

Pause for Thought

“It is impossible to learn to compete and to cooperate at the same time. As children compete against each other for better test results and higher grades, as do their schools and their countries, cooperation remains an abstract notion because children learn by example, not by exhortation. The pressure of standardized testing transforms children into cookie-cutter test-takers omitting from the operative definition of education whatever is not tested. Competitiveness as a value which informs education creates education failures, in contradiction of the basic requirement of human rights.”

Katarina Tomesevski, Human Rights lawyer, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

“Enlightened moral action is our highest calling as humans and as formal education aspires to inform our understanding of ethics while arousing us in the strength to act on our best judgment. The news this fall has been replete with the story of Kathryn Sihota who exemplifies these standards by engaging in an act of professional conscience and civil disobedience when she refused to administer a standardized reading test to her third graders. Thus far she has been disciplined by a letter from her school board. You should remember that you entered the profession at the moment when this courageous teacher was taking her principled stand. Let her character, conviction and willingness to act be an inspiration to you. The point is not, of course, whether you or I agree with the particulars of her stance. The point is that her professional conscience was definitive for her and gave her the courage to act in the face of public disapproval, disciplinary measures and economic risk. Essential to societies we consider “free” is the right and responsibility to engage in civil disobedience, that is to follow the dictates of our conscience in non-violent ways when we are so called upon. When our conscience is stirred professionally, however, we are called to yet a higher standard. We are obliged to act. Essential to the professional identity is the obligation to protect our students, not only from bullets and brutality, as we have seen teachers regularly do, but also from the psychological and educational vandalism against their spirits.”

Paul Shaker, Dean of Education, SFU, address to PDP graduates, 2007

“Every hour spent on such exam preparation is an hour not spent helping students to become critical, creative, curious learners.”

Alfie Kohn, author, education researcher, lecturer

“When they assess for learning, teachers use the classroom assessment process and the continuous flow of information about student achievement that it provides in order to advance, not merely check on, student learning.”

**Canadian Association of Principals, Valid Uses of Student Testing as part of Authentic, Comprehensive Student Assessment,
A Statement of Concern from Canada’s School Principals**

“Educational reform in Canada should not just be about narrowing numerical gaps in easily measurable outcomes, but about striving to benefit and enrich the learning of all students and all aspects of every student in an inspired and inclusive social and educational vision of what the country still stands for today and must aspire to become tomorrow.

Andy Hargreaves, *The Long and Short of Educational Change*, Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education, Boston College

“If social engineers had set out to invent a virtually perfect inequality machine, designed to perpetuate class and race divisions, and that appeared to abide by all requisite state and federal laws and regulations, those engineers could do no better than the present-day accountability systems already put to use in American schools.”

Peter Sacks, journalist, author, Pulitzer Prize nominee

“Believing we can improve schooling with more tests is like believing you can make yourself grow taller by measuring your height.”

Robert Schaeffer of *FairTest* (www.fairtest.org)

“I don’t think there’s any way to build a multiple-choice question that allows students to show what they can do with what they know.”

Roger Farr, professor of education, Indiana University

“Anyone can confirm how little the grading that results from examinations corresponds to the final useful work of people in life.”

Jean Piaget

“Teaching to the test also has a ‘dumbing’ effect on teaching and learning as worksheets, drills, practice tests and similar rote practices consume greater amounts of classroom time (Sacks, 2000). Insofar as standardized tests assess only part of the curriculum, time spent on test taking often overemphasizes basic-skill subjects and neglects high-order thinking skills (Herman, 1992). Research suggests that while students’ scores will rise when teachers teach closely to a test, learning often does not change (Shepard, 2000; Smith & Fey, 2000). In fact, the opposite may be true. That is, there are examples of schools from New York and Boston that have demonstrated improvements in student learning while their standardized test scores did not show substantial gains (Neil, 2003b). In both jurisdictions, these schools did not focus on teaching to the test or participating in test-preparation programs. Teachers that address the entire curriculum, particularly when preparing their students for standardized tests, provide their students with a solid foundation for future success.”

Louis Volante, *Teaching to the Test*, Concordia University

“Teaching to the test is a practice likened to memorizing an eye chart. With enough drill and rote work, even a person with 20/150 vision can rattle off ‘E-F-P-T-O-Z’. Of course this doesn’t mean that person can truly see.”

Meredith Scrivner, *Advocates for Education*, Wisconsin

“Standardized tests can’t measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and function, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning.”

Bill Ayers, Distinguished Professor of Education, University of Illinois

“As a true believer in public education, I cannot be a participant in its demise.”

Lynn Spampinato, Denver principal, who resigned in protest over the governor’s report card ranking of schools.

“Never eat at a place called Mom’s. Never play cards with a man called Doc. Never trust your child to a Standardisto who has a plan that works for all children.”

Michael Winerip, The New York Times

“The good gray managers of the U. S., the fellows who gave us Wonder Bread, the Pinto, hormone-laded beef wrapped in Styrofoam, and People magazine--not to mention acid rain, the Kansas City Hyatt, \$495 hammers, and political campaigns--are now loudly screaming that we teachers should mend our slothful ways and get back to excellence. I would invite the corporate leaders, the politicians, and the professorial consultants to climb down from their insular glass towers before casting any more stones of censure at, or even giving advice about, my lack of excellence in the classroom. Life is complicated. All of us are, in Thomas Hardy’s words, ‘people distressed by events they did not cause.’ There is no reason for teachers alone to shoulder the blame.”

Susan Ohanian, “Who’s In Charge? A Teacher Speaks Her Mind”

“If I were to compare the agendas of teachers and the agendas of test publishers, the bottom line for teachers is always kids. For test publishers it’s money. For politicians, it is votes. Who do you want to trust your child’s learning to? George Bush, Prentice Hall, STAR test, or a teacher with a strong sense of commitment to the welfare of children?”

Nancy Haas