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THE REVIEW OF
EDUCATION
PEDAGOGY &
CULTURAL STUDIES

EDITORS

Susan Searls Giroux
Henry Giroux
Imre Szeman

CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors	247
The Culture of Discourse on Educational Reform in Spain <i>Cathryn Teasley</i>	249
“No-Business-As-Usual German”: A Critical Pedagogy of Business German <i>Benjamin Robinson</i>	277
Why the Novel (Still) Matters: Doing Student-Centered Cultural Studies in the Literature Classroom <i>Eric G. Lorentzen</i>	289

(CONTENTS continued on Back Cover)

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The Review of Education Pedagogy & Cultural Studies

CONTENTS

Volume 26, Number 1, January–March 2004

Notes on Contributors	1
In the Place of a Common Culture, What? <i>Nick Couldry</i>	3
Digitize This: The Cultural Studies e-Archive Project <i>Gary Hall</i>	23
Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Holocaust and Film <i>Terri Ginsberg</i>	47
Hitchens, Orwell, Capitalism, and the Real Threat to Democracy <i>Paul Street</i>	61

Volume 26, Numbers 2–3, April–September 2004

Special Issue on Cultural Studies and Education	
Guest Editors: Handel Kashope Wright and Karl Maton	
Notes on Contributors	69
Cultural Studies and Education: From Birmingham Origin to Glocal Presence <i>Handel Kashope Wright and Karl Maton</i>	73
New Times, New Stakes: Moment of Transit, Accountability, and Classroom Practice <i>Robert J. Helfenbein, Jr.</i>	91
The Practice of Cultural Studies in the Turkish Republic <i>Laurence Raw</i>	111
Cultural Studies in Turkey Education and Practice <i>Gönül Pultar and Ayşe Lahur Kirtunç</i>	129
Culture and Pedagogy in Teacher Education <i>Ronald Soetaert, Andre Mottart, and Ivo Verdoodt</i>	155
Teaching to Divide the World: The Perverse Curriculum of a Television Program <i>Marisa Vorraber Costa</i>	175

Reading Youth Writing: Grazing in the Pastures of Cultural Studies and Education <i>Michael Hoechsmann</i>	193
Multiculturalism or Assimilation? An Examination of an University International House through a Cultural Studies-as-Praxis Models <i>Tatiana V. Ryba and J. Patrick Williams</i>	211
Superseding Williams: Critical Literacy in Williams and Said <i>John Higgins</i>	229

Volume 26, Number 4, October–December 2004

Notes on Contributors	247
The Culture of Discourse on Educational Reform in Spain <i>Cathryn Teasley</i>	249
“No-Business-As-Usual German”: A Critical Pedagogy of Business German <i>Benjamin Robinson</i>	277
Why the Novel (Still) Matters: Doing Student-Centered Cultural Studies in the Literature Classroom <i>Eric G. Lorentzen</i>	289
Your Best Friend or Your Worst Enemy: Youth Popular Culture, Pedagogy, and Curriculum in Urban Classrooms <i>Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade</i>	313
The Case Against Standardized Testing and the Call for a Revitalization of Democracy <i>Carlo Ricci</i>	339
Following page 361: Title Page to Volume 26 Table of Contents to Volume 26 Author Index to Volume 26	

The Case Against Standardized Testing and the Call for a Revitalization of Democracy

Carlo Ricci

All great changes have begun to manifest themselves in a few people at first,
but these were only the "seeds" as it were of something much greater to come.
(Bohm and Peat, 2000: 271)

In *Chomsky on MtsEducation*, in the chapter titled "Market Democracy in a Neo-Liberal Order: Doctrines and Reality" Chomsky warns: "Neither the United States nor any other power has been guided by 'global meliorism.' Democracy is under attack worldwide, including the leading industrial countries—at least, democracy in a meaningful sense of the term, involving opportunities for people to manage their own collective and individual affairs" (Chomsky, 2000: 136).

My objective in this essay is to encourage others to join the campaign in the struggle to revitalize participatory democracy. We must join the scores of people that are determined to fight for meaningful democracy. We must continue to increase the pressure and the momentum already started by those people who are struggling for democracy in, for example, the summit meeting of 1997 in Vancouver, of 1999 in Seattle, of 2001 in Quebec City, and of 2001 in Genoa, Italy. We must understand that we the citizens are empowered, and that we can make a difference. We must rally and fight the enemies of democracy. The battle is not easy, but the need is vital. We must rally around those who have fought valiantly and even lost their lives fighting for democracy, and by doing our part, honor and continue their laudable efforts.

I will never forget the shock, disgust, inspiration, and the urgent need I felt to participate in revitalizing democracy when I read the newspaper headline on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* on Saturday, July 21, 2001 about the G8 summit and

the by now familiar story of violent clashes between activists and police. The headline read "Killing shocks G8 summit," and the image was of a gruesome scene in which a twenty-four-year-old activist from Rome lay dead from a gun shot wound to the head, his body left under the wheels of an Italian Carabinieri's vehicle. He died fighting for democracy. The caption read, "Protestor Carlo Giuliani of Rome lies dead on a Genoa street yesterday [Friday, July 20, 2001] after being shot by police and run over by a security vehicle during violent demonstrations at G8 summit. An Italian cabinet minister said Mr. Giuliani was killed by an injured paramilitary officer" (Killing Shocks G8 Summit, 2001: A1).

Accordingly, in memory of Carlo and all those who have died and continue to die for democracy, for those working and living in impoverished conditions, and for those who continue to be oppressed, it is our duty to continue the fight for a meaningful democracy. Transforming the world is not easy, but necessary if we want to realize a participatory democracy. As Freire tells us, "Those who always see events as *fatti accompli*, as things that happen because they had to happen, live history as determinism and not as possibility" (Freire, 1998: 102). We must strive to live history as possibility, in part, by striving to eliminate discrimination of class, sex, sexual orientation, race and so on. We must continuously strive toward the melioration of society by participating in the democratic process, and not allow profits to take precedence over human, nonhuman, and environmental concerns. I am not advocating and condoning violence, but I am calling for citizens to choose a battle and begin the urgent need to revitalize democracy.

This essay is my battle cry for help in revitalizing democracy. It deals with the institutions in which our future citizens are being educated. It deals with the undemocratic way in which our schools are run. In *Democratic Schools*, James Beane and Michael Apple remind us of Dewey's insistence that in order for students to learn how to live in a democracy they need the opportunities to learn what that way of life means by being immersed in democratic school environments (Apple & Beane, 1995: 7). Students cannot adequately learn about democracy merely by being exposed to democratic principles in reading texts. Instead, students learn about democracy by participating in the democratic process; therefore students need to experience what it means to live in a democracy within schools. Chomsky writes, "Because they don't teach the truth about the world, schools have to rely on beating students over the head with propaganda about democracy. If schools were, in reality, democratic, there would be no need to bombard students with platitudes about democracy" (Chomsky,

2000: 16). Far from being democratic, Chomsky tells us that schools are

institutions for indoctrination and for imposing obedience. Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion. And once you are well educated, you have already been socialized in ways that support the power structure, which, in turn, rewards you immensely. (16)

He goes on to criticize how teachers become commissars, "the intellectuals who work primarily to reproduce, legitimate, and maintain the dominant social order from which they reap benefits" (26). He concludes with the statement that real intellectuals have the obligation to seek and tell the truth about things that matter and are important. This is similar to Giroux's (2000) call in *Impure Acts* for oppositional intellectuals to challenge and transform society.

Beane and Apple offer the following conditions as being central concerns of democratic schools:

1. The open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.
2. Faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems.
3. The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.
4. Concern for the welfare of others and "the common good."
5. Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.
6. An understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealized" set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people.
7. The organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (Apple & Beane, 1995: 6-7)

Unfortunately, schools in Ontario are undemocratic because they do not meet many of these conditions.

Given the time and space, I would like to narrow the focus of my battle even further and argue for a revitalization of democracy by making a case against standardized testing; specifically, the Ontario Grade 10 Literacy Test is undemocratic, and we need to stop this damaging, undemocratic practice immediately. Throughout this paper, among the sources to which I am going to appeal are 1) Linda McNeil's book *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*; 2) a case study I conducted in an Ontario school and the impact that standardized testing has had on the curriculum, students, and teachers at the school; as well as 3) EQAO documents; and 4) Peel District School Board documents.

improving the learning that is taking place. Rather, we need to make the case that adding external control does not lead to school improvement. In fact, the more control that is exercised from the outside, the less flexibility teachers and students have to creatively manipulate and therefore better their learning. In *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West*, John Ralston Saul describes what happens when the hierarchical power structure rules and those in the field are not allowed to react appropriately, using their professional judgment. The following analogy is revealing, even though the situation is different. Saul writes,

That World War I was a strategic disaster is now commonly accepted. Blame, however, has not been clearly assigned. It was the staff who made all the decisions. These were arrived abstractly, on paper, and were communicated in writing to the field commanders. Field officers, who dared to warn headquarters that these orders would result in disaster, were religiously ignored. Headquarters felt it more important to preserve what they saw as the essential chain of command—the common language, common method, common panic-suppressing chain of command. If, however, the results of the battle proved that the field officer's warnings had been right, then that officer—providing he had survived the carnage—was usually fired. (1992: 201)

This is the type of obstacle faced by teachers. They are asked not to take charge and make decisions locally (a strategy Saul explains works best in battle), but they are asked to follow a structure regardless of the lack of success it may have locally. Teachers are asked to follow the pre-established hierarchically defined plan and make it work. If it fails, it is the fault of the individuals involved, not the impracticality of implementing the standardized centrally directed plan at the local level.

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS

Clearly, a system that ignores difference and local needs is one that is working from undemocratic principles. Freire critiques educational systems that call for a "how-to recipe" for teaching (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 134) in favor of one that is more fluid. McNeil echoes this sentiment and suggests that the success of the magnet schools is not a result of any single pedagogy.

The approaches to teaching varied widely, depending on the subject, the teachers' personalities and philosophies, the teachers' perception of their students' interests and capabilities, the role of a particular course in the overall school program, and many other factors. The curriculum in the magnet schools was in a constant state of flux, as teachers updated and reworked their courses from year to year and from class to class within a given year. The curriculum itself, then, was not an "independent variable" that could account for the schools' accomplishments. The curricula grew

as teachers' knowledge and students' accomplishments. The curricula grew as teachers' knowledge and students' experiences grew and shaped the possibilities of topics and activities. (McNeil, 2000: 193)

Unfortunately, as will be made clear, schools in Ontario, unlike the magnet schools, treat curriculum as an independent variable.

It is often argued that standardized tests and standardization in general allows for "sameness" which in turn translates into fairness. As McNeil points out, although "sameness" may be a symbolic proxy for equity, it is not an investment in equity (198). We cannot, as standardized tests do, ignore differences in historical, cultural, fiscal, organizational, and other "context" factors (McNeil, 2000: 199).

THE ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL LITERACY TEST

The first time students in Ontario were expected to write the Grade 10 Literacy Test was in the 1999–2000 school year. Since it is such a high-stakes test that students need to pass in order to receive their high school diploma, and since this was the first time that the literacy test was to be written, the decision was made to have students write the test, but to reduce the stakes by not having the test "count" this one time. The political motivation was clear: just in case anything would go wrong, this would be a safe and politically wise thing to do. Even though the 1999–2000 literacy test "did not count" a huge deal was made of the results. Results were posted in newspapers and websites, and the school board and principals met to discuss ways of training teachers to respond to the public, as well as ways of disseminating the information to the public with the least amount of resistance.

In the school I examined, the principal held an emergency staff meeting and coached teachers on how to best respond to questions about the test. The official policy was that teachers were not to criticize the implementation of standardized testing, nor offer critiques of standardized testing as a whole, but were expected to tell the public that now that they are armed with the information about how the students did on the test they are now going to find ways to help the students increase their performance on the test. As well, teachers were to remind the public that this test did not mean much, but was merely another tool used to assess students. However, we all knew that despite our better judgment these test scores would be misused. In "No-one Has Ever Grown Taller as a result of Being Measured" Revisited," Sharon Murphy offers six lessons for Canadians to keep in mind when thinking about standardized testing:

- Lesson 1. Neither standards nor standardized testing mean excellence or are a guarantee of excellence.
- Lesson 2. Test results that are reported numerically, despite cautions of the test developers, take on a life of their own.
- Lesson 3. Invariably, the media will misuse information from standardized testing to manufacture news and, in doing so, contribute to making the consequences of such testing much weightier than they should be.
- Lesson 4. In a time of globalization, business interests and business ways of thinking have infused public policy and contributed to the move toward standardized testing.
- Lesson 5. The consequences of standardized testing can have a negative impact on the quality of education students are receiving and the effects can be particularly detrimental to children whose race, culture, or first language is not that of the majority.
- Lesson 6. The inappropriate implementation and interpretation of standardized testing has allowed politicians to misguide the public, a consequence of which is the destabilization of the education system. (Murphy, 2001: 146-157)

As we will see, all of these warnings have indeed negatively contributed to schooling in the specific case that I am examining, despite the suggestion that the test is merely another tool.

STATISTICAL COMPARISONS MADE DESPITE THE CLAIMS THAT THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN

One aspect of this emergency staff meeting that remains vivid is the secrecy that surrounded the statistical chart that analyzed and number-crunched how the school fared in comparison to other schools in the area and across the province. This information was so confidential that only the principal had access to it. I now know that the results of the District School Board EQAO Results for Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test put out by the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Research and Evaluation Department—Program Services (Peel District School Board, 2001), consisted of not only a chart for Grade 10 test, but also one for Grade 6 and one for the Grade 3 feeder school results for both 1997-1998 and 1999-2000 (see Figures 1 and 2). The results for the Grade 10 Literacy test include scores for the school, the board, and the province. As well, it included information on the number of grade 10 students, the percentage of students that deferred, the percentage of students that were absent, the number of students exempt, the percentage of students that passed the reading and writing component, the percentage of students that failed the reading and writing component, the percentage of students that passed the reading but failed the writing component, and the percentage of students that passed the writing and failed the reading component.

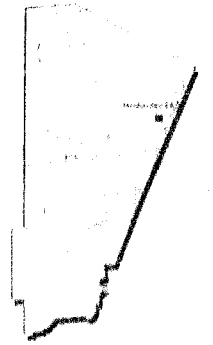
**Peel District School Board
Grade 10 EQAO - Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test
School Profiles
Humberview S.S.**

The Ontario Ministry of Education has mandated that the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test be given province-wide to determine whether students have reached a proficient level of literacy. The test was developed by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

Administration of the test took place in October, 2000. All students who had started secondary school (Grade 9) were required to write the test. Exemptions were allowed under specific conditions.

Results for students participating in the first administration of the test (October, 2000) did not count in any way toward a student's academic progress or graduation requirement. However, for students taking the test in the Fall of 2001, receiving a high school diploma will depend on passing the test.

EQAO reports results only in terms of whether or not the student passed/successful on the test. Students are considered to have completed the test successfully only if they have passed both the reading and writing components. Students who did not complete the test successfully will be provided with remedial help.



Humberview S.S.: Principal: Patricia Macdonald
Superintendent: Tony Pontes

School Demographics: Enrolment of Students: 801 # Teaching: 50/41/50
% Students whose most frequent language in the home is English: 81%
% Students born outside of Canada: 3%
% Students who read outside of school 3 or more hours a week: 31%
% Students who write outside of school 3 or more times a week: 21%

**Overall Results - Method 1
(includes deferred and absent students)**

	# of Grade 10 Students	% Deferred	% Absent	# Exempt	% Passing Reading & Writing	% Failing Reading & Writing	% Passing Reading & Failing Writing	% Failing Reading & Failing Writing
Humberview S.S.	172	0	0	0	70	13	10	1
Peel Board	7,716	3	6	73	62	14	11	7
Province	141,392	3	7	1,118	61	13	11	7

**Overall Results - Method 2
(excludes deferred and absent students)**

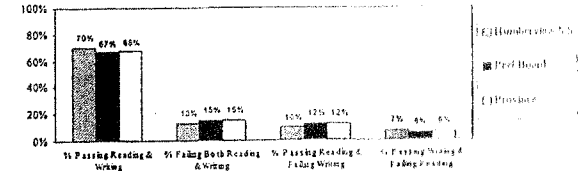


FIGURE 1. Peel District School Board Grade 10 EQAO Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test School Profiles Humberview S.S.

Another chart was provided that further subdivided the results of the test. One chart outlines the 'Detailed Reading Results' which included the following categories: First, under reading skills the following items are included: understands directly stated ideas and information, understands indirectly stated ideas and information, makes connections between personal knowledge and experiences and the ideas and information in the reading selections. Second, under reading strategies the following items are included: ability to use knowledge or context to

Peel District School Board
EQAO Results For Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test
Grade 3 and Grade 6 Feeder Schools
Method 1

Humberview S.S.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Results: 2000-2001

Grade 10	# of Grade 10 Students	% Deferred	% Absent	# Exempt	% Passing Reading & Writing	% Failing Reading & Writing	% Passing Reading & Failing Writing	% Passing Writing & Failing Reading
Humberview S.S.	172	0	0	0	70	13	10	7
Peel Board	7,716	3	6	73	62	14	11	4
Province	141,392	3	7	1,118	61	13	11	5

Grade 6 EQAO Results For Feeder Schools: 1998-1999 To 1999-2000

Grade 6 School	Reading % Levels 3,4		Writing * % Levels 3,4		Math % Levels 3,4	
	1999/2000	1998/1999	1999/2000	1998/1999	1999/2000	1998/1999
Caledon East	70	67	57	53	86	75
Ellwood Memorial	41	55	47	53	47	55
James Bolton	59	60	70	71	84	75
Macville	53	58	39	58	53	61
Palgrave	92	83	85	81	95	95
Peel Board	58	52	53	52	59	49
Province	51	48	49	48	52	46

* The writing scores can not be directly compared from year to year

Grade 3 EQAO Results For Feeder Schools: 1997-1998 To 1999-2000

Grade 3 School	Reading % Levels 3,4			Writing * % Levels 3,4			Math % Levels 3,4		
	1999/2000	1998/1999	1997/1998	1999/2000	1998/1999	1997/1998	1999/2000	1998/1999	1997/1998
Caledon East	90	72	45	71	83	45	96	86	45
Ellwood Memorial	52	63	42	54	54	53	67	70	53
James Bolton	73	56	48	72	69	51	88	63	39
Macville	64	53	42	69	58	58	67	47	64
Palgrave	84	76	82	75	67	56	94	89	73
Peel Board	58	55	54	57	60	56	67	68	55
Province	49	48	46	52	56	49	58	60	43

* The writing scores can not be directly compared from year to year

Note: Method 1 includes students who were deferred or absent for all or part of the test.

FIGURE 2. Peel District School Board EQAO Results for Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Grade 3 and Grade 6 Feeder Schools Humberview S.S.

understand vocabulary, ability to use grammar and syntactic structures to aid understanding, ability to use structure and organizational elements to aid understanding, and ability to use graphic features to aid understanding. And third, under types of reading selections the following items are included: information (e.g., explanations instructions); graphic (e.g., schedules, graphs, tables); literary (e.g., story, description, dialogue). Students were graded as either very weak, weak, or acceptable in each of the categories.

Yet another chart outlines the detailed writing results. The students were asked to write a summary paragraph, a paragraph expressing an opinion, a news report and an information paragraph. For each of the students, the work was judged as being blank or illegible, off topic, instructions not followed, category 1 (included written work that failed to successfully address the assigned task or has spelling or grammatical errors that prevented clear communication) or category 2, 3, or 4. Each category's descriptors progressed with the qualities lauded by the test designers ultimately being represented in category 4.

A final chart that offers a summary of the students' work on different characteristics of writing is divided as follows: main idea, supporting details, organization, tone, grammar and punctuation.

Detailed Reading Results

In total, 25 students wrote but failed the reading component of the test. Of these, 0 students attempted less than half of the reading questions. The following table provides percentage breakdown on the remaining 26 students.

The categories in the table below show how students performed in each distinct reading skill and strategy and their ability to understand different types of reading selections.

Reading Skill	Percentage of Each Category of Those Who Failed the Reading Component		
	Very Weak	Weak	Acceptable
understands directly stated ideas and information	27 %	60 %	23 %
understands indirectly stated ideas and information	46 %	42 %	12 %
makes connections between personal knowledge and experiences and the ideas and information in the reading selections	69 %	27 %	4 %
ability to use knowledge or context to understand vocabulary	15 %	73 %	12 %
ability to use grammar and syntactic structures to aid understanding	4 %	73 %	23 %
ability to use structure and organizational elements to aid understanding	19 %	58 %	23 %
ability to use graphic features to aid understanding	0 %	62 %	38 %
information (e.g., explanation, instructions)	48 %	54 %	0 %
graphic (e.g., schedules, graphs, tables)	4 %	85 %	12 %
literary (e.g., story, description, dialogue)	12 %	69 %	19 %

"Acceptable" performance represents scores in a range typical of those who passed the reading component of the test.

"Very Weak" performance represents scores at the low end of the possible scores; generally well below half of the questions correct. Less than 1% of students whose performance on reading skills and reading strategies was "very weak" passed the reading component of the test.

"Weak" performance falls between the above descriptions.

FIGURE 3. Detailed Reading Results.

spelling. For each of these characteristics results were divided as being either the percentage of students who did weak work in most or all pieces of writing, work varied across pieces of writing, work met requirements in some or all pieces of writing, insufficient work to mark this characteristic.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Let's now look in depth at how standardized testing has negatively impacted one Ontario school. In preparation for the Ontario Literacy Test significant changes were made at the Board, school, and classroom level. For example, at the classroom level changes were made in the course profiles (resource materials teachers are expected to use and follow when teaching a course) by narrowing the curriculum to reflect what teachers, administration, and the school board knew would be included on the test. To begin, the

Detailed Writing Results

The following tables include data on the 31 students who wrote but failed the writing component of the test.

Performance on Four Types of Writing Tasks

	Blank	Off Topic	Instructions Not Followed	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Summary	19 %	0 %	23 %	20 %	19 %	6 %	3 %
Paragraph Expressing an Opinion	16 %	10 %	6 %	16 %	39 %	10 %	3 %
Notes for a Task	13 %	3 %	16 %	10 %	23 %	35 %	0 %
Informal Paragraph	26 %	16 %	26 %	6 %	16 %	16 %	0 %

Off Topic includes situations such as a student submitting a passage on "Dangerous Driving" in response to an assigned topic of "Teen Fitness."

Instructions Not Followed includes such things as submitting a single paragraph in response to a task that requested "a series of paragraphs (a minimum of three)..." or submitting a personal opinion when the assigned task was to write a summary of given information.

Category 1 includes written work that failed to successfully address the assigned task or had spelling or grammatical errors that prevented clear communication.

Category 2 includes written work that was on task but had significant shortcomings, such as insufficient information, errors that interfered with clear communication, or faulty structure.

Category 3 includes written work that successfully addressed the assigned task with minor shortcomings in such areas as organization, grammar and punctuation, or spelling.

Category 4 represents well developed and effective work with few, if any, grammatical or spelling errors.

FIGURE 4. Detailed Writing Results.

Detailed Writing Results (continued)

The following table summarizes students on different characteristics of writing. The categorization is based on the analytic marks for that characteristic across the four different types of writing assignments.

	Weak Work in Most or All Pieces of Writing	Work Varied Across Pieces of Writing	Work Met Requirements in Some or All Pieces of Writing	Insufficient Work to Mark this Characteristic
Organization	6 %	23 %	32 %	39 %
Supporting Details	23 %	26 %	13 %	39 %
Organization	16 %	29 %	16 %	39 %
Tone (i.e., use of language appropriate to the purpose and intended readers)	0 %	13 %	39 %	48 %
Grammar and Punctuation	10 %	16 %	26 %	48 %
Spelling	3 %	16 %	32 %	48 %

Weak Work in Most or All Pieces of Writing refers to work that consistently fell below an expected level. For example weak performance in Spelling would include instances of spelling errors interfering with communication in all or most of the pieces of writing.

Work Varied Across Pieces of Writing applies to students who performed reasonably well on this characteristic in some pieces of writing, but poorly on others.

Work Met Requirements in Some or All Pieces of Writing refers to situations where at least some of the work met the expected level of performance. For example, in Organization, this category would include one or some pieces of work that were organized in a simple or mechanical way and one or some pieces of work in which the organization created a smooth flow of information and ideas.

Insufficient Work to Mark this Characteristic applies to students who submitted two or more pieces of writing that could not be assessed on this characteristic because the responses were blank, illegible, off topic, or because instructions were not followed.

FIGURE 5. Detailed Writing Results (continued).

EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) posted information on its web site identifying sample and practice questions for students, parents, teachers, in short all those who have a vested interest and would benefit from the information. Following the insight posted by the EQAO, the school board quickly mobilized and put out numerous actions and plans of their own, including *School Success: A Focus on Literacy for Student Learning* (Peel District School Board, 2001)—this document is hundreds of pages in length, a *Package of Materials for Teachers to Support Preparation for the EQAO Grade 10 Test of Reading and Writing Skills* (Galen et al., 2000)—and is also hundreds of pages long. The reason I mention the length of these resources is that the time, man power, and money spent on putting these packages together,

unfortunately, takes away from other more important endeavors setting up democratic schools, for instance.

To backtrack slightly, in sum, the Ministry of Ontario's Department of Education created policy documents (The Ontario Curriculum) that specified specific outcome based objectives that "students will" meet, then, EQAO, an independent branch of the Ministry of Education, writes the standardized tests that students are expected to write and prepares packages that students, teachers and others can use as a guide. This now brings us to the school level. As a whole, this particular school spent a significant amount of time preparing students for the Grade 10 Literacy Test. The test was scheduled for late October (it was postponed and later rescheduled for February 14/15, at great expense, because someone posted a copy of the test on the Internet), and so the school decided to dedicate one period every Wednesday to prepare grade 9 and 10 students for the test. While the grade 9 and 10 students were preparing for their dreaded Literacy Test, the senior students, on several occasions, were given free reign. This time spent on preparing for the test is time that students are not doing other things, including dealing with other more substantive issues. The students at this school were negatively impacted by standardized testing because it resulted in the regular school program being cancelled to drill students on the writing of the test.

So, for over a month students were coached on writing the Literacy test. Based on the results compiled by EQAO, the school offered advice to their future test takers informing them of the areas on which first-year test takers fared poorly. The primary focus was not literacy, but test taking. The instructions that teachers received were "Explain [to students] that the sessions planned for the next few weeks are **NOT** designed to make students literate! . . . Emphasize that these . . . sessions **ARE** designed to **IMPROVE THEIR TEST-TAKING SKILL**. We know from the detailed feedback we received from EQAO that even students who were apparently making a sincere effort last year lost points in a number of ways that had more to do with **PROCEDURE** than actual **LITERACY**" (emphasis original). This instruction highlights one flaw in a test that was designed to measure literacy, but is clearly also measuring test-taking skills and compliance. In fact, the EQAO markers have the option of failing students for being noncompliant.

Accordingly, in the first session students were given three major test-taking tips: "use all the space provided, always state your reasons when asked!, read and obey all instructions." This was followed by some detailed information on the reading test taken from EQAO:

1. The reading test consists of a number of passages. Some are literary: stories with character, plot setting, etc. Some are informational: explanations, descriptions, opinions. Some are graphic: charts, graphs, timetables, etc.
2. You will be asked to answer two categories of questions:
 - a) Multiple choice.
 - Choose the most correct answer, if two appear correct.
 - Make changes clearly, as shown in the test booklet.
 - b) Written answer.
 - You don't always have to use sentence form.
 - Some answers can be given in one or several words (i.e., "identify one detail," "find a word which means . . .")
 - The space provided shows how much you should write.
 - If asked to "explain," your answer needs "because!"
3. Other points to remember:
 - a) You may (and should) underline key ideas as you read.
 - b) Sometimes you must look for facts clearly stated in the passage.
 - c) Sometimes you must draw conclusions suggested by the facts.

And finally, the students were asked to do a practice reading activity to prepare them for the reading test.

In week two, the focus was on writing the summary and informational paragraphs. In week three, students were given a mock reading and writing test. During a half-day where students were sent home early so that teachers could spend time on professional development, the teachers were instructed, instead, on how to mark the mock test, placed into groups, and made to mark the mock test. In week four's session, students were given back their tests and given some feedback, followed by more tips and pointers. One incident that is worth mentioning because it makes clear how students are being negatively impacted by standardized testing is the following: While students were taking the test in their respective session, I happened to walk by a group that was headed by two physical education teachers. They knew that I taught English at a high school and so they asked if I could clarify some points of contention. Essentially, the students were given a model response on how to write a summary paragraph and were expected to absorb this model as the best way to write a summary of the piece they were asked to engage. Apart from the poor quality of the piece the students were asked to summarize, the students questioned whether the sample summary was the only/best way and offered just as plausible alternatives. I wholeheartedly agreed with the students that their alternative summaries were just as plausible. The

discussion then momentarily turned to a more interesting political debate on the subjectivity of marking and EQAO testing, which was quickly quashed as being a wasteful discussion because it did not focus on training and drilling students on the writing of the test. Unfortunately, the students' attempt at thinking critically about testing and power was replaced by more training, and with the students playing the compliance game—at least outwardly. Students were then given information on writing a supported opinion paragraph. All the while, the focus for these sessions was and remained procedural issues at the expense of time that could have been spent learning, dialoguing, and thinking about substantive issues.

As poorly spent as this time is, regrettably, it is not all students have to endure in preparation for the test. Also as part of the training, the school scheduled several motivational speakers, at significant expense, to motivate and educate students about the literacy test—a significant number of students took this opportunity to skip, thereby, missing the message anyway. And, perhaps, the greatest sacrifice to learning the school made to prepare its students for the Grade 10 Literacy Test is at the expense of the Grade 10 course in English. I spoke with several teachers who were teaching the course, and they expressed their frustration at spending so much time drilling the students on test taking and on the skills that they knew students would be asked to perform on the literacy test. English teachers lamented that they spent a solid five to six weeks going over the EQAO and school board preparation material. They expressed their frustration at how far behind they were in the usual curriculum because of their "diligence" in focusing on preparing their students for the literacy test. A first-year teacher at the school admitted to me that she did not feel she had done enough preparation work with her grade 10 class, but felt that what she did do was more important than teaching test taking. As these examples make clear, the more time students and teachers spend on drilling and practicing skills preparing students for what is going to be on the literacy test, the less time they have to spend discussing and dialoguing about more engaging substantive issues. In other words, the more time that is spent on training, the less time is spent on education.

One teacher informed me that at the school his children attend (an elite, expensive private school), the school did not spend any time preparing for the test, since they are confident that their students will be able to pass the test successfully. What this means for students who are spending so much time on preparing for the test is that they are going to be at a further disadvantage since they are now going to fall behind, because while they are spending a significant amount of time on low-level drill and skill work in

preparation for the literacy test, other students are moving on. Therefore, standardized testing further increases the gap between the haves and have-nots. McNeil points out that these students are doubly penalized (2000: 243). First, they are not taught what their peers in more affluent schools are taught. Second, they spend so much extra time on the low-level test-taking skills and training that they are missing out on education. Another danger that needy students face is that they are often "seen as deficient, as failing, as in need of remediation because their forms of learning do not coincide with the forms of testing" (249). And so, this view of needy students results in even more time spent in drilling them to learn in spite of the fact that their forms of learning do not coincide with the forms of testing.

Minority students and students for whom English is a second language will suffer from academic weakness for being exposed to test preparation activities and materials in lieu of the regular curriculum (248). When test preparation becomes pedagogy, students suffer, society suffers. We pride ourselves, and lie to ourselves, when we praise and proudly iterate the phrase, "we live in a democracy." As Chomsky informed us earlier, we do not live in a meaningful democracy. If we did, we would work to appreciate and understand difference, rather than promote a standardized test that all students need to pass in order to graduate. This type of thinking is undemocratic—standardized tests are undemocratic. "A technical curriculum, designed to be testable by "objective" measures and represented by numerical indicators, does more than omit the diverse cultural content of the students' lived experience. . . A technical test-driven curriculum closes out the stories children bring to school" (McNeil, 2000: 248).

Minority students, McNeil points out, suffer from standardized tests because the appearance of sameness is used to mask persistent inequalities. She argues,

The educational losses to minority students created by centralized, standardized system of testing are many. What is taught, how they are taught, how their learning is assessed and represented in school records, what is omitted from their education—all these are factors that are invisible in the system of testing and in the accounting system reporting results. Standardization of educational testing and content is creating a new kind of discrimination—one based not on a blatant stratification of knowledge access through tracking, but one which uses the appearance of sameness to mask persistent inequalities. (xxx)

Students who are unfamiliar with the dominant language or culture may not graduate because of their poor performance on the test. By not examining the students holistically, but merely statistically,

students suffer and society suffers. By being forced to pass a literacy test in order to graduate, these students are denied choices. Certain careers and decisions are now closed off for them. McNeil points out how schools with the greatest number of poor and minority students are shifting their already scarce resources into test-prep materials (259), a practice used in the school I examined.

As McNeil makes clear, standardized tests are not “objective,” but instead embody someone’s valued knowledge (214). It is unconscionable to impose a hierarchical power’s vision of knowledge onto students. Not only is it objectionable to manipulate students into learning an imposed curriculum by making the tests so high stakes, but to impose a curriculum that is test-driven and thereby limited in content is abhorrent. The test-driven curriculum that students are forced to endure, and do endure out of fear that they will not get their diploma, as one teacher said to me, needs to be challenged and brought to an end. This type of testing reduces both the quality and the quantity of schooling to which students are being exposed. McNeil points out how

Teachers report having to omit or severely decrease extended reading assignments, analytical writing, research papers, role play, student-led discussions, speaking activities, oral histories, multimedia activities, science experiments, library hours. They have been seen having to curtail or omit extended problem solving by students, in-depth discussions, approaches that end up with oblique perspectives because they are not seen as contributing directly to passing rates... (246)

Many teachers at the school I observed recognize and are frustrated by this type of narrowing of the curriculum, but feel that the test takes precedence, largely because it is so high stakes.

It is important to engage in dialogue parents, students, teachers and all those who are immediately affected by standardized tests and their repercussions, regarding the real life experiences that these tests are having on real people in their daily lived experience. Recently I became engaged in conversation with a parent whose son is now in third grade—another grade that has been negatively affected by having students write a standardized test during the year. She related to me her frustration at how her son, who the year before was engaged in his learning, is now feeling frustrated by the repetitive drills that he is expected to perform. McNeil echoes this mother’s frustration when she relates how with standardized tests, curriculum goes from engaging students in research projects, written papers, the study of primary source documents, role play, and debates, to drills (253). The mother lamented that even when students do engage in learning with which they become involved, the students’ enthusiasm is

dissipated by having to practice tasks they will be expected to perform on the standardized test as the culminating activity. She is also disillusioned with the rigidity with which students are expected to solve problems, particularly in math. She told me that at a recent interview with her child’s teacher, the teacher expressed surprise at how creative and successful her child is at problem solving. The teacher then proceeded to express her concern that while the student’s skills were impressively creative, unfortunately they did not conform to what students are expected to do on the standardized test, and therefore his method of solving the problems needs to change/conform. In speaking about her child’s writing, the mother was disappointed at how the year before he was encouraged and motivated to produce creative pieces, whereas this year the focus and emphasis was on drilling students with grammar and punctuation-free writing to the point where students no longer felt like writing—remember this student is only in grade three. As McNeil suggests, curricula should be aimed at the highest knowledge level in every field. It should call for risk-taking experimentation, visionary possibilities, and open-ended instructional purpose (263). It should not be aimed, as the above examples make clear, at stifling student creativity and critical thinking in favor of a pre-established transmission of limited knowledge.

With all of the time and effort wasted on coaching students to write the standardized test it would not be surprising if test scores do go up. Elliot Eisner argues that it is possible to increase test scores while at the same time diminishing education. However, the question then becomes at what cost? The answer: at the expense of learning. As a result, with the intense drills, test scores may go up, but this does not equate with enhanced learning (McNeil, 2000: 255). If we look at what students are expected to do on the Grade 10 Literacy Test, the pointless skills students are expected to perform becomes transparent. As we saw earlier, for the writing component of the test students are expected to complete the following: 1) Summary, 2) Information Paragraph, 3) News Report, and 4) Opinion Piece. Of these the Opinion Piece is the only piece of writing that asks students to engage with their learning. The others are merely rote, factual recall, basic-skill responses that students are expected to complete. Consequently, standardized tests train students to simplify their thinking (McNeil, 2000: 256). While test-score inflation through concentrated test-preps give the impression that teaching and learning are improving, in fact teaching and learning may be severely compromised by the relentless effort to raise test scores (259).

Although testing in Ontario is relatively new, the preliminary evidence based on the reports published in the local and national

papers suggests that an increasing number of students will drop out of high school, thus leave without a diploma. Undoubtedly, those who are most at risk—needy and minority students—will suffer the most. Without a high school diploma the injustice that these citizens have been forced to endure will not end when they leave high school, rather it will continue. A false assumption is made that if students do not graduate from high school with a certain set of skills they will be unsuccessful once they leave. There are too many counter examples to warrant arguing the flaws in this argument. Suffice it to say that many people learn best the skills they need by doing. Furthermore, learning does not end with high school, we are always learning. The problem is that society places such a high value on a high school diploma that without it many will be disadvantaged; when options do become available to them, they will not be perceived as qualified to prove their competence.

Test design and test preparation material serve the political function of centralizing control over the curriculum (McNeil, 2000; 259). The teachers that I talked with felt torn between implementing what they believe is good pedagogy versus what they believe is their duty as a teacher. With standardized tests looming they feel that their opportunities to resist have been severely reduced. An outcome based curriculum that insists that students will successfully be able to perform certain tasks is limiting enough, however, by imposing a high-stakes literacy test it is that much more limiting in that it practically assures that a test-driven curriculum will be followed, no matter how flawed. McNeil says that part of what results from a test-based curriculum is that teachers react to a standardized curriculum by deleting the substantive lessons and/or by appealing to double-entry notebooks—a practice where they present the official proficiency-based material while in truth shape their lessons around the “real” curriculum (211). Some of the teachers I talked to preface their instructions to students by making a distinction between what is expected of them for a particular assignment for the teacher, and what students needs to do when asked to complete a similar task on the EQAO test.

In her book *Stolen Harvest*, world-renowned physicist Vandana Shiva persuasively argues against monocultures and the planting of homogeneous seeds, and instead stresses the need for biodiversity. Among her arguments she suggests that, “The seed, for the farmer, is not merely the source of future plants and food; it is the storage place of culture and history . . . It involves exchange of ideas and knowledge” (8). As well, she argues that the tremendous diversity that has been the basis of our food supply is under threat from genetic erosion and genetic piracy.

“Monocultures,” she continues, and “and monopolies are destroying the rich harvest of seed given us over millennia by nature and farming cultures” (79). Furthermore, the more strains of seeds we have, the greater biodiversity, the greater chance we have for sustaining food security. In case of draught or pestilence, biodiversity would help ensure that we have a strain that either can survive the harsh conditions, or is immune to that strain of disease. In the same way, a test-driven curriculum that imposes a monoculture of training will limit the biodiversity of ideas, knowledge, culture, and history. By limiting the biodiversity of ideas in schools, the less chance we have of critically challenging the status quo, and thinking of creative alternatives to the injustices that need to be challenged within our society. We must fight for the biodiversity of learning and eliminate a test-driven, monocultural training environment.

The media have been reporting that in Ontario, since the introduction of the test-driven curriculum, there is an increase in the number of students that are failing the new Grade 9 Curriculum. The rationale given for this increased failure rate is that the New Ontario Curriculum challenges students, is harder than the old curriculum, expects more from students, and therefore will produce “better” graduates, which in turn will make us more a competitive province, both nationally and internationally. However, I would like to challenge this explanation and argue that the reason more students are failing grade 9 is that the new test-driven curriculum that has been introduced is not harder and better, but less democratic, which leads to student apathy. The new curriculum is imposed on students and teachers in a top-down fashion. This imposition is enforced by the phrase “students will” in the policy document and the high-stakes literacy test. The curriculum ignores student needs by implementing a standard curriculum that is expected to fit all students. Students are not engaged by a repetitive, skills based, test-driven curriculum and therefore are obviously responding in a democratic way by resisting what is being imposed on them.

In conclusion, standardized testing leads to compliance, silences professional expertise, and marginalizes ethical discourse (McNeil, 2000: 246). With standardized tests, citizens within a community are disempowered. The control of schooling is concentrated in the hands of those that create the tests and therefore direct the schooling. We need to collectively fight to put an end to this test-driven, undemocratic, skills-based, training-centered, monocultural pedagogical curriculum, and in its place call for a democratic education that values and respects diversity. This will result in a more just learning environment that values and respects student needs.

rather than the imposed standardized, top-down training system that is currently in place in Ontario. A democratic education will engage students' learning, produce a diversity of ideas, encourage creativity, and critical thinking. It allows children to practice democracy: It will teach them that we the citizens can transform and mellorate society, that we are not merely cogs in a machine that must conform to the system's expectations. In short, we must insist that our children be educated and not merely trained. In order to do this, we must become politically active, spread the word, call our Ministers of Provincial Parliament, write our newspapers, lobby our school boards, refuse to have our children write the tests, and ultimately get our point across anyway we can. We need to show our children that we, the citizens, need to participate in the decisions that affect our lives. We need to revitalize democracy so that we can benefit from the creativity and diversity of ideas, knowledge, and cultures that will be the inevitable result of democratic education. Above all, we do not want to train workers at the expense of educating freethinking citizens. And for this, we must replace the test-driven curriculum with a democratic based one.

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