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The final irony of the antitesting movement is that in the name of social fairness it opposes using high-stakes tests as gatekeepers, monitors, and incentives—functions that are essential to social fairness. Without effective monitoring and high incentives, including high-stakes testing programs, no educational system has achieved or could achieve excellence and equity. Good tests are necessary to instruct, to monitor, and to motivate. John Bishop has shown in great detail the importance of high-stakes tests in motivating students to work hard.<sup>48</sup> The Romantic idea that learning is natural, and that the motivation for academic achievement comes from within, is an illusion that forms one of the greatest barriers to social justice imaginable, since poor and disadvantaged students must be motivated to work even harder than advantaged students in order to achieve equality of educational opportunity. It was Antonio Gramsci, that wise spokesman for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, who wrote that the gravest disservice to social justice entailed by Romantic theories of education is the delusion that educational achievement comes as naturally as leaves to a tree, without extrinsic motivation, discipline, toil, or sweat.

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in schools lead kids to focus on their performance? Make your own list and you'll probably come up with some of the same items I've heard from people all over the country who were asked this question:

- Grades.
- Variations on grades that increase their impact, such as privileges made contingent on a high grade-point average, honor rolls and societies, and weighted grades (where some classes count for more than others).
- Standardized tests, especially when the scores are published.
- Academic contests and other instances of competition.
- Frequent evaluations of student performance, particularly when done publicly.
- Rewards ranging from gold stars to scholarships.
- The segregation of students by performance or alleged ability, including tracking and special enrichments for those labeled “gifted and talented.”
- The current criteria for (and sometimes mistaken beliefs about) college admission.
- The kind of teaching that values error-free assignments and right answers more than real thinking.

It comes down to this: all of us who are bothered by the effects of overemphasizing achievement—namely, the prospect of kids trying to take the easy way out, thinking superficially, and losing interest in learning—will view this as a “hit list.” Collectively, these items describe an antilearning environment—reason enough for us to work to eliminate (and, in the meantime, deemphasize) as many of these practices as possible. The consequences of a preoccupation with performance are quite clear; the question is whether we're willing to follow that analysis where it leads.

One place it leads is to the recognition that the problem with tests is not limited to their content. Rather, the harm comes from paying too much attention to the results. Even the most unbiased, carefully constructed, “authentic” measure of what students know is likely to be worrisome, psychologically speaking, if too big a deal is made about how they performed, thus leading them (and their teachers) to think less about learning and more about test outcomes. This point is overlooked even by some of the most incisive critics of standardized testing and traditional instruction.<sup>25</sup>

Another disconcerting implication of this whole analysis is that we're

obliged to rethink the very idea of motivation. Getting students to become preoccupied with how well they're doing is typically achieved by techniques intended to "motivate" them. These include giving students rewards for good performance—or, in what seems almost a parody of Skinnerian psychology, giving them one reward (like money) for having received another reward (a good grade)! This practice is so patently destructive that you can almost watch kids' interest in learning fade before your eyes. Yet some of the parents who do this are obviously bright, thoughtful, and well intentioned. How is this possible?

Two simple and almost universally shared beliefs about motivation may account for the use of such gimmicks. Belief number one, which is so elementary that no one even thinks about it, is that it's possible to motivate someone else, such as your child. The truth is that doing so is impossible, unnecessary, and undesirable. Let's take these in order. First, while you can often make someone else do something—in effect buying a behavior with a bribe or a threat—you can never make him or her *want* to do something, which is what "motivation" means. The best you can do is create the kind of setting and offer the kind of tasks that will tap and nourish people's own motivation.

Second, such motivation is natural. I don't think I've ever met a child who wasn't motivated to figure things out, to find the answers to personally relevant questions. However, I've met (and taught) plenty of kids who aren't motivated to sit quietly and listen to someone else talk or to memorize the definitions of a list of words. That lack of interest doesn't suggest an absence of motivation (to be remedied with carrots and sticks) but a problem with the model of instruction or with the curriculum. Anyone who has been around young children knows that it's hard to stop them from learning, almost impossible to curb their natural motivation. They persist in asking questions about things we take for granted. They want to apply their new reading skills to every sign in sight, from highway billboards to restaurant menus.

"A passion for learning . . . isn't something you have to inspire [kids] with; it's something you have to keep from extinguishing," as Deborah Meier has remarked.<sup>26</sup> Unhappily, it often does get extinguished. At least in the United States, research has repeatedly found that this enthusiasm for learning declines sharply by the time kids are well along in elementary school.<sup>27</sup> Even so, it's not helpful to see our task as "motivating" such kids. Rather, our short-term obligation is to help revive or resuscitate what used to come naturally, and our long-term obligation is to figure out (and change) what's going on in schools that's contributing to this decline.

Finally, even if it were possible to provide motivation from outside, it's not a good idea. Think for a moment about the arrogance of setting out to motivate a child. It should be clear that this is an exercise in control and therefore likely to boomerang, if only because humans hate to be controlled. Once the issue is framed as "how to motivate" someone, it is quite likely that the usual techniques of control—namely, rewards and punishments—will be used.

One popular myth about motivation, then, is that it can be done to others. The other, even more basic misconception is one we encountered while looking at high-stakes testing—the idea that there's a thing called motivation, a single substance that people possess to a certain degree. The reality, remember, is that there are qualitatively different types of motivation. What determines how effectively students will learn isn't how motivated they are. It's how they are motivated. The type of motivation referred to as "extrinsic"—which we find, for example, when kids are led to read books so they can get some goodie—turns out to be not merely ineffective but counterproductive. It tends to reduce "intrinsic" motivation—that is, an interest in reading itself.<sup>28</sup> Thus, when things go badly for kids at school, it "is just as likely the result of [their] being *overmotivated*, but for the wrong reasons, as it is of not being motivated at all," in the words of Martin Covington.<sup>29</sup>

This basic point—that all motivation isn't created equal—goes a long way toward explaining those data demonstrating that giving (and emphasizing) grades is such a mistake. Recall the three key consequences of grading: less interest in learning, less proficiency at learning, and less desire to challenge oneself (pp. 41–43). None of these findings seems so counterintuitive once you stop thinking of motivation as something that comes in only one flavor.

Even apart from how more of one kind of motivation can mean less of another, the simple fact that there are different kinds can change the way you look at kids in school. Say you walk into a classroom and find everyone in the middle of doing an assignment. All the kids are busy and "on task," as some educators like to say. But don't leave without asking a few kids what they're doing<sup>30</sup>—*and why*. If the most common answer is "Because Mr. Riley told us to" or "Because it's going to be on the test," then something here may be terribly wrong just below the surface. The kind of answers we hope to hear sound more like this: "Because I just don't get why the character in this story told her friend to go away!" or "Because we're trying to figure out a better lunch schedule for all the classes. You want to see what we've come up with?" Both sets of answers may indicate that students are motivated. But the kinds of motivation are altogether different—and so are the long-term effects.

strong aid to learning, I view the war on standardized tests as mainly a disheartened, scapegoating attempt to shoot the messenger that is bringing the bad news. Educators would hardly be so preoccupied with attacking standardized tests, and blaming them for the ineffectiveness and inequity of American schooling, if those machine-scored messengers were bringing less depressing bulletins, or if educators had workable ideas about how to make the results better. If our children's scores on standard tests were getting significantly higher, or if the spread of scores were more equitably distributed by race, class, and gender, or if American kids were further from the bottom on international rankings, these unceasing attacks on standardized tests would subside.

But perhaps not. Orthodox educational doctrine since the 1920s has been consistently opposed to testing and grading. When William Heard Kilpatrick designed his demonstration school at Teachers College, one of his first innovations, after having dispensed with the subject-matter curriculum, was to abolish tests and grades. In the progressive-Romantic view of education, to give number or letter grades to students in the classroom or on tests is a fundamental educational mistake. It sends an implicit message that one child is better or abler than another, and thus fosters undesirable competition instead of cooperation. It offends against the antihierarchical principle that all children are equally worthy. One simply cannot properly describe complex flesh-and-blood human beings, each of whom is immediate to God, with single letters and numbers. Romantics have always abhorred connecting human beings with numbers. As Blake put it with customary trenchancy: "Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth."

Kilpatrick and his intellectual descendents argue that the use of such measures imposes external rewards and punishments for learning rather than encouraging an inward motivation toward learning for its own sake. According to this orthodoxy, which is contravened by psychological research, what is learned under compulsion or through external incentives is superficial, artificial, and short-lived. It will not lead to deep understanding or to lifelong love of learning. Learning must be natural. And to enhance that naturalness, any evaluation of learning must be lifelike and "authentic." To these earlier educational and psychological objections against grades and tests has been added in recent years a corollary—racial-social objection. Tests and grades discriminate unfairly against minorities and poor people, and sometimes against females—the proof being that on some measures these groups do not receive average marks as high as those of white males. The strength and influence of such objections against grades and tests among educators have not diminished.

Resistance to these antitest criticisms comes from parents and the general public rather than from the educational community.

In *Education Week* for June 14, 1995, there was a long article on a controversy over a “new research-based” idea: abolishing letter grades. In the Rhode Island city of Cranston, an intense controversy between parents and the schools had arisen over yet another attempt to introduce “descriptive” rather than “evaluative” report cards. (Just a few weeks earlier, *Education Week* described an emotional controversy in Massachusetts over a proposal to unbolt classroom desks in a fondly remembered classroom.) Both the desk unbolting and the grading controversies are symbols of the undying influence of progressive orthodoxy, though now dressed up in such modern terminology as “narrative report cards” and “portfolios,” and through new-age techniques such as videotapes that can provide parents with “greater insight into what their children are learning.” Equally persistent since the 1920s, however, has been the “reactionary” resistance of parents and citizens against ideas that do not seem to them persuasive or practical.

Few teachers who aren’t sadists are fond of grades and tests. After more than thirty years of teaching, I still view those parts of my job with a distaste that has grown rather than diminished with the years. Teachers want all of their students to be A students, each in his or her own way. They want them to work hard without the extrinsic motivations of punishment and reward, and to be motivated entirely by intrinsic interest in the subject matter at hand and by the inherent joys of learning and accomplishment. They wish and hope that students’ inherent desire to learn and do a good job will be its own reward. Teachers often blame themselves when not every student is intrinsically motivated by schoolwork. Moreover, most teachers strongly dislike disappointing a student with a bad grade. On the other hand, they also dislike the idea of giving everyone the same grade, because doing so, apart from other disadvantages, is egregiously unfair to students who do better work. Consequently, most teachers feel compelled to perform the disagreeable acts of testing and grading because they feel a sense of responsibility not only to honesty and fairness but also—and this is the critical point—to effective teaching.

It has been shown convincingly that tests and grades strongly contribute to effective teaching. This commonsense conjecture was confirmed by research conducted after the antigrade, pass/fail mode of grading had become popular at colleges and universities in the 1960s and ’70s. Quite unambiguous analysis showed that students who took courses for a grade studied harder and learned more than students who took the courses for intrinsic interest alone.<sup>3</sup> This scientific confirmation of the common sense of Cranston, Rhode Island, par-

ents runs counter to the claim that “research has shown” that giving marks *inhibits* learning. According to one expert quoted in the *Education Week* article, there are “detrimental aspects” of report cards that give grades because they make

*learning a highly competitive activity. Students compete against each other for the few scarce rewards—the high grades—that are going to be administered by the teacher. It sets learning up as a win-lose situation for the students, and because the number of high grades is typically limited, most students will be losers.*<sup>4</sup>

Losers in what sense? Since research has clearly shown that students learn more when grades are given, the main issue for this expert is not how much students learn but how much their self-concept may be affected. The antigrade view continues to be associated with its origins in Romantic egalitarianism, which declines to accept any version of the idea that “most students will be losers” (i.e., get less than super grades). But this absolute, Romantic version of egalitarianism is very different from Jeffersonian democratic egalitarianism, which aimed to give rich and poor the same foundations for achievement, but to be quite rigorous in selecting only the better students for subsequent free education through a system of tests and grades.<sup>5</sup> This Jeffersonian version of meritocratic equality has been attacked even by (or especially by) some members of the testing community. In a recent newsletter put out by the UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST), one expert was quoted as saying that “Americans have long supported what she called *procedural* equity that ensures that every one has access to valued goods. But *substantive* equity or equal results has never enjoyed public support.” Far from accepting Jeffersonian meritocratic equality, the test expert recommended “re-educating” the public to favor equal results for everyone by appealing to their “self interest for a better society.”<sup>6</sup> This improvement is to be accomplished by repudiating standardized tests in favor of more “equitable” nonstandardized kinds which will ensure that every group performs the same.

I do not mean to disparage nonstandardized tests, however. The last chapter of my 1977 book on the teaching of writing was titled “The Valid Assessment of Writing Ability,” and it called for what are now labeled “authentic” or “performance-based” assessments.<sup>7</sup> Later on in the 1970s and early ’80s, I continued to do research on performance-based writing tests and conducted experiments over a number of years. To my pleasure, the results were published in a refereed scientific book alongside the work of mainstream cognitive