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## Coda

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## Coda

Gail M. Boldt

In the four weeks since we published the first essays of this series, there has been a new wave of articles about teacher accountability published in a variety of media outlets. Spurred by the New York City Department of Education's release of individual teacher ratings based on "value added measures," the authors of these articles have debated: the economic politics of the accountability movement; the validity of value added measures; the question of whether what is measured is really at the heart of a good education; and how best to capture, evaluate and promote effective teaching practices. I found three articles particularly compelling.

### Low Morale

Fernanda Sanders reported in *The New York Times* (March 7, 2012) that the Annual Met Life Survey of the American Teacher found teacher morale to be at its lowest point in more than twenty years. One in three teachers surveyed planned to leave the profession within five years. Among the many reasons teachers cited for wanting to leave: increasing class sizes, layoffs, the loss of services such as aides and counselors as well as programs such as art and music, and out of date technology and materials. They believed that the already acrimonious discourses surrounding teaching would only worsen in the face of the impossible goal of continuing to improve test scores in order to meet the Annual Yearly Progress requirement of No Child Left Behind.

### Value Added Measurement as "Mathematical Intimidation"

In a 2011 *Washington Post* blog currently making the rounds on Facebook, Dr. Valerie Strauss reprinted an article originally published by mathematician John Ewing in the *Notices of the American Mathematics Society*. Ewing warns that the selling of the value added model is a form of "mathematical intimidation" and that the claims that value added measures can predict which teachers will be most successful at supporting student learning are unsupported. He cautions his readers:

Making policy decisions on the basis of value-added models has the potential to do even more harm than browbeating teachers. If we decide whether alternative certification is better than regular certification, whether nationally board certified teachers are better than randomly selected ones, whether small schools are better than large, or whether a new curriculum is better than an old by using a flawed measure of success, we almost surely will end up making bad decisions that affect education for decades to come.

### Alignment Gone Wild

*Huffington Post* education blogger Alan Singer (February 28, 2012) reported on the efforts of the Pearson Corporation to create a system that unites the creation of standardized assessment, curriculum (called instructional modules), teacher certification exams, teacher development workshops, teacher assessments and multimedia digital textbooks. The perniciousness of this sell-out of children's education to a corporate giant is only made more staggering when we consider that the most

measurably successful teachers in the proposed system may well be those who are little more than Pearson consultants. Clearly the Pearson vision of teaching would obviate the need for university-based teacher education, with its attempts to encourage critical thinking, professional knowledge and independent judgment.

### **Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future**

In creating *Challenging the Politics of the Teacher Accountability Movement*, it has been easy to find reasons for anger and despair. Realizing the second half of our title, *Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future*, has been harder. And yet there are islands of promise.

*The New York Times'* Michael Winerip has been reporting on efforts of school principals to fight back against attacks on teacher professionalism as well as their own. Since November, 1400 principals in New York State have signed a letter protesting the use of test scores and what the principals experience as low quality and deprofessionalizing trainings in teacher assessment (Schoolbook, 2012). One principal, cited in Winerip's November 27, 2011 article, noted that one good thing about the new evaluation system was that it united principals and teachers. This assertion was borne out in more recent reporting (Winerip, March 4, 2012) on Brooklyn's P.S. 146, a school that sounded to my teacher education sensibilities like a strong learning environment with smart and talented teachers. When some of her faculty did not fare well in the release of the teacher ratings, Winerip describes the principal coming to the teachers' defense, calling the scores "invalid value-added." He also describes the efforts of Maribeth Whitehouse, a top scoring Bronx teacher, to circulate a letter of protest among the other top 1% teachers. Whitehouse says their desire to show unity with fellow teachers is a reflection of "our profession and professional disdain for this nonsense."

Indeed, the teachers identified by Winerip as well as the teachers with whom I spend time in my hometown of State College, Pennsylvania are a source of hope. My colleagues and I recently completed a free, digital archive ([edtap.psu.edu](http://edtap.psu.edu)) featuring K-8 State College teachers working with their students in project-based learning. I show videos from this archive to my teacher education students in order to inspire them, to demonstrate what children are capable of in great classrooms.

Of course we also want this special edition of the Bank Street [Occasional Papers Series](#) to be a source of hope. The essays have already garnered strong responses. One reader sent the link for the issue to all her state legislators. It is being widely shared on Facebook. Teachers have reported that they are forwarding essays to colleagues and administrators, and university faculty have communicated plans to use the issue in teacher education and educational leadership classes. We are making new connections with educators across the country. And most importantly, readers are saying that they feel encouraged by essays that match their own experiences and support their efforts to deliver high quality education for all children.

We hope that this is just a beginning. With the release of Part III, the issue is now complete. It will continue to be hosted [here](#) and can be downloaded individually or as one complete volume. If you find any of the essays helpful or provocative, we urge you to use them, to spread them and to add to them with your comments.