mean the translation of words; rather, they believe the reason for this disconnect varies and includes the lack of understanding of theoretical frameworks to lack of understanding of aspirations to a "willful misrepresentation" (p. 113).

Accountability and high-stakes testing present robust examples of policy borrowing at a global level. This movement considers the influence and impact of policy borrowing as "dissolving national boundaries" (Pollock, Murakami, Swamp, 2015, p. 5). In the US, educational reform conversations about accountability can be linked to the Nation at Risk report in 1983 (NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION, 1983; PARK, 2014; WEISS, 2004). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Biesta (2004) saw the rise in the culture of accountability as a result of the 1988 Educational Reform Act (United Kingdom Parliament, 1988). Later, in 2009, we find another example, from Eklöf, Andersson, Wikström (2009) of whether the Swedish national assessment system could be joining in discussions about quality assurance and accountability movements. Interestingly, in 2018, it is already possible to see how Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have each already launched websites with national accountability indicators and are now building cross comparisons of student performance (Wallenius et al., 2018).

In the Americas, attention to accountability began in 2005 in Brazil (Schneider, 2019), depicted from a power relation from State to institutions, with little democratic freedom in resolving school needs, even though it proposes transparency in its activities. Hofflinger and von Hippel (2018) shared findings after 6 years of high-stakes testing in Chile with mixed results. They found teachers focused on tests preparation at the expense of activities such as debates, projects or presentations, and

schools serving disadvantaged students inflating their ratings by having up to 30 percent of low performing students miss the test dates. These countries are just a minute example of policy borrowing in education – and how the educational accountability concepts and practices spread around the world.

In terms of school leadership, common research efforts have been in place to examine the improvement and sustainability of schools through the work of principals (BENNETT, MURAKAMI, 2016; Bryant, Cheng, Notman, 2014; Moos, Johansson, Day, 2011). In highly vulnerable contexts, such as schools in poverty or in remote areas, scholars focused on school leadership believe that school leaders can prepare generations empowered to improve the conditions of their communities. In the next section we provide information about Galapagos Islands' context and education.

## **The Galapagos Islands' context and education**

The Galapagos population of 25,124 inhabitants is distributed among 20 islands and are composed of a majority of migrants (74.0%) (INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADISTICA Y CENSOS, 2011). The Islands were declared a national park by the Ecuadorian government in 1959. Living on the edge of natural diversity and ecotourism, the population is mostly composed of 81.0% of the residents, self-identified as Mestizo, followed by 7.5% of mainland Ecuador Indians, 7.3% Caucasian, and 4.2% African-Ecuadorians. Most of the population has migrated to the Galapagos Islands for economic reasons. The Galapagos Conservancy (2018), an entity providing support for the schools in the area, recognized that:

While many short-term policy and conservation interventions seek to mitigate environmental damage in Galapagos, long-term protection of the islands will be possible only when local residents become champions for conservation and have the knowledge, skills, and vision necessary to live in balance with the fragile Galapagos environment (Galapagos Conservancy, 2018, para. 13).

The 5,200-student population is distributed mainly in four out of the 20 islands in the archipelago. There is a total of 20 public and private schools in Santa Cruz (9 schools), San Cristóbal (6), Isabela (4), and Floreana (1) (Galapagos Conservancy, 2018). Recently, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education straightened ties with private and non-profit entities including the local foundation, Fundación Scalesia, and the Galapagos Conservancy, which highlights sustainability principles in the national curriculum standards, as well as providing professional development to educators

in an agreement with the ministry (Galapagos Conservancy, 2018). This research is based on the efforts initiated through these partnerships<sup>1</sup>.

The government of Ecuador values the economic interests based on tourism, fishery, and public administration. The government is highly aware of the worldwide visibility of the islands due to its inclusion in the Unesco's World Heritage list ([whc.unesco.org](http://whc.unesco.org)). The country divides school supervision into nine educational zones, where supervision of the Galapagos Islands is part of zone 5, including the regions of Guayas, Los Rios, Santa Elena and Bolivar. In the last decade, Ecuador heavily invested to increase access to education through the addition of an online portal, with the intent of standardizing access to data on teacher and student performance, curricular practices, and financial accountability. The effort, named *Educar Ecuador: Comunidad Educativa en Linea* (Educate Ecuador: Online Educational Community) (ECUADOR, 2018a) aims to reach the entire educational community including students, teachers, institutional authorities, parents, and community (ECUADOR, 2018b). The effort is connected to a *Ley de Transparencia* (ECUADOR, 2004), making also public salaries and the preparation of teachers, school administrators, and supervisors.

#### *School leadership in an era of accountability*

When the focus of schools changes from building a community of learning to a culture of accountability, the culture of the entire educational system, including governmental central control, changed to now focus on auditable accounts. With a focus on school leadership, Hargreaves (2005) argued that change in schools can be multidimensional, and include cultural, structural, moral, political and emotional aspects for all stakeholders. School principals may have to observe implications for change based on all these aspects as affecting teachers, students, and families. When observing the school as an organization, Marcoulides and Heck (1993) suggested an organizational culture approach when observing change to include: "a sociocultural system of the perceived functioning of the organization's strategies and practices; an organizational value system; and the collective beliefs of the individuals working within the organization" (p. 209).

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<sup>1</sup> Fundación Scalesia Galapagos is a private foundation established by local leaders in 1993 from Puerto Ayora, Galapagos (FUNDACIÓN SCALESLIA GALAPAGOS, 2018) Galapagos Conservancy is a U.S. based non-profit organization focused on the long-term protection of the Galapagos Islands ([www.galapagos.org](http://www.galapagos.org)).

Biesta (2004) defined accountability as being divided between a technical-managerial meaning and a more general meaning. In a general meaning, accountability means, “being answerable to” (p. 234). In a technical-managerial language, accountability “has the duty to present auditable accounts of *all* (emphasis from the original text) of its activities” (p. 235). The logic is that organizations that are *accountable* are *manageable* (and vice-versa). Hence the need to make all schools auditable. However, Biesta (2004) highlights that there is not a link between the two meanings. Instead, there is an idea that any argument against accountability can only result in negative outcomes or incompetence.

The comparison of schools becomes faulty when the contextual condition of schools and their families are not fully considered. For example, Clotfelter et al. (2007) recognized that,

The consistency of the patterns across many measures of qualifications for both teachers and principals leaves no doubt that students in the high-poverty schools are served by school personnel with lower qualifications than those in the lower poverty schools (p. 1345)

In order to examine accountability ratings, and the performance of students in comparison with students in other schools, Clotfelter and colleagues (2007) argue that it requires that the quality of schooling provided to students be similar across schools (p. 1348). They add:

Under an outcome standard, equality of resources would not be sufficient. Instead, the schools serving disadvantaged students would need to have more-or higher quality-resources than the other schools to compensate for the educational disadvantages that children from disadvantaged families typically bring to the classroom (p. 1348).

Based on these observations, the examination of leadership in high-need schools in the Galapagos Islands may provide for important research findings. It is possible to anticipate a need to observe a high support from the educational system if to provide successful outcomes along students. Hallinger (2003) further confirmed that, “the context of the school is a source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand and address in order to lead” (p. 346). This study, therefore, may bring about lessons related to school leaders capable of developing knowledge that is respectful of high-need communities (Gurr, Drysdale, 2018; Hallinger, Murphy, 1986), while documenting leadership that confront challenges related to the adaptation towards the newly implemented accountability system in a highly vulnerable context.

## Methodology

We used an ethnographic design (Weick, 1985; Morrison, 2012; Pole, Morrison, 2003) to examine principals, asking: What are the perceptions of principals in relation to expectations and demands of a newly implemented accountability system? The value of ethnography has been highlighted by Pole and Morrison (2003) as “situated meaning and contextualized experience as the basis for understanding social behavior” (p. 5). We focused on the context as having great importance and considered Morrison’s (2012) theory of ethnography as allowing for deep, critical insight into the social perceptions of organizational life and in this case, of leadership.

Nineteen principals from public and private schools in the Galapagos Islands’ schools consented and participated in this research. Principals were assigned to their position after being approved at the Galapagos’ district level and carried variable workloads, including teaching hours. As such, most of them received a managerial instead of leadership title (*encargados*), or teachers with administrative duties. The sample was generalizable to all principals in the Islands, since all but one principal participated.

## Procedures

The principals were interviewed observing a criteria and protocol set by the International Study of Leadership Development Network (ISLDN). ISLDN brings together researchers focused on social justice leadership and high-need schools (INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT NETWORK, s. d.). The High-Needs group convenes more than 50 scholars using common protocols to consider the school context, internal and external challenges, student, teacher, and parents’ experiences, and leadership for school improvement (Baran, Berry, 2015). Questions used the aforementioned considerations within the areas (a) accountability, (b) data driven decision-making, and (c) teacher performance. The analysis focused on challenges, needs, and principal focus in relation to the preparation of teachers in their performance.

The findings are reported through a case scenario offering researchers and practitioners with the opportunity to examine changes affecting school leaders. Findings include aspects of the school’s organization, culture, governmental investments and support, students’ background, and teacher and principal preparation for the challenges documented. To the extent possible, names and school were masked for

anonymity, and the case does not depict challenges from one specific school, but a compilation of events and situations shared by a number of schools and participants observed. Data provided for the school scenario follow the Ministerio de Educación information (ECUADOR, 2018a). In the next section we present the case of principal Ramiro, followed by additional findings generalizable to all schools in this study.

### **Principal Ramiro at Espejo del Mar High School**

Ramiro is a principal with more than 20 years of experience in education. He has been a principal (*encargado*) for the last three years at Espejo del Mar High School (EM, pseudonym) in the Santa Cruz island, in the Galapagos archipelago, located about 850 miles off the coast of Ecuador. The town of about 12,000 inhabitants is one of the most populated areas of the islands. Ramiro has been a teacher, coordinator and now principal for the past 10 years. He was not born in the islands, but has been a part of the Santa Cruz community most of his adult life. The school is remotely located in reference to the country's capital, by about 900 miles.

Ramiro's love for the students is apparent. In the mornings, he greets every student in the simple, but well landscaped main gates at the high school. A total of 31 teachers serve 700 students at EM. Students' parents work in a variety of activities, from fishery to commerce, rural and touristic activities. It is not easy to find a robust teaching workforce in the islands, but Ramiro has built a great reputation as a leader. He is recognized for generating a stable and welcoming environment for teachers. During our research visits, we noticed that teachers are valued and treated with high respect-after all, some of them were his own students when he started as a teacher. Today, his "once" students are active local teachers, often mentoring new teachers coming from the mainland.

Ramiro's preparation is limited, since he has taught in the islands, and was later promoted before getting any leadership training. The ministry has arranged for training from district supervisors, and external experts, partially funded by Fundación Scalesia and Galapagos Conservancy. Ramiro's leadership could be perceived as shared or distributed where, with one assistant principal and teacher leaders, decisions are made on behalf of the improvement of different disciplines and programs. He facilitated monthly meetings with his leadership team composed of the assistant principal and four teachers in main subject areas to evaluate concerns and plan sup-

portive interventions. As a public high school on the island of Santa Cruz, Ramiro is proud of the strategies implemented so far, reflected in the above the mean student performance when compared to similar schools in the whole archipelago.

Lately, Ramiro has been very concerned about the fast changes and demands coming from the Ministry of Education. The ministry – guiding all schools and enforces its national curriculum, programs, standards and expectations for school leaders and teachers - is about to launch a revised national curriculum which will demand swift implementation. In addition, new standards and expectations for teachers had been established, where the instructional time was increased, leaving teachers with less time for lesson planning, classroom preparation, grading, and after-school student support. In fact, he learned that some of the teachers' children were increasingly seen playing on the streets, being left on their own after school hours. A couple of teachers under his supervision have resigned due to pressures related to work-life balance.

To complicate matters, new accountability reports were being released to the public as part of the *Ley de Transparencia* (ECUADOR, 2004). He had not yet been trained about how to access the report or its contents, but he knew that the reports would be sharing academic performance data from each school in the country. He was unclear about where to begin, in terms of using the information since, so far, his efforts were focused on the last ministerial demands to integrate the educational disciplines with active-learning strategies, and to focus on environmental and sustainable efforts to protect the islands.

As Ramiro was in his office reflecting about how to begin strategizing, a district inspector came by his door. She was visiting from the mainland, to set dates to come screen teachers following policies from the Ministry to implement a new national system to evaluate teacher performance that could result in severe consequences for teacher employment. At this point, we transition from Ramiro's experience, and add other participants' evidence related to his experience in the following section.

## **Principal leadership and accountability: additional findings from Galapagos' schools**

As depicted in the case scenario, areas of concern in Ramiro's and other principals' experiences related to national demands, and included (a) accountability, (b) data driven decision-making, and (c) teacher performance. Here we expand on these issues:

**Accountability Issues.** With increased accountability demands from the Ministry of Education, Ramiro and other principals found it difficult to make sense of the new accountability demands. They lacked instructions about how often to visit the online portal, how to identify and disaggregate the data for their own schools, and what to look for when using the data for school improvement. Because the data available would be made public, there was a general concern about their responsibilities. One of the principals said: “Now that I lead, my responsibility includes a larger education community, and I must be aware of all requirements at the Ministry and district level in relation to improvements in the educational system.”

Another principal felt that the responsibilities shifted and reflected: “I need to learn how to integrate the educational community to the educational expectations and improve the academic experience of students.” These principals’ reflections are just some examples validating Biesta’s (2004, p. 234) concern when he asked: “What kind of relationships are made possible by the culture of accountability, [and] what kind of relationships are made difficult or even impossible as a result of the accountability regime?” Principals in the islands demonstrated a concern about a shift in responsibilities. These concerns also relate to the time spent on building relationships.

**Data-Driven Decision-Making.** As the schools in Ecuador are beginning to emphasize data-driven decision making, principals in the islands like Ramiro began to plan strategies to make that shift. One of the principals said: “I hope my colleagues (teachers) do not lose sight that what we need to do is for the benefit of the educational community.” The principals were afraid that the data analysis would change the teachers’ focus from a whole-student approach to a reflection on their performance. The principal reflection also demonstrated that there was an unclear positionality when making decisions over data.

When asked to clarify how educators would lose sight of benefitting the community, another principal said: “We will not focus on the immediate needs of the community but would spend time to create a connection bringing together educational demands, teachers, parents and students,” showing that the educational demands would take precedence in the campus priorities. Another principal further reflected: “How are we to further develop goals that have not been met, when new ones may surface?”

While the principals were informing this research, they were being prepared to retrieve and understand the data. They were also being trained in data-driven

decision-making strategies, along with teacher training to strengthen instructional leadership teams to support teacher knowledge and growth, using tiered coaching systems established in schools.

**Teacher Performance and Professional Development.** Considering both demands for curriculum changes and student improvement, the principals and teachers were learning about documenting teacher performance for accountability purposes. Principals like Ramiro would have to quickly implement strategies to set documentable routines to report on curricular changes, ensure school improvement, implement a teacher observation protocol, and the further preparation of teachers. The principals felt that in order to promote teacher growth, they needed to address some tensions including “Learning how to implement new strategies to negotiate conflict among colleagues, before we get to academics,” one principal said. Another principal confirmed that “negotiating teachers’ attitudes and changing negative attitudes” was going to be one of their main challenges.

The principals’ challenges in relation to address collegial conflict stemmed from the fact that teachers did not necessarily see the principals as leaders. They were just in charge of additional activities beyond the classroom, such as facilities, custodial staff, absences, and paperwork. Furthermore, teachers also expected their school principal to be in his or her office so that they would be available to community members and parents when needed. This, of course, was contrary to observing teachers in their classrooms. In addition, principals were responsible to be entrepreneurial in order to obtain donations for items not funded by the districts or government such as basic hygiene needs (i.e., garbage bags, cleaning products, toilet paper), unfunded facilities’ needs (items for physical education, outdoor landscaping, security systems, small repairs), and items to improve the well-being of students (sports court, benches, cafeteria area, safety issues). Teachers were not privy of the dimension of the additional work of colleagues turned into *encargados*, or the added dimension of the effects of accountability demands. Principals emphasized the difficulty of “approaching teachers with further pedagogical needs,” and a lack of leadership skills or authority, needed to “learn how to approach colleagues that needed feedback in order to improve their teaching skills”, as one principal stated.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Education had well described expectations and standards for school principals, but most of the principals in the islands did not have the position. Their willingness to serve the community was one of the motivators to

take on the position, since there was little recognition for the role, or pay differential. One of the principals said she was dedicated to the improvement of teachers: “I like to collaborate with my colleagues and support them in their needs. Companionship is fundamental in the work of schools and can be developed with friendly relationships”. Another one said: “I build engagement and collaboration for a common goal”. One of the principals reflected that her leadership referred to “learning about the students’ needs every day and focusing on their skills and attitudes – ‘I need to take every chance to build upon their needs!’”

Finally, the principals shared concerns about parental involvement, especially when they would be learning more about how their children’s data compared to those in other local schools. One of the principals said, “We need to encourage parents with initiatives and participation in the schools”. Another one said, “There is a need to build a culture where parents are part of their children’s learning”. Parental involvement was not taken lightly, since all who worked inside of the school were part of a very small community, where sometimes, they had familial ties. Principals belonged to the community, and as such presented a deep understanding of the families’ needs. However, families did not necessarily understand the implications of new ways in which schools operated from an accountability standpoint. An interpretation or reaction of data made available, in relation to students and teachers, was still to be seen. The next section summarizes this research and offers a discussion of findings, and concluding thoughts.

## **Discussion**

This study confirms that the accountability movement has reached several nations and their school systems, becoming “an integral part of the day-to-day practice of educators in many countries around the world” (Biesta, 2004, p. 233). The case scenario and principals’ reflections in this study demonstrate the turn of events as the Ministry began implementing accountability systems at a national level. In relation to top-down policies related to accountability, school principals can be hard-pressed to adopt changes and make decisions on a daily basis (Day, Leithwood, 2007), while being evaluated in their capacity to generate change (Heck, Hallinger, 2005). In consideration is not only how school principals impact change, but how they are impacted by change (Pollock, Murakami, Swamp, 2015).

In the case of the Galapagos Islands, careful attention will be required in the observation of equal opportunity to develop results comparable at a national level. For example, principals in the Islands have less opportunity to interact with school administrators and Ministry officials in other districts due to the distance to the mainland. They also have less access to professional development materials beyond those provided in trainings, when compared to schools in largest cities. Teachers similarly have less professional development opportunities beyond those provided by the district.

Equity of opportunity was found limited for parents. The idea of transparency is an attractive feature of national accountability efforts, where parents are able to compare their children school with others, and make informed decisions as a taxpayer and consumer of public services. The accountability era indeed affected the way schools are organized and relationships within them, pointing out gaps in academic achievement of students, and making these available to both parents and governmental entities. In search for the best education, parents are now empowered, for example, to challenge their children's schools, or seek better schools. However, as in the case of the Galapagos Islands, parents in poverty or in rural and remote areas are limited by few choices when seeking the best schooling for their children.

## Concluding thoughts

We concur with Biesta (2004) as this study demonstrates that “the current culture of accountability is deeply problematic” (p. 241). When parents target institutional and professional failures in name of accountability, and schools aim to raise standards for the same end, Ramiro and other principals demonstrated that little focus is given to the possibility of reforming deficiencies from regulators, governmental control, or enforcing policies (O’Neill, 2004). The principals’ fear that educators should not lose focus when supporting children in an era of accountability is founded.

Further, Biesta (2004, p. 249) predicted that the effect of accountability relates to the “*deprofessionalization* of the relationship between schools/teachers and parents/students”. He explains:

Teachers and educational institutions have been maneuvered into a position in which they have to go along with the customer and meet the customer's needs. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for them to act according to their professional judgment if it runs counter to the apparent needs of the learner. Similarly, parents and students have been maneuvered into a consumer position in which it is difficult for them to rely upon and ultimately to trust the professionalism of educators and educational institutions (BIESTA, 2004, p. 249).

Schools and their educators will be dependent on the Ministry's quality adjustments and supervision in order to build an educational system that will support schools perceived as underperforming. This means that the Ministry will also need to consider how policy borrowing can be done seamlessly and in a way relevant to school improvement efforts in the Galapagos Islands. Support in the case of high-need schools in vulnerable contexts, in the example this research offers, means built-in interpretation of data that leverage the contextual differences among schools and consider the limitations and conditions of their populations (in other words, considering for example, indigenous; in poverty; with disability; or in vulnerable contexts).

During this research, it was important to observe the principals and teachers as they transitioned to a culture of accountability, especially as a reminder of how accountability was established in different countries. At the Galapagos' schools, principals and their leadership teams learned how to look at data and address root causes of areas of concern in the efforts to improve learning during their training. A valuable activity prepared the principal and teacher leaders to learn to identify areas of strength, opportunities for growth, and questions or issues they would like to investigate in collaboration. While there were a number of steps involved with this first protocol, the most important was not to surface every interesting insight from the data, but to target and prioritize their efforts. The idea of this activity was to challenge the school leaders and their teams to *not* go directly to solutions; rather, focus on what the current data were telling them without looking for explanations or causes. Each group was required to come to a consensus as a team about the most important areas of strength and opportunities for growth to investigate further. The teams were also trained to brainstorm potential causes and write them down and prioritize them.

Since resources are limited for schools, focusing on root causes and learning how to target areas of improvement was offered as a way to assist with using time and energy more efficiently to solve the schools' most pressing issues. Further negotiations on ways to increase the support to schools, principals, teachers, students and their families in terms of equitable opportunities are still to be observed, when considering their highly vulnerable contexts, and high need student population. Nonetheless, this study documented the beginning of an important landmark and training, preparing principals and teachers committed to the preparation of students in a robust culture of learning for the success of future generations in the Galapagos Islands.

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