



education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: gustavo e. fischman /
melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

March 25, 2015

ISSN 1094-5296

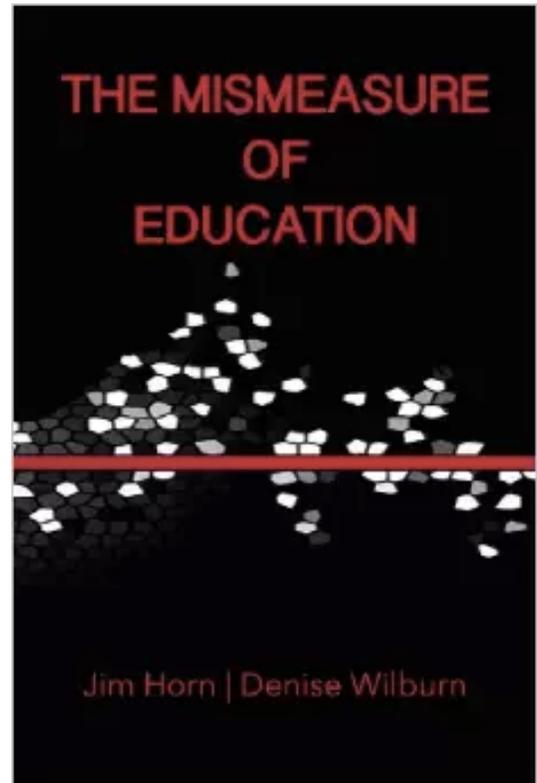
Horn, J., & Wilburn, D. (2013). *The mismeasure of education*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Pp. 1 + 286

ISBN: 9781623963910

Mark Garrison
D'Youville College
Buffalo, NY

Recently I was asked to talk to a large group of area educators and parents about the relationship between the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI) and the use of student test scores on high stakes standardized tests to evaluate teachers and principals – so-called valued-added models (VAMs). Public criticism of this disfiguring of teacher evaluation and the Common Core testing regime continues to grow across New York State and elsewhere, giving rise to many public forums such as the one described below. More than 40,000 parents reportedly opted their children out of New York's Common Core tests this year.¹ Many parents are “refusing the tests” on the grounds that consistent and vocal public concerns about the Regents Reform Agenda have been ignored (e.g.,



¹ See the New York State Allies for Public Education website, and in particular, this accounting of opting out in New York State:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AuLBonoXvLu9dFF1NmtyeWxGTmpRazYtcXoyVGFMeVE&usp=drive_web - gid=0

Strauss, 2013).²

During the discussion following my talk linking the rise of the test-delivery Common Core regime and VAMs to cuts to education funding and privatization, one teacher likened her experience to being flushed down a toilet, “day after day,” struggling but never being able to escape that dark vortex known as “education reform,” which, she said, “sucks the life out of education” and renders any authentic work of students and teachers “wasteful.” After the crowd had left, the event organizer told me that a teacher sitting next to him during the talk, “cried quietly for the first half hour.” When I asked why, he said: “The talk put everything together for her, helped her understand the pain she had been experiencing over the last decade.” In no small measure was my ability to “bring everything together” based on having just finished reading Horn and Wilburn’s volume, *The Mismeasure of Education* (MME). Readers should know that MME is imbued with an activist spirit and so it seems imminently fitting to introduce the book in the light of its role in my own work as a public intellectual.

I’ve been studying and writing about standardized testing, and VAMs in particular, for some time, so I asked myself, “what was it about MME that proved so valuable to me?” The value of MME for me – and I believe this will be the case for many readers – is the manner in which it links the rise of test-based accountability policy to elite ideologies and efforts to block public demands for equality of educational opportunity, and demands for policies that foster social equality, more generally. Through its case study of the rise of VAMs in Tennessee, MME leaves the reader with a keen sense of the dynamic relationship between the increasing reliance on standardized tests, school finance litigations, and privatization efforts, which include increased expenditures on for-profit prisons and a simultaneous reduction in funding for public schools. This analysis and the author’s mode of presentation helped me put all that knowledge

² This is the name given to the Obama administration’s venture philanthropy driven Race to the Top competitive grant programs as they are developed in New York State.

together such that I was more able than before to effectively communicate an analysis to a public audience, one that was both partisan – unabashedly in favor of defending and renewing the democratic potential of public education – and eager for objective analyses of the actual conditions, developments and facts related to the “mismeasure” of the work of teachers and students.

In short, the value of MME is how it makes the case that *testing is political*. It makes the case that standards used to judge schools, teachers and students represent the interests and values of those who establish them. For me, it is further proof of the thesis outlined in my own work (Garrison, 2009) regarding the inherently political and value-laden nature of academic standards and assessments and their role in struggles between political factions and social classes. The *Mismeasure of Education* will help readers understand that fights over testing practices can be understood as means for sorting out larger political and economic contradictions. Horn and Wilburn’s work, then, can be summarized as presenting a case history and political analysis of the mismeasure of education. This is an analysis of who does and does not benefit from the systematic distortion of social reality and alteration of the goals and control of public education that emerges from VAMs and high-stakes testing more generally.

An Objective Yet Partisan Analysis

Horn and Wilburn present their argument about mismeasurement in four sections. While each stands alone – expanding the pedagogical uses of the book – each section contributes to an overall argument, guided by a definite method of analysis. With its title paying homage to Stephen J. Gould’s famous treatise on intelligence testing (1981),³ *The Mismeasure of Education* is, in the author’s words,

³ I commend Horn and Wilburn (2013) for exposing Gould’s own “mismeasure” when reporting that he had corrected Morton’s famous head skull calculations (pp. 9-11). Yet, another key error in Gould’s account of IQ testing rests with his treatment of Alfred Binet, who is misrepresented as harboring no classist or racist assumptions, an error that remains uncorrected by nearly all commentators (p. 12). For a more accurate view of Binet, see Garrison (2009, pp. 76-81).

“a more modest volume,” that is focused on “how the vestiges of this dangerous ideology [of eugenics] and this obsessive practice of quantification among education policy people has molded the dominant dogma of testing that has held sway from the very beginnings of educational measurement and testing even to today” (p. xi).

To guide their study, Horn and Wilburn draw on Flyvbjerg’s (2001) notion of an activist oriented social science. His framework highlights the manner in which goals, values, and political and economic interests *necessarily* shape social life. Thus the study of goals, values and interests must be at the center of disciplined social inquiry. The authors summarize the approach in this manner:

Flyvbjerg throws down the gauntlet to all social policy researchers to aim for an understanding of social organizations and systems as products of human actions that occur within multiple contexts of expressed power and values, which make the traditional natural science goals of "explanation and prediction" impossible to attain. (Horn & Wilburn, 2013, p. xiii)

While Flyvbjerg’s ideas frame the major questions social science should strive to answer – where are we going, is this desirable, and what should be done, questions that constitute the basis for the book’s organization – Horn and Wilburn’s volume does not suffer, in my view, from what some critics have identified as weaknesses of Flyvbjerg’s approach. These include observations that even Flyvbjerg engages in prediction and a form of grand social theory, while possibly assuming a one-sided emphasis of *phronesis* at the expense of *episteme* (see Falk & Rocha, 2009).

But Horn and Wilburn make regular use of the findings of “normal” social science that Flyvbjerg challenges; everything from the Coleman Report to psychometric reviews of the validity and reliability of VAMs inform their analysis. The point here is not that these modes of science do not warrant scrutiny, but rather that Horn and Wilburn are able to use them to craft a deeper understanding

of the origin of mismeasurement and thus construct a basis for forming alternatives. In fact, Horn and Wilburn repeatedly and masterfully use the findings of positivist social science to expose the political machinations behind the seemingly neutral mantras for data-driven accountability. This accountability campaign is exposed as ideological and political in nature, as it repeatedly ignores or selectively uses the published findings of key major education research efforts.

In short, MME is premised on the idea that one can be both objective and partisan. The authors' urgent analysis is clearly informed by their adherence to principles of equality, democracy and against oppression, inequality and degradation of the natural environment, and these convictions are neither veiled nor something for which they apologize. Just as the values of those who organized VAMs are exposed, the authors are upfront regarding their own commitments. But the aim of such disclosure is to objectively answer questions regarding mismeasurement and its beneficiaries – without an admission that partisanship is itself an objective feature of social life, the analysis would suffer. And while Horn and Wilburn, following Flyvbjerg, reject a narrow model of social inquiry premised on the methods of the natural sciences, it becomes clear to the reader that MME nonetheless offers a grand prediction: if education policy continues on its current path, further harm to the quality and public purpose of education will result.

Readers of this review will benefit from an overview of each of MME's four sections. In each, I highlight what I believe to be particularly important points, including how each section might serve as a resource in education-related coursework. I generously quote from the volume to shine a light on the narrative style that I find engaging, honest and direct.

I should emphasize here that a strength of the book is the wide range of topics and literature that it presents as necessary for understanding standardized tests and their policy use. As a result, the book may serve a variety of purposes in a variety of educational contexts. One caveat is that for the full benefit of the book to be felt in a college

classroom, the instructor must have prior knowledge of the varied and multiple strands of literature that the authors draw from. While not dense in its prose, the volume covers a great deal of ground and makes a variety of important connections across a fairly wide body of literature, making the book far more complex and deep than first appears. Most of my students failed to grasp the book's significance, for example, until I reassigned several portions toward the end of the semester following additional lectures and discussions.

Mismeasure, Past and Present

Part 1 is the broadest or most varied section of the book, and requires the most space to properly summarize its features and offer highlights. It stands as a useful introduction to a variety of issues surrounding current policy debates and may serve as an introduction to the politics of testing for some, or a refreshing means for knowledge integration, for others.

Part 1 is guided by the question, "where are we going with educational assessment in the United States?" To answer this question, the authors argue, "we make the case that the succession of education reforms during the past century represent the institutionalization of an historically repetitive motion that serves to reproduce dominant power relations and values" (xiii). Testing and quantification, not surprisingly, are the indicated key "repetitive motions". Importantly, however, Horn and Wilburn begin this history from the present with an overview of the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) grant programs. Starting from the present helps orient readers to see the significance of the past for understanding present practice.

Significantly, for it is unlike other contemporary analyses (e.g., Manna, 2011) the overview of RTTT highlights the role of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation in setting the stage for Tennessee – the "case" that is the subject of much of the book – as an unlikely winner of RTTT grants, given its consistently low performance on accepted measures of achievement. A fairly lengthy

quote here will give readers a sense of the book's tone as well as a sense of how the authors integrate literature and information. They write:

In Tennessee, the Gates influence was no joke. Tennessee's education reform history since 1980, along with its use of value-added testing (Tennessee Value Added Assessment System [TVAAS]) since 1992, had not escaped the attention of the BMGF [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation]. Having satisfied all of the BMGF reform criteria for favorable consideration for grants, including the demand for "no firewall barring the use of student achievement data in teacher evaluations" (McNeil, 2009, para. 4), Tennessee, indeed, was one of 15 states hand-picked in August 2009 to receive a \$250,000 Gates Foundation grant to help prepare the lengthy RTTT applications, which BMGF personnel had helped to construct. Then, in addition to receiving assistance from the BMGF, the organization that had helped establish RTTT goals, the criteria for selection, and the application assistance grants, Tennessee recently received another plum advantage from the BMGF during the frenetic weeks leading up the announcement of winners in the RTTT contest. In November 2009, Gates had established a beachhead in Memphis City Schools, with \$90 million in grant money "to improve teaching in tie district" (Roberts, 2009). The new program was focused on attempting to isolate teacher influence on raising test scores, to the exclusion of other influences that affect student achievement. (p. 4)

Horn and Wilburn outline the role of RTTT and the rise of VAMs in Tennessee and across the country,

and after this introduction, set the stage for the rest of the chapter, as follows: “A number of things have not changed in the repeated revival of the testing drama for which we offer our present interpretation and critique.” Horn and Wilburn prepare readers for “the recurring theme of science of some quantifiable variety applied for personal and public betterment,” where the “impacts of abstracting socioeconomic, cultural, and political experience into a quantifiable format that can be efficiently conveyed in the name of scientific-based education have had lasting effects on the way schooling is conducted and the purpose we attach to education in general.” And they emphasize: “The fact that testing, standardized for the masses, became the primary tool to sort the privileged from those under the privileged is no mistake or fluke of nature” (p. 7).

The book excels in how it highlights the role eugenicist and meritocratic ideologies played in the development of standardized testing technology and related practices, those more or less famous instances of mismeasurement. These examples, the author’s argue, stand as the foundation of current policy; while traceable to the writings of Thomas Jefferson, these impulses are not, unfortunately, left only to the past.

Few are likely conscious of the degree to which eugenicist ideology informed the architects of standardized testing technology, an ideology that, for example, justified sterilization laws. Horn and Wilburn, after summarizing the roles of E. L. Thorndike, Henry Goddard, Lewis Terman, and others, note:

By 1920, the social efficiency social control ideology based on differentiation through scientific management provided a central rationale for the “progressive” use of intelligence tests and achievement tests to measure, sort, and segregate school children in ways that upheld social structures based on class and race prejudice. (p. 16)

Later, emphasizing racist ideology as a basis for prominent social and educational policy, Horn and

Wilburn observe:

Since the eugenics chapter of American social history is rarely taught in schools where even the story of our slave-holding history remains controversial, most Americans do not know that eugenics was taught as a regular part of science curriculums in junior high and high schools, as well as at Princeton, Harvard, Yale, University of Chicago, Stanford, and dozens of other American colleges and universities. (p. 23)

Few educational professionals are aware of the force of this history, and thus they are not in a position to discern similar patterns in present reform efforts. One of the strengths of the book is the manner in which it leads readers to look to the past to understand the present. Throughout Part 1, I found myself making marginal notes comparing past practices to our present “Race to the Top” era. For these reasons alone, MME offers any reader a policy-relevant critical history of testing and its supporting ideologies, and this past semester, it served as an exceptional tool for classroom discussion and debate.

Horn and Wilburn close out Part 1 with a targeted history of the SAT, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the significance of the Coleman Report in the transition from a policy focus on “inputs” to “outputs.” I say targeted because MME does not present a narrative history, but rather pulls together facts and trends that will help readers quickly draw connections between past and present conditions.

A key example of this is found in their prescient reading of James Coleman, emphasizing not only the well-known findings relative to social class, but also his less cited finding with respect to forms of segregation. “Coleman found hope,” Horn and Wilburn underscore, “strongly correlated with the presence of a sense of autonomy, which is more easily demonstrated, measured, and retained where racial and economic mixing prevails, rather than in racially and economically segregated environments”

(p. 38). This point is especially relevant in our present era, where elite planners and ideologues alike have abandoned the goal of integration, abandoned efforts to remedy extreme school funding inequities, favoring instead market-based policies which serve to further segregate schools (Glass, 2008; Saltman, 2012).

In a March 3, 1970 speech by Richard Nixon, Horn and Wilburn find a public genesis for a focus on accountability driven reform, or “outputs,” aligned with Nixon’s so-called silent majority.

The President's speech called for a new focus on school outputs rather than inputs, along with the creation of a new National Institute of Education to "lead in the development of educational output." In initiating "a new concept: accountability," Nixon called for new "dependable measures" even at the local level: "School administrators and school teachers alike are responsible for their performance, and it is in their interest as well as in the interest of their pupils that they be held accountable." (p. 43)

With Nixon, Horn and Wilburn point to the origin of test-based “accountability” in efforts to counter democratic and egalitarian movements associated with the Civil Rights movement and War on Poverty.

Origins of Test-based Accountability

One of the key contributions Horn and Wilburn make is with respect to understanding the rise of “accountability”. While there are a variety of interpretations of the rise of test-based accountability and value-added models (Dorn, 2007; Manna, 2006; McGuinn, 2006; Mehta, 2013; Pierce, 2013; Proefriedt, 2008) none given central place to the role funding litigation played in establishing the context for what made VAMs a viable political alternative for policy makers. Dorn (2007), for example, concludes that an important condition for test-based accountability, came from popular discontent with the arrogance of administrators. Resistance to desegregation was

certainly one face of this arrogance. The civil rights movement had targeted schools as one public institution that was treating poor and minority children unequally, and the responses by both school boards and administrators reshaped educational politics. (p. 4)

For Horn and Wilburn, testing grew out of a crucible of racism and reductionist forms of reasoning regarding how educators and the public were to think about schooling. Their point is to draw a line between scientific racism and the eugenicist project of the “administrative progressives” of the early 20th century and present high stakes testing in general and current value-added models in particular. It is not, as Dorn suggests, that the tools adopted by administrators during the progressive era have been turned against them in the fight for equality. Horn and Wilburn write:

What resulted from that first generation of testing and sorting was a system that continues today to provide "scientific" rationalization for the creation and maintenance of measures whereby children of the privileged display test results, on average, consistently higher than those children under the privileged on tests that were devised to show as much. By using measures stamped with the seal of science, then, high test scorers are guaranteed seemingly legitimized access to the legacy of privilege that accompanies higher performance, thus reproducing social and economic dominance by descendants of the middle class elites who first established their dominion in the Colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some who read this will surely doubt such a claim, but we hope that by the time readers finish the book, this contention will be an indisputable,

though unacceptable, fact. For those less skeptical now, we hope this book will provide a deeper understanding as to how the mismeasure of children became standard pedagogical practice. (p. 14)

Unlike Dorn (2007), and unlike (Manna, 2006) and McGuinn (2006), Horn and Wilburn emphasize the role of corporate interests and government service to those interests in institutionalizing mismeasurement and establishing an ever increasing centralized and privatized form of educational governance. This theme parallels some of Mehta's (2013) analysis, which highlights the role of the Rand Corporation and Department of Defense in popularizing the technocratic framework that built upon the "scientific management" of previous decades. While Dorn (2007) argues "One can thus view statistical accountability systems as one way to resolve the dilemma between granting autonomy and authority to educators and keeping them under some political control" (p. 13), Mehta traces these "statistical accountability systems" to technocratic practices developed to manage the Cold War. He highlights the connection between the Rand Corporation, Robert McNamara and the Department of Defense in building a technocratic model that would later be adopted to manage education policy at federal and state education department levels. Mehta described this approach as, "defining objectives, measuring goals, and aligning available resource" (2013, p. 64). What is key about Mehta's analysis is that it links a test-reliant management technology to a specific outlook and form of governance: testing, nor its use, is politically neutral, benefiting some, and not others. What Horn and Wilburn add here is the key role funding litigation played in the rise of test-based accountability from the 1980s onward. Thus, while almost all scholars who have explored the rise of test-based accountability emphasize the shift in policy from one that regulated on the basis of inputs, to one that focused on outputs, Horn and Wilburn link this shift to resolving contradictions arising from struggles over school funding. And so now I turn to

review MME's Part 2.

Accountability Against Funding Equity and the Rise of Value Added Reform

Following the general line of questioning introduced by Flyvbjerg (2001), Part 2 of the book asks "who gains, and who loses, and by what mechanism of power" (p. xiv)? Using Tennessee as a case study, testing is explored as a key mechanism of power. Part 2 explores how and why assessment came to dominate curriculum and instruction and who benefited from this arrangement. The most important aspects of this section is how it shows test-based accountability to be a political response to funding litigation, struggles over who should receive state funds, and the struggle for equality more generally.

The authors begin by tracing how business elites and accountability for output reformers assumed control over education policy at the state level. Importantly, Horn and Wilburn make clear in this section a point often lost in discussions of education policy and school finance: the idea of focusing on outcomes as a means for being efficient and saving money had little to do with actual budget problems. The actual problem was a diverting of funds elsewhere and so, Horn and Wilburn argue, test-based accountability was in fact a means to justify the transfer of funds to the private sector.

As a result of this transfer, public spending for public schools decreased, creating a "political and economic context for corporate influence" over education reform (p. 99). The authors explain: "Revenue lost in tax breaks to business and industry, [increased] state spending for highway systems and other infrastructure, and vocational education programs tailored to meet business and industry workforce needs," reduced the funds available to provide "adequate and equitable education for all students in the state" (ibid).

These changes were taking place in the context of school funding litigation at the state level, following a failed attempt to convince the U.S. Supreme Court that education is a right in the United States. This context is presented as key to understanding how the value-added teacher

evaluation model of William Sanders – a politically connected biostatistician – became written into Tennessee education law in 1992. Thus, Horn and Wilburn observe: “Running parallel to ... the crafting of new accountability management and funding systems was the ongoing lawsuit filed by the Tennessee Small School Systems in July 1988” (p. 87). “By the end of the 1980s,” the authors explain, “lawsuits had been filed in 16 states by local school systems seeking relief from inequitable funding structures, and by 2007 almost 100 ‘education reform cases had been brought before state supreme courts’ ... It was from within the context of these state lawsuits over education funding that this part of our story unfolds, and it takes us back once more to Tennessee.” They continue:

If economic deprivation could be statistically adjusted for and the influence of teachers on "progress rates" could be determined and closely monitored, and if some teachers were getting better "progress rates" than others, independent of where the school was located, then it stood to reason that holding teachers accountable for "progress rates" made sense. Clearly, then, the education answer for Tennessee policy elites lay in teacher improvement and more accountability measures, rather than in expensive interventions to equalize funding that may or may not work; the Sanders Model, framed as it was in 1990, offered the remedy for a serious problem that remained unspoken, even if it was on every legislator's radar screen. (p. 75)

Thus, “Sanders' claims offered policy makers a surefire rationale for turning attention further from financial inputs for education and toward student test score outputs” (p. 65). Horn and Wilburn argue that the Sanders Model offered the “missing link to a coherent legislative package for education reform based on accountability and measurable results that

minimized political and economic risk for policymakers and the business community” (ibid).

And thus the,

attention that may have accrued in earlier years to the continued shrinkage in education funding in Tennessee was effectively shifted toward outcomes that allowed disparities in learning opportunities to continue largely unchallenged by a public bedazzled by charts, graphs, and numbers that plotted winners and losers in an undeclared race with increasingly high stakes and no finish line in sight. (p. 65)

As the Small Cities case continued, Horn and Wilburn chart how value-added policy logics became integral to winning the courts approval without resolving funding inequities. “When Chancery Court held its hearing to begin drafting an order in July 1993, the State offered the 1992 passage of the EIA [Education Improvement Act] with a specific revised funding formula of the Basic Education Program (BEP) as new evidence that the State was making good on its responsibility to phase in an equitable funding formula. Chancellor High was impressed and ruled that he would allow for the BEP to take effect before any further orders would be rendered (p. 89) even the BEP did not account for disparities in teacher salaries. Value-added offered thus became central to the new mismeasurement.

Value-Added Models: The New Mismeasure

Part 3 asks, “is it desirable,” answering that question by examining the validity and reliability of the value-added system that emerged in Tennessee. While researchers and policy analysts have increasingly raised serious concerns about the validity and reliability of VAMs for personnel decisions (e.g., Baker, Oluwole, & Green, 2013), Horn and Wilburn provide a unique presentation of otherwise now well-known facts regarding VAMs as applied under Race to the Top. They articulate three reasons the Sanders Model in particular falls short:

Sanders assumes (a) that tests and test scores are a reliable measure of student learning; (b) that characteristics of students, classrooms, schools, school systems, and neighborhoods can be made irrelevant by comparing a student's test scores from year to year, (c) that value-added modeling can capture the expertise of teachers fairly. (p. 157)

The authors argue out each point in Part 3, providing one of the most robust and accessible critiques of VAMs available. But here I want to only briefly highlight three insights Horn and Wilburn offer that do not commonly appear in most current VAM critiques: (1) the validity and reliability problems with VAMs were well established and known to researchers and policy makers in Tennessee in the 1990s; (2) VAMs intensify the harmful, long-standing practice of education reformers viewing schools in terms of “production-function measurements” – that is, as factories; and (3) that VAMs as developed in Tennessee serve to mask educational inequality. While the first two points are, I believe, readily understood without elaboration, the third point does require explanation.

Horn and Wilburn emphasize that the “focus of education reform in Tennessee for the past quarter century has not been on the adequacy of resources to provide equal opportunity for all children.” Instead, focus has been on a narrow test-based accountability. And despite decades of test-based accountability, “Tennessee’s average 2012 ACT composite score for general knowledge and reasoning skills was 19.7, ranking Tennessee 48th among 50 states and the District of Columbia;” Tennessee ranked 50th in ACT math, with a score of 19.1. “Predictably,” the authors note, ACT scores and graduation rates for districts with greater percentages of economically disadvantaged students “are significantly lower.” “However,” they continue,

most poor districts' value-added scores are above the state average,

sometimes exceeding the growth of wealthier districts. For state legislators looking to convince constituents that a third decade of the same accountability plan is what is needed, it is easy to see that Dr. Sanders' growth numbers offer the only evidence that could be used for such a purpose. (p. 152)

A few pages later, they ask:

Do TVAAS growth scores mask students' proficiency level for parents, the media, and politicians alike? If Humboldt (a district with much poverty) is making more growth than more advantaged districts like Williamson County, then can parents and politicians agree that the BEP is adequate for providing an equal educational opportunity for all students across the state? (p. 154).

Thus Horn and Wilburn assert the “TVAAS's masking effect.” While showing growth, TVASS (and all growth models adopted under Race to the Top), may mask the limited academic progress of poor and minority students, letting the state “off the hook for maintaining and supporting an adequate system of public education for all students” (p. 155). While VAMs appear to be policy mechanism for weakening teachers unions and thus a basis for further reducing expenditures on public education, moving states like New York from court established standards of adequacy, VAM-based systems of accountability may also create the conditions for more education inequality in terms of both funding and academic outcomes. In the words of Horn and Wilburn: What “value-added modeling has contributed in the testing fairness formula by acknowledging different starting points in the testing race, it takes away by helping to conceal the chasms that constitute the inequalities that mark the very different starting points of the disadvantaged and the privileged” (p. 214).

The Alternatives that are Urgently Needed

Horn and Wilburn conclude their work with a simple question: what is to be done? In this last section, the authors begin by comparing the past to present, analyzing the themes that remain constant – the economic justification for reform for example – and those that are new, or different. They write:

The biggest difference between 2013 and 1913 is that, instead of requiring the waling of defectives for the protection of society, as Terman cheerfully admitted, we now call constant surveillance and total compliance "freedom" and "choice" and pretend that children and their parents prefer penal-style school settings and test prep to the more humane schools and real content that we find where middle class parents demand it. In the name of not leaving children behind, reform schoolers have applied more and more draconian compliance measures that allow a two-tiered school caste system, whereby the testing "defectives" are segregated, contained, and provided behavioral interventions that no middle class parent would allow. (p. 210)

Here the authors highlight the present as having a stronger link between proposed reforms and business opportunities for a variety of education-related companies and especially emphasize the big education foundations, including their role in applying policies once reserved for the K12 system to higher education. Significantly, Horn and Wilburn highlight the undemocratic nature of this corporate-philanthropic command and control of education, and direct the reader to focus on the political implications of “instrumentalist” reform initiatives. As readers have already come to appreciate, Horn and Wilburn have a way of getting to the point, and so they are worth quoting again:

For those who view the schools' and the universities' core mission as foundational to creating and evolving

knowledge and understanding to advance the autonomy and improved living for all people and cultures, the fixation by unelected plutocrats on a singular vision of what is fair for everyone except themselves expresses a level of arrogance for which no parallel exists in the national history. Public education policy steering by billionaires offers a real and present danger to the purpose and functioning of democratic institutions. (p. 199)

A page later they assert:

By the 1980s the accountability movement that had originated in attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of ESEA Title I programs became solidified and deeply entrenched by a standards and testing movement driven largely by an ideological agenda aimed at establishing alternatives to public schools at public expense. (p. 200)

In short, then, they offer that what is needed is a renewed commitment to public education and a recognition that social inequality and environmental degradation must be dealt with head on.

Predictably, they call for an end to high-stakes testing and reductionist instrumentalism in general.

And they defend the wisdom of educators and theorists that has existed for some time. A choice example is this:

The most productive way to assess student understanding beyond strict adherence to rules is for teachers to observe and evaluate, using refereed criteria by educators and disciplinary professionals, student performance of real life tasks in either simulated or actual disciplinary contexts. (p. 212)

So that the reader is not confused, these authors are not dogmatic in their rendering of value-added modeling, and offer that it might be useful for diagnostic purposes for large systems. They

advocate a model of assessment based on studies of the transformation of novices to experts. Thus, policymakers must address the roots of social inequality, to be driven by a renewal of the democratic purpose and control of public education, and public support for education professionals and their central role in evaluating students and schools at the site of practice.

I think Many readers will find, as I have, that several passes through the *Mismeasure of Education* are required to grasp its contribution to understanding the origins of our current situation and to fully consider the orientation it provides as a counter to what more and more practitioners, scholars and even policy analysts are seeing as the wrong direction for education. The profound “mismeasurement” that plagues schools is premised on a distorted and narrow understanding of the purposes of education, the nature of teaching and learning, and a refusal to admit that school governance cannot be separate from either its purpose or vision of the educated person.

References

- Baker, B. D., Oluwole, J. O., & Green, P. C. I. (2013). The legal consequences of mandating high stakes decisions based on low quality information: teacher evaluation in the race-to-the-top era. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21(0), 5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v21n5.2013>
- Dorn, S. (2007). *Accountability Frankenstein: Understanding and taming the monster*. Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.
- Falk, T. M., & Rocha, S. (2009). Social science and its discontents: An essay review of Bent Flyvbjerg's Making Social Science Matter. *Education Review*, 12(4). Retrieved from <http://www.edrev.info/essays/v12n4.pdf>
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Garrison, M. J. (2009). *A measure of failure: the political origins of standardized testing*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Glass, G. V (2008). *Fertilizers, pills, and magnetic strips: the fate of public education in America*. Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Pub. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy0804/200803133.html>
- Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Manna, P. (2006). *School's in: federalism and the national education agenda*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0519/2005027244.html>
- Manna, P. (2011). *Collision course: federal education policy meets state and local realities*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- McGuinn, P. J. (2006). *No Child Left Behind and the transformation of federal education policy, 1965-2005*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy0613/200606836.html> <http://www.h-net.org/review/hrev-a0f1v9-aa>
- Mehta, J. (2013). *The allure of order: high hopes, dashed expectations, and the troubled quest to remake American schooling*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pierce, C. (2013). *Education in the age of biocapitalism: optimizing educational life for a flat world*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Proefriedt, W. A. (2008). *High expectations: the cultural roots of standards reform in American education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Saltman, K. J. (2012). *The failure of corporate school reform*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Strauss, V. (2013, October 13). How New York's education commissioner blew it big time – principal. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/13/how-new-yorks-education-commissioner-blew-it-principal/>

About the Reviewer

Mark Garrison

Professor, Education Policy & Research

D'Youville College

garrison@dyc.edu

Dr. Mark Garrison is Professor of Education Policy & Research at D'Youville College. He is a noted sociologist of education focusing on applying the insights of social research to help educators better understand and thereby improve the quality of education. His research and publications have won him acclaim, including the *2010 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title* from the American Library Association for his book, *A Measure of Failure* (SUNY Press, 2009). He is also the recipient of the 2004 NYC AAUP Scholar of the Year award. He has become a noted critic of current education reform efforts, with a growing array of presentations, papers and journal articles examining the political aspects of education reform.

**education review // reseñas educativas**

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: gustavo e. fischman /
melissa cast-brede / gene v glass**Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University**

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

Please contribute reviews at <http://www.edrev.info/contribute.html>.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview