

Views on High-Stakes Testing, Profiling, and the Protection of Childhood

David Mitchell (USA)
Douglas Gerwin (USA)
Ernst Schuberth (Germany)
Michael Mancini
(Hawaii)
Hansjörg Hofrichter
(Germany)

Abstract:

Assessment without High-Stakes Testing: Protecting Childhood and the Purpose of School

The funding and building of massive, largely-impersonal education factories is preparing American society for a cultural nightmare in which a generation of young people are being trained to take tests rather than to think or act with moral fortitude. High-stakes testing has led to heightened stress in children, compromised the integrity of teachers, and created an intellectual caste system in which end results are undermining the process of learning. In the attached paper, a creative approach to the assessment of both students and teachers, based on the exercise of their nascent powers imagination, is outlined as part of a broader reform of the American educational system.

What is it that schools are trying to assess in a student's educational progress? The authors of this paper argue that the purpose of education is to draw out students' nascent capacities and guide them towards a life-long quest for learning and knowledge rather than to fill them with information and then test their recollection of it. Education should prepare students to find creative, self-confident, purposeful direction to their grown-up lives.

Education needs to be pursued for its own ends, not for an extrinsic goal beyond itself, be it political or economic. It needs to serve children and young

adults as they unfold those capacities that make them uniquely human. A teacher who works with the behavioral, emotional, cognitive growth of students, at each stage of their development, fulfills the purpose of education. Thus, alternative assessment techniques must vary according to the educational level and developmental phase of children, as well as the teacher's own learning goals. Each developmental phase of childhood requires different techniques and approaches. For example, assessment in early childhood should consider the physical development of young children as essential to their later artistic and academic learning. Gross motor skills need to be developed before fine motor skills.

With elementary age children the teacher uses an awareness of "multiple intelligences" to form the basis for both the educational method 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 differing learning styles, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. As children arrive at puberty and enter into the turbulent phase called adolescence, the teacher can work with the students' ability to think flexibly. Students need to learn not to become caught in fixed or rigid ideas; instead, they must become more rigorous in their pursuit of truth. Fluidity and movement are important as different forms of thinking

(such as analytic, causal, teleological, and synthetic).

Any assessment method needs to focus not simply on the performance of students but on the efficacy of teachers. Assessment that furthers student progress and interest in learning, and thereby fulfills the real mission of education, requires the full engagement of the teachers involved with the student. We need a culture in our schools that proclaims that there shall be "No Teacher Left Behind." Finally, any educational reform and assessment criterion is the task of a school's circle of educators, not of a government's house of legislators. Teachers need to be charged with the task of studying their students, deepening their expertise, and developing appropriate methodology as a result. They can then set appropriate educational policies based on freedom and cultural pluralism.

This is the Abstract of a research paper which was a collaboration between the Research Institute of Waldorf Education in North America, and the Bund (the Union of Free Waldorf Schools in Germany). It was sent to the U.S. Congressional Committees on Education this year as part of the opposition to Bush's "No Child Left Behind" policy which has depended on standardized tests (high-stakes testing) forcing teachers to become coaches instructing "test accomplishments at the expense of everything else." NCLB has added stress towards both teachers and pupils in the States. It was submitted Easter 2008.