Insecure: The Cultural Politics of Neoliberalism
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Learn to Earn

And no matter what you want to do with your life – I guarantee that you'll need an education to do it. You can't drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You've got to work for it and train for it and learn for it.

And this isn't just important for your own life and your own future. What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. What you're learning in school today will determine whether we as a nation can meet our greatest challenges in the future.

Barack Obama
National address to America's schoolchildren
September 8, 2009

PART I
Introduction

This paper explores the way that neoliberal economic and social policies have come to shape American public schools. Tracing the impact of human capital theory on education, we investigate how this market ethos has taken hold in standardized testing to dramatically influence school practices, funding and culture. A case study of The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET) highlights the risks of applying market logic (and the corollary practices of perpetual quantitative assessment) to teacher evaluation and speculates on the dangerous repercussions of implementing MET policies in the "high-stakes" education environment.

Human Capital, the Knowledge Economy, and the Marketization of Schools

Schooling serves many social functions. Historically American schools have been tasked with providing moral education, assimilating newcomers, and promoting citizenship, democracy, and national identity. Today, much of the language of education—the culture and promotional culture of schools—centers on markets. Parents and policy-makers alike, caution: *In today's job market, what you learn determines what you earn*. This naturalized link between education and economy is built on the concept of human capital, the notion that an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies constitute quantifiable assets akin to physical capital. The theory postulates that people and nations that invest in human capital (via education) will reap returns on their investment in later periods through higher incomes and national economic growth.

With roots in labor economics and the work of Adam Smith, human capital theory was developed extensively in the 1960s by economists Theodore Schultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1964)[i]. However, human capital policies and rhetoric did not take hold in American schools until the 1980s with the rise of neoliberal political-economic practices. The neoliberal agenda characterized "market exchange as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs" (Harvey, 2007). Along with a program of privatization, deregulation, and disinvestment in social welfare, neoliberalism colonized new social sectors such as water, health care, and education (Harvey, 2007) with market logic.

The concept of education as an economic engine is strengthened by the parallel theory of an emerging knowledge economy—the idea that contemporary economic growth is driven by ideas, knowledge, and information as opposed to the manufacture of goods and services. First introduced by Peter Drucker in 1966, the notion gained traction alongside human capital theory in the 1980s and 1990s as American manufacturing—aided by anti-labor neoliberal policies of free trade and deregulation—relocated to the global south and the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector surged. Challenges to the "imaginative genre" (Poovey, 2008) of the knowledge economy aside, the concept has captured the public imagination and focused increasing attention on education. Then Senator Obama synthesized this transformative shift in a 2005 speech to the American Library Association:

> As revolutions in technology and communication began breaking down barriers between countries and connecting people all over the world, new jobs and industries that require more skill and knowledge have come to dominate the economy…As countries like China and India continue to modernize their economies and educate their children longer and better, the competition American workers face will grow more intense; the necessary skills more demanding.
>
> These new jobs are about what you know and how fast you can learn what you don't know. They require innovative thinking, detailed comprehension, and superior communication.

The intertwined theories of human capital and the knowledge economy work together to correlate educational and economic success and to naturalize the application of market logic to schools. Knowledge, skills, and information become quantifiable commodities in the language of the knowledge economy while human capital rhetoric attributes market

value to individuals based on their acquisition of educational assets. Significantly, this neoliberal framework exploits American concerns about globalization, waning empire, and the rise of new economic powers, converging national fears and expectations on the education system.

The Marketized School

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American schools have collaborated with advertising and media industries to advance consumer ideology. Manifestations of this alliance in school products, cafeterias, curricula, and sponsorship have been well documented by Spring (2003), Klein (2000), and Zelizer (1985) among others. The marketized school implies a progression and cultural shift—the expansion of isolated consumerist practices within schools to a school ethos governed by market logic. This neoliberal vision takes shape in many forms—school superintendents with the title of "CEO," financial incentives for student test scores and grades, and growing involvement of for-profit educational corporations in public schools. However, the most pervasive expression of market logic in schools is the total culture of testing, standards, outcomes, and accountability.

The testing culture enables, propagates, and promotes school marketization. In her history of Britain's 19th century credit economy, Mary Poovey (2001) describes the

conceptual and material "gestures," that facilitate marketization: quantification and abstraction.

> Before a thing or an experience can be assigned a market price or exchanged in the market, it must be broken down into units whose commensurability is more important than any features that might distinguish these units. Once the thing or experience has been conceptually subdivided into units that are equivalent in this sense, these units can be evaluated according to the common (and apparently noninterpretive) scale of number, and then they can be regrouped according to categories that are explicitly interpretive…
>
> Just as quantification entails subdividing an object or experience according to the neutral (or apparently noninterpretive) system of number, so abstraction entails subjecting things or experiences that can also be experienced qualitatively, through their distinguishing particulars, into conceptual categories that are apparently neutral.

Testing culture carries out these dual processes through a multi-tiered compression of the diverse and chaotic humanity of schools into ordered, equivalent parts. Knowledge is divided into learning standards such as "developing cross-cultural skills and understanding" (determined at the district, state, national, and international levels); these skills are then measured through quantitative instruments; and student results are conveyed in numerical scores. Stripped of all politics and subjectivity, the scores—relabeled as "outcomes"—serve as a currency, facilitating comparison (and competition) between students, schools, districts, and nations. The scores also carry real market value as they are used to assess teacher salaries and school budgets, and potentially impact students' future human capital.

Thus quantified and abstracted, packaged in the neutral cloak of numbers, the scores form an educational market, a scale by which to estimate and appraise human capital. Questions of purpose or determination—what is being measured, how and why particular categories of knowledge are prized above others—are subsumed by the process of collecting, aggregating, and analyzing the data. As Randy Williams (2002) suggests with regard to financial predictions, "the act of measuring itself performs the necessary service." The raw scores, already several steps removed—from the learning objectives, school context, and student—are reproduced and reconfigured through statistical analysis and as a result become more opaque.

The numbers reference material "outcomes," but in the world of the human capital-knowledge economy, they also serve as modes of discipline for the teacher labor force and forecasts for the future worth of individual students and national economies. Together, these theories and practices form a set of self-perpetuating concentric circles that are difficult to penetrate. Human capital theory views education as a quantifiable investment in individual earnings; the knowledge economy predicts a world in which education is a precondition to personal and national prosperity; and school testing culture evaluates students through a market-ethos of personal responsibility and measurable outcomes. Each practice and belief validates the others by weaving together educational culture with market logic. As Poovey (2001) argues, it is precisely through this complex tangle of relationships, ideology, and data that markets are formed and gain power.

> The [market] logic that informs commodification has become totalizing…partly because the institutions and modes of circulation that embody or objectify the logic have attained a level of complexity, geographic extension, and pervasiveness that makes resistance to this logic virtually unimaginable. Partly the logic that informs commodification has colonized the terms in which we experience, imagine, and register because this logic is tautological: once one accepts any of its premises, all its presuppositions and conclusions come pouring in, like the flood that follows the proverbial first drop.

Through increasing specialization, abstraction, and axiomatic reasoning, the educational market is embodied as a mass of scores, people, and systems (aided by technology), commanding the collective intelligence of the whole.

Imag(e)ining Education

In order to understand the form and meaning of testing culture and the marketized school, we must investigate the way that scores and statistics come to represent students and teachers. The form of marketized school is illuminated through an image-based analysis[ii], deeply rooted in the context of our contemporary moment: a time of rapid advances in information and communication technologies and a pervasive visual-promotional culture, set against the backdrop of global neoliberalism. Ours is a time of twitter feeds and camera phones, constant streams of new information—Facebook updates, the scrolling tickertape of financial news, webcams and the "recorded life." In the competition for public attention, knowledge and images are ever concentrating and condensing into bits, bytes, and visual snippets. Google browser screens are designed to communicate the most amount of information in the shortest amount of time, because as the company

proclaims, "every millisecond counts[iii]." This mode of making (images) and seeing resonates with the promotional culture of branding. "In a competitive global economy characterized by surfeits of information and hypermediation, and corresponding deficits of time and attention, brands are heralded as the 'imaginative genre' (Poovey 2008) that can simplify, differentiate, and narrate a wide range of economic and social values" (Aronczyk & Powers, 2010). Brands—like Google web pages and much of our visual culture—are engineered to "message" extensive information at a glance. As the language of branding appropriates new social spaces (like radical movements and individuals), the visual scape grows saturated, and everyday life is increasingly financialized[iv], our breakneck image culture is becoming the new normal.

What we know and how we think about public education is also constructed in images, visual fragments and shortcuts. Our notions of what schools are and should be often come out of media "images"—newspaper articles, the evening news, film, and television. The culture/ industry of educational testing is the most active producer of school imagery. Test scores, student rankings, and school grades—quantified and de-contextualized—function like market goods, but also like a kind of visual shorthand. As Vinson & Ross (2007) challenge, "how many times do individuals and groups determine the "effectiveness" of particular schools by relying on test scores—*images*—whether or not they have any first-hand information on what actually occurs in any unique and concrete school environment?" The products of testing culture—scores, statistics, and rankings—are

meant to convey with a single letter or number all of the "necessary" information about students, teachers, and schools. Numerical data, presented in statistical spreadsheets, graphs, and percentage points is associated with the culture of science, business, and fact (which in turn "builds the brand" of the administrators, politicians, foundations, or companies responsible). Devoid of tangible information, these blank materials encourage us to color them with our own values—to imagine the *"effective" teacher as nurturing* or *a "failing" school as filled with teachers who don't care*. Couched in complicated statistical analysis, the information is almost always impenetrable—there is no time or space within the report to explain exactly what is being measured or what the classroom looks and feels like. The aesthetic and content of the data comes to "brand" students and teachers with visual sound bites connoting their worth. Like brands, this school imagery is designed for quick and easy consumption.

PART II
CASE IN POINT: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Reforming Schools, Remaking Futures

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is a leading powerbroker in the manufacture of school images. The philanthropy is a site for superlatives—the largest private foundation in the United States and the world, run by the man who has topped the Forbes' "richest list" for 14 of the last 17 years (due to his philanthropic activities, he

is now second to Mexican, Carlos Slim). As a self-made billionaire and Microsoft magnate, Gates himself is the poster boy for the new world order—a globalized knowledge economy built on cutting edge technology. At the age of 15, Gates and his friend Paul Allen developed "Traf-o-Data," a computer program that monitored Seattle traffic patterns and netted the boys $20,000. At 20, he dropped out of Harvard and partnered again with Allen to form Microsoft, a software company that eschewed the open source ethics of computing at the time, in favor of commercialization[v]. By Gates' 23rd birthday, Microsoft had grossed 2.5 million dollars and at 31, he was the world's youngest billionaire.

In his philanthropic career, Gates has continued to chart new ground with his $33.9 billion dollar foundation. He is a leader in a new wave of entrepreneurial activism called "venture philanthropy," (VP) which applies venture capital strategies to charitable giving. Also known as "philanthrocapitalism," VP is governed by a belief in business as the superior model for all endeavors and echoes neoliberal strategies of privatization, competition, and efficiency. As Saltman (2011) elaborates,

> Venture philanthropy treats giving to public schooling as a 'social investment' that, like venture capital, must begin with a business plan, must involve quantitative measurement of efficacy, must be replicable to be 'brought to scale,' and ideally will 'leverage' public spending in ways compatible with the strategic donor. [In VP] grants are referred to as 'investments'; donors are called 'investors'; [and] impact is renamed 'social return.'

Conceptually, venture philanthropy reframes public education as private enterprise. Materially, this framework has a significant impact on foundation practice that trickles

down and around the public education sector. When business ideology is funneled through the language of "social enterprise," the bottom line is translated from financial gain to social gain. Like their business counterparts, social "investors" demand a demonstrable (and timely) return on their "investments" so all social programs must produce quantifiable outcomes. *If you can't measure it, you can't manage it*[vi].

This evidence-based ethos generates copious amounts of educational imagery—scores, charts, graphs, policy briefs, research reports—and also drives the kinds of "investments" that are made. Venture philanthropists seek to maximize their donations by heavily funding a small number of key concerns that they determine—through research and data analysis—will have the greatest social impact. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation shares this approach as they explain in the 2011 annual letter:

> Our foundation is teaming up with partners around the world to take on some tough problems: extreme poverty and poor health in developing countries, the failures of America's education system. We focus on only a few issues because we think that's the best way to have great impact, and we focus on these issues in particular because we think they are the biggest barriers that prevent people from making the most of their lives.

In their quest to "tackle" the "failures" of American education, Gates has identified teacher quality as a "leverage point" for dramatic systems improvement. In 2009 they launched the $45 million dollar Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET) to radically shift the way we understand and evaluate teaching.

Measuring Practice: Gates on Effective Teaching

And we're not doing enough to provide data for teachers. Amazon.com knows every book you've ever bought from them. They can recommend five more based on what you like. But we have no such tool set for teachers. On the first day of school, a ninth-grade teacher has absolutely no idea which of her students can calculate the area of a circle or identify the elements of a short story. Teachers should know this.

Bill Gates
Speech at a Forum on Education in America
November 11, 2008

Despite the controversy around manufactured "crisis" in education dating from the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, most scholars and practitioners from charter advocates to deschoolers agree that American education is failing many of the country's youth. The questions of how to define success and failure and where to attribute blame for schools' shortcomings are complex; answers (to the extent that they are knowable) are many and localized. However, the importance of "good" teaching to the formation of "good" schools and "successful" students is also widely accepted by diverse education stakeholders. A spate of research has emerged over the last twenty years strongly indicating that in schools, teachers (rather than curriculum, class size, or school size) have the greatest capacity to impact student success (Hanushek et. al 2010; Kane et. al, 2008; etc.) . For those of us who care about schools and want to make them better, this research elucidates a way forward: strengthen our teachers and all boats will rise. Yet, this rich insight also forces thick negotiation with the foundational principles of American schooling: *how do we define teachers' roles? What is good teaching? What does success mean for students?* In this contemporary moment of flux—the alleged age of the

"knowledge economy," disappearing American industry, and new global flows (of information, capital, culture, people) (Appadurai, 2000)—these questions assume a sort of frenzied desperation about what is to come. The rhetorical and programmatic answers to issues of teacher quality have sparked contentious debate among groups with very different visions for the future of schools and society. Gates, in partnership with government, nonprofit, and corporate entities represents a strong perspective in favor of school marketization.

The Measures of Effective Teaching Project seeks to systematically analyze and assess the components of successful teaching practice as defined by student achievement. "The goal of the MET project," according to Foundation literature, "is to improve the quality of information about teaching effectiveness available to education professionals within states and districts—information that will help them build fair and reliable systems for teacher observation that can be used for a variety of purposes, including feedback,

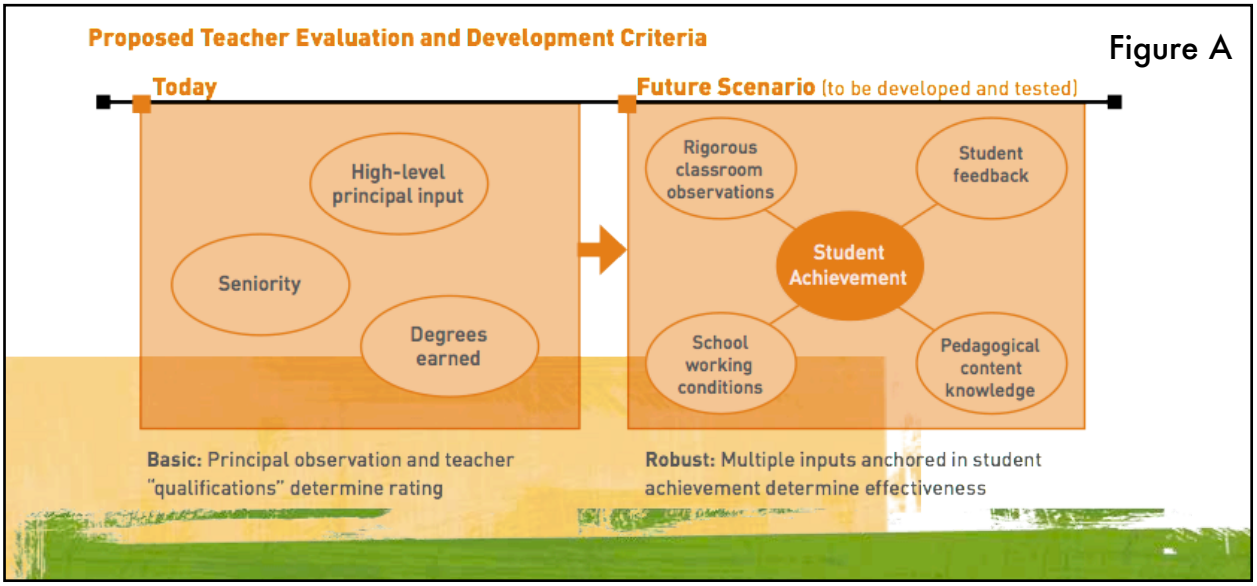

Figure A

development, and continuous improvement" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). MET highlights a disciplinary knowledge gap—lack of consensus on how to identify and measure good teaching (although the subject of "student achievement" also intrinsic to the study remains unexamined). As depicted in Figure A, the project aims to transform the current scenario in which teachers are assessed and compensated based on credentials and infrequent classroom observations to one in which teacher assessment (and remuneration) is determined by a rigorous five-tiered metric focused principally on student achievement.

In the fall of 2009, Gates launched the MET Project with 3,000 teachers of English, Algebra and Biology in 6 school districts across the country. The project takes place over two years during which time all teachers have agreed to record and collect a broad compendium of personal and student data, materials and assessments for submission to Gates. Effective teaching will be evaluated based on the following five measurements:

1. **Student Achievement Gains:** Gates will review student test scores on state standardized tests as well as a supplemental assessment "designed to assess higher-order conceptual understanding" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). Changes in student scores between years 1 and 2 of the project will be evaluated to determine teacher effect.

2. **Digital Classroom Observations:** Using panoramic video cameras, specially designed by Teachscape[vii], each teacher will film a total of eight lessons and upload them online for review. Teachers provide a short commentary and then "trained raters score the lesson based on classroom observation protocols developed by leading academics and professional development experts" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

3. **Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge:** Each teacher will complete a survey to test their capacity to analyze and correct student reasoning. "These assessments focus on specialized knowledge that teachers use to interpret student responses, choose instructional strategies, detect and address student errors, [and] select models to illustrate particular instructional objectives" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

4. **Student Surveys:** Students will respond to yearly questionnaires evaluating the instructional environment. They "will assess the extent to which [they] experience the classroom environment as engaging, demanding, and supportive of their intellectual growth" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

5. **Teacher Survey of School Conditions:** Teachers will complete surveys assessing the school environment and instructional supports. This questionnaire provides teachers with an opportunity to evaluate school culture and leadership.

Once all of the information has been submitted, Gates—working with the RAND Corporation—will analyze the aggregated data to develop a metric for identifying teacher efficacy and test this measure across their two-year data set. The foundation outlines the process as follows:

> We are using three years of historical data on student performance, student demographics, and teacher characteristics…to estimate each participating teacher's impact on student achievement gains. These data will serve as a benchmark and help determine the extent to which a teacher's impact on student performance in 2009–10 compares to past years.
>
> RAND will combine data from each of the MET project measures to form a composite indicator of effective teaching. We will assign a weight to each measure (classroom observations, teacher knowledge, student perceptions, and teacher perceptions) based on the result of analyses that indicate how much each weight contributes to predicting student learning gains.
>
> We will [then] test whether those teachers whose performance was rated most highly during year 1 (2009–10) actually produce larger student achievement gains than their colleagues in year 2 (2010–11) (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

MET's evaluation framework is an extension of the "value-added" model for assessing teacher quality. "Value-added" estimates a teacher's effectiveness by comparing his or her students' performance on standardized tests to their performance in previous years. Teachers' "value-added" is calculated based on their students' gains on test scores from one year to the next. The MET Project advocates strong links between student achievement and teacher assessment, however, they believe that by analyzing multiple data points—such as digital classroom observations and student evaluations—they can develop a more precise measurement of teacher efficacy.

Fewer, Clearer, Higher[viii]: Implications of the Study

MET is positioned as a knowledge-gathering-and-sharing project—a social science study with a roster of contributing scholars, economists, and research analysts[ix] to back it up. *"The goal of the project is to improve the quality of information about teaching effectiveness, to help build fair and reliable systems for teacher observation and feedback"* (Learning about). The foundation speaks only tentatively about the study's potential policy outcomes, but the suggestions are implied: employ the efficacy metric to dramatically elevate the quality of the teaching labor force by incentivizing "effective" teachers with higher wages and terminating those who don't meet the mark. Figure B illustrates the MET's aspirational vision for system-wide education reform. The foundation doesn't provide an explanation of the chart leaving several questions ambiguous (e.g.

what does "more meaningful tenure" mean?) but the basic message is clear. *By identifying the characteristics that account for effective teaching→ teachers will be accurately evaluated→ based on their measured efficacy teachers will be granted tenure more selectively, receive greater or lesser compensation, be placed with higher or lesser achieving students, and receive professional development aligned with their needs→ these interventions will lead to better teachers→ which in turn will produce better student outcomes.*

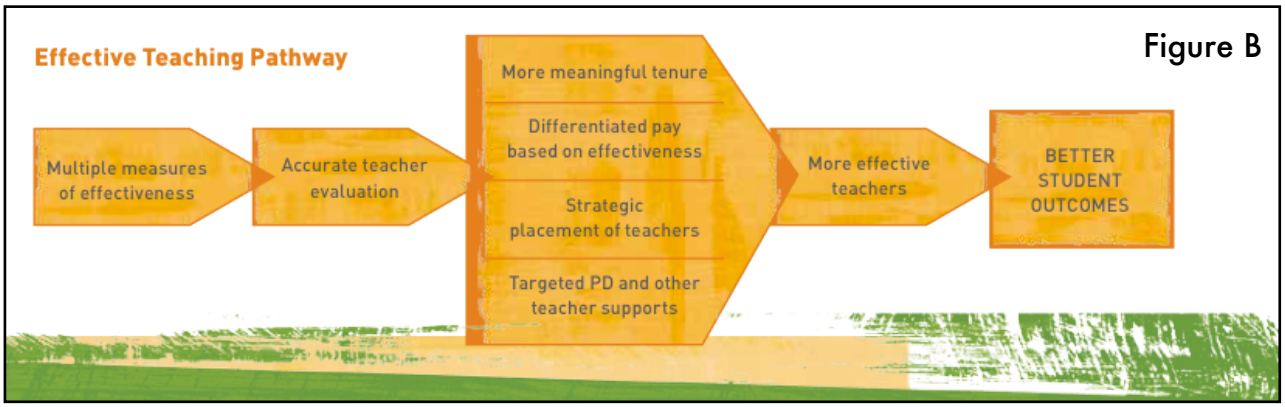

Figure B

The project and its implied reforms have drawn impassioned reactions from both supporters and opponents. Advocates such as the United Federation of Teachers laud the multi-dimensional approach to the evaluation. "Nationally, current measures of teaching rarely take into account the full range of what teachers do (no single measure really can), or the context in which they teach. The Measures of Effective Teaching project, on the other hand, begins right in the classroom and will explore a broad array of teacher measures" (Mulgrew, 2009). The Obama administration also champions Gates' approach to education reform, making states' eligibility for $4.35 billion dollars in

competitive, federal, Race to the Top grants contingent on states linking teacher evaluation to student test data.

Yet the study has also provoked significant criticism from a wide cross-section of education stakeholders. Critics have focused largely on three issues: the validity of the research methods, the implications for teacher labor and unions, and the ideology embedded in MET (and other like initiatives).

Research Validity

Several recent studies have raised concerns about the reliability and validity of "value-added" modeling (VAM) (Corcoran, 2010; Kane et al., 2008; etc.). Scholars cast doubt on the capacity of VAM to isolate a single teacher's unique effect, and cite unstable and imprecise data (as Rothstein 2011 states, teachers in the lowest quartile one year have a 1 in 3 chance of ranking in the highest quartile the following year). With regard to MET in particular, the research design, ahead of any outcomes or analysis, suggests possible bias. As Rothstein (2011) reports,

> The Project has two stated premises: 'First, a teacher's evaluation should depend to a significant extent on his/her students' achievement gains; second, any additional components of the evaluation (e.g., classroom observations) should be valid predictors of student achievement gains' (pp. 4-5). These premises rule out conclusions that test score gains are too redundant with other available information, too loosely related with good teacher practice, or too poor a measure of the wide spectrum of material that students should learn in school to be useful components of teacher evaluations.

The MET Project seeks to move beyond value-added models by evaluating other components of teaching practice (e.g. student survey and video observations), however, by evaluating (and weighting) these additional measures based on their impact on student test scores, the attempt is rendered null and the data biased to reflect student achievement. Further, Gates provides no analysis of the standardized tests that determine "student achievement" as adequate measures of school experience, predictors of student "success," or reliably correlated with teaching practice. Weak relationships in any of these areas would have significant implications for the study's results.

Finally, the conditions of the study involved "no-stakes" data collection meaning that results from teacher observations, surveys, and tests would not be used to determine decision making. There is reason to believe that under "high-stakes" conditions—if evaluations were used to determine teacher salary or tenure (as Gates indicates in Figure B)—the properties of the MET study would be different. Recent scandals over systemic cheating on state tests in Atlanta, Philadelphia, and D.C. point to the risks of outcomes-based approaches to education policy.

The MET Project promises to capture an unprecedented quantity of data on teaching practice and offers new opportunities for insight into "what works." However, the study contains several inconsistencies and there are indications that the results may be "predetermined" (Rothstein, 2011). Given these contradictions, we must examine the space between the imagery and content of the MET study. Where are the gaps between

what the MET says and does and shows? What do the Project's images—compendia of charts, percentile rankings, survey data, and standard deviations—convey about the doubts, certainties, and complexities of the research? I argue that we can see this study like a kind of spectacle, as defined by Situationist artist Guy Debord (1994).

> In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. [Moreover, the] language of the spectacle is composed of signs of the dominant organization of production—signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization.

The images of the MET feed into the circular justification for more measurement to extract outcomes in the form of more data, more analysis, and inevitably more measurement. The system that Gates proposes through the MET relies on an ever-growing (and never-ending) capacity to measure, produce, and analyze data. In this way, the MET also serves as a justification for the dominant system of marketized schools and high-stakes testing.

Teacher Labor, Teacher Unions

Teachers and teacher advocates interpret MET as part of the current assault on educators and a threat to their job security. MET comes out of (and contributes to) a moment when the "failing" education system is being blamed for America's ills and teachers are being blamed for the "failing" system. In the media, 2010 ushered in a wave of anti-teacher propaganda including the highly publicized film "Waiting for 'Superman'" which paints "bad" teachers as the culprits for low student achievement; a

November Newsweek article titled "Why We Must Fire Bad Teachers"; and The Los Angeles Times' (spectacular) publication of teacher rankings based on student test scores. 2010-11 has also been a time of radical political action against teachers and unions including the dismissal of the Providence, Rhode Island's entire teaching force by the mayor in order to circumvent tenure regulations and shrink the teaching staff; and massive protests in Wisconsin in response to anti-union legislation that seeks, among other measures, to abolish collective bargaining rights for state employees.

This anti-union rhetoric echoes the neoliberal calls for privatization, free markets, and cuts to social welfare. As part of the recent campaign against teachers, the MET Project suggests that "bad" teachers are chiefly responsible for "bad" schools. Yet this focus on teachers as the most important determinant obscures the more pervasive influence of social factors (read: poverty) outside of schools (Anyon, 2005). Neither the word nor the concept of "poverty" is present in any of the Gates literature on MET. The only possible allusion to socio-economic status is made with regard to teacher placement: "students with the greatest needs clearly require the most effective teachers" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). Does this imply that placing "effective" teachers with needy students will eradicate inequity? In the case of MET's message to teachers, we need to examine those images which have been left out, the pervasive "inequality and opportunity gaps that plague our schools" (Fine & Noguera, 2011). Teachers matter, and many would agree that certain union reforms are in the best interest of students, however,

any wide-scale education initiative that does not take on (or even acknowledge) the dominant concerns of class and race inequity in schools, misses the mark.

Embedded Ideology

While it appears neutral, the Measures of Teacher Effectiveness Project promotes particular ideological values and ways of thinking. MET prizes the quantifiable and also suggests that everything is quantifiable. The study's framework emphasizes standardized tests while also applying a quantitative lens to qualitative experiences such as classroom observations. This scientistic approach necessarily undermines those aspects of school that are difficult to quantify (and lose meaning in translation) like relationships between students and with teachers, arts, innovation, and discovery. How will the application of MET policy affect the space for these nuanced modes of teaching and learning, already so marginalized in our "high-stakes" testing environments?

Implemented in its most extreme form, MET diverts more and more of the teacher's discretion and agency (as well as education funding) to the testing machine. Teachers, particularly teachers of low-income youth of color who are most likely to struggle on tests, will have less control over what and how they teach. When educators' jobs or school budgets are on the line, students will also have less ownership of their learning process. What do these constraints mean for the participation, motivation, and dialogue essential to deep learning? If school is a preparation for citizenship, where is the space for debate,

democracy, and critical engagement in the MET framework of "even-higher-stakes"? What is the meaning behind the image of an "effective" teacher if her students are disengaged or anxious or docile? By quantifying and abstracting the processes, goals, and values of data collection and the tangible experience of classroom dynamics, relationships, and student work, the MET Project precludes deep understanding and nuanced analysis.

Conclusion: MET in Context

The Measures of Effective Teaching Project emerges alongside a cluster of corporate school reforms including charters, scholarship tax credits, standardized curriculum, and attempts to diminish or dismantle teachers unions. Such policies are promoted by a network of philanthropists, researchers, policy makers, corporations (seeking to tap the "youth market"), and education companies who often work together so closely that their societal roles and messages are difficult to distinguish. The links between corporations like Pearson Education—the largest textbook publisher in the world—and the Gates Foundation—the largest private funder of education—which has invested 20 million dollars with Pearson to create digital learning courses[x] based on the common core standards (also developed with funding from Gates[xi])—and tied to the Obama/ Duncan "Race to the Top" policy initiative—are labyrinthine. What is clear is that through these alliances and savvy political negotiation designed to 'leverage' government

backing (from politicians whose campaigns they may also fund), VPs like Gates, affect an outsized impact on the field.

The practices of foundations like Gates are problematic because they divert massive amounts of tax revenue for "privately designed purposes" (Saltman, 2011) and effect major public sector reforms without providing opportunities for democratic processes like public, transparent debate. However, Gates' bottom-line human capital approach and fixation on quantitative metrics are manifestations of the prevailing neoliberal paradigm rather than the driving cause. Gates' philanthropic work and the scientistic, lightening fast "images" they produce are emblematic of the contemporary moment and could as easily be attributed to a host of academics, corporations, nonprofits, and politicians.

While the notion that public schools must be publicly accountable for their work has merit, our current mode of understanding, regarding, evaluating, and reforming these institutions demands a radical paradigm shift. This shift must take shape in the school sector, but also more broadly in the ways we conceive of and relate to labor, social welfare, and the environment. As Poovey (2001) contends, in response to the circular logic of marketization, "it is necessary for us to develop and circulate concepts that belong to an equally tautological logic." She argues for creativity as a guiding principle, asserting that, "even if there are no things that money can't buy we have to insist that there ought to be—even if only to hold open a space for experiences and sensations

whose value we cannot presently conceptualize." Alongside Poovey's vision is the "Earth Democracy" described by Vandana Shiva (2005). She articulates an indigenous worldview that rejects "the rhetoric of the 'ownership society' in which everything...is property" in favor of "the planet as a commons." For Shiva, the commons implies shared space for collective autonomy, direct democracy, and hyper-local economies that "ensure sustainability and prosperity for all." These radical perspectives—defiant of a world wholly calculable and commodified—have great if somewhat intangible implications for our schools and communities. By positing societies driven by human creativity, care for community and the earth, they make visible the extent to which our lives are currently choked with marketization. They appeal for the formation of places apart. In the case of school, we must cultivate spaces that are not meticulously measured, preserve the value in not-knowing, and hold fast to the process of discovery so central to deep learning.

NOTES

[i] Becker was a student of Milton Friedman's at the University of Chicago and later returned as a professor. Schultz also served for more than 50 years as a professor and member of the Chicago School.
[ii] I use the term "image" not to mean "picture," but rather more like Baudrillard's simulacra—the notion that the image is not a copy of the real, but becomes real (or hyperreal) in its own right.
[iii] This is true quite literally for Google in as much as their revenue is tied to advertising which changes—and is tailored to our online activity—with every click, the company is financially incentivized to encourage fast and frequent usage.
[iv] Martin, 2002
[v] In fact he repeatedly stole the work and ideas of others for his own profit. The PBS miniseries documentary The Triumph of the Nerds: The Rise of Accidental Empires (1996) provides a valuable history of the early commodification of the software and computer industry.
[vi] This quote has been attributed to many management and financial gurus, but the origin of the saying is unknown.
[vii] Teachscape is a $22 million+ private company
[viii] This phrase comes out of a 2010 Gates report, Fewer, Clearer, Higher: Moving Forward with Consistent, Rigorous Standards for All Students.
[ix] Lead Partners include: Mark Atkinson, Teachscape; Nancy Caldwell, Westat; Charlotte Danielson, The Danielson Group; Ron Ferguson, Harvard University; Drew Gitomer, Educational Testing Service; Pam Grossman, Stanford University; Heather Hill, Harvard University; Eric Hirsch, New Teacher Center; Dan McCaffrey, RAND; Catherine McClellan, Educational Testing Service; Roy Pea, Stanford University; Raymond Pecheone, Stanford University; Geoffrey Phelps, Educational Testing Service; Robert Pianta, University of Virginia; Rob Ramsdell, Cambridge Education; Doug Staiger, Dartmouth College; John Winn, National Math and Science Initiative.
[x] 5/6 of which will generate profit for the company
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/education/28gates.html
[xi] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/38282806/ns/business-bloomberg_businessweek/

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