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## **The tension field between testing and inclusion**

*Introducing a research endeavour*

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*Routledge Research in International and Comparative Education*

# **TESTING AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING**

## **INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Edited by  
Bjørn Hamre, Anne Morin and Christian Ydesen



# Testing and Inclusive Schooling

*Testing and Inclusive Schooling* provides a comparative perspective on seemingly incompatible global agendas and efforts to include all children in the general school system, thus reducing exclusion. With an examination of the international testing culture and the politics of inclusion currently permeating national school reforms, this book raises a critical and constructive discussion of these movements, which appear to support one another, yet simultaneously offer profound contradictions.

With contributions from around the world, the book analyses the dilemma arising between reforms that urge schools to move towards a constantly higher academic level and those who practice a politics of inclusion, leading to a greater degree of student diversity. The book considers the types of problems that arise when reforms implemented at the international level are transformed into policies and practices, firmly placing global educational efforts into perspective by highlighting a range of different cases at both national and local levels.

*Testing and Inclusive Schooling* sheds light on new possibilities for educational improvements in global and local contexts and is essential reading for academics, researchers and postgraduate students interested in international and comparative education, assessment technologies and practices, inclusion, educational psychology and educational policy.

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# Testing and Inclusive Schooling

International Challenges and  
Opportunities

**Edited by Bjørn Hamre,  
Anne Morin and  
Christian Ydesen**

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# Preface

The idea for this book first emerged from a collaboration between the editors, who shared an interest in what they saw as a field of tension between two powerful waves in contemporary education policy and practice, namely, those of inclusion and testing. Convinced of the idea's potential to bring together diverse research environments across the globe, we applied to the Danish Research Council for a transnational network on the topic. Unfortunately, the research council did not share our enthusiasm, and we had to proceed without funding network activities. However, since we were all in the privileged position of being tenured associate professors in Danish universities, we were able to find the necessary time and invoke our international contacts and networks to compile an international group of contributors, some from the field of testing research and others from the field of inclusion research but who all shared our drive to explore the field of tension further.

Apart from obtaining the actual contract with Routledge, the provisional peak in our research endeavour was the tripartite symposium at the European Conference for Educational Research (ECER) held in Copenhagen in August 2017. The symposium served to bring together most of the book's contributors and provided a space for the group to listen and comment on each other's chapters, which undoubtedly helped improve the book's coherence.

We are very grateful to a number of individuals and institutions for their support and assistance in helping us bring this volume to completion. We are most obviously indebted to our contributors, who not only produced their chapters within the required limits of time and length, but also supported this project in many important ways. We also want to extend special thanks to Dr Tim Corcoran from the School of Education, Deakin University, and to Professor Roger Slee from the School of Education, University of South Australia, for serving as discussants at our ECER symposium. At Routledge, we would especially like to acknowledge the work and assistance of our editor, Aiyana Curtis, and editorial assistant, Will Bateman. We are also thankful to AcademicWord for providing efficient and professional assistance in terms of copyediting the entire manuscript. We are grateful to Dr Jessica Holloway, Centre of Research for Educational Impact (REDI), Deakin University, for her assistance in copyediting

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Bjørn Hamre  
Anne Morin  
Christian Ydesen

# The tension field between testing and inclusion

Introducing a research endeavour

*Bjørn Hamre, Anne Morin, and Christian Ydesen*

This book employs comparative and juxtaposing perspectives of seemingly different or perhaps even incompatible global agendas and efforts in education: on the one hand, what has been framed as the global testing culture (Smith, 2016), and, on the other hand, the global inclusive effort currently evident in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2016). Through 14 different chapter contributions discussing cases from all over the world, the book sets out to investigate the relations, dilemmas, and opportunities between the policies and practices of educational testing and calls of educational inclusion often associated with ideals of equality and democracy. The ambition of the book is, thus, to raise a critical, constructive discussion of these movements, which have been argued by some as supporting one another (Liebman & Sabel, 2003) but seemingly offering profound contradictions (Allan, 2015; Allan & Artiles, 2017; Slee, 2013).

## **The ideal of excellence and the ideal of diversity: caught under the same neoliberal umbrella?**

Since 1994, when many countries ratified the renowned Salamanca Statement on social and educational inclusion, efforts have been made to include all children in general day care and school systems and thus reduce mechanisms of exclusion and the prominent role formerly ascribed to special needs education. This inclusive effort can be seen as linked to values of democracy and equality in society (Slee, 2011). However, this effort at inclusiveness faces constant challenges due to a general rise in exclusion and social inequality and increases in the numbers of refugee and minority children and students being diagnosed with mental disorders, along with a similar rise in the number of students referred to special needs education (Bucharadt, 2014; Harwood & Allan, 2014; McNeely et al., 2017; Padovan-Özdemir & Ydesen, 2016; Slee, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012). Such increases in student diversity and diagnoses implicating student referrals to alternate education paths are intimately connected to ubiquitous testing practices stemming from the practical application of international, national, and local testing and accountability programmes at different levels of education systems. These programmes range from psychological and psychiatric tests to

large international comparative testing schemes (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Collaboration and Development's Program for International Student Assessment). Different testing technologies thus influence educational practice and decision makers at all levels of the education anatomy (Andreasen, Rasmussen, & Ydesen, 2013; Pereyra, 2011). A key component of this influence arises through the constituting power and truth regimes instituted by tests because they influence decision makers' and professionals' understanding and actions, as well as shape student identities (Au, 2008; Bernstein, 1996). In turn, these power and truth regimes affect students' learning opportunities and trajectories, not least in terms of inclusion (Morin, 2015). This field of tension between testing and inclusion seems to point towards a dilemma between, on the one hand, ideals about accountability, assessment, and measurable levels of success, and, on the other hand, ambitions to create a school system that can support possibilities of participation and learning for all children.

The above-mentioned ambiguities are apparent at the policy level, as well as when these agendas are implemented in educational activities. Thus, in line with these ambiguities, this book analyses the dilemmas arising between school reforms that urge schools, teachers, and students to move towards a constantly higher academic level and those who call for a politics of inclusion, leading to a greater degree of student diversity in regular schools (Biesta, 2009). It is a dilemma that calls for new discussions and solutions by and among educational policy makers, researchers, school administrators, and teachers. In particular, these dilemmas underline a call for a discussion of the teacher's role, as well as the role of the various professionals cooperating in student assessment, learning, and development. The two discourses – one following an ideal of individual excellence in its aim to optimize and cultivate the performance of the individual student, and the other following the ideal of diversity, securing fair and easy access for all students in the educational environment – are contemporary historical constructions. We argue that these two discourses are current historical constructions expressing power relations that influence and define what education and schooling could and should be. The contributions in the volume present different cases of how these agendas of excellence and diversity relate to one another around the globe. As mentioned, the two discourses seem somehow contradictory in their different rationalities, as well as entangled in reforms, such as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States, which seemingly represent both the idea of excellence and that of diversity. This volume questions whether reforms such as NCLB and ESSA absorb both agendas under the umbrella of neoliberalism. By applying the term *neoliberalism* in education, we draw on some of the definitions fleshed out by Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004, p. 138), stating, 'that subjects are economically self-interested, that competitiveness is a mechanism for quality and efficiency; that governments should rule from a distance through devolved management'. School reforms can thus be analysed as state-organized ways of turning students into educational subjects that aim to fulfil an agenda of accountability and marketization.

### **Norming and normalizing technologies: a poststructuralist approach to educational policy**

On a theoretical level, we will present these agendas as historical phenomena inspired by the poststructuralism of Foucault and specifically draw on his distinction between *norming* and *normalizing* technologies of society, as analysed in his historical analysis of the emergence of the city (Foucault, 2009). According to Ball (2013), the historical development of the British schooling system can be analysed as a constant exchange between the norming and normalizing functions and technologies of the school. Historically, general education informed by politics has served a norming function in establishing how students are supposed to be and perform and which goals the school should follow to transfer these norms to educational practice and thus transform the students in accordance with the norms. Similarly, special needs education serves a normalizing function by presenting compensating technologies to reposition the problematics in accordance with the norm. Ball draws on Foucault's historical constructions of the *dispositive* in Foucault's (2009) analysis of this relation between the norming and normalizing functions of the school. In line with Foucault (1980), the *dispositive* is a historical construction that permeates discourses, practices, and institutions. This explains, for example, how school reforms not only appear at the discursive level of policy documents but also become embedded in institutions and practices and at the subject level. Serving a norming function discipline has a prescriptive function in the boundaries between desired and non-desired behaviours. Stating school standards is what educational politics have been about, and these standards thus work strategically in terms of the way norms are constructed in politics and schooling, legitimized by human and social sciences such as sociology, education, psychology, and psychiatry (Foucault, 1977, 2009). These norms are often legitimized through statements such as economic growth, 'what is needed for the future' (e.g. Bürgi, 2016), or relate to notions of the public good (e.g. Ydesen, 2016). Education policies can thus, in themselves, be seen as having a *norming* function, since education reforms express certain definitions of how students should behave. School reforms such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy in Australia clearly articulate norming as students performing better in reading or mathematics or 'using their full potential'.

### **Inclusion: promoting adaptable subjects?**

Ball's analysis of the English school clearly shows that, historically, the school has always tried to handle diversity and deviancy in different ways (Ball, 2013). This is especially apparent in the historical role of special needs education, which has dealt with different subjects considered risky, deviant, or disabled. From this perspective, special needs education has served a normalizing function in defining that which deviates from the norm. The *dispositive* of security serves a normalizing function in relation to the population (Foucault, 2009).

Those excluded from society and the school may present a potential danger to society's cohesion. The welfare state thus draws on a range of security technologies aiming to anticipate the unexpected, thus serving to safeguard society through calculations to minimize risks. As seen in the historical role of special needs education, certain behaviours in society may be identified as dangerous or worrisome in order to launch interventions drawing on different technologies (Padovan-Özdemir & Ydesen, 2016). Thus, security measures take on the character of remedial technologies aimed towards the population in the welfare state. Whereas special needs education may have served such remedial technologies since at least the rise of the modern welfare state, the politics of inclusion seem to have increasingly taken over the normalizing functions of special needs education. Some of the contributions in this volume examine this shift in approach to students moving towards a more malleable subjectivity, adapting to the agenda of educational reforms that seeks to move the individual towards a trajectory of self-optimization, as well as striving to adapt to different educational settings in the era of inclusion. We question whether the politics of inclusion have overtaken the role of special needs education, since the adaptable subject of inclusion better fits the political era of neoliberalism and the neo-liberal positioning of the subject as entrepreneurial (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004, p. 136). This is one of the issues we will investigate and return to in the conclusion of the book.

In addition to our treatment of this main dilemma, the book also examines a second one arising between global agendas and local practices and solutions. What problematics arise when reforms springing from the international level are transformed into national and local policies and practices? By applying a global and comparative view to educational practices and solutions, the book aims to put global educational efforts into perspective by highlighting different cases at both the national and local levels. Overall, the book may be viewed as an argument for the need to discuss the discourses of the global accountability/assessment culture and the agenda of inclusion in a particular context, one that will frame new analyses of this context, as well as indicate new practices and solutions. The backbone of the book is thus an interdisciplinary global research collaboration consisting of researchers from all over the world investigating the relation between testing technologies and practices and the ideals of inclusion, equality, and democracy from an international perspective. By integrating these two agendas, we hope the book will shed light on new possibilities for educational improvements in global and local contexts.

### **The structure of the book**

The book is structured into three main sections related to the thematic focus on testing and inclusion in policy and practice: Section I, 'Testing and school reforms'; Section II, 'The agenda of inclusion'; and Section III, 'Inclusion and psychological assessment'. The first section on testing and school reforms from a global perspective features five chapters. The section investigates and compares

testing practices in different countries, touching on such themes as democracy, the welfare state, minority education, access to education, discursive struggles, and the shaping of student subjectivities. Put together, the chapters of this section shed light on how the aforementioned discourse of *excellence* links with the features of the global testing culture – such as raising standards and promoting accountability – and how its movement into contingent national contexts has led to different manifestations in seven different national contexts (Australia, China, Greenland, Scotland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States), each positioned differently and with their own distinct idiosyncrasies in relation to the themes of the section.

Section II is concerned with the agenda of inclusion and sheds light on the dilemma between the criteria for student achievement, spurring the student to a constantly higher performance via a culture of testing, and the political discourse of *diversity and inclusion*, putting values of plurality, diversity, and participation in the foreground. In this section, the agenda of inclusion and the related ambivalences and challenges in the implementation of an inclusive school system are analysed from different theoretical and comparative perspectives involving tensions between global and local principles, structural barriers for realizing inclusion, new modes of governing in schooling, neoliberal logics, the marketization of teacher and student, and inclusion, which is seen as the student's individual responsibility.

While the two first sections thus analyse dilemmas of the political discourses of excellence and diversity, the final section, Section III, on inclusion and psychological assessment, traces the effects of assessment from the system level into concrete practices on the ground relating to the agenda of inclusion in classrooms. The purpose and use of assessment in local practices can be manifold, such as control, certification, legitimation, selection, differentiation, learning, and development. The use of assessment technologies and its results is therefore connected to educational practice, how issues of inclusion and exclusion are handled, and how the community of children, teachers, and other professionals works. Thereby, in this section, the chapters present a closer look into concrete practices and investigate the effects and meaning of testing as part of everyday school life with different consequences for different professionals and students in different positions.

Each section concludes with an essay by a high-profile researcher looking across the chapters of the section in terms of themes and perspectives and thereby adding a meta level to each section that will be followed up in the concluding chapter.

In Chapter 1, 'Educational testing, the question of the public good, and room for inclusion: A comparative study between Scotland and the United States', Wayne Au and Christian Ydesen, using a comparative study between Scotland and the United States, explore the relation between educational testing, the question of the public good, and room for inclusion by investigating the discourses and practices surrounding the launch of key educational testing schemes in the United States and Scotland. The chapter employs a comparative



methodological design to identify contrasts and recurrences to elucidate and amplify educational values and the implications in terms of educational inclusion. Chapter 2, 'Minorities and educational testing in schools in Arctic regions: An analysis and discussion focusing on normality, democracy, and inclusion for the cases of Greenland and the Swedish Sami schools', by Kristine Kousholt and Karen Andreassen, also employs a comparative perspective but focuses on Greenland and northern Sweden, where ethnic Inuit and ethnic Sami students, respectively, are identified as potentially problematic and subjected to practices reproducing social inequality in the tension field between testing, language, and the history of these minorities. In Chapter 3, 'Educational opportunity between meritocracy and equity: A review of the National College Entrance Examination in China since 1977', by Yihuan Zou, the different – but entangled – logics of meritocracy and equity are discussed in relation to a review of the evolution of the National College Entrance Examination in China since 1977. The analysis throws light on the role of market mechanisms working in parallel with strong state-directed interventions in distributing higher education opportunities in China's transitional economy. In Chapter 4, 'The "problem" of "quality" schooling, national testing, and inclusion: Australian insights into policy and practice', by Ian Hardy and Stuart Woodcock, the focus turns to the Australian continent. Drawing upon Bacchi's (2009) notion of the representation problem in policy analysis, this chapter describes how inclusion is constituted in schooling in Australia. In Chapter 5, 'Standardized assessment and the shaping of neoliberal student subjectivities', Peter Kelly ends the first section by focusing on the experiences of children in their final year of primary school in England, considering how standardized assessment shapes the curriculum and pedagogy and supports the formation of stratified neoliberal student subjectivities. It is argued that approaches invoked to improve students' test performances will neither help raise the grades of those identified as low-attaining beyond the mediocre nor have a positive impact on their reading outside of the tests. This first section ends with an essay by Stephen J. Ball, 'The banality of numbers'.

William C. Smith begins Section II with Chapter 6, 'Quality and inclusion in the SDGs: Tension in principle and practice'. The chapter explores the dilemma of primary school leaving exams in Uganda, where the Primary Leaving Exam creates different levels of exclusion, resulting in over 50% of exam takers in 2014 being denied access to government-funded secondary schools. Policy options are explored to overcome this conflict between inclusion and perceived quality in practice. In Chapter 7, 'School reforms, market logic, and the politics of inclusion in the United States and Denmark', Jessica Holloway and Bjørn Hamre compare parallel effects, ambivalences, and differences in the current inclusive efforts in educational politics in Denmark and the United States while relying specifically on a poststructural critique of policy. The authors argue that the policies in the two countries produce particular norms for how a student is 'supposed to be', which requires a disposition of optimization and a commitment to constant self-work to be more 'normal'. Julie Allan and Tanja Sturm investigate, in Chapter 8, 'School development and inclusion in England

and Germany', school development directed towards inclusion in England and Germany and the barriers to these efforts. The principal barriers arise, in both countries, from meeting the competing obligations of establishing an inclusive educational system and maximizing student attainment to compete effectively in a global economy.

Stating the argument that the welfare state in Western Europe underwent a wave of liberalization in the 1980s, Janne Hedegaard Hansen and Halvor Bjørnsrud, in Chapter 9, 'Inclusion as a right and obligation in a neoliberal society', compare policies in Norway and Denmark and show that, even though the two countries have different political strategies, they end up with the same problem: an inability to realize similar political educational goals in relation to inclusion. In Chapter 10, 'Refugee education: Conceptualizing inclusion amid conflict and crisis', Nanette Archer Svenson ends Section II by reviewing the present situation, where roughly 30 million young people are displaced and living under what can often best be described as extremely precarious conditions. The chapter places the discussion within the broader education inclusion discourse and focuses on the factors involved in refugee education globally. Section II ends with a section essay by Roger Slee, titled: 'Testing Inclusive Education?'

Section III starts with Chapter 11, 'Inclusion: The Cinderella concept in educational policy in Latin America', where Ezequiel Gomez Caride and Magdalena Cardoner analyse the discourse of the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study in a Latin American context. The chapter explores how the framing and understanding of inclusion/exclusion arises in Latin American testing technologies. The chapter thus aims to track the ways in which the rationality that embraces inclusion and testing developed in Latin America. In Chapter 12, 'Psychiatric test knowledge and everyday school life: Collaborative work with diagnosed children', Anne Morin and Lotte Hedegaard-Sørensen discuss the two fields and practices of (neuro)psychiatric testing and inclusion in relation to each other. On the basis of an empirical case analysis, the chapter focuses on professional collaboration concerning diagnosed children, analysing how different interventions and procedures create certain conditions for the children's developmental and learning trajectories. To understand the reasons for professional decision making, dilemmas as well as developmental possibilities in the school system are explored, with a special focus on the different professional practices (e.g. teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists). Brian Abery and Renáta Tichá, in Chapter 13, 'Development of a formative assessment system within a cross-cultural context (MANGO)', explore the differences between summative and formative assessment and make the case for the latter, due to its direct relevance to instructional decision making and support of an inclusive approach to education. The discussion is based on a case study that describes the process through which a team of researchers from the United States and the Russian Federation developed a technology-supported approach to the formative assessment of students with significant cognitive disabilities. Chapter 14, 'The significance of SEN assessment, diagnoses, and

psychometric tests in inclusive education: Studies from Sweden and Germany', by Thomas Barow and Daniel Östlund, analyses similarities and differences in SEN assessment from a Swedish – German perspective to shed insight on the relation between assessment and inclusive education. Their research findings contribute to a discussion on whether inclusive education can be based on a decategorized type of special education or whether it should promote the use of medical diagnoses and psychometrical tests. Section III concludes with an essay by Lani Florian, titled: 'Inclusion and Assessment: complicated and complex'.

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**Section I**

**Testing and school  
reforms**



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# 1 Educational testing, the question of the public good, and room for inclusion

A comparative study of Scotland and the United States

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## Introduction

Testing is a technological tool that cannot be treated in isolation from society at large along with the attendant questions of power, education access, education management, and social selection (Au, 2008; Ydesen, 2011). Several sociologists have argued that modern societies, in keeping with the increased division of labour, are dependent on some form of selection system able to establish criteria of human worth and the corresponding social positions they should fill (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Weber, 2009). In a democratic society, such a selection system is legitimized in terms of objectivity, fairness, and justness (Ydesen, 2014). Testing is as endemic as ever (Connell, 2013; Lindblad, Pettersson, & Popkewitz, 2015), and it employs the language of science (numbers and statistics), rendering the perception that testing is credible, fair, impartial, authoritative, valid, and precise (Dorn, 2007; Hansen & Porter, 2012; Hopmann, 2007).

Despite critical research on educational testing pointing out the inadequacies, inconsistencies, and unjust nature of many educational testing practices (e.g. Au, 2008, 2010; Madaus, Russell, & Higgins, 2009; Nichols & Berliner, 2007), testing is still closely linked with imaginaries of the public good. Drawing on a Bourdieusian concept of state, the public good can be understood as a justifying referent for governing (Arnholtz & Hammerslev, 2013, p. 54; Bourdieu, 2014), where the public good is understood as a key repository or reservoir for justifications and legitimations of professional interventions, such as launching a national testing scheme (Ydesen, 2016, p. 617). In other words, a testing practice must be accompanied by a positive discourse about the benefits of the selection practice in terms of improvements and gains for society and the individual; otherwise, the practice will be void of legitimacy and lose credibility. Therefore, using educational testing discourses and practices as entries to understanding the imaginaries of the public good is of scholarly interest because it contributes knowledge about inherent educational values, which, again, frame educational conditions and have implications in terms of inclusion,

that is, who can be a legitimate participant in education. This chapter uses the cases of both the United States and Scotland to explore this phenomenon because, as we shall argue, despite their differing historical trajectories, both cases illustrate how testing is framed around a discourse of social inclusion and what Depaepe and Smeyers (2008) have called the educationalization of social problems. This means that the education system is being held accountable for solving all sorts of social problems. In fact, every social challenge facing contemporary society – such as social cohesion, inequality, attainment gaps – has an unmistakable educational component.

### ***Case studies, methodology, and chapter structure***

In this chapter, we investigate the discourses and practices surrounding the launch of key educational testing schemes in the United States and Scotland. The chapter employs a comparative methodological design to identify contrasts and patterns for elucidating and amplifying educational values and the implications in terms of educational inclusion. The sources are research literature, policy documents, newspaper articles, and reports.

In the United States, the discourse around educational testing and the public good has largely revolved around the use of testing to promote race equality, with special attention to testing as a ‘civil rights issue’ that will ameliorate racial inequality in public education (e.g. Brooks, 2014; Brown, 2015). Civil rights framing in educational testing in the United States began as part of the discourse surrounding the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 and has continued as a driving discourse for the use of educational testing to improve schools and hold educators accountable for increasing the test-based achievement of non-white students (Au, 2009b). By proxy, the idea is that such testing is a public good because, according to its proponents, it creates more opportunities for students who have been systematically disadvantaged.

Scotland is in the process of introducing national tests in its educational system. They are a key feature of the National Improvement Framework, which the Scottish government claims will help narrow the attainment gap between the least and most deprived children. In this respect, the main argument for introducing the tests can be interpreted as an issue of eradicating class differences and creating an inclusive education system. It is noteworthy that proponents of the testing program claim that it will steer clear of the damaging teaching to the test, target setting, and league table agenda prevalent in England (British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC, 2016a; Scottish Government, 2015a).

The chapter is structured accordingly. The first section investigates the US case, and the second section focuses on the Scottish case. The concluding discussion analyses the contrasts and similarities between the cases in terms of the educational values in evidence and puts the findings into perspective in terms of inclusive education.



## Testing as a public good in the United States

For over 100 years, in the United States, forms of standardized testing have been promoted as a public good (Reese, 2013). For instance, in the early 1900s, despite deep cultural and class biases, such testing became the basis for setting students onto different educational tracks according to test scores. It was argued that such differentiation was a public good because it played into a dominant public discourse of efficiency in production and in schools, particularly relative to the social and economic ‘crises’ of sharp poverty, an increasing immigrant population, and the need to organize schooling for masses of children (Au, 2009c).

Standardized testing was once again presented as a public good in the United States in response to the then USSR’s launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1957, as well as later, in 1983, during the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. In both cases, the crises constructed through Cold War competition provided the impetus for increased standards and testing in federal US education reform efforts (Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001; Madaus, Russel, & Higgins, 2009, p. 16f.).

The current framing of standardized educational testing as a public good in the United States spans three policies and programs: the 2002 NCLB reauthorization of the federal US Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Obama administration’s Race to the Top initiative, and the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorization of the federal US Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB in particular was built around a crisis of racial disparities in educational achievement, especially as measured by standardized educational test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2007). As such, within this context, such testing has been advanced as a public good for diminishing racism in education, drawing explicitly on the legacy of the United States’ racial civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

### *Testing, civil rights, and the discourse of race equity*

Public education reform in the United States has always been connected to social projects connected to race and racism, but this relation was cemented with the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and ruling in 1954. The *Brown* decision linked struggles over racial desegregation in the United States with school desegregation policy and practice, because it determined that separate schools for racial groups could not be considered equal, thus beginning the forced racial desegregation of schools in the United States (Baker, Myers, & Vasquez, 2014).

Beginning with NCLB (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Hursh, 2007), policy makers and non-governmental organizations have thus summoned the legacy of the racial civil rights movement as a key justification for education policy reforms built upon a foundation of standardized educational testing, a justification itself built upon the assertion of educational testing as a public good. Indeed, as Rhodes (2011) argues, mainstream civil rights organizations played

pivotal roles in pushing for educational testing and passing NCLB and similar policies into law, which Crawford (2007) notes also corresponded with a shift in defining educational civil rights in terms of test-based outputs instead of access to educational resources.

There are many examples of politicians and dignitaries mustering the language of the US civil rights movement relative to educational inequality, all voiced in support of standardized educational test-based policies. For instance, speaking around the time of NCLB's passage into law in 2002, then-US president George W. Bush asserted that 'education is the great Civil Rights issue of our time' (CNN, 2002, n.p.). At the time, legal analysts suggested that the educational test-based accountability policies of NCLB would give the civil rights movement a 'second chance' to fight for the civil rights of educational outcomes (Liebman & Sabel, 2003), arguing that the tests provided a basis for determining adequate education for racial groups. Other state officials under the administrations of both US presidents Bush and Obama specifically evoked the language of civil rights in connection to testing (Au, 2009b; Feinberg, 2004; Hursh, 2007; Paige, 2006; Resmovits, 2014).

Little changed in US federal education policy when the ESSA was signed into law in December 2015, since it relied on high-stakes testing as the key mechanism for leveraging educational equality and improvement (Karp, 2016). Even though anti-testing activists were successful enough that ESSA included language on parents' rights to opt their children out of tests if they so choose, the law still requires that 95 percent of eligible students take the tests, thereby undercutting resistance efforts and maintaining a reliance on high-stakes testing (Au, 2016; Au & Hollar, 2016). Further, mainstream civil rights organizations have continually opposed grassroots movements against standardized educational testing (Brown, 2015; Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2015) on the presumption that such testing, as a public good, facilitates racial equality (see also Au, 2015a; Hagopian & Network for Public Education, 2015).

### *US testing fails the race equity test*

The assertion that using high-stakes tests will serve the public good by improving race equity in US schools is empirically testable, and the data tell us that this focus on testing not only has not improved race equity in schools, but has also damaged the education of non-white children. For instance, the United States has essentially required national high-stakes testing since 2002, and, since then, test score gaps between white and non-white students have increased (Lee, 2006; National Research Council, 2011; Ravitch, 2013).

Research has also found that the impact of high-stakes testing on US classrooms has denigrated the quality of education for non-white students in particular; these students end up experiencing the greatest restrictions in curriculum and pedagogy, since teachers of children of colour focus more on test preparation and less on enriching educational experiences (Au, 2009a;

Nichols & Berliner, 2007). The negative, disparate impact of high-stakes testing on non-white children in the United States is also illustrated through the effects of high school exit exams. It is well established in the research that such exit exams generally fail non-white students at disproportionate rates (Zabala, 2007). These negative effects are compounded by research that has found a correlation between such exams and a 12.5 percent increase in the rate of incarceration (Baker & Lang, 2013), suggesting that such tests contribute directly to the school-to-prison pipeline for African American and Latino youth in the United States.

### *The enduring discourse of testing as a public good*

Given that the rhetorical claims surrounding high-stakes testing in the United States as a public good in the service of racial equality and civil rights are directly contradicted by the empirical evidence, it is important to consider how and why such testing remains at the centre of reforms efforts there. One aspect of testing's persistence is part technological, part ideological, and part historical: the presumed objectivity of the tool of standardized testing as a technology to measure human intelligence and learning has directly contributed to the maintenance of the ideology of meritocracy. That is, if the tests are presumed to function as objective measures, then they are also presumed to provide pure measures of student effort, with individual merit and hard work being what determines test scores. Historically, this ideology has been used to deny structural constraints facing non-white communities (e.g. racism or lack of access to resources), effectively justifying the existing educational and social order (Au, 2009c; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In the case of the United States, the framing of high-stakes testing as a public good for racial equality has thus been used to pivot conversations and policy away from substantial community reforms such as affordable housing and universal healthcare and created a laser-like focus on school reform as the central mechanism for challenging racism.

Further, there is an economic aspect to the persistence of testing and using civil rights and racial equity to frame it as a public good. The entire K–12 education market in the United States has been estimated by some analysts at over US\$700 billion. This large market has attracted major corporations, business leaders, and entrepreneurs eager to seek profits as policymakers in the United States have become increasingly aligned with the principles of free market and neoliberalism for public institutions, including education. High-stakes testing, with its inherent ability to produce numerical data to make comparisons, is central to the neoliberal project of the financialization of public education because it facilitates the creation of quasi-markets of educational performance (Au & Hollar, 2016). The framing of high-stakes testing as a public good in the service of racial equity functionally provides ideological cover for educational reforms and neoliberal policies that fundamentally hurt non-white children and their communities (Au, 2015b).

As the above discussion suggests, high-stakes standardized testing in the United States raises significant issues regarding inclusion in education. Such testing has shaped the content of the curriculum and the forms of classroom instruction with which students engage. The control of content and delivery holds strong implications for whether or not students see themselves reflected in the classroom. This means the tests create an immediate gatekeeper with regards to whose knowledge and identities are considered allowable in classroom discourse and whose are not, making them a filter and arbiter of acceptable and unacceptable student identities and epistemologies (Au, 2008, 2009a). High-stakes standardized testing thus fundamentally acts as a mechanism for the exclusion of student diversity at the cost of inclusion for all students. The question remains as to whether or not Scotland, with its new testing program, will learn from the negative example of the United States.

### **Testing in Scotland**

In September 2015, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) government, announced the introduction of national standardized testing in Scottish schools in 2017 (BBC, 2015). The new national testing scheme is part and parcel of the National Improvement Framework for Scottish education, a comprehensive package of programs launched by the government to improve Scottish education and coordinated by Education Scotland, a new national improvement agency for education established in 2011 that incorporates the curriculum agency and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (Scottish Government, 2011, 2016a, p. 3). In a wider political sense, the National Improvement Framework may be viewed as a core feature of the SNP's political ambition to strengthen national identity through improving education performance and thus perhaps – in due time – contribute to the political goal of gaining independence from the United Kingdom (Arnott & Ozga, 2010, p. 337).

From a historical perspective, however, educational testing has a mixed history in Scottish education policies ever since professor Godfrey Thomson (1881–1955) created the Moray House intelligence tests in the interwar years, arguing for their ability to create equal opportunities for every child (Lawn & Deary, 2014). In the early 1990s, national tests were introduced. According to Hayward and Hutchinson (2005, p. 229), the tests were designed to 'provide teachers with the means to check their own assessments . . . and should ensure more consistent interpretation by teachers of what particular levels of attainment mean'. However, as argued by Hayward and Hutchinson, testing in Scotland soon became high stakes because teachers did not challenge the test results. The reason teachers acted against policy and tests came to be seen as a proxy for teachers' professional judgement.

An important rupture in the history of Scottish education is undoubtedly the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, which meant that education policy began to break away from the UK government's pro-testing line

(Ozga, 2011). It was important for the new government to demonstrate independent policy making and favour the oppositional stance of parents and teachers towards educational testing. In 2003, national testing was officially scrapped.

The initiative was the result of a national debate on education launched by the Scottish Government in 2002 in response to public perceptions that ‘standards were falling and that Scotland was in danger of falling behind other countries in terms of a skilled workforce and economic competitiveness’ (Hayward & Hutchinson, 2013, p. 54). However, in line with the political ambitions of the new government – but contrary to what was going on in many other countries, where Programme for International Student Assessment shocks reverberated – the insight emerging from the debate was not the advancement of further testing but, rather, that testing seemed to inhibit ‘deeper learning’ because teachers were prone to only focus on the curriculum and the measurement of progress (Hayward & Hutchinson, 2013).

### ***Public debates: national testing or national assessments?***

In congruence with the critical stance towards testing taken by many educators and stakeholders of education in Scotland, the first minister’s announcement in 2015 was met with severe opposition. Brian Boyd, Emeritus Professor of Education at Strathclyde University, described the plans as ‘at best a disappointment and at worst a retrograde step which will simply serve to worsen the problem’ (McEnaney, 2016). On the same note, teachers raised concerns about league tables, washback effects, and the undermining of pupils’ deeper understanding of subjects, while the Scottish Parent Teacher Council stated that many parents were uncertain about how the data might best be used (McIvor, 2016). In these debates, England – where educational testing has always been more popular because of the widespread existence of school choice and the stronger promotion of competition between schools than in Scotland – was often used as an example of what not to do (e.g. Educational Institute of Scotland, 2015; Herald Scotland, 2016; Ozga, 2011).

In response to these criticisms, the government avoided the phrase *national testing* and stressed that the new *assessments* would not be comparable to those taken south of the border (BBC, 2016b). The first minister argued that ‘this is not about narrowing the curriculum or forcing teachers to teach to the test. It is not a return to the national testing of old’ (BBC, 2015). Education Secretary John Swinney described the tests as ‘not educational’ (BBC, 2016b) and insisted that the new national assessments would neither create extra work for teachers or children nor be high stakes in any way. Rather, the education secretary argued,

The standardised assessments will be an important tool for teachers, who will have an additional source of nationally consistent evidence about how well pupils are progressing. They will be able to draw on this alongside other assessment information to help inform their professional judgement,

which is how we evaluate whether children have achieved the relevant Curriculum for Excellence levels for their stage.

(Edinburgh News, 2016)

If anything, the debates over the new national testing – or assessment – scheme show a rather acrimonious exchange of views – rooted in the history of education – indicating fierce discursive negotiations over terminology. Using the term *testing* seems to invoke fears that the English educational testing regime would flow over the border and contaminate the Scottish way of education. In this understanding, testing is by no means a public good; in fact, testing is even incompatible with imaginaries of the public good, since it is a Pandora's box type of tool for governing that will essentially stymie social equity and progress in society.

Obviously, the government holds a very different view, arguing that the national assessment scheme only serves the role of a humble tool that will provide genuine progress for Scottish education, with positive implications for both the individual child and society as a whole. It is, however, remarkable that both sides of the debate seem to share ideas about the public good, such as social equity and children's ability to succeed. It may seem like a paradox, but the big bone of contention is precisely the testing scheme and its spin-off effects on education.

### ***The Scottish government's reasoning***

The official and overall aim of the new national testing scheme is to raise attainment amongst schoolchildren and close the poverty-related attainment gap, based on reliable data (BBC, 2015; McEnaney, 2016). However, from a government perspective, the new testing scheme plays a role on several levels: 1) the macro level (knowing the overall performance of the education system and the size of the attainment gap), 2) the meso level (knowing the performance of each region and each school), and 3) the micro level (knowing the performance of each individual child).

Looking first at the macro level, the government's argument is that 'this new system will . . . help to reduce the burden of assessment, building on best practice and replacing the wide variety of approaches taken by local authorities with a new streamlined, consistent approach' (Scottish Government, 2015b). The new system is, in this sense, about standardizing the output measures of the Scottish education system and avoiding idiosyncrasies inhibiting the comparability and transparency of the system. The aim of this standardization is the identified 'need to know the size of the attainment gap at different ages and stages, across Scotland, in order to take the right action to close it' (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 16, 2016b).

Moving to the meso level, the government argues that the new testing scheme 'will help us to identify where we are doing well and which practices and interventions are having an impact. It will also help us to identify areas

where, collectively we need to do more' (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 16). The reasoning of this argument is built on the condition that regions, local councils, and individual schools can be compared in light of the political goal of closing the attainment gap; it is about acquiring knowledge through comparable data for making justified professional interventions. As argued in the 2016 government report, the new framework 'will provide a level of robust, consistent and transparent data across Scotland that we have never had before' (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 5).

Finally, at the micro level, the government's main goals are that Scottish children should become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 2). These goals feature both economic and civic purposes of education. Overall, education seems to serve a dual purpose: 1) to improve children's well-being and ability to succeed and 2) to contribute to a more successful country with increasing sustainable economic growth (Scottish Government, 2016a). In that sense, the Scottish government is attempting to strike a balance between the considerations of the child and of society. As argued by Arnott and Ozga (2010), the Scottish government, in its education policies, seeks to invoke 'modernized nationalism,' understood as non-exclusive and comprised of fluid, contingent, and processual elements, as the central cog for striking a balance between considerations of economic growth and considerations of community, fairness, and inclusiveness. In this endeavour, the Scottish government supports teacher curricular autonomy while strengthening inspection and the production of data. This cocktail is seen as being able to secure better outcomes for poor children.

In terms of the public good, the new national testing scheme is a reflection of a social inclusion agenda and meritocratic egalitarianism; everyone should be able to take part in society as best they can to the benefit of society and the individual, in perfect harmony. The other side of the coin, however, is that testing is also a tool for detecting particular kinds of deviance, justifying professional intervention. In that light, the creation of test data is a form of governing aiming to make sure that people live not just any type of life, but a particular type of life centred on educational advancement and societal usefulness. Testing is, in that sense, a 'normalization' process. In that governing process, even parents are enrolled as the prolonged arms of the state to further advance the normalization process in the home. In its 2016 report, the Scottish government (2016a, p. 5) argues that

Parents will be able to access information from teacher's professional judgement and the underlying standardised assessment data about their own child's learning, providing valuable, nationally consistent information about children's progress and signalling where further support may be required at home and in school.

This Janus-faced view of educational testing is, to some extent, precisely what is reflected in the public debates analysed above, but it is also a very clear

expression of the educationalization of social problems. On the same note, the Scottish government report (2016a, p. 2) clearly outlines how ‘achieving improvement in education is closely related to achieving other key National Outcomes in the National Performance Framework’ and argues that ‘as a core part of our drive to achieve fairer outcomes for our children and young people, we know that investing in their education is essential to achieving their aspirations and our ambitions as a country’.

Given these analytical insights, the next paragraph takes a closer look at some of the very methodological assumptions behind the national testing scheme to further uncover the implications in terms of educational inclusion.

### ***The national testing scheme***

As noted above, the new testing scheme is assumed by the Scottish government to encompass the ability to diagnose children in relation to the learning goals of the Curriculum for Excellence. Although little is publicly known about the actual test items comprising the new Scottish test battery, a number of core characteristics are known: They are online, adaptive, and marked online; there is no pass or fail cut score; and the items are not used for making official league tables.

A closer look reveals that the National Improvement Framework is based on the 2015 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report ‘Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective’; a what-works and best-practice approach as defined by the OECD; and, not least, the ‘Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment’ publication from 2013. The 2015 OECD report (p. 11) states that the current Scottish assessment system does not provide sufficiently robust information for policymakers, councils, schools, or teachers.

The Scottish government report, however, demonstrates no engagement – or quality check – with the political agendas and values inherent in the OECD reports to reflect an evidence-based and best-practice regime. The government only notes that the reform framework ‘is designed to address one of the key issues identified by the OECD, the need to develop an integrated framework for assessment and evaluation that encompasses all system levels and ensures all partners are focused effectively on key priorities’ (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 5).

To reach its conclusions, the OECD (2015, p. 50) ‘put Scotland into its international context on diverse measures relating to both quality and equity’. This means the OECD has reviewed ‘international evidence and compares Scotland with certain other systems – especially, with Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway’ (p. 49). Thus, the OECD and the government’s new international council of educational advisers serve as pundits for the National Improvement Framework in education (Scottish Government, 2016b, p. 1). Many, but not all, of these advisers are, incidentally, associated with the OECD, the Ontario school system, and an evidence-based and what-works approach



to educational reform. In that sense, there is a link with what has been termed the global testing culture (Smith, 2016), but its outlet is distinctly Scottish, in that the Scottish government frequently refers to fairness and action on poverty.

Given the above, the new Scottish testing scheme may be described as closely linked with a positivist and measurable ontology utilized to achieve efficiency and the productive use of all available human resources. Together with the social inclusion agenda and meritocratic egalitarian ideals, these observations are also features of the public good in the Scottish case. However, they must be understood in congruence with the modernized nationalism outlined above, the point of gravity being ‘outward referencing’, placing Scotland as a member of a community of Nordic countries (the Scandinavian and Baltic countries), and ‘inward referencing’ to historically embedded popular narratives of fairness (Arnott & Ozga, 2010).

## Conclusions

Even though the United States and Scotland are different – not least in terms of their history – a number of contrasts and patterns present themselves across the two cases. What we have framed as the educationalization of social problems rooted in concerns about social inclusion and an ideology of meritocracy is consistent across both countries, at least at the discursive level. Social inclusion and meritocracy are central in terms of describing the public good of education in general and educational testing in particular. However, while social inclusion and meritocracy focus more on racial inequalities in the United States and less on economic class, from the onset, the Scottish case displays a clear concern with poverty and socially disadvantaged children.

Empirically, the two cases are very different. As we have argued, the United States has a long history of high-stakes testing, while Scotland is a relative newcomer to the field; that is, educational testing has long been an ambiguous tool in Scottish education, not least because of national sentiments calling for clear demarcations from England.

In the US case, the empirical evidence indicates that the use of educational testing to diminish social and racial inequalities is problematic in terms of the inclusion agenda. The main reasons are that arguments of social and racial equality are ahistorical, because they do not recognize how such testing has been used against non-white and socially disadvantaged communities and students. The arguments are not technically sound because they do not account for the role of standardized testing in constructing the very inequalities proponents claim the tests will diminish. They are not based in empirical research, which has consistently found that such testing has not increased achievement and, instead, has functioned to worsen the educational experiences of non-white and socially disadvantaged children. Finally, the arguments lack understanding of the use of standardized educational testing as a tool for neoliberal reformers to undermine and attack the very concept of the public good and reshape institutions and policies along the lines of private markets.

In Scotland, the national testing scheme has not yet been rolled out, and, so, there is no empirical evidence upon which we can base our conclusions in terms of practical implications. However, our analysis of the policies and discursive arguments – and comparing with the US experience – raise awareness that the new Scottish testing scheme may have unintended consequences that will work contrary to the ideals of meritocracy and social inclusion. Indeed, if the US case can offer any lesson for the Scottish case, it is that standardized testing can be used by governments to obscure structural inequalities beneath a veneer of meritocratic competition and tropes of individuals' hard work. Quite often, the empirical practices of testing differ from the drawing board theories about testing and what it does to education. Attempting to tame the educational testing tool to serve political ambitions at the macro, meso, and micro levels may prove to be an ill-advised exercise that deepens social disadvantages rather than heals them.

However, while the values of the public good seem to be a shared experience of the two case countries, the political priorities seem to differ. Scotland is oriented towards traditional social democratic welfare state values, arguing its links and commonalities with the Scandinavian and Baltic states. The United States, on the other hand, has largely embraced the neoliberal economic and social paradigm, which has meant the continual erosion of structural state support for social well-being in favour of market mechanisms. Consequently, the United States is currently seeing the sharpest income disparities in almost 100 years, and the evidence indicates that its system of education, including high-stakes testing, cannot overcome such stark socioeconomic inequality. There is thus a stark contrast between Scotland's framing of what counts as a public good (more social support) versus that of the United States (less social support), and this difference will hopefully place the new Scottish testing scheme on a better trajectory than what has transpired in the United States.

When the SNP took office, there was a strong urge to do 'something different', and the Scottish government is undoubtedly well intentioned. For example, it has prioritized free higher education, free prescription charges, and free care for the elderly, while the rest of the United Kingdom has gone in a different direction. It has not reduced taxes for higher earners, while other UK countries have. Hitherto, Scotland's educational testing practices have provided national-level data without washback problems, although they appear to have been replaced by the new national testing scheme and it remains to be seen whether a balance can be found between the different considerations and goals of the nation as it aspires to independence.

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