

Why Are We Doing This to Our Children?

The Consequences of High-Stakes Testing

A Working Draft

The following document, drafted by a group of contributing Waldorf educators, provided the basis for an article entitled “Assessment without High-Stakes Testing: Protecting Childhood and the Purpose of School,” to be published in the autumn of 2008. This document is being made available as on-line background material rather than as a published paper.

This paper explores the U.S. government legislation “No Child Left Behind” (a.k.a. NCLB) and suggests alternatives to high-stakes testing as a means of assessing the developmental progress of students at pre-school, elementary school, and high school levels. While NCLB was drafted with a noble intent—to provide every child with quality education—the requirement of high-stakes testing has led to heightened stress in children, has compromised the integrity of teachers, and has created an intellectual caste system in which end results replace true education. Rather than being renewed, this legislation needs to be replaced by healthier and developmentally more appropriate forms of assessment in which teachers play a more central and creative role.

It is becoming apparent in many arenas that NCLB is having undesirable and unhealthy side effects by creating stress-filled testing utilized as early as pre-school and kindergarten, to the extent that we are placing the developmental stage of life known as “childhood” at peril. Waldorf education stands behind the unfolding of a healthy childhood involving free play, social warmth, and healthy rhythms—the unfolding of which is transformed into cognitive and moral capacities that become sources of strength in adult life. As Waldorf teachers speaking on behalf of all children the contributors to this document challenge the value of high-stakes testing and offer alternative methods of assessment as well as new thinking on the setting for standards. On behalf of all children facing high-stakes testing, we as teachers from the Waldorf school movement around the world would like to join the discussion and express our objections.

First, consider a historical exchange about educational reform and a curious exchange about the nature of testing.

The 21st Century is the age of accountability. The stated intentions in NCLB are important in that our educational centers need attention so that no child is neglected and minorities are honored. However, the High-Stakes Norm Reference Test must be reconsidered. This test accomplishes ranking and scaling; it is not a true educational testing or accounting. It is social engineering, the result of a “fear based” mentality. High-stakes testing directs and limits human potential. A million dollar industry is now based on this activity.

The U.S. government has received a letter from one hundred and ten teachers, psychologists, children's authors, and other experts who are calling on the legislature to act to prevent the death of childhood.

They write:

We are deeply concerned at the escalating incidence of childhood depression and children's behavioral and developmental conditions. They still need what developing human beings have always needed, including real food (as opposed to processed 'junk'), real play (as opposed to sedentary, screen-based entertainment), first-hand experience of the world they live in and regular interaction with the real-life significant adults in their lives. They also need time. In a fast-moving, hyper-competitive culture, today's children are expected to cope with an ever-earlier start to formal schoolwork and an overly academic test-driven primary curriculum. They are pushed by market forces to act and dress like mini-adults and exposed via the electronic media to material which would have been considered unsuitable for children even in the very recent past."¹

Others have also sounded the clarion call:

This federal law, now in its sixth year, puts American public school students in serious jeopardy. Extensive reviews of empirical and theoretical work, along with conversations with hundreds of educators across the country, have convinced us that if Congress does not act in this session to fundamentally transform the law's accountability provision, young people and their educators will suffer serious and long-term consequences.²

Can we teach children the values of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of law and rules, courtesy and dignity, and still devote enough class time to preparing them for the required standardized tests in reading, math and science?

The propensity of the government to control the minds of citizens has never been as prominent as it is today. There is a strong attempt to control the bankrupt public educational system by NCLB. The role of "guardian" of the right to education has been mixed up with the role of "being accountable" for the quality of education. Education has become hostage to a centralization and bureaucratization with regard to the management of schools, their curricula, and the profession of teaching. Particular "end result" ideologies and interests are prevalent. Parents are being pushed away from the education of their children. The very foundation of freedom which the United States stands upon is threatened. Educators should be determining policy, not the government.

The Constitutional Delegation consisted of a group of men with a variety of different educational backgrounds. This led to rigorous debates and allowed for the explorations of different point of view. Their diversity led to creative and imaginative approaches to problems at hand. Making education homogeneous by government obligated testing creates the very problem recognized by the 911 Commission when they stated that "we

¹ *The Daily Telegraph*, London, England, December 9, 2006.

² David Berliner & Sharon Nichols March 12, 2007 "High Stakes Testing is Putting the Nation at Risk."

in America lacked a ‘sense of imagination,’ which left us vulnerable to terrorists who thought unconventionally.”

America today is the place on earth where the very real threat of global warming is dealt with through a studied disregard of facts; the cultivation of denial of responsibility of wrongdoing is rampant;³ and the rest of the globe is being forced to pander to America’s basest instincts of greed and fear. Our America represents a stunning lack of morality and moral leadership. The fact that many Americans base their voting patterns on such a flawed or simplistic understanding of moral values has profound implications for the United States and the rest of the world. In terms of foreign policy, the past several years provide ample evidence that a mind-set of dualities—“for us or against us,” good or evil—that exempts more nuanced and sensitive approaches, undermines peace and security both at home and abroad. Domestically, it highlights a failure of our educational system—of, among other things, our ability to distinguish between the need for cultivating, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, a “spiritual democracy,” and the need for maintaining a clear separation between church and state. At a conference exploring “Education for the Twenty-First Century” at Harvard University last year, the importance of the inclusion of moral and ethical growth was emphasized and one speaker challenged Waldorf educators to make transparent our thoughts because our results seemed so effective.

Former Harvard professor Lawrence Kohlberg stated: the foundation of morality is sense of “justice” as empathic awareness or “empathy.” In the cognitive-developmental view, morality is a natural product of a universal tendency toward empathy or role taking, toward putting oneself in the shoes of other conscious beings. It is also a product of a universal human concern for justice, for reciprocity or equality in the relation of one person to another. Morality cannot be taught or forced upon individuals—it must be awakened within them. How to do this is the question we must confront when we consider education for the 21st Century.

Origins of Public Education in the United States

When Thomas Jefferson brought about the reality of public education he did so because he believed that an educated citizen would never allow his country to fall under tyranny. Jefferson said: “Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.”

He also warned of interference by the government:

“Education not being a branch of municipal government, but, like the other arts and sciences, an accident [i.e., attribute] only, I did not place it with election as a fundamental member in the structure of government.”

--Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, 1816. ME 15:45

“Education is here placed among the articles of public care, not that it would be proposed to take its ordinary branches out of the hands of private enterprise, which

³ See David Brooks’ excellent and humorous article “The Rank-Link Imbalance” published in the *New York Times*, March 14, 2008.

manages so much better all the concerns to which it is equal; but a public institution can alone supply those sciences which, though rarely called for, are yet necessary to complete the circle, all the parts of which contribute to the improvement of the country, and some of them to its preservation.”

--Thomas Jefferson: 6th Annual Message, 1806. ME 3:423

“This schools will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.”

--Thomas Jefferson to William Roscoe, 1820. ME 15:303

Freedom

The United States is the only place in the world where we can have truly “free” education. This has been, up to this point in time, protected by our Constitution. Individuals filled with imagination who were educated in diverse disciplines and open to each other’s point of view wrote this remarkable document. Our forefathers’ efforts in creating free education also allowed for a “home schooled” student to gain acceptance to an Ivy League college and for a fifty-year-old woman to return to the university to obtain her degree. Learning had no ceiling and opportunities were available to those who worked hard, regardless of age, sex, or race.

The guarantee of freedom is called into question whenever government-enforced testing is invoked. When this happens schools are required to alter curriculum, teachers are hobbled in their creativity, and a sclerotic form of stress paralyzes children who are forced to define themselves through multiple-choice questions. The federal government’s attempts to set curricula is akin to asking a washroom attendant to repair one’s high fidelity stereo system. This is something that might prove risky. Professional educators should be leading educational reform, not the government, which usually harbors political motives.

What is the Real Problem in our Current Educational Dilemma?

The real problems are:

- the support of large co-operative schools where most children become invisible
- a departure from individualized education
- support of computers and technology in early education instead of teachers
- lowering of moral and ethical standards
- apathy, passivity, detachment
- adverse effects of media (television, movies, rap music, etc.)
- recreational drugs
- breakdown of the nuclear family

Large cooperative schools were constructed in the 1960s with the intention of providing students with first-rate laboratories, gymnasiums, and learning facilities. This has proved to be a grievous error. Individualization, a cornerstone to good education, became marginalized. Bigger and better, the American creed was doomed to failure. In

these large school faculties teachers became overburdened with massive student loads. It was inevitable that only the top and the bottom of the student academic strata would receive attention. The majority in their anonymity were on their own.

Assessment and standardization will not work in the consolidated educational factories that we have created for today's students under the guise of giving them better gyms and science facilities. The big schools are proving to be an educational failure that needs to be dismantled. It has been determined that only the brightest and the most needy receive attention where the vast majority are left to their own devices to succeed or fail. Students of the twenty-first century require relationship-based education in which an adult is invested in each child, and children feel that one or more adults are invested in them.

Alfred North Whitehead's critical remarks on external standardized testing point out that such testing undermines the freedom of the teachers to adapt to the complex, context specific circumstances in order to obtain the maximum of a creative learning process in the students. Instead, external standardized testing leads to 'teaching to the test'. As a consequence the attitude of creative, adventurous exploration is undermined and substituted by simple pattern recognition, narrow visions, and even boredom; the final outcome is what Whitehead had termed inert knowledge. All of this has led to a breakdown of the educational system and now we are pouring inflammable fluids on the burning problem in the form of high-stakes testing.

What does this mean for the children? Stress . . . the testing has dropped right down into the kindergarten. This is causing social problems as the children become compartmentalized as a result of test scores. Education ends and "end result" concerns subtly turn teachers into coaches mechanically geared to achieving success.

Teachers receive merit pay increases if the students test well. Schools lose government money if test scores do not rise incrementally. All of this encourages corruption, cheating, and a further astigmatism against the noble profession of educators.

Stress on Children Caused by NCLB

"By restricting the education of our young people and substituting for it training for performing well on high-stakes examinations, we are turning America into a nation of test-takers, abandoning our heritage as a nation of thinkers, dreamers, and doers."⁴

Parents are observing their children and expressing their frustration, but it seems that no one is listening. Susan Ohanian writes:

When my 11th grade child is sick to her stomach nervous about taking the ACT test, that's one thing. When a 3rd grader is throwing up the morning CSAP testing begins that is quite another. There is a problem here. When school days are lengthened and recess and lunch times are decreased (in some states they have done away with recess altogether) in order to allow more time toward improving CSAP test scores, there is a problem.

⁴ David Berliner & Sharon Nichols March 12, 2007 "High Stakes Testing is Putting the Nation at Risk."

The funny thing is, with all this stress placed on our schools and children to do well on CSAPs, our state is not making the grade. We haven't met the mandate of No Child Left Behind for Annual Yearly Progress since NCLB went into effect. Not many states have. This alone should tell us all something about the validity of grading our schools based solely on one test. Furthermore, the people who grade our children's CSAP tests don't have to be educators or even have any kind of degree.

Something has to change but it will not happen until parents like me, like you, protest what is happening to our schools. Until we come out and make it clear that we have had it with the kind of stress placed on CSAP testing, these problems will continue.⁵

Another comment adds weight to the one above.

NCLB puts needless stress and pressure on students with high stakes testing. High stakes testing gives them unneeded anxiety, which hinders their performance. Education needs to be individualized to student's specific interests, especially in high school. Learning needs to be fun and enjoyable, and NCLB takes the fun out of it. Learning needs to be about enjoyment, skills, goals, and personal progress. Regrettably, NCLB makes it strictly about standards and testing.⁶

Doctors and psychiatrists are also becoming involved:

The Missouri Association of School Psychologists is in concert with the National Association of School Psychologists in regard to our concerns of recent federal legislation's impact on Missouri's school children and school districts. The following is taken from NASP's position paper on large-scale assessment.

Tests are considered high stakes for students when the results are used to make critical decisions about the individual's access to educational opportunity, grade-level retention or promotion, graduation from high school, or receipt of a standard or alternative diploma. These kinds of decisions all have immediate as well as long-range impact on the student. In some states, high stakes also are attached to test results for school systems – teachers, administrators, and schools are rewarded or sanctioned based on student performance.

The National Association of School Psychologists recognizes that, when high stakes are attached to test scores, there is greater potential for misuse of data and negative consequences (such as): The impact on student mental health. When "failing" the test means failing the grade, failing to graduate, or even lesser consequences such as attending summer school or loss of certain privileges, students may experience long-term anxiety, low self esteem, depression, etc. At a more systemic level, class-wide and building-wide testing can put students, teachers and administrators at risk for anxiety and other forms of emotional distress. These consequences can impact not only test-taking but also learning and motivation.⁷

Teachers have also posted their direct observations:

⁵ Susan Ohanian, http://susanoonian.org/show_nclb_outrages.html?id=3303

⁶ **Is the "No child left behind" law leaving children behind?**
<http://www.helium.com/items/174384-person-happens-strongly-against>

⁷ Missouri Association of School Psychologists, <http://www.maspweb.org/nclb.html>

I have seen children sick. I have seen children who have had to leave testing situations because they cannot handle the stress, either physically or emotionally. Our special education students, even though they are given time accommodations, are still handed a pencil-and-paper test, just like their peers, and expected to perform at the same level, so that we can continue to make adequate yearly progress.⁸

And

‘Stress is a killer,’ says Raquel Flores, a second-grade teacher at Modesto’s James Marshall Elementary School. ‘It’s really causing a lot of health problems. And it’s having an effect on kids. Behavior isn’t good, especially in the upper grades.’⁹

Additionally, the following call from California asks the question, “Where are the mental and social health professionals and why are they not reporting their observations on increased stress in children following the inception of NCLB?”

Now we learn of new horrors of kindergarten and pre-K abuse in the liberal bastion of California, where they are using standardized tests and scripted curriculum to move the intellectual and emotional genocide even further toward infancy. If anyone in a professional mental health capacity had predicted this 25 years ago, they would, themselves, have been committed. While children are being subjected to this institutionalized abuse at the behest of the federal government, where are the APA and AERA and the other professional groups with their high-sounding pronouncements on the ethical use of tests? They are going about their business undeterred by this organized attack on childhood, hoping that they, too, will keep their federal money flowing and not lose any of their valuable contracts.

An education policy that traumatizes children, destroys the desire to learn, and corrupts the purposes for learning should be eliminated, not reformed.¹⁰

Stress on Teachers as a Result of NCLB

Teachers are no longer the drivers of reform, but the driven. Many teachers and schools, in fact, are being driven to distraction from their educational goals. Under the pressures of NCLB and its mandate for “adequate yearly progress,” teachers in

⁸ **Voices From the Classroom**, National Education Association, Sarah Barton, Elementary School Teacher, Rogers Public School District Fayetteville, Arkansas, <http://www.nea.org/esea/nclbstories/nclbar01.html>.

⁹ **Punitive Law Fails to get results - NCLB gets an F**, California Teachers Association http://www.cta.org/media/publications/educator/archives/2006/200609_feat_1.htm

¹⁰ School Matters, <http://schoolsmatter.blogspot.com/2006/03/where-are-mental-and-social-health.html>

struggling schools are being told that only results matter—and even these rarely extend beyond tested achievement in literacy and math. In hurried meetings after school, educators go through endless reams of performance data, targeting the problematic cells where results are defective—a subject department here, a grade level there, a group of male minority students elsewhere. They find themselves instead scrambling to apply instant solutions to all the students in the problematic cells—extra test-prep, a new prescribed program, or after-school and Saturday school sessions. There are few considered, professional judgments here, just simplistic solutions driven by the scores and the political pressures behind them.

Data-driven instruction obliterates the crucial fact that to be effective, educators have to use many different kinds of information to think about what they are doing in classrooms. While statistics can be immensely useful, they do not automatically point to which instructional approaches will work best with the diverse learners that make up a school's classes, or a nation's schools. One child may struggle with under performance because she has difficulties with reading, a second because he has a turbulent home life, and a third because she is a recent immigrant learning English as a second language. Faced with such diversity, teachers and educational leaders have to be intelligently informed by evidence, not blindly driven by it to teach a certain way.

A new book, *Collateral Damage*, documents hundreds of examples of the ways in which high-stakes testing corrupts American education. Using Campbell's law as a framework, the authors cite examples of administrators and teachers who have cheated on standardized tests. Educators, acting just like other humans do, manipulate the indicators used to judge their success or failure when their reputations, employment, or significant salary bonuses are related to those indicators.

The law makes all who engage in compliance activities traitors to their own profession. It forces education professionals to ignore the testing standards that they have worked so hard to develop.” Administrators falsify school test data or force low-scoring students out of school in their quest to avoid public humiliation. The authors documented the distortion of instructional values when teachers focused on “bubble” kids—those on the cusp of passing the test—at the expense of the education of very low or very high scorers. They found instances where callous disregard for student welfare had replaced compassion and humanity, as when special education students were forced to take a test they had failed five times, or when a student who had recently suffered a death in the family was forced to take the test anyway.¹¹

As talk of reauthorization swirls around the NCLB Act, the National Education Association wants everyone to know what happens when the federal education law trickles down to the classroom. That's why the 3.2 million-member group published *Voices From the Classroom*, a book of teachers' stories about the effects of NCLB. Below is a sample of educators' experiences.¹²

¹¹ David Berliner & Sharon Nichols March 12, 2007 “High Stakes Testing is Putting the Nation at Risk.”

¹² Stories from each state are online at www.nea.org/leal/nclb/stories/states.html

[NCLB] has taken the fun and creativity out of the teaching profession. Gone are the days when I could take an entire class period to react to current events and develop the whole child by teaching them how what is going on in the world impacts their life. Instead, my instruction is limited to being on a certain page of the text by a certain day of the year.

–Terri Zumbrook, 7th grade math teacher
Round Lake, /Illinois

As an alternative education teacher working with expelled students, I have been forced to teach only academic subjects. I no longer have time in the school day to teach independent-living skills, social skills, the arts, and community-access skills. These are areas of learning that these students lack and need in order to turn their lives around.”

– Celia Lamantia, counselor
Santa Rosa, California

Although I have been teaching for 28 years, I was unable to teach my own students reading and math without a teacher present who had met the NCLB definition of highly qualified. I had to pay \$200 to prove my competence. [Consider this a punishment for choosing to major in a very demanding field.

– Marcie Kuykendall, special education teacher
Carrollton, Georgia

Since my students have begun to take the tests to show that we are meeting [NCLB] standards, their understanding of math has gone down. ... They just want to know what to do next, not why. The students are concerned about passing the tests, not knowing what they are doing.

– Susan Allen, middle school teacher
Baltimore, Maryland

As the person in charge of testing at my school, I totaled the average time that a sophomore student might spend in testing ... to be about 54 hours over three years. That is roughly equivalent to more than one quarter in a given school year at our school! That is time the teacher could have used to actually teach those students.

– John Pruitt, high school counselor
Richfield, Utah

A curious ramification will be to see how many really accomplished and proven teachers leave the profession because they want to teach not coach students in testing. The profession of being an educator is a threatened species.

How Can We Extricate Ourselves from this Educational Dilemma?

High-stakes testing is an American question; however, what starts in American education has ripple effects around the world. It raises fundamental questions about the health of childhood with regard to the end results that the program serves. We have been too comfortable and too dependent upon standardized testing. Is high-stakes testing really teaching toward the needs of the twenty-first century?

We must ask ourselves:

“What is our vision of the human being?”
“What are human capabilities?”
“What do we want our students to do, and why?”
“What is it that testing really determines?”

How can teachers be inspired from the consideration of these questions? .

Alternative Assessments

There are many alternative approaches that educators can use in order to assess achievement in subject matter other than high-stakes testing. Many of these methods ensure greater retention of material and a more lively process activating the life forces of their children rather than subjecting them to stress.

One method is called authentic assessment, distinct from standardized assessment; in other words direct assessment and performance assessment have been fixtures in private schools for decades. First, a teacher charts each student’s progress by observing his or her actions in several (but not all) of seven “domains,” which are broad categories that embrace types of learning, from personal and social to scientific thinking. “You try to notice what the children are doing, looking for continuity over weeks and months,” says Melissa Shablott, work sampling coordinator for the St. Paul Public Schools. The observations, recorded on Post-it® notes or journals, ultimately find their way onto a checklist that the teacher keeps. Meanwhile, one or two samples of student work from the domains are put into a portfolio. Also collected: pieces of work unique to a child, like a first drawing or a name being printed for the first time. From the checklist and the portfolio, the teacher prepares a summary report, which contains a narrative section and “progress ratings.” The summary report has replaced the report card for children.

Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch is commonly recognized as one of the chief architects of the modern standards movement. In her book *National Standards in American Education: A Citizens Guide* (1995), Ravitch provides a common-sense rationale for standards:

“Americans . . . expect strict standards to govern construction of buildings, bridges, highways, and tunnels; shoddy work would put lives at risk. They expect stringent standards to protect their drinking water, the food they eat, and the air they breathe. . . . Standards are created because they improve the activity of life.”

This technological way of thinking shows what the spirit behind the standards movement is. Traditional benchmarks for assessing educational success are being redefined in rapidly changing global conditions. Social changes have altered the essential learning capacities in the 21st century and demand that we, as educators, must begin to understand the new capacities our children will need in order to succeed in modern times. For instance, new research by Educational Testing Service (E.T.S.) underscores eight key competencies needed by workers in today’s new economy.¹³

¹³ Tony Wagner, Robert Kegan. *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our*

- Basic Skills: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
- Foundation Skills: Knowing how to learn
- Communication Skills: Listening and oral communication
- Adaptability: Creative Thinking and Problem Solving
- Group Effectiveness: Interpersonal skills, negotiation, and teamwork
- Influence: Organizational effectiveness and leadership
- Personal Management: Self-esteem and motivation
- Attitude: Positive Cognitive Style

“Basic skills” alone can no longer be the primary determiner, or standard, of success in modern social conditions.

Another assessment strategy, employed by the Waldorf schools, originates from their mission and philosophy, a central premise of which is that students undergo stages of development which dictate a specific curriculum and methodology to address key readiness capacities. The benchmarks and learning goals for educational standards are built upon the emerging learners’ developmental capacities. In addition, Waldorf education honors the concepts of multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, and inner motivation. Specifically, it states its mission as educating students’ thinking, feeling, and willing capacities. Thus, assessment modes vary depending on the type of developmental capacity being assessed.

The developmental basis for assessment is illustrated during the first seven years of a child’s life. During that period, the Waldorf teacher is primarily concerned with the physical development of the child, especially the sensory motor system, which lays the foundation for learning in the next phases of growth. The sensory motor system underlies developmental skills such as self-management skills, social skills, emotional skills, and cognitive skills. It follows, then, that assessment for the young child is focused on the physical domain as opposed to the more mainstream emphasis on cognitive capacities in early childhood education. In contrast, early childhood Waldorf educators use the development of motor skills such as standing, walking, and speaking as the benchmarks for assessment. Educational standards stem from areas such as the rhythm of eating and sleeping, swaddling, floor time, freedom from restraint, respecting natural milestones, and proper nutrition.¹⁴

In the pre-school and kindergarten years, imitation is one of the benchmarks to determine first grade readiness. Imitation and sensory processing are assessed through activities such as story telling, singing, movement exercises, and other artistic activities. These activities segue into the student’s picture forming ability during elementary school years, when imitation is less a key capacity than a symptom of delayed growth. Finally, as students enter into puberty and adolescence, benchmarks transition to cognitive and intellectual development where more traditional forms of assessment such

Schools. Jossey-Bass; 2006.

¹⁴ Bonnie Rivers, Nancy Blanning. *The Well Balanced Child*.

as testing, grading rubrics, and formal analysis are appropriate. The cognitive capacities such as language acquisition and complex reading comprehension that begin in the early years with a rich story telling curriculum eventually emerge in the high school years as critical thinking skills.

An intimate student-teacher relationship is central to authentic assessment and consistent standards, pointing to the importance of the role of the “class teacher” in Waldorf schools. While there are numerous specialty teachers, one teacher remains with a class from first through eighth grade. In the high school this teacher is called the “class sponsor.” This system of one teacher through consecutive years encourages intimate relationships with each student and promotes consistency in assessing physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The class teacher arranges regular annual conferences with parents to promote on-going communication of student learning. At the end of the school year, the final “report card” provides an overview of the curriculum, a developmental analysis, and personal student anecdotes. Only in the upper grades is the narrative report accompanied by formal letter grades, grading rubrics, and testing scores. Grading is common in the high school years, but is not used to achieve learning goals and is prohibited in the younger grades due to the detrimental effect upon the students’ inner motive.

Because assessment in the Waldorf school is based on standards which are connected to the student’s developmental stage and the corresponding learning capacities, Waldorf teachers employ a variety of unique assessment tools. For example, every morning the class teacher shakes the hand of each student entering the classroom. The handshake helps the teacher understand the feeling life of the students as they begin the day. Another tool is assessment through story telling. The teacher leads daily recall of the previous lesson’s story as a way of assessing the student’s developing imagination. This formative assessment develops the student’s imagination while at the same time measuring individual student progress and capacities. A third example is the student-created “main lesson books” which replace traditional textbooks. The main lesson book reflects a combination of artistic, written, and conceptual work which functions as the basis for monthly assessment by the class teacher. Student work, specifically through the main lesson book, serves as the primary way a teacher can evaluate the thinking (conceptual) and feeling (artistic) abilities of the learner.

Summative assessment through testing is used infrequently as a teaching method until high school. Waldorf methods are based on the understanding that assessment is most effective before and during a unit of instruction because student learning transpires within a developmental continuum. The use of the arts to deliver the curricular standards allows teachers to assess thinking, feeling, and willing capacities while concurrently developing student work portfolios as a way to document, track, and present student learning outcomes.

Modes of assessment are consistently reflected in the underlying view of child development. For instance, before the onset of puberty, students work collectively, as a whole class, and the teacher assesses individual progress or deficiencies within the group context. As the student goes through the individuation process entering into adolescence, assessment becomes more individualized. In the high school years, self-assessment is included since the student has developed the capacity for self-awareness and reflection. Similarly, in early childhood education personality styles do not dominate the learning process. As the feeling life and imagination of the child becomes

a central focus in the elementary years the teacher begins to include an understanding, and application of the temperaments in assessing the learning process. Assessing the student's temperament guides the teacher in determining teaching strategies such as defining dominant learning styles, student partnering, and appropriate expectations for individual student participation. The awareness of multiple intelligences also guides the teacher's teaching methods and assessment process. Lessons consist of visual, auditory, and experiential components; assessment is based on multiple modes of student learning as a way to track a student's strengths and weaknesses within the differing learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, kinesthetic).¹⁵

A central goal in the mission of Waldorf education is the development of the students' will or inner motive. Because the development of motive is less tangible it requires consistent qualitative assessment strategies. As children mature, will forces are assessed through performance-based assessment, project based learning, and artistic renderings. Annual class plays, musical presentations, speech recitation, mental math, and other daily rhythmic activities provide consistent multi-modal forms of assessment while also promoting the development of the will. Project based learning is used throughout the learning process but is most clearly seen in the high school senior projects, a cumulative assessment tool to determine the achievement of key competencies of a Waldorf graduate.¹⁶ This assessment model is student based, focused on both the learning process and the final product while reflecting the standards for student learning outcomes at the end of the educational process.

Assessment in Waldorf education transcends the classroom setting. For example, a weekly faculty meeting encourages regular discussion of on-going instruction and assessment in the classroom. The process of an entire faculty focusing on a specific unit of instruction, child, or learning issue provides the framework for formative assessment and a qualitative understanding of the application of abstract standards. It also unifies standards within the school, and ultimately is the foundation for school improvement.¹⁷

The mission of Waldorf education, by educating the thinking, feeling, and willing capacities of the child, endeavors to encourage a life-long love of learning. Waldorf schools continue to have regular meetings with graduates in order to assess the long-term effectiveness of the education. A recent research study on the moral reasoning capacities of high school students by Dr. Christine Hether reflects on-going assessment of the mission of Waldorf education.¹⁸ The study was designed to substantiate with hard data the anecdotal reputation that Waldorf schools have for promoting morality. Credible research was developed through the utilization of a well-established research tool called the Defining Issues Test. DIT has been used thousands of times in research contexts, and its database constitutes the largest and most diverse body of information

¹⁵ Douglas B. Reeves. *Making Standards Work*, Advanced Learning Press, 2004.

¹⁶ See *Survey of Waldorf Graduates, Phase II*, by David Mitchell and Douglas Gerwin,, AWSNA Publications, Ghent, NY: 2007.

¹⁷ Zachos, Paul. "Discovering the True Nature of Educational Assessment," *Research Bulletin*, IX, Number 2, pp. 7-12. The Research Institute for Waldorf Education, 2004.

¹⁸ Christine Hether, PhD. Saybrook Institute and Research Center. See also *Research Bulletin XIII*, Number 1, Autumn 2007.

on moral judgment that exists. Results indicated that students who were Waldorf-educated scored significantly higher than students from the religiously-affiliated institutions, and significantly higher than public high school students. Waldorf educated students earned a mean average score that would be equivalent to what would be more commonly associated with graduate level philosophy students. In addition, there was evidence that Waldorf students were more likely to act upon their moral beliefs.

Dr. Hether's research reflects aspects of authentic assessment which aid in the development of moral reasoning. For instance, practices contributing to moral reasoning are not explicit, but rather consist of what teachers do on a regular basis to educate their students. Five broad themes seem to be the contributing factors in Waldorf settings:

1. Emphasis on educating the whole person
2. Commitment to developmental appropriateness
3. Story-telling
4. Integral place of the arts in the curriculum
5. Preserving a sense of wonder about the natural world.

The five themes can be consolidated into one motif: educating the whole child. The use of standards in Waldorf education is a dynamic process to meet such a goal. Educational standards and assessment must evolve at a rapid rate in order for education to remain relevant in the 21st century. Standards based education is not the standardization of learning. In Waldorf education standards and assessment are living and breathing just as the growing child. The implicit concept behind standards and assessment in Waldorf education is that the educator needs to assess the right things, not all things. Standards and assessment of thinking, feeling, and willing capacities will be of the utmost importance for the next generation of learners for it is our inner capacities that foster a life long love of learning for the renewal of society.

The Struggle for a New Paradigm In Testing

Waldorf schools all over the world are independent of government control. Being private they have some freedom to decide how testing, reports, and descriptions of a Waldorf student can be done. They try to describe what she can do or what her special needs are. The limits of that freedom are obvious—once the student leaves the school the conditions of his or her admission to a college, a university, or any other institution are not given by a Waldorf school. This is obvious especially public institutions ask for special tests like the SAT in the United States or the *Abitur* in Germany. What is the problem?

In standardized testing we test knowledge and competencies. The well-known problem of all testing is—do we learn to know by a test what we want to know? But, there are more problems. Do the same test results of two different students tell us the same? What about an English native speaker and a student whose first language is not English? What does a test in mathematics or English tell us about the fundamental ability or disability to work perseveringly on a problem? How far do we learn anything about the social and personal competencies of a student when we use the tests, which are most often used in our schools? Out of common sense it is absolutely understandable and is confirmed by our daily experience that subjects that are not tested become more and more meaningless for students, teachers, and parents. The motivation to learn and to

work hard in artistic or social projects declines. Are they of less importance than mathematics or science? Fixations on tests discourage students to start their own activities and their personal engagement which is fundamental for any later success.

Teachers who try to stimulate and foster the non-tested activities are often frustrated because of the lack of positive response. Classes with non-tested subjects are often reduced and are in danger of dying out. Teachers who ask for some more time for a special project like a play get more and more difficulties among the faculty because it is not test preparation. These and more facts point to the urgent need for a change in our widespread understanding of teaching and today's commonly held underlying paradigm: Teaching is said to be the transmission of information from the teacher to the students and the conditioning of their behaviour. The students are more or less seen as the objects of this process.

Of course, many teachers have actually a different understanding of their task and they behave differently in their classes. But how can we describe the necessary changes in the widespread understanding of teaching and education? The first and most important step is a different understanding of the human being. Is he an empty vessel that has to be filled? Is his only activity to absorb the offered information and to be able to reproduce it?

This one-sided understanding of teaching does not take into account the character of a human individuality. She is an entelechy that has her own goals in herself; that is asking questions; that develops her own special abilities and is probably not much interested in others. This self-determination may be a nightmare for technologically thinking people—how could such a principle respected in car production or similar cases?

But, the human being is not a car and if we apply laws that are valid in technological production to humans we will fail. Our picture of the human being will be incorporated and we miss the most important human abilities like creativity, self-determination, and social behaviour. Are there ways out of this trap?

In Waldorf schools which are oriented towards the full spectrum of human abilities—intellectual abilities, social and artistic faculties, and practical skills—teachers feel that usual testing and the given credit points are not significant enough to describe what we learn from our students working and learning along side of them.

Education is not a conditioning to learn some answers for a set of questions. What she has to develop is a broad spectrum of intellectual, social, artistic, and practical skills. Creativity can only be trained, if it can be experienced among the adults, the teachers, the classmates, and the parents. We need the message—learning is your task. Develop your abilities as far as possible and show us what you know or can do.

Waldorf schools try not to condition a student to fit into a given matrix but to find a balance between the development of the individual abilities and the skills which are necessary in our contemporary world. A child, an adolescent needs freedom to find their own goals that make sense in their lives.

But this is not the common paradigm behind our education. Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch is commonly recognized as one of the chief architects of the modern standards movement. In her book *National Standards in American Education: A Citizens Guide* (1995), Ravitch provides a common-sense rationale for standards:

Americans . . . expect strict standards to govern construction of buildings, bridges, highways, and tunnels; shoddy work would put lives at risk. They expect stringent standards to protect their drinking water, the food they eat, and the air they breathe. . . . Standards are created because they improve the activity of life.¹⁹

Ravitch (1995) asserts that just as standards improve the daily lives of Americans, so, too, will they improve the effectiveness of American education: “Standards can improve achievement by clearly defining what is to be taught and what kind of performance is expected”²⁰

This is what we call a technological thinking not an understanding of the very many aspects of human beings. The most necessary thing a young person needs in his or her life is to find meaningful goals and to give sense to what he or she does.

Standards of course are very helpful in all areas of modern technology. They make the products cheaper, more reliable, and of a better quality. But all philosophies behind education that understand the human being as more than just matter and a behavior but acknowledge the human spirit and soul as an inborn individual part of each of us cannot share this reduction of a human being to matter and behaviour.

Let us overcome the primitive and technological understanding of education, let us change the fundamental paradigm, let us be aware of the richness of human individualities, and let us help leave no child behind us.

All testing mirrors our understanding of the human being and what is in our understanding important and what is not important. Are we sure that those abilities and competencies which are not tested are not as important for the further development of a person as the tested ones? Are music, artistic work, rhetoric abilities which are trained in a play, the ability to help others—are they less or more important than knowing how to spell a word? It is so simple to find out whether a word was spelled correctly or not, whether the answer of a problem in mathematics is correct or not. They are so easy to test. But real human qualities, like social intelligence, willingness to work hard, endurance, humour, compassion, interest in other people work, etc., are hard to test. Credit points cannot really describe them.

These points can be amplified through a story.

There was a six years old girl who was tested to determine whether she was ready to start in the first grade. The teacher had her complete a drawing of a human stick figure with a bow tie that had appendages left off and parts missing. The girl proceeded to complete the drawing by providing a body and clothing, rather than just complete the stick lines.

¹⁹ <http://books.google.com/books?id=8fk2yE1a0PEC&dq=national+standards+in+american+education+a+citizens+guide&pg>, pp 8–9.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

The person doing the testing found that girl was not ready to be taught in a first grade and suggested remedial and curative classes.

When they went home the mother asked her daughter: Why did you complete the drawing of the person rather than just complete the stick figure? And the daughter answered: “I have never seen a person looking like a stick person and I thought it was sad so I drew a proper body and a colorful bow tie.”²¹

Taking all these aspects into account the Waldorf schools developed a lot of different tools to let the students show what they learned, what they are able to do in a group, their motor skills, their aesthetic abilities and judgements, and so forth.

As we said before, learning and education are on the one side stimulation of human development and on the other side the gain of techniques which are developed in our modern world. One without the other is more or less meaningless.

We need the tools to make us understandable, to communicate with other people, to use modern technology. But these skills can never give meaning to our life. In Waldorf schools we try to balance these two directions. Of course the students should be able to write, to read, to spell words correctly, they should be able to solve math problems, to know literature and history and many other things. But they get at the same time a lot of assignments with open answers.

That already starts in the first grade. Starting with math we put questions like that – what is 12? Many correct answers are possible. For example: $12 = 6 + 6 = 11 + 1 = 3 + 4 + 5 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 2 + 1$. From the very beginning children learn that a question can have many correct answers; but not all answers are correct. Giving an unexpected answer may be a problem for a teacher because she has to calculate. The child gave her a problem which she has to solve. As teachers we have to learn to love such unexpected answers. Every moment when a child produces something out of him or herself which is meaningful in a given context is a highlight of our teaching.

How many possibilities do we have to give open problems to students in physics. Give them the choice between 25 different questions and let them show their own profile. The one student will give a wonderful description of a color circle, the other one will develop a formula, the third one will solve a problem that needs good mathematical abilities. We must not be so narrow minded that we fear an answer that we never thought about before. By its underlying philosophy which is called Anthroposophy Waldorf educators and teachers learn about the singularity of each human entelechy. How and where does this entelechy express him or herself? Can we understand the hints which are given by the young people—please, understand my deepest questions.

Of course Waldorf schools are not the only schools which try to strengthen the individuality of each student. There is a strong movement as well in the United States as in Europe that are striving for a new educational paradigm far beyond standards and high-stakes testing. The idea of a developmental portfolio is not originally created by Waldorf teachers, but, it expresses what we want to do: Give the student the opportunity to show what he or she learned, what he or she produced in a group or out of themselves—a play, a sculpture, a music a eurythmy performance, a special research

²¹ This girl went on to receive a degree in art with honors from Hampshire College on a full scholarship and later became a jeweler, a painter, and a landscape designer of local fame.

problem on semiconductors, a small play with a lot of new ideas, the report of a social project, some new chemical indicators, and so forth. Do we know in what our children and students are really interested? Waldorf schools are or at least should be open to new ideas that reveal more and more the richness of individualities.

Thirty five years after my own graduation from a Waldorf school I met a larger group of my classmates. Of course we knew which of us was more or less gifted than others. What was the most astonishing fact? All of us took responsibility within the realm of their professional activities. For example one was asked to solve the most critical problems of the insurance where was employed. Another classmate was together with his brother the owner of a small metal factory. His task was to care for the production. He had to put the right man to the right place and to decide how things were produced. Another was an air controller and, when Germany was re-united, he worked out the new network of airways in Germany.

What was not astonishing was that the intellectual best and gifted students became scientists or managers—astonishing was the career of those who were not able to pass high-stakes testing. In a Waldorf school the students of the first grade stay together for twelve years—if the parents don't move somewhere else or there are other reasons to leave the school. During this time the teachers and classmates become aware of what he or she showed as an artist, a practical gifted person, or as a scientist. In most Waldorf schools at the end of the 12th year everybody is asked to produce a special piece of research or art. The whole class will perform a play and a eurythmy performance.

Beside this a portfolio can include so many different achievements that say—look here, I produced that!

Technological standards divide the products into those that pass and in those which do not fulfil the standards. Imagine they would be produced without standards and testing. How many machines would fail and endanger human lives. We need methods to exclude those screws which are not good enough. They are waste material and used as raw material for a next cycle of production. Human beings are not screws. Nobody can be recycled.

Of course not everybody is able to become a pilot or a doctor and such a specialist has to show his or her abilities to do what he or she has to do. General education has to give the chance to develop a wide spectrum of fundamental human qualities which are so urgently needed in our society. Our society cannot miss anybody's contribution. The most expensive mistake of our schools is to let a child undeveloped and let her not find her individual goals.

That seems to be very idealistic and unreal. Look at the achievements of the Waldorf schools and you will find how successful idealism can be.

Evaluation

There are two types of evaluation: formative and summative. The formative is used to improve instruction and the kindling of knowledge. The summative is used to collect information absorbed. NCLB manipulates the educational system. The government prescribes the goals and pathways of education not the educator.

New forms of Assessment

Brügelman outlines several possibilities for developing new assessment methods.

What might be a feasible alternative? The prevailing idea of system monitoring is overloaded with expectations it cannot satisfy. The quality of classroom instruction is improved on location, and evaluation must be sensitive to the specific context of that instruction.

It seems most likely that a combination of various levels of self-evaluation and accountability to others can make the greatest use of the specific potentials involved in:

- Internal and external evaluation
(Familiarity with the situation and lack of anxiety vs. impartiality of judgment and necessary social pressures)
- Informal and formalized methods
(Adaptability and facility in completing surveys vs. objectivity and comparability of the data).

At the same time, such a combination of varying forms of evaluation will most likely be able to prevent extensive negative effects of the specific weaknesses and risks involved in the individual forms.

Here, we should keep in mind that concrete evaluative measures should aim at problems the solutions of which actually lie within the responsibilities of the institution or person being evaluated and that at the specific level examined there are possible courses of action available to improve the situation (at least the possibility of receiving support from external sources).

How, then, can the responsibility of the persons involved be more clearly perceived; what can these people do in a concrete sense to check the quality of their work and to improve it?

The following seven perspectives seem especially significant; they are readily feasible and can be developed from existing activities and then, step by step, combined to form an effective system of quality control:

- Students should make efforts to achieve a clear view of their own goals and of the successfulness of their own work, e.g., by committing themselves to certain goals and by self-evaluations of assignments, but also by regular reports on their own learning progress and on imminent goals.
- Teachers should observe and evaluate learning processes with a view to individual students and to the class as a whole; e.g., they should maintain a card file in which they record observations and sample assignments relevant to the development of the students

and in which they continuously document learning processes so that they can discuss perceptions and explanations of progress and difficulties on an individual basis with the students and negotiate joint goals of future work with them.

- Teachers should also observe their own classroom instruction in order to apprehend and check the effects of their own work, e.g., to clarify their own demands and check their realization in a first step, by means of a ‘conversation’ with oneself and by self-observation (e.g., in the form of a diary),
- Then, by requesting an ‘external’ perspective (that of a colleague, a trainee, a prospective teacher, or of parents).
- The teaching staff should develop and modify the school’s program with a view to the specific needs of the school; the school management should stimulate, promote, and ensure the corresponding activities, by, e.g., periodically enquiring people involved with the school:
- “What would you identify as the specific strengths and weaknesses of our school (in a certain area)?”
- “Do you have concrete suggestions for change?”
- “Which procedures can we agree on?”

External visitors should be asked the following:

- “Do you notice anything particular about our school?”
- “Are the goals and underlying assumptions of our school program convincing?”
- “Where does our work lag behind the demands we make on ourselves?”
- The school administration authority can reinforce the external perspective with reference to schools, can acknowledge developments, provide support, formulate demands, by, e.g., visiting schools and asking the school management, teacher teams, and individual teachers questions like the following:
- “What are your own goals?”
- “How far are you able to realize these aspirations?”
- “Which obstacles do you encounter in doing so?”
- “Which realistic next steps are possible?”
- The Department of Education can identify general problematic areas and check political priorities with a view to the entire system, e.g., accumulate and present information needed to ensure material

preconditions or to ensure that legal requirements are met. Such information could relate to secondary analyses of administrative statistics and to periodic studies of achievement and development status in anonymous samples of students along with surveys of the prerequisites, the process characteristics, and the basic conditions of classroom instruction.

Thus, nationwide tests are to be conceived of as one building block in a much more comprehensive system.

Their function is clearly to be understood as system monitoring and providing referential data for evaluation on location. But this form of stocktaking need not take place every year or even every second or third year.

Evaluation Should Serve to Improve Instruction

Promoting the quality of instruction is a demanding task that involves conflict. The completion of this task demands of education policy and education administration the implementation of differentiated measures.

Evaluative measures must be organized in such a way that the desirable impulses and insights are not counteracted by undesirable side effects. For this reason, they are to be oriented to specific needs for information and action—within concrete fields of action. The main goal is to develop the everyday work of the school or of individual teachers in such a way that, e.g., by means of a better understanding of learning processes and difficulties, they can make more specific demands on and offer more specific support to students engaged in developing their own individual abilities. But, above all, the capacity and competence required for (self-) evaluation must be installed in the system itself on a long-term basis. Schools themselves must become ‘learning systems.’ To this end, teachers require competencies and methods appropriate for everyday application. In addition, they are dependent on the challenge presented by external perspectives and on the support from external competencies and resources. Here, it has proved useful for teaching staff to invite observers as ‘critical friends’ in order to confront internal perception with an external view. At the level of materials, assignment examples with commentaries and data from representative samples providing orientation are more useful than standardized comparative assignments for all classes that cannot relate to the specific situation on location (prerequisites of students, resources of the school).

In the final analysis, all such measures must contribute to further developing schools and concrete improvements of instruction, i.e., to supporting the teachers so that they can support the learners (Heide Bambach). For this reason, both efforts at evaluation and financial resources should be focused on studying and documenting models and prerequisites of successful instruction.

Thus, the priority should be on measures aiming at developing quality. A purely descriptive stocktaking of well-known problems (disadvantages of immigrants, children from lower social strata) results in short-term public attention, but in little else. A higher priority than isolated comparisons of effects must be the analysis of processes and conditions. Only such analysis can identify reasons behind problems and substantiate suggestions for intervention.²²

NCLB is Not Working and May Be Creating Great Dangers for Children

Awarding diplomas, supplementary pay for teachers, and the allocation of finances to schools contingent on student results in annual tests in the 1990s have repeatedly reported an increase in achievement according to government sources. At the beginning of 2000, 28 states—more than half of the United States—had committed themselves to this program. Yet, a study undertaken by Amrein and Berliner (2002) demonstrates that the increase reported by the states usually only applies to the limited area of those tests that are already established practice in the particular state. On independent tests like those testing aptitude for college-level study, there was a *decrease* in test scores in 2/3 of the 28 states. Increasing dropout rates were also reported.

In other words, low achievers had completely dropped out of the system, additionally driving test scores upward, but without any actual improvement in ‘output.’²³

Because of the varied conditions in individual classrooms, it would be necessary to gauge students’ learning progress from their own individual needs in order to adequately judge the quality of instruction. Socioeconomic factors relative to the school district are too superficial.²⁴

Even more fundamentally, it is questionable whether instructional quality can actually be controlled by measures from a centralized authority. The concept of ‘control’ itself is associated with power fantasies that (should they be acceptable at all) are certainly not realistic in the light of the education reforms of the last thirty years. In this

²¹ Brügelmann, Hans. http://www.ined.uni-siegen.de/abteilung1/aktuell/dokumente/vortrag_hans_bruegelmann_englisch.doc, 2005.

²³ Berliner

²⁴ In a study of 271,000 Texas public high school students, Rice University researchers found that the state’s accountability system, the model for NCLB, has succeeded wildly...in producing more dropouts. Disproportionately minority student dropouts.

How bad was it? The study found that 60 percent of the African American students, 75 percent of Latino students and 80 percent of ESL students did not graduate within five years

Avoidable Losses, Posted February 21, 2008 by NEA Editor, <http://nclbchange.wordpress.com/page/2/>

sense and despite all lip service paid to notions of autonomy, as innovation strategies or as sociological concepts of organizations centralized control models are, in the final analysis, naïve.

Centralized tests are overloaded with expectations, while opportunities for self-evaluation are simply overlooked. Evaluations of systems are important, but in a more differentiated composite model more emphasis would have to be placed on an evaluation closely related to classroom instruction, an evaluation that in addition to effects would also gauge the quality of processes. In addition to more general competency levels that only become concretized directly at schools, the new Finnish educational standards also define requirements for the learning environment and for the style of classroom instruction. The arguments behind such requirements are of a normative nature (related to principles of human interaction) and not simply instrumental (with a view to results).

Such standards for high quality instruction can be put into concrete terms as criteria of organizational form and of the material surroundings, of mutual consent on rules and of the quality of stimuli provided by teachers. These should be characterized in the following ways:

- they should stimulate children to do self-assigned and self-responsible work, e.g., by means of joint planning sessions in the mornings or by individual learning ‘contracts’;²⁵
- they should challenge familiar ways of thinking and commonly available patterns of behavior, e.g., by confronting the students with other perspectives in group discussions or through repeated queries from the teacher at the workplace;
- they should facilitate widely diverse activities, e.g., by providing opportunities to realize individual plans or by offering prepared elective activities;
- they should demand and support an exchange of individual experiences and results, e.g., with institutionalized forms of reports;
- they should promote reflection on one’s own work, e.g., by means of self-evaluation at regular intervals and constructive criticism of the work of others;
- they should ensure helpful support when difficulties arise, e.g., by a tutoring system and by regulated access to the teacher;
- they should substantiate rules and directions with reference to their function (avoiding disturbances of others or impediments to work), not in

²⁵ Reggie Clark, a middle school robotics teacher, told the paper that under NCLB, students “are not really even thinking. They are just remembering certain skills.” Discouraging Words, Posted January 11, 2008 by NEA Editor.

a authoritarian manner.²⁶

We are beginning to observe that especially the low achievers, for whose support the induction of standardized tests was actually intended, are at a disadvantage because in various ways teachers or schools have removed them from the test sample: In combination with inappropriate sanctions, standards and evaluations result in

- an enormous increase in the dropout rate,
- an increase in repeated grade levels,
- and increasing difficulties for economically and socially disadvantaged students to become admitted to schools, students who are then relegated to special schools.

A further study differentiates between effects of 'high-stakes' testing on students (negative effects in general, especially for socially disadvantaged students) and on schools (increase in test performance, but combined with more pronounced selection).

In a national survey of U.S. teachers on their perception of 'high- vs. low-stakes testing' conducted by Pedulla et al. (2003, 5-9), 8 of 10 teachers reported that they spent increasingly more classroom time on subjects tested and ever less time on subjects not covered by the tests. In addition, the tests led to

- an increase in students not promoted to the next grade level (according to 20% of teachers in states with high-stakes programs vs. 5% in those with low-stakes programs)

and to

- an increase in dropouts (according to 25% of teachers in states with high-stakes programs vs. 10% in those with low-stakes programs).

In general, the teachers maintained that

- the time and energy needed was not worth the returns (about 75%),
- tests did not do justice to the performance of low achievers (90%), and
- colleagues on the teaching staff were able to attain higher test results

²⁶ Brügelmann, Hans. http://www.ined.uni-siegen.de/abteilung1/aktuell/dokumente/vortrag_hans_bruegelmann_englisch.doc, 2005.

without improving their classroom instruction (40%).²⁷

Points of Contention

- Development phases in the lives of children need to be respected
- Education is for life yet the incursion of test taking into pre-puberty is eliminating the balance free play gives to overall development
- Children are becoming overstressed
- Teachers are forced to become coaches for test-taking
- Teachers have been caught cheating in order to achieve merit pay increases
- Teachers, principals and school districts have been caught cheating in order to keep federal funds coming
- Test are not able to teach or inspire; they measure
- Process is as important as end results
- One of the main purposes of education is to teach pupils how to think
- NCLB is wasting large sums of money that could be applied toward dealing with the real problems.²⁸

Problems

- Our schools are too large
- Individualization has become minimalized in education
- High-stakes testing leads to social discrimination
- The Government cannot fix the problems with education²⁹

Conclusion

Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education.
– John Fitzgerald Kennedy

A complete education needs to take into account a holistic view of the young child. One could also ask: what about the value of individual learning styles? Or of a child's creativity? Or of acknowledging a child's progress?

²⁷ Ibid., Section 8, 2005.

²⁸ The year before NCLB went into effect, states spent \$423 million on standardized tests. During the 2007–08 school year, that amount will increase to almost \$1.1 billion. And the windfall largely goes to five (soon to be four) testing companies.

And yet, federal funds have been lacking to help pay the tab for administering now 45 million tests a year (going up to 56 million once NCLB's science assessment is added). Hence a reliance in many states on cheaper-to-score multiple-choice assessments.

The Trouble With Testing, January 18, 2008 by NEA Editor, <http://nclbchange.wordpress.com/page/2/>

²⁹ Albert Einstein once wisely remarked that problems cannot be solved out of the same consciousness that created them.

After six years of experience with the NCLB, and with reauthorization looming, it is time to wake up to the reality of the way this education act has actually unfolded.

That hierarchy of responsibility—from Washington to state capital to local school system to school—has been the basic architecture of federal education policy for decades. Yet it was never designed to support a results-based accountability system, to make effective repairs to faltering schools, or to function in an environment peppered with novelties like charter schools, home schooling, and distance learning.

NCLB began with the noble yet naïve promise that every American student would attain proficiency in reading and math by 2014. While there is no doubt that the percentage of proficient students can and should increase dramatically from today's approximately 30 percent level, no educator believes that universal proficiency in seven years is a serious goal; only politicians promise such things. The inevitable result is cynicism among educators and a compliance mentality among public officials.

We do not expect our schools to turn out their alumni already enthroned on the pinnacles of their respective sciences; but only so far advanced in each as to be able to pursue them by themselves, and to become Newton's and Laplace's by energies and perseverances to be continued through life.

—Thomas Jefferson to John P. Emmet, 1826. ME 16:171

It is the expressed hope of the writers of this paper that policy makers will open their minds and ears to the thoughts and voices coming to expression from many sectors of American society, and that they will stop the attack on childhood that NCLB represents with the insidious testing of our children. Further, we hope that the courage can be found to institute real change, downsize the monstrous mega-schools, and return the practice of individualized contact to elementary school teaching. We further hope that children will be looked upon as needing moral, ethical, heart-warmed attention so that their will forces are activated to do well in the world. We need to protect the phase of life known as childhood and all the subsequent treasures that can be mined from these healthy experiences throughout the rest of life. The children of America are awaiting our action; if we fail to act their future—and ours—will be perilous.

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