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**ARGUMENTATION IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY DISPUTES: COMPETING  
VISIONS OF QUALITY AND EQUITY**

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4 **ARGUMENTATION IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY DISPUTES: COMPETING**  
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6 **VISIONS OF QUALITY AND EQUITY**  
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9 What is a “good” school? Who is a “good” teacher? How can we ensure that all students  
10 have access to both? Current educational policy debates revolve around these questions. How we  
11 answer them matters for whether and how we can provide a quality education for all students. In  
12 this article, we describe how policymakers and educators engage these questions as they argue  
13 about test-based accountability. Test-based accountability currently dominates educational policy  
14 and practice in the US, Australia and other industrialized nations (Van Zanten, 2008; Porter, 1995;  
15 Lingard, 2011). It focuses entire school systems on a small set of quantitative performance  
16 indicators, most prominently standardized test scores in literacy, numeracy and sometimes science.  
17 State, national and international policymakers use these indicators to monitor schools, teachers  
18 and students and negatively sanction those who perform below standards.  
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30 Whether the press for accountability can improve the quality of education for all students  
31 depends, in part, on the quality of our debate about such policies. The metrics and data that test-  
32 based accountability makes available provide information that might support new ways to  
33 understand and enact educational quality and equity. As they simplify and reduce complex  
34 educational processes to numerical ratings and rankings, however, these metrics can also narrow  
35 debate and the kind of education we think is possible (Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge & Jacobsen,  
36 2013).  
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50 In this article, we hope to help educators and other stakeholders better understand the  
51 structure of current educational policy debates and engage more deliberatively in them. We first  
52 draw on pragmatic sociology to describe the argumentation frameworks that people employ in  
53 public disputes about evaluation policies. We then explore how various stakeholders use these  
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4 frameworks to argue about two prominent test-based accountability policies, the Organization for  
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7 Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student  
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9 Assessment (PISA) and enhanced teacher evaluation.

### 10 11 **Argumentation in Public Disputes**

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13  
14 Pragmatic sociology examines the arguments people employ to justify or critique  
15  
16 evaluative policies that raise questions about the quality of schools and teachers. As people engage  
17  
18 in disputes about these policies, they evoke different "orders of worth," or higher order principles,  
19  
20 to build arguments about the policies' legitimacy and fairness. We have found Boltanski and  
21  
22 Thevenot's (1999) work helpful in understanding these arguments. Boltanski and Thevenot (1999)  
23  
24 identify orders of worth commonly employed in public disputes about evaluative policies: civic,  
25  
26 market, industrial, domestic, inspired, and fame. Each emphasizes a distinct mode of worth, test  
27  
28 of worthiness, type of evidence, and valued human qualifications or qualities. Table 1 summarizes  
29  
30 the orders of worth.  
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35  
36 INSERT TABLE ONE HERE

37  
38 Orders of worth are argumentation kits (Jacquemain, 2008). They provide the grammars  
39  
40 for justifying and critiquing policies about school and teacher quality and how it should be  
41  
42 evaluated. We highlight the industrial and civic orders here as we have found them to dominate  
43  
44 current policy disputes about test-based accountability policies. The industrial order values  
45  
46 technical efficiency. Industrial arguments define school and teacher quality as technical  
47  
48 effectiveness. Tests of worth assess teachers' competence and reliability. Evidence considered  
49  
50 valid must be measurable and includes data and statistics that compare school and teacher  
51  
52 performance to standardized metrics. The civic order, in contrast, values the collective over  
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54 individual welfare and emphasizes law, rights, and issues of equity. Tests of worth assess equality  
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4 and solidarity. Quality schools and teachers therefore adhere to official rules and laws and seek to  
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6  
7 serve the collective good.

8  
9 In modern democracies, orders of worth co-exist. Individuals and groups who mobilize  
10  
11 multiple orders of worth garner legitimacy for their arguments and their actions (Jagd, 2011). The  
12  
13 extent to which policymakers and educators, in particular, can balance multiple orders of worth in  
14  
15 disputes about test-based accountability matters for their ability to withstand public scrutiny, not  
16  
17 only of their arguments about these policies, but also of their work and their authority over it  
18  
19 (Patriotta, Gond & Schultz, 2011). In the following, we describe arguments surrounding the PISA  
20  
21 and enhanced teacher evaluation, attending to the orders of worth various stakeholders mobilize  
22  
23 and how they grapple with questions of educational quality and equity.  
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### 29 *Justifying PISA*

30  
31 Promoters of the PISA primarily evoke industrial and market orders to justify international  
32  
33 assessments as valid tests of the worth of national educational systems. As we show, this argument  
34  
35 rests on correlating quality and equity and on re-articulating the latter into the logic of testing.  
36  
37 International large scale assessments can be traced back to the late 1950s and the attempt, by  
38  
39 academics, to measure educational outcomes across national systems. This history culminated in  
40  
41 the creation of TIMSS and PIRLS by the International Association for the Evaluation of  
42  
43 Educational Achievement, PISA by the OECD (first administered in 2000), and other lesser known  
44  
45 assessments. Due to its policy focus and the involvement of many powerful industrialized nations,  
46  
47 PISA is the most influential of these assessments. It tests 15 year olds on measures of reading,  
48  
49 numerical and scientific literacies and extends beyond the 34 OECD members. Sixty-five nations  
50  
51 participated in 2012, and more again in 2015. Every three years, newspapers around the world  
52  
53 carry headlines describing the comparative success or failure of national education systems on  
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4 PISA. The OECD assiduously choreographs this global media release of PISA results, enabling  
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6  
7 national media to create global league tables of national system performance. The extensive global  
8  
9 media coverage has produced ‘PISA shocks’ (e.g. Germany 2001, Japan, 2006) where PISA results  
10  
11 contradict national expectations and educational performance is framed as of national importance  
12  
13  
14 (Martens & Niemans, 2013).

15  
16 The graph in Figure 1 is one of the most common visualizations of PISA data. Quality,  
17  
18 represented on the Y axis, is the average performance on that portion of the focal test of each  
19  
20 round, e.g., reading, math or science. Equity, represented on the X axis, is the extent to which  
21  
22 social background correlates with this performance (e.g. weaker correlation equals greater equity).  
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26 INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

27  
28  
29 As the graph suggests, the OECD (2007) argues that quality and equity are complementary.  
30  
31 However in its choreographed release of PISA performance data, the OECD emphasizes league  
32  
33 tables of national performance on the quality measure. These tables get an enormous amount of  
34  
35 media coverage, focusing debate on the achievement measure. The OECD does release a very  
36  
37 extensive report on equity and PISA. It does so, however, quite some time after the initial release  
38  
39 of PISA ‘results’ and with much less fanfare. The equity data do not get the extensive media  
40  
41 coverage that the quality indicators garner. In its education work, the OECD also prioritizes  
42  
43 policies that address organizational factors while eschewing consideration of structural  
44  
45 inequalities.  
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49  
50 While PISA allows for considerations of equity, it thus rearticulates them within the  
51  
52 industrial and market orders of worth. Equity measures fundamentally draw on the civic order with  
53  
54 its emphases on rights, equality and the collective good. Yet, the OECD’s emphasis on  
55  
56 achievement measures in its reports and release of PISA data gives preeminence to the industrial  
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4 order with its focus on standardized measures of performance and productivity. As an  
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6  
7 intergovernmental organization concerned with economic policy, the OECD also argues that  
8  
9 equity matters because of its benefits to national and global economies, illustrated by its 2012  
10  
11 report, “Investing in Equity in Education Pays Off” (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014). The worth  
12  
13 of national educational systems is determined by how well their students’ performance on the  
14  
15 relevant standardized achievement tests ranks against the performance of other nations’ students.  
16  
17  
18 This performance matters as it contributes to a nation’s human capital. Broader and more fulsome  
19  
20 constructions of equity as equal opportunity and social equality in respect to schooling policy and  
21  
22 practices are elided or recast according to their relation to productivity and efficiency.  
23  
24

25  
26 The re-articulation of equity into the logic of testing exemplifies how data furnish the basis  
27  
28 for argumentation in policy development, serving a rhetorical function and demanding debate  
29  
30 about whether such data actually do constitute evidence. OECD reports mobilize PISA data  
31  
32 rhetorically to argue for increasing equity and democracy, while simultaneously framing the data  
33  
34 within the industrial and market orders. The focus on improving achievement scores will, OECD  
35  
36 reports suggest, increase the quality and quantity of “human capital” within a given nation and  
37  
38 thus enhance “economic productivity” and “international competitiveness” (Lingard, Sellar, &  
39  
40 Savage, 2014). Equity and social inclusion are valued as contributing factors in enhancing  
41  
42 economic productivity and efficiency.  
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47  
48 If we wish to argue with or against PISA data for equity and the democratic purposes of  
49  
50 schooling, we must attend to the relationships between data, fact, evidence and values. Here we  
51  
52 follow Rosenberg’s (2013) useful distinction: ‘facts are ontological, evidence is epistemological,  
53  
54 data are rhetorical.... When a fact is proven false, it ceases to be a fact. False data is data  
55  
56 nonetheless’ (p.18). OECD arguments for increasing equity as a correlate to increased productivity  
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4 and efficiency mobilizes testing as fact and evidence in relation to market and industrial values.  
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6  
7 Mobilizing counter-arguments that PISA data can also constrict our understanding of the purposes  
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9 and outcomes of schooling to numbers will require evoking other orders of worth and reassessing  
10  
11 the ontological and epistemological status of data according to their justificatory frameworks. For  
12  
13 example, test data may provide a useful basis for factual claims about the relationship between test  
14  
15 performance and productivity, but their status as facts may be challenged by questions of testing  
16  
17 bias that evoke the civic order. Similarly, arguments that challenge the use of PISA data as  
18  
19 evidence that narrowly focuses educational policy on academic literacies could be launched from  
20  
21 the civic, domestic or inspired orders which value education for citizenship, social cohesion, and  
22  
23 creativity, respectively.  
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### 27 28 *Arguing about Enhanced Teacher Evaluation*

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30 In this section, we examine the debate surrounding enhanced teacher evaluation policies in  
31  
32 the US, focusing on Washington DC Public School's (DCPS) IMPACT policy. If PISA represents  
33  
34 the global reach of test-based accountability, IMPACT represents its reach into schools' core –  
35  
36 the global reach of test-based accountability, IMPACT represents its reach into schools' core –  
37  
38 teaching and learning. Adopted in 2009, IMPACT quickly became a national model. IMPACT is  
39  
40 a system of metrics, classifications, and compensation structures. It categorizes teachers into  
41  
42 different groups (1 through 4), based on availability of student testing data, subjects taught, and  
43  
44 specialization areas. Teachers in each group are rated according to their students' achievement  
45  
46 and their instructional expertise, community contributions and professionalism. Most general  
47  
48 education classroom teachers fall into Groups 1 and 2. In 2014-2015, ratings for teachers in Group  
49  
50 1 comprised 35% value-added measures of individual teachers' contributions to their students'  
51  
52 scores on standardized mathematics and reading achievement tests (IVA) and 15% teacher-  
53  
54 assessed student achievement data (TAS); 40% instructional expertise measured by teachers'  
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4 average scores on multiple classroom observations conducted by school principals and district-  
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6  
7 appointed evaluators using the district’s Teaching and Learning Framework rubric (TLF); 10%  
8  
9 Commitment to the School Community (CSC). Group 1 constitutes roughly 15% of DCPS  
10  
11 teachers. In 2014-2015, Group 2 teachers’ ratings comprised: 75% TLF; 15% TAS, and 10% CSC.  
12  
13  
14 Group 2 includes approximately 65% of DCPS teachers. For all groups, Core Professionalism is  
15  
16 determined by attendance, adherence to policies and procedures, and respectfulness. The district  
17  
18 ties teachers’ composite ratings to its performance-pay compensation system, IMPACT<sub>plus</sub>, and  
19  
20 career ladder, LIFT. Teachers rated “ineffective” can be fired. Those rated “highly effective” can  
21  
22  
23 earn significant annual bonuses and salary increases, depending on their LIFT classification  
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25  
26 (DCPS, 2014a, 2014b).

27  
28  
29       Though monetary rewards evoke the market order, IMPACT rests on industrial principles,  
30  
31 methods and evidentiary practices. It determines teachers’ worth based on their productivity and  
32  
33 competence; teachers who produce the highest gains in test scores and whose practice most closely  
34  
35 aligns with district standards receive the highest ratings. IMPACT uses an array of statistical  
36  
37 models and standardized tools and processes to collect evidence of teachers’ effectiveness. The  
38  
39 differentiation of teachers into IMPACT performance categories and LIFT expertise categories  
40  
41 further exemplifies the industrial order’s use of elaborate classification schemes to rank teachers’  
42  
43 worth against their peers’.

#### 44 45 46 47 *Justifying IMPACT*

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49  
50       Not surprisingly, proponents overwhelmingly employ industrial arguments that marshal  
51  
52 various statistics to defend IMPACT’s implementation and effectiveness. District officials justify  
53  
54 IMPACT by repeatedly citing the discrepancy between low student achievement scores (12% of  
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56  
57  
58 8<sup>th</sup> graders at proficiency on national test) and high teacher evaluation ratings (98% teachers rated

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4 satisfactory) documented prior to IMPACT (e.g., DCPS, 2014; Education Trust & TNTP, 2014).  
5  
6  
7 DPCS officials and other proponents also frequently cite statistics from research on IMPACT’s  
8  
9 effects on teacher attrition and performance (e.g., DCPS, 2013; TNTP, 2013). The widespread  
10  
11 circulation of these numbers reflects and strengthens their rhetorical force. The district’s reports  
12  
13 of teacher firings at the end of the policy’s first year are illustrative. In 2010, the district reported  
14  
15 that it fired 241 “ineffective” teachers (Turque, 2010a). Though it was later revealed that only 75  
16  
17 of these teachers had been dismissed because of “ineffective” IMPACT ratings (Turque, 2010b),  
18  
19 the original number had garnered considerable press and been repeated in feature stories, blogs  
20  
21 and editorials in local and national news media and electronic forums (e.g., Holland, 2010; DeVore  
22  
23 & Cheers, 2010). The corrected number received little media coverage. While the number “241”  
24  
25 had lost its ontological status as “fact,” it retained its historical status as “data” in the public debate,  
26  
27 highlighting the rhetorical force of industrial arguments in disputes about test-based  
28  
29 accountability.  
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35  
36 Importantly, proponents also mobilize civic arguments to justify IMPACT. Then-  
37  
38 Chancellor Rhee, for example, heralded the 241 teacher firings as fulfilling the “rights” of DCPS  
39  
40 children, “Every child in a District of Columbia public school has a right to a highly effective  
41  
42 teacher... Today...we take another step toward making that commitment a reality” (Turque,  
43  
44 2010a). In the 2009-2010 IMPACT guidebooks, Rhee similarly wrote:  
45  
46

47  
48 ...we are motivated by a commitment to ensure that the gap in achievement that separates  
49  
50 District of Columbia children by race, class, language of origin, and special education  
51  
52 status is eliminated once and for all. Research and experience tell us that the most  
53  
54 important factor impacting our ability to close the achievement gap and increase student  
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56 learning is *you*: the adults who serve our students each and every day. Recognizing the  
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4 unparalleled importance of ensuring that talented and committed individuals are serving  
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7 our students, we have developed IMPACT, the new DCPS effectiveness assessment system  
8  
9 for school-based personnel (DCPS, 2009, p. 3).

10  
11 The statement positions IMPACT as the primary means for achieving equality as defined by the  
12  
13 elimination of various achievement gaps. While the Chancellor acknowledges teachers' potential  
14  
15 contribution to closing these gaps, a collective goal, she emphasizes the "effectiveness" of  
16  
17 "individual" teachers, not their collective action. Similar to PISA arguments, pro-IMPACT  
18  
19 arguments rearticulate civic values of equity and collective action as individual teachers'  
20  
21 efficiency measured by student achievement tests.  
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### 26 *Critiquing IMPACT*

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29 Critics use different orders of worth to critique IMPACT. Researchers typically employ  
30  
31 industrial arguments to question the district's calculation of value-added measures and mechanistic  
32  
33 implementation of classroom observations (e.g. Pallas, 2010; Curtis, 2011). These critiques aim  
34  
35 to improve the policy not challenge its conception of quality. Teachers critique IMPACT  
36  
37 implementation with civic arguments that question its fairness. In blogs and editorials in DC  
38  
39 newspapers, teachers denounce the district's differential use of IVA and TLF scores among DCPS  
40  
41 teachers as "inequitable expectations" (e.g., Perschke, 2011). They also highlight the disparity  
42  
43 between the high percentage (40%) of teachers rated "highly effective" in the district's few low-  
44  
45 poverty schools versus the low percentage (15%) of teachers rated "highly effective" in high-  
46  
47 poverty schools (e.g., Cintron, 2014). Importantly, though the vast majority of DCPS students live  
48  
49 in poverty, teachers' civic critiques do not extend to broader questions of socio-economic  
50  
51 inequality. Their arguments narrowly define equity as fairness for teachers.  
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4 Teachers also critique IMPACT using domestic arguments. These arguments often appear  
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7 in “open letters” to the DCPS Chancellor written by teachers and circulated by bloggers and  
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9 newspaper columnists (e.g., Perschke, 2011; Fuchs, 2011). In these letters, teachers contest the  
10  
11 TLF ratings assigned by district-appointed Master Educators (MEs). Teachers denounce the ME  
12  
13 ratings, based on one hour of observations per year per teacher, as incapable of capturing the  
14  
15 complexity of their work and their relationships with students. Teachers enumerate the extra hours  
16  
17 they devote to teaching and school-wide duties and document their pastoral care of students as  
18  
19 evidence of their worth. As one teacher argues, the ME ratings fail to capture the value of her  
20  
21 work as “a mother, best friend, sister, guidance counselor, mentor and teacher” to her students  
22  
23 (abcde, 2011). Teachers’ domestic critiques thus counter IMPACT’s definition of quality teaching  
24  
25 as “effectiveness” by defining quality teaching as familial-caring whose quality is evidenced not  
26  
27 by numerical ratings derived from systematic observations, but by personal anecdotes.  
28

### 29 30 31 **Implications and Conclusion**

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34 As our research suggests, current debate about test-based accountability is dominated by  
35  
36 industrial arguments. This partly reflects the rhetorical force of the measures and metrics of test-  
37  
38 based accountability. These measures radically simplify and reduce complex processes of  
39  
40 teaching, learning and schooling into numbers, ratings and leagues tables that can circulate across  
41  
42 local, national and international contexts and media. Even when shown to be false, these numbers  
43  
44 profoundly shape educational policy debate, defining both quality and equity as efficiency and  
45  
46 productivity as evidenced primarily by standardized test scores. Concerns about broader structures  
47  
48 and impacts of poverty and social exclusion on students’ lives, life chances, and educational  
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50 attainment go largely unmentioned.  
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4 If debate about test-based accountability is to support a more expansive vision of equitable  
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6 education, critiques of these policies must evoke principles of the common good that extend  
7  
8 beyond teaching and schooling and that connect to the well-being and rights of students. Such  
9  
10 critiques will require arguing with numbers. Numbers and statistics make visible inequities in  
11  
12 educational opportunities and in the social and economic conditions that profoundly interact with  
13  
14 them. As Piketty in his analysis of growing levels of inequality suggests, ‘Refusing to deal with  
15  
16 numbers rarely serves the interests of the least well-off’ (2014, p. 577). Arguments that seek to  
17  
18 counter the narrow vision of test-based accountability need to rearticulate these numbers through  
19  
20 civic arguments which emphasize collective responsibility for educational equity that extends  
21  
22 beyond teachers and schools to include policymakers and those stakeholders with access to  
23  
24 resources and power. While educators must counter policies that are unfair to them, they must  
25  
26 also mobilize broader principles of the common good to garner legitimacy for their arguments and  
27  
28 their work.

29  
30 Arguing for a more expansive vision of educational quality and equity will also require  
31  
32 finding new genres and media outlets. Proponents of test-based accountability use metrics and  
33  
34 numbers to justify and legitimate these policies. Critics of test-based accountability more often  
35  
36 rely on personal anecdotes of their work, relationships with students, and dispositions. Such  
37  
38 evidence cannot be easily verified or circulated beyond local classroom and school contexts.  
39  
40 Efforts to oppose or improve test-based accountability will depend partly, however, on marshalling  
41  
42 this evidence in ways that enable both. This includes developing relationships with journalists,  
43  
44 reporters and activists who can circulate this evidence. Notably, local media and bloggers in  
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46 Washington D.C. did take up teachers’ “open letters to the Chancellor,” illustrating the rhetorical  
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48 potential of the evidence and these relationships.  
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4 At a moment in which more narrowly defined tests of school, teacher and students' worth  
5  
6 proliferate, educators and proponents of democratic education must find ways to rearticulate ideas  
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8 of effectiveness and achievement as access for all students to competent *and* caring teachers and  
9  
10 to learning opportunities that engage students' academic, moral, and civic capacities and  
11  
12 imaginations. In the end, we argue for creating and valuing "heterarchies of worth" (Lamont,  
13  
14 2012), or the co-existence of multiple conceptions of good teaching and good schools and of  
15  
16 multiple ways to assess them. Establishing such heterarchies will require creating new ways of  
17  
18 documenting and arguing for such diverse conceptions. It will also mean that public disputes  
19  
20 about educational policy will never be fully resolved as each order of worth contains conflicting  
21  
22 justificatory principles. Such disputes when engaged in by the widest range of stakeholders are,  
23  
24 however, essential to democratic society and to achieving "good" and "just" schools.  
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#### 49 50 51 52 53 54 **Additional Resources for Classroom Use**

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7 states under the No Child Left Behind law. The authors identify several ways in which current  
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10 school report cards distort information on schools. They provide helpful suggestions on how  
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12 school leaders and policymakers can select, present and communicate school data to avoid these  
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14 distortions and promote public discussion and engagement in school policy.  
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26 This article tells the story of how 1920s Milwaukee public school teachers mobilized arguments  
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28 against a business-model school reform aimed at increasing efficiency by radically restructuring  
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30 schools along a “platoon” model. The article provides an interesting historical account of how  
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32 teachers engaged the press and local civic organizations to promote an alternative vision of  
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34 quality education that challenged and ultimately led to the defeat of the proposed reform. The  
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36 article describe how these efforts can help contemporary teachers strengthen their voice in  
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38 current educational policy debates.  
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### 47 **Rethinking Schools**

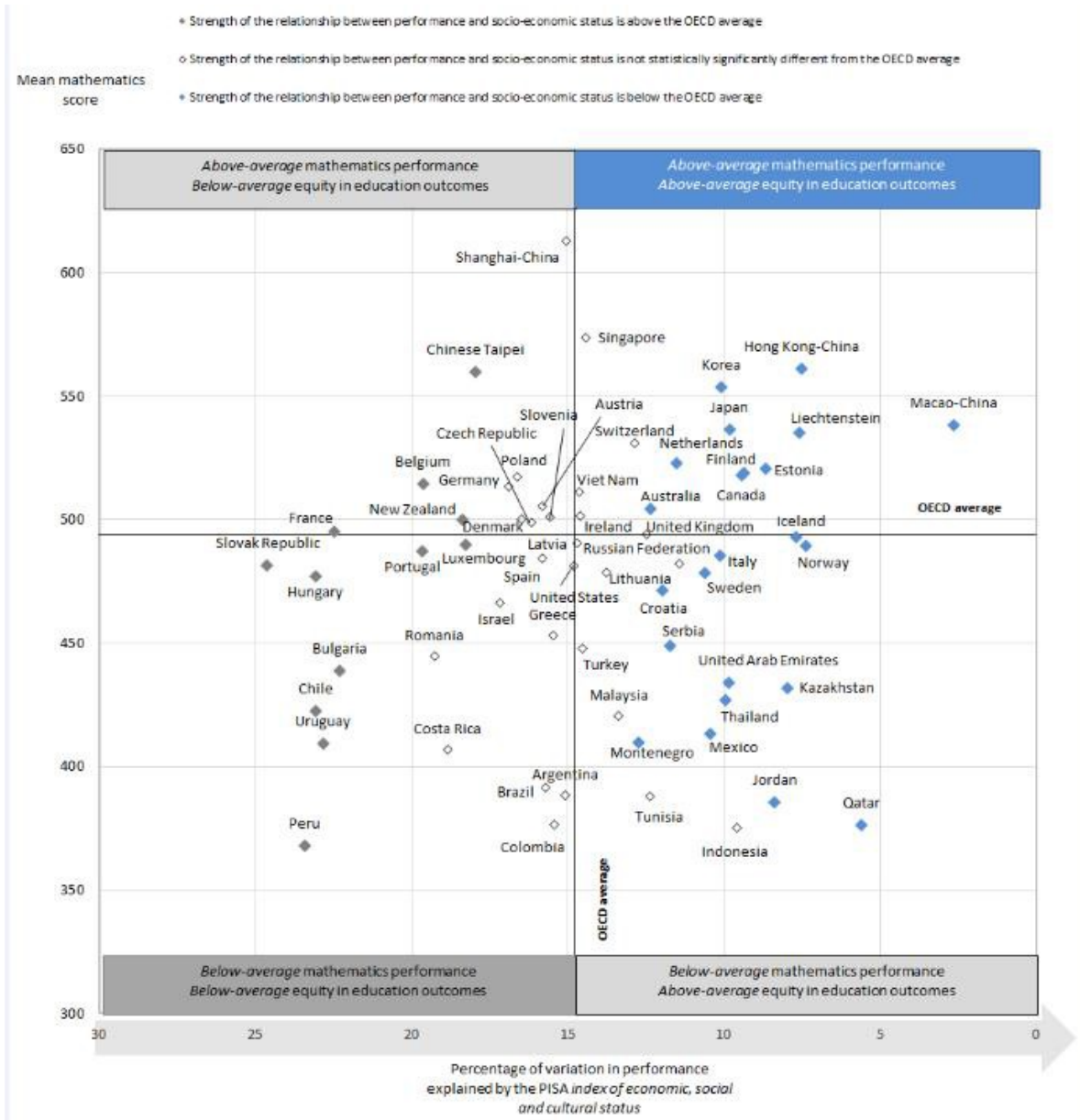
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50 [www.rethinkingschool.org](http://www.rethinkingschool.org)  
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53 This website features journals and books written by teachers, parents and students that promote  
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55 social justice teaching and learning. The publications provide both critical analyses of current  
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4 school reform movements, including test-based accountability, and examples of how teachers  
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7 can mobilize support for an alternative vision of high-quality education for all students.  
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Figure 1. PISA Student Performance and Equity Table



Source: OECD, 2013, p. 27

Table 1. Orders of Worth

Order	Industrial	Civic	Market	Domestic	Inspired	Fame
Basis of evaluation or worth	Technical efficiency	Collective welfare	Price	Esteem, reputation	Grace, creativeness, nonconformity	Renown, fame
Test	Competence, reliability	Equality, solidarity	Market Competitiveness	Trustworthiness	Passion	Popularity
Evidence	Measurable statistics, standards	Formal rules, official regulations, laws, rights	Money	Anecdote, case, example, personally warranted	Emotional involvement & expression	Semiotic
Valued Human Qualification	Professional competency, expertise	Equality	Desire, purchasing power	Authority, tradition	Creativity, ingenuity	Celebrity

Source: Boltanski & Thevenot, 1999b; Patriotta, et al, 2011