

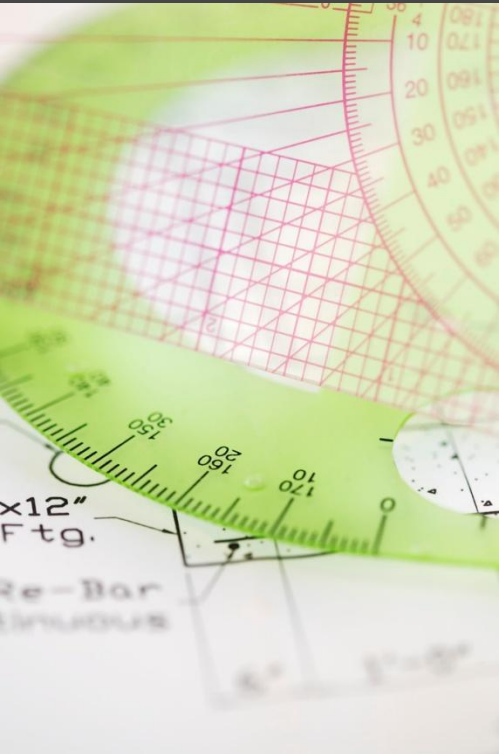
# MEASURING UP: THE MORAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

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‘Not everything that counts  
can be counted and not  
everything that can be  
counted counts.’

(Einstein, attributed by Scott & Light 2004: 135)

# the appeal of measurement



# the appeal of measurement in education

- ▣ citation indices
- ▣ league tables
- ▣ testing
- ▣ targets



numerical measures have been misused in the promotion of questionable goals

objective scientific measures of quality?

# measurement matters: global educational opportunity

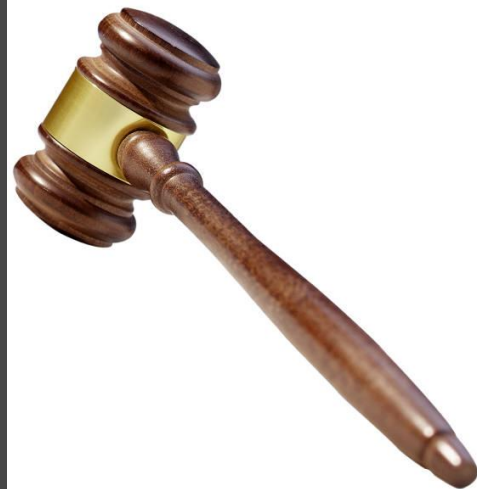
- ▣ what not to count
- ▣ how to count
- ▣ who counts
- ▣ accountable counting

# the language of measurement

▣ **numerical or normative**

▣ **literal or metaphorical**

# measurement as metaphor: justice



# metaphors of measurement in the language of justice

- ▣ dividing a cake
- ▣ equal distribution
- ▣ aggregating utility
- ▣ maximising one's share



# justice: what metric?

- ▣ justice is largely about distribution
- ▣ so numerical information is apt
- ▣ policy and decision-making in large-scale contexts depend on numerical indices
- ▣ but measurement can be done well or badly

# justice: what metric?

## debates about the appropriate metric of justice

- ▣ are about its normative foundations, as well as getting the statistical measures right
- ▣ have prompted some recasting of normative measures
- ▣ can create beneficial rather than corrupting feedback loops

# measurement creates positive feedback loops

- ▣ **classification practices create new possibilities for action, new ways for people to be**
- ▣ **the danger of 'positive feedback loops'** (Hacking 2002)

# poverty and educational opportunity

- ▣ levels of literacy and numeracy necessary to development require free, compulsory public education
- ▣ child labour needed in poor households can prevent school attendance
- ▣ malnutrition and untreated illness undermine learning
- ▣ education can increase incomes and promote participation

the global educational order does not measure up

# counting what counts

## GDP in decline as a measure of development

- ▣ measures economic productivity in terms of labour, goods, services bought and sold in the marketplace
- ▣ omits subsistence production and reproductive labour, ignoring gender as an indicator of poverty
- ▣ treats the family as the basic economic unit, a 'black box' (Okin)
- ▣ assumes growth in GDP measures progress

# what metric of justice?

debate in political philosophy, between rival theories of justice (and in development economics, a shift from GDP per capita to):

- basic social goods

OR

- capabilities

# what metric of justice?

- ▣ Rawls' account of just distribution explicitly includes an index of *primary social goods*: basic liberties, powers, positions, income, wealth, social basis of respect
- ▣ principles of distribution of primary social goods are developed by hypothetical contractors, behind a veil of ignorance
- ▣ each has a right to equal basic liberty; inequalities must benefit the least advantaged

# what metric?

- ▣ for **Sen** and **Nussbaum**, the 'currency' of justice is *capabilities*, rather than social goods

## Sen:

- needs are diverse and opportunities to convert goods into functionings vary
- a resources metric focuses on means rather than opportunities
- development is best understood as expanded freedoms, not economic growth



# applying metrics: the Human Development Index (HDI)

## CAPABILITY APPROACH

adopted as official measure by international agencies and NGOs

UNDP adopted Human Development Index (HDI) as capability metric, instead of GNP per capita

developed in collaboration with Amartya Sen



# the Human Development Index

- ▣ **quality of life comparisons rank countries over time**
- ▣ **development calculated as the average of three components:**
  - **life expectancy at birth (L)**
  - **education (E)**
  - **gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (P)****combined in a single index**
- ▣ **annual reports monitor progress towards improved well-being**
- ▣ **critique has prompted revised methods and indices**

# HDI: Australia & Mozambique

(UNESCO 2013)

|                          | Australia | Mozambique |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Rank on HDI              | 2         | 185        |
| Life expectancy at birth | 82.0      | 50.7       |
| GNI per capita           | 34 340    | 906        |
| Mean years schooling     | 12.0      | 1.2        |
| Expected years schooling | 19.6      | 9.2        |

# which metric: resources or capabilities?

- ▣ **how different are the resourcist and the capability approaches?**
- ▣ **both provide insights on educational inequality and its significance for justice**
- ▣ **means, opportunities and ends are all measures of justice**
- ▣ **in education, means are most amenable to numerical measurement, and ends most vulnerable to positive feedback loops**

# an objective metric of justice?

- ▣ apart from a basic informational ingredient, objective diagnosis of injustice and its reduction requires public reasoning (Sen 2010)
- ▣ as we cannot agree on aggregative distributive principles, a theory of justice needs to be supplemented with a fair deliberative process that makes reasons for choices publically available and subject to democratic approval (Daniels 2010)

# measuring up:

- 1 redistribution
- 2 giving
- 3 structural change

# measuring up: redistribution

- ▣ global inequality is huge and growing
- ▣ resourcists, capability theorists and utilitarians propose alleviation of global inequality through rich countries giving a percentage of their income to poorer countries
- ▣ eg Pogge: 2% shift in distribution of global household income could eradicate severe poverty of 48% of world population living below World Bank's \$2.50 a day poverty line (in 2005)

# measuring up: giving

can rich countries and their citizens measure up morally through charity?

- ▣ **charity: which organisations can be trusted?**
- ▣ **voluntary philanthropy: how to ensure we all contribute our share?**
- ▣ **individual donations are unlikely to address structural problems**



# measuring up: structural change

## rich countries

- enjoy a disproportionate share of global resources, spending power and profit
- use their financial strength to enforce easier access to global resources
- connive in keeping corrupt rulers in power while both take advantage of the 'resource curse', illicit financial outflows and tax evasion

**deep structural inequalities, with no commitment to an equal say in the global order for the world's poor, demand a changed, global public sphere**

# disaggregating indices & structures

- **dominant indices**
  - rank countries rather than individuals on global poverty
  - implying that underdevelopment is the responsibility of poor countries
- **instead**
  - each individual should be a unit of moral concern
  - responsibility for poverty should be shared worldwide
  - ‘There is a south in the north and a north in the south’ (UNESCO 2013:2)
  - disaggregated indices should be complemented by reconsidering the traditional distinction between international and intranational relations (Pogge, Beitz)

# the problem of aggregation

- ▣ pitfalls of basing decisions on additive aggregation, allowing numbers to be the deciding factor
- ▣ in some situations the numbers just don't count; in others they do
- ▣ handle this by supplementing our theory of justice with a fair deliberative process (Daniels 2010)

# who counts, what counts?

## counting the voices of the poor

Nussbaum (2004:135) support for listening to the voices of the poor, in the direction of democratizing measurement itself:

**‘We need to rely on the ingenuity of those who suffer from deprivation: they will help us find ways to describe, and even to quantify, their predicament’.**

# conclusions

- ▣ **inputs and outputs, goods and outcomes, are all important metrics in education, though the latter is more vulnerable to negative feedback loops**
- ▣ **the debate about metrics and indices points the way to**
  - **a normative shift in how we understand educational inequality – globally and ‘domestically’**
  - **a different world order**
  - **democratisation of measurement**

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