

When The Test Becomes The Goal

Education

What happens to a measure once decisions are attached to it.

Campbell's law and Goodhart's law both state a version of the same effect: the more a quantitative indicator is used for decisions, the more it is distorted and the less it measures.

- Score gains often do not transfer to other tests.
- Narrowing follows: untested content is dropped.
- Effort concentrates on pupils near a boundary.
- Coaching on format inflates scores without learning.
- The measure degrades exactly as it becomes important.
- This is a systems effect, not individual dishonesty.

LOOK FOR IT

Gains on a high-stakes state test frequently fail to appear on a low-stakes national sample of the same subject and cohort.

Educational reference. Contested in degree, not in direction. Some teaching to a good test is teaching; the question is what the test