

Campbell's law

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Campbell's law is an adage developed by Donald T. Campbell:^[1]

"The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."

The social science principle of Campbell's law is sometimes used to point out the negative consequences of high-stakes testing in U.S. classrooms.

What Campbell also states in this principle is that "achievement tests may well be valuable indicators of general school achievement **under conditions of normal teaching aimed at general competence**. But when test scores become the goal of the teaching process, they both lose their value as indicators of educational status and distort the educational process in undesirable ways. (Similar biases of course surround the use of objective tests in courses or as entrance examinations.)"^[1]

Campbell's law was published in 1976 by Donald T. Campbell, an experimental social science researcher and the author of many works on research methodology. Closely related ideas are known under different names, e.g. Goodhart's law, and the Lucas critique.

Technically schooled people often use the term "Heisenberg" as a shorthand to represent concepts such as Campbell's law. This is taken from the concept of Heisenberg uncertainty in quantum physics where the act of measuring something changes what is being measured.

Notes

- ^{a b} Campbell, Donald T., Assessing the Impact of Planned Social Change (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED303512.pdf>) The Public Affairs Center, Dartmouth College, Hanover New Hampshire, USA. December, 1976.

References

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