

Editors' Note: Special Section on Teacher Evaluation

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Value-added models suddenly stand at the center of the education policy and research landscape. 2009 saw the publication of *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, the inauguration of President Obama, and the launch of the Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project. Since then, states and districts across the United States, and school systems across the world, have moved to reform their teacher evaluation systems, often incorporating value-added models as a substantial part of their new systems. The rapid pace of change has been accompanied by such an overwhelming amount of debate and research on value-added models that you may wonder, as I have, "what is left to say?" Critics may also question whether all this focus on value-added models might be pulling our attention away from more important issues in education policy and research.

Yet, the currently central position of value-added models is hard to deny, so it makes sense to dive into that center and begin to search, and re-search, whether we are interested in unseating these models from their position of dominance, in using them to improve education, or simply in understanding them. The articles in this teacher evaluation special section of *InterActions* take that dive and look out in all directions. Glory Tobiason peers underneath the words being used to help us understand how language choice shapes the value-added debate. Jessica Holloway-Libell and Clarin Collins look back at how value-added models got to this place of prominence. Janelle Lawson's piece scrutinizes the models from inside and wonders how they might function for measuring the effectiveness of special education teachers. Daniel Dockterman and I gaze forward to how the use of these models might break down in the face of their limitations, or how their strengths might be incorporated into a different type of teacher evaluation system.

Dive in anywhere, and take a look with us. And look for one other thing: there is a debate going on under the surface. Throughout their article, Jessica and Clarin weave an incisive critique of value-added modeling and accountability policies, arguing that our current focus distracts us from the deeper causes of inequality and failure. Danny and I pull in close to examine the various mathematical models that go by the name of value-added, and in the process lay out the competing assumptions underlying these models. Janelle points out how the unique roles of special education teachers pose

distinctive challenges to the evaluation community. And, Glory's piece will help you uncover the unstated perspectives of every interlocutor in the debate. In fact, it might just leave you with a new lens to apply when you turn to study other controversial issues. There is a lot more in each of these articles, and my short introduction cannot do justice to their complexity. Surprises and new thoughts await you, dear reader. Dive in!