

Excerpt from:

"Value-Added" Assessment: Tool for Improvement or Educational "Nuclear Option"?

Kenneth J. Saltman... There are two basically different ideas of educational value at play in this debate. For proponents of value-added assessment, standardized tests contain certain, verifiable and numerically quantifiable knowledge. The tests are mistakenly thought to be objective. What is tragically denied in this view is the subjective aspect of test creation. Who made the test? What are their values, assumptions, class and cultural positions and frames of reference for deciding what is true and what is of value to know? What to include and exclude from the test?

...As one of the greatest American philosophers John Dewey suggested, truths are arrived at through dialogue and debate; they are revisable and fallible as in science. Indeed, what value-added assessment does is it wraps canonical dogma in a veneer of scientism. If you put a number on the test, then who can argue with numbers?

*... Value-added assessment is being promoted in conjunction with a number of corporate education reforms including chartering and the linked, continued expansion of private, for-profit school managers (EMOs), corporate-style school turnarounds, scholarship tax credits (or neo-vouchers), standardized curriculum, the privatization of teacher education and educational leadership programs and a frontal assault on teachers unions. These efforts are being promoted by think tanks funded by corporate dollars, venture philanthropists including the Gates, Broad and Walton foundations, and they have been largely embraced by both political parties. For 20 years, the business metaphors of choice and competition, consuming education and corporate accountability have been invoked to reframe public education as a **private consumable commodity**.*

...The corporate reforms do not address the apartheid state of American schooling nor do they address the structural radical funding inequalities (\$8,000 per pupil in Chicago and four times that in the north suburbs) that stand alone in the industrialized world, nor do the corporate reforms increase the intellectual climate in schools. What they do is they set the stage for a more thoroughly privatized bottom tier of the public system in which public tax dollars are funneled to private, for-profit companies...

...These anti-intellectual reforms, which are essentially prohibitions on thinking, are utterly antithetical to teachers acting as intellectuals, performing the public role of fostering that dialogue, debate and critical thought are the lifeblood of public, democratic life outside of schools. As the public problems facing humanity - from nuclear Armageddon to eco-collapse to technological disasters - appear to most citizens to be reaching a threatening point of no return, public schooling is one of the last public spheres not yet thoroughly overrun by commercial culture. It should be one point of hope where youth, the very embodiment of hope for the future, can be invested with the tools and skills for creative and deep thought to comprehend and ruthlessly criticize the present, so as to imagine a future that is not just free and equal, prosperous and peaceful, but that is survivable.

