

Standardized testing dumbs America down

By Marion Brady, *Orlando Sentinel*, February 13, 2020:

Decade after decade, the academic performance of America's secondary schools stays basically flat and achievement gaps refuse to close.

The institution has a fundamental, unaddressed problem.

Consider the possibility that it's the "map" teachers must follow—the taken-for-granted curriculum adopted in 1893 now called "the core."

That curriculum ignores important fields of knowledge. No procedures adapt it to change or force it to incorporate conclusions from research. Poorly organized information is dumped on learners in unrealistic amounts at unreasonable rates. Disconnected subjects disregard the integrated nature of the world that schooling is supposed to help the young understand.

The core doesn't prioritize what's taught by level of importance. It emphasizes study of text to the neglect of better ways of teaching and learning. Its inefficiency leaves little or no time in the school day for elective studies or programs that identify and develop individual abilities and interests. Its daily hours of passive, feet-on-floor, rear-in-seat, eyes-on-teacher-or-text are at odds with youthful nature and physical fitness—just to begin a much longer list.

Meanwhile, beyond school walls, in the world the young are about to inherit, tribalism is paralyzing politics, authoritarianism is destroying democracies, wars are converting wealth to waste, inequality is triggering instabilities, and climate change is threatening the whole of the planet and humankind itself.

Here's a question: When nobody knows what the future holds except that it will be increasingly complex and continuously changing, what should the young be taught?

No matter what tomorrows bring, it can be said with certainty that the young will need to know more than the core curriculum can teach them. They'll have to think in new, more productive ways, and the core as it's traditionally taught doesn't make the cut.

"To think" is to hypothesize, generalize, synthesize, imagine, predict, estimate, relate, extrapolate, intuit and exercise the dozens of other thought processes that make routine human functioning and civilized life possible—*processes that standardized tests can't test.*

The merit of thought processes depends on their quality, determining relative quality involves value judgments, and standardized tests can't make value judgments. Standardized tests count right and wrong answers of recalled, secondhand information. They can't say that in this or that particular situation, which hypothesis or inference or prediction is better, and why.

There are ways to use the content of the core that require learners to use a full range of thought processes, but they won't even be tried until standardized testing stops.

Adopting the core curriculum as the primary organizer of schooling was a serious, institution-damaging, profession-fragmenting, mind-cluttering mistake.

Someday, one can hope, education policymakers will realize that infants are born already equipped to organize and integrate information. They master the process long before reaching school age, and if continuously immersed in rich, varied experiences and asked probing questions, will teach themselves at rates and to depths that traditional core-based schooling will never match.

When, or if, that happens, America will produce an impressively thoughtful citizenry capable of governing itself.

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