

**The Schools Our Children Deserve; Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and  
“Tougher Standards” by Alfie Kohn, 1999  
(SESSION ONE Chapters 1-6)**

**Forward into the Past**

**Two Models of Schooling**

*Behaviorism –teacher centered*

*Constructivism – student centered*

**Back to the Basics? When did we leave?**

**Poor Teaching for Poor Kids**

**Explaining Educational Déjà Vu**

**The Demand for Tougher Standards**

**Are Schools Failing?**

**Five Fatal Flaws**

*A preoccupation with achievement*

*Old school teaching*

*Wedded to standardized testing*

*Imposing specific requirements and trying to coerce  
improvement*

*Harder is better*

**Part One: Tougher Standards vs. Better Education**

**2 Getting Motivation Wrong: The Cost of Overemphasizing Achievement**

**What vs. How Well**

**The Cost of Overemphasizing Achievement**

*Interest*

*Reaction to failure: “When the point isn’t to figure things out  
but to prove how good you are, it’s often hard to cope with  
being told you’re not so good.” Page 29*

*Avoidance of challenge*

*Quality of learning: “In this sense, students who have been  
led to focus on how well they’re doing tend not to do very  
well.” Page 32*

**Think You’re Smart? Think Again: “When kids are led to focus on  
how well they are performing in school, they tend to explain their  
performance not by how hard they have tried but how smart they  
are.” Page 35**

*Effort*

*Ability*

*Luck*

*Difficulty*

**Making a Bad Thing Worse**

*Increase the pressure on students*

*Set them against one another in some kind of contest*

Students who have come to equate success with doing better than others are more likely to think in a “surface level” way.

Students are more likely to attribute the results of the competition to factors outside their control (compared with how they explain noncompetitive success or failure).

Competitive learning environment causes students to dislike school and show less interest in a given subject. People of different abilities tend to learn more effectively on a range of tasks when they’re able to cooperate with one another than when they’re trying to defeat one another.

***Dare them not to fail***

**Grade Expectations**

***“The first problem with grades is simple: they don’t provide accurate and reliable information about how students are doing.” Page 41***

***“In sum, researchers have found that traditional grades are likely to lead to three separate results: less impressive learning, less interest in learning, and less desire to do challenging learning.” Page 43***

**Grades: The Long View**

***“Researchers have tried to quantify the extent to which different variables contribute to such measures of occupational performance as income, job satisfaction, and ratings of effectiveness at work. It turns out that even college grades and test scores tell you very little about how those things will turn out: in statistical terms, they account for less than 3% of the variance.” Page 46***

**3 Getting Teaching and Learning Wrong: Traditional Education and Its Victims**

***“The movement is also vulnerable because of how it defines achievement. The vast majority of policymakers have accepted a dubious set of assumptions about what good teaching and learning are all about... in most states, to stand for educational excellence is to issue a list that begins: “all students will be able to...”– The implicit assumption that all students need the same amount of time to reach a certain goal... Every student must be able to do such and such by the end of second grade... the result of grade by grade standards, with their willful disregard of individual differences, is that some children will be branded as failures because they don’t learn as quickly as their peers.” Page 47***

***“Emphasize the Basics”***

*“There is considerable converging evidence that by sixth grade, children have some success at mastering basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic... there are also disturbing signs that many students lack a firm conceptual grasp of the goal of which they engage...” Page 49*

*“A growing number of educational theorists over the last couple of decades has made the point that facts come and go, while what endures, what we really require, is the ability to look up facts, to interpret them, to connect with one another, and to analyze their importance.” Page 49*

**“Thinking Comes Later”**

**“Facts Must Be Memorized”**

**“Skills Require Drills”**

**“The Point is to Get the Right Answer”**

*Once again, Dewey got to the heart of the issue: “The zeal for answers is the explanation of the zeal for rigid and mechanical methods.”<sup>33</sup> Page 56*

*“Indeed, Jean Piaget’s vital contribution to our understanding of how children learn was based on studying the qualitatively different errors they make at different stages of development.”<sup>38</sup> Page 58*

**“Get to the Civil War By Thanksgiving”**

*“Linda Darling-Hammond, a researcher who has studied this topic extensively, observed that “many existing standards documents do not encourage teaching for understanding... They outline hundreds of bits of information for students to acquire at various grade levels in each subject area, creating expectations for content coverage that render impossible the in-depth study students need to understand and apply ideas.”<sup>41</sup> Page 59*

**“Bring Your Own Containers”**

*“The idea of a teacher with the ready-made course just waiting to be taught makes about as much sense as a single person with a ready-made marriage who needs nothing more than a partner to share it with.” Page 63*

**“Don’t Do Something – Sit There”**

**“Give it to Them in Bits and Pieces”**

*One kind of learning is separated from another*

*One subject is separated from another*

*One task is separated from another*

*Learning is separated from doing*

*One student is separated from another*

**“Looking at the long-term impact of traditional teaching and the push for tougher standards, then, we are finally left with Dewey’s**

timeless and troubling question: “What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?”<sup>85</sup> Page 72

#### 4 Getting Evaluation Wrong: The Case Against Standardized Testing How Little Test Scores Mean

*“Estimates of how many times students in the United States sit down to take these tests every year vary from 40,000,000 to 400,000,000. It is clear, though, that no other nation in the world does anything like this to its children.”<sup>3</sup> Page 74*

*Tests are profitable and efficient*

*“It is easier to measure efficiency than effectiveness, easier to rate how well we are doing something than to ask if what we are doing makes sense.” Page 75*

#### The Worse Kind of Testing

*Norm referenced tests compare test-takers against each other*

*Criterion-referenced tests compare each test-taker to a given standard*

*“When specialists sit down to design a norm referenced test, they’re not interested in making sure the questions cover what is most important for students to know. Rather, their goal is to include questions that some test-takers – not all of them, and not none of them – will get right. They don’t want everyone to do well. Furthermore, they want each question to be answered correctly by the same students who get most of the other questions right. But to separate them, to get a range of scores.” Page 78*

*“First, these tests contribute to the already pathological competitiveness of our culture, which leads us to regard others as obstacles to our own success– with all the suspicion, envy, self-doubt, and hostility that rivalry entails. The process of assigning children to percentiles helps to ensure that schooling is more about triumphing over everyone else than about learning. Second, because every distribution of scores will contain a bottom, it will always appear that some kids are doing terribly. That, in turn, reinforces the sense that the schools are failing. Worse, it contributes to the insidious assumption that some children just can’t learn—especially if the same kids always seem to fall below the median.” Page 79*

## What the Tests Test

*“These test ignore the most important characteristics of a good learner, to say nothing of a good person.” Page 82*

*“Behaviorist psychology rears its unattractive head yet again. These tests are predicated on the predilection for breaking things down into their components and offering them in a prescribed sequence.” Page 83*

*“These test care only about whether the student got to the right answer.” Page 83*

*“These tests are frequently dominated by multiple-choice questions, a format that is inherently limited and limiting.” Page 83*

*“These tests are timed.” Page 84*

*“These tests are given to individuals, not to groups, and helping one another is regarded as a serious offense. Not only is there no measure of the capacity to cooperate effectively, or even to assimilate other people’s ideas into your own, but they communicate precisely the opposite message: Only what you can do alone is of any value.” Page 84*

*“The content of these tests is kept secret.” Page 84*

## Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools

*“You don’t fatten us steer by weighing it.” Page 85*

*“Linda Darling-Hammond offers this analogy: Suppose it has been decided that hospital standards must be raised, so all patients must now have their temperatures taken on a regular basis. Shortly before the thermometers are inserted, the doctors run around giving out huge doses of aspirin and lots of cold drinks. Remarkably, then, it turns out that no one is running a fever! The quality of hospital care is at an all-time high!”<sup>66</sup> Page 90*

## 5 Getting School Reform Wrong: The Arrogance of Top-Down Coercion

### Do It My Way...or Else

*“The support model begins with the premise that the role of teachers, administrators, parents, public officials, and the community at large is to help students act on their desire to make sense of the world. The school should guide and stimulate their interest in exploring what is unfamiliar, constructing meaning, and developing a competence at (and a passion for) playing with words and numbers and ideas. Improvement is seen as something that tends to follow when students are provided with stimulating, worthwhile tasks. Students are not just expected to take responsibility for their own learning but are actively assisted in doing so.”<sup>1</sup> Page 93*

*“In the demand model, by contrast, those outside– and, figuratively speaking, above– the classroom decide what the people in it are required to do. List of specific achievement goals are imposed on teachers and students. The methods and metaphors of this process are often borrowed from the corporate world, with much talk of results, performance, accountability, and incentives. Children are even described as “workers” who have an obligation to do a better job. Schools represent an “investment” and must become more “competitive,” the idea being that test scores in the United States but to surpass those in other countries. Education is described as though it were a hybrid of an assembly line and a sports match.”<sup>1</sup> Page 93*

#### **Burnt at the High Stakes**

*“The beatings will continue until morale improves!”*

*Intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation*

*“High-stakes testing routinely drives good people out of the profession, and it is particularly hard to find qualified educators in those areas who will agree to take a position...”*

*Page 99*

#### **6 Getting Improvement Wrong: Confusing Harder with Better**

**...and the Devil Take the Hindmost**

**More of the Same**

*More time*

*More homework*

*More kids held back*

*Opposite of Japan*

Tracking

Retention

Elementary testing

Teacher centered approach

Back to the basics

*“ ‘When a child feels that his work is a task, it is only under compunction that he gives himself to it,’ Dewey wrote in 1913. ‘At every let up of external pressure his attention, released from constraint, flies to what interests him.’<sup>32</sup> The greater the pressure on students to achieve–or on teachers to raise standards–the less engaged students become with what they are doing. And the worst things get, the more this brand of reform demands further emphasis on exactly what made them worse.” Page 108*

**Harder is Better**

*“Dewey reminded us that the value of what students do ‘resides in its connection with a stimulation of*

greater thoughtfulness, not in the greater strain it imposes.”<sup>39</sup> Page 109

How many adults could pass these tests?

“How many of us need to know this stuff—not just on the basis of job requirements but as a reflection of what it means to be well-educated? Do these facts and skills reflect what we honor, what matters to us about schooling and human life? Often, the standards being rammed into our children’s classrooms are not merely unreasonable but irrelevant; it is the kinds of things students are being forced to learn and the approach to learning itself that don’t ring true. The tests that result—for students and sometimes for teachers<sup>43</sup>—are not just ridiculously difficult but simply ridiculous. It is time for us to look for more sensible alternatives—better ways of understanding the sources of achievement, better ways of teaching, and better ways of evaluating the success of students and schools.” Page 112

**(SESSION TWO Chapters 7-10 and Appendices A & B)**

**Part Two: For the Love of Learning**

**7 Starting from Scratch**

**What’s the Point?**

*“Nel Noddings, professor emeritus at Stanford University, urges us to reject ‘the deadly notion that school’s first priority should be intellectual development.’ She argues that ‘the main aim of education should be to produce competence, caring, loving, and lovable people.’”<sup>1</sup> Page 115*

*“Perhaps, as Seymour Sarason says, ‘the overarching purpose of schooling is to stimulate, capitalize on, and sustain the kind of motivation, intellectual curiosity, awe, and wonder that a child possesses when he or she begins schooling.’”<sup>2</sup> page 115*

*“As it stands, traditional practices, such as direct instruction, fact-based tests, and the quest for the right answer are more consistent with the original conception of schools, whose catechisms ‘sought to produce believers rather than thinkers.’”<sup>7</sup> Page 116*

*“That last distinction raises the question of whether we see schools as places where cultural knowledge is transmitted to a new generation in order to preserve important institutions, or as places where a new generation learns the skills and dispositions necessary to evaluate those institutions. Again, it’s more a continuum than and either or, but the point on*

*that continuum we identify as ideal makes all the difference.” Page 116*

*“This, of course, raises yet another basic question: Do we want schools to be about ‘sorting people out, the presumed enabler from the less able’ or ‘educating all children, generously and without qualification?’”<sup>11</sup> Page 117*

*“My own vision of schooling, which necessarily informs this entire book, is defined by a concern for both the fulfillment of each child in the creation of a more democratic society. As for the other objectives discussed here, I believe school should be about more than just academics, more about producing thinkers than walking repositories of knowledge, more about creating an ethic of questioning than of preserving the status quo, more about teaching and learning than sorting and selecting, and more about honoring the needs and interests of the child in the present without overlooking legitimate, humanistic concerns about the future.” Page 120*

#### Goals and Memories

*“Wherever I go, people say they want their kids to be happy and fulfilled, successful and productive, ethical and decent, independent and self reliant, but also caring and compassionate—and (to continue the alliteration) confident, curious, creative, critical thinkers, and good communicators. Also, someone invariably expresses the hope that his or her child will always keep learning, and want to learn, even after leaving school.” Page 121*

*“Are school practices in sync with the long term goals shared by most parents and teachers?” Page 121*

#### Beyond Achievement

*“Virtually any ambitious goal for our children will require us to rethink this set of psychological assumptions— or perhaps I should say the disregard of psychological factors— that characterize the Tougher Standards movement.” Page 123*

##### Grades

Variations on grades that increase their impact, such as privileges

Standardized tests

Academic contest and competition

Frequent evaluations

Rewards

Segregation of students by performance

Criteria for college admission

Teaching that values error free assignments and right answers

*“What determines how effectively students will learn isn’t how motivated they are. It’s how they are motivated.” Page 126*

#### The Secret of Success

*“If we want kids to learn for the right reasons, then the content and method of the instruction becomes directly relevant.” Page 127*

*“In effect, it pointed to the conclusion that high achievement is a by-product. Now we’re ready to ask: A by-product of what? And the answer is: Of interest.”<sup>32</sup> Page 127*

*“Here’s another way of putting it: where interest appears, achievement usually follows.”<sup>34</sup> Page 128*

*“Who could disagree with the proposition that what students don’t care about they’re unlikely to learn very effectively?”<sup>39</sup> Page 128*

*“Right now, of course, the mission of most school boards and legislatures has nothing to do with interest.” Page 128*

*“To skip the question of interest and proceed directly to trying to boost achievement (or “Raise the bar”) is to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.” Page 129*

*“The point isn’t to turn learning into a game. There’s an important difference, as Dewey emphasized, between natural interests, which grows organically ‘out of some question with which the student is concerned,’ where a topic has to be made appealing by sugarcoating it.<sup>41</sup> Dewey’s point was not only that the latter fails to work in the long run, but that the perceived need to do this indicates a problem with the original assignment.” Page 129*

#### 8 Education at Its Best

##### Overhauling the Transmission Model

*“Thus, in place of superficial facts, we emphasize deep understanding. In place of fragmentation, we seek to integrate; we bring together skills, topics, and disciplines in a meaningful context. In place of student passivity and isolation, we value learning that is both active and interactive.” Page 131*

*Kids need to be taken seriously*

*“All of this represents a decisive repudiation of the Old School, where, as Dewey observed, ‘the center of gravity is outside the child.’”<sup>1</sup> Page 131*

*“As Dewey put it, ‘Nothing is more absurd than to suppose that there is no middle term between leaving the child to his*

*own unguided fancies and likes, or controlling his activities by a formal succession of dictated directions.”<sup>2</sup> Page 132*

*“Constructivism is derived from the recognition that knowledge is constructed rather than absorbed: we form beliefs, build theories, make order. We act on the environment rather than just responding to it—and we do it naturally and continually. It’s part of who we are.”<sup>6</sup> Page 132*

#### **Making Trouble for Students**

*“[Such teaching] cannot be scripted; rather, it depends on one’s capacity to respond spontaneously to students’ perplexities and discoveries.”<sup>11</sup> page 135*

Leisurely lessons

Collaborative lessons

Interdisciplinary lessons

#### **Beyond the Right Answer**

*“I’ve come to believe that this aspect of traditional classrooms—formality— helps to explain why those classrooms are so unsuccessful.” Page 140*

*“Bad teaching doesn’t just happen. It’s practically demanded by systemic factors.” Page 140*

#### **Deep Thinking**

##### ***5 Habits of the Mind***

Evidence –how do we know what we know?

Point of view– whose perspective does this represent?

Connections – how is this related to that?

Supposition – how might things have been otherwise?

Relevance –why is this important?

*“As Steven Zemelman and his colleagues have remarked, ‘Covering less in more depth not only ensures better understanding, but increases the likelihood that students will pursue further inquiry of their own at later times.’<sup>36</sup> Page 143*

*“Ultimately, we want to call into question the whole idea of a curriculum to be ‘covered’ and to think instead about ideas to be discovered.” Page 143*

*“Gardener argues that schools should incorporate the best of two models of learning: a museum, which encourages open ended exploration, and an apprenticeship, which provides a more structured environment for practicing meaningful skills in an authentic, real-life context.”<sup>37</sup> Page 143*

#### **Starting with a Question**

*Horizontal relevance*

“The trick is to start not with facts to be taught or disciplines to be mastered, but with questions to be answered.” Page 145

*“Great teachers are always looking out for real life opportunities to help students play with words, reason with numbers, and think systematically in general.” Page 146*

*“Back in 1918, William Kilpatrick wrote a famous article laying out what he called the ‘project method’: A curriculum based on ‘wholehearted purposeful activity proceeding in a social environment... The essential factor [being] the presence of a dominating purpose.’”<sup>49</sup> Page 147*

*“... discipline problems are minimal because students are interested in what they are doing— they see their pursuits as having purpose.”<sup>50</sup> Page 147*

#### Decision-Making in the Classroom

*“Students learn most avidly and have their best ideas when they get to choose which questions to explore.” Page 150*

*“Indeed, the story of American schools is— and always has been— the story of doing things TO students rather than working WITH them.” Page 150*

*“Bringing kids in on the process of designing their own education is particularly terrifying to the staunch defenders of traditional education, who’s tightly regulated classroom procedures represent the polar opposite of something messy, something unpredictable— something, well, democratic.” Page 151*

*“But the rule of thumb is that the more students questions and decisions drive the lesson, the more likely that real learning will take place. That’s why the best teachers constantly ask themselves, ‘Is this a decision I have to make by myself or can the students be involved?’” Page 151*

*“This framework exemplifies what I like to call a ‘sandwich’ model of teaching, in which anything to be learned is nestled between a discussion of what we are about to do in the reflection about what we just did.” page 152*

#### Cooperating to Learn

*“Any number of theorists have argued that learning at its root is a social rather than a solitary act.” Page 153*

Cooperative learning

Block scheduling

Looping

#### Where it All Comes Together

#### 9 Getting the 3 R’s Right

#### Half Truths About Whole Language

*Are basal readers and phonics prerequisites for learning to read?*

*“A Whole Language teacher would rather spend her classroom budget on the kind of children’s stories that can be found in bookstores in libraries. The underlying assumption isn’t just that reading material doesn’t need to contain controlled vocabulary, where do phonemes or skills are introduced on a specific schedule. Rather, it sets such text a lot to be actively avoided. Better to have a child read a well-written story about an interesting subject. Better, in fact, you have children practice reading other things that matter to them: a list of their classmates, or of today’s activities, or of the ingredients in their favorite cereal – or perhaps their own ideas, as transcribed by the teacher. In sharp contrast to random sentences about things like Pat’s bat collection, these examples of language are used in the real world. Kids don’t have to be bribed with stickers, stars, or praise to figure out what these words mean; they want to know.”*

*Page 162*

*“As parents, we often think about that fundamental difference and then ask which model seems to describe more accurately what reading is all about. Which model seems more respectful of children? Which is more likely to help them become enthusiastic readers– or even skillful decoders?”* Page 163

#### The Consequences of How Kids Learn to Read

*“To the unique difficulties of English, add the unique limits of young children. It’s hard for a five – or six – year – old to learn abstractly, and that’s precisely what’s entailed by a phonics-based approach: skills are removed from context and learn as abstract rules.”* Page 164

#### Sit Down for a Spell

*Students who use in invented spelling “Are inclined to write more, to take risks, when they don’t have to worry quite yet about spelling words perfectly.”*<sup>31</sup> Page 167

Spelling lists?

Vocabulary lists?

“Book It” from Pizza Hut

“Accelerated Reader” from Renaissance

#### Why the Basics Don’t Add Up

*“... doing math is pretty much the same in a high school algebra lesson as it is in a first grade addition lesson. The teacher begins by demonstrating the right way to do a problem, then assigns umpteen examples of the same*

*problem (with different numbers), the idea of being for students to imitate the method they were shown, with the teacher correcting their efforts as necessary.” Page 172*  
*“More than 70 years ago, a math educator named William Brownell observed that ‘intelligence plays no part’ in this style of teaching.” Page 172*

#### **Math Worth Doing**

*“Teachers make a special effort to create a caring community lest disagreeing with one another’s answers turns into a competition and discourage some children from speaking out. For another thing, students are more active, more at the center of their classroom, than in the traditional model; their choices count and their voices are heard. And as with whole language, which takes advantage of naturally occurring uses of words and ideas, math teachers are always on the lookout for real issues and activities that can offer ‘opportunities for children to engage in numerical reasoning.’<sup>58</sup> News articles from the morning paper raise questions about probability; cooking provides authentic fraction problems; even taking attendance can be put to use (“What proportion of our class is absent?”).” Page 175*

#### **Inventing Facts**

*“The real question is whether understanding is passively absorbed or actively constructed.” Page 177*  
*“Inviting children to make up their own procedures gives the teacher a much better sense of what they understand and where they need help. An open ended invitation to tackle a new kind of problem lets the teacher see how they think, whether they can integrate earlier concepts, and exactly where they get stuck – as opposed to judging only whether they got the right answer.” Page 179*

### **10 The Way Out**

#### **Explaining Educational Déjà Vu (Again)**

*“Getting past the Old School won’t be easy. As we saw in the very first chapter, traditional education not only has fierce defenders but enjoys the presumption of being familiar to most of us.” Page 183*

#### **Reasons for the failure of implementing progressive the school reform**

Tried to do too much too quickly, without providing adequate training and support for teachers.  
Didn’t pay enough attention to the kinds of structural changes that support better teaching, such as reducing

the size of classes and the extent of departmentalization in schools.

Try to impose change on teachers rather than making them active partners in the process.

Merely provided teachers with information (about how and why to adopt new instructional techniques) rather than helping them experience a new way of teaching and thereby makes sense of a radically different understanding of learning.

*“Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, Learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, but that they are still so entrenched in practice? That education is not an affair of ‘telling’ and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory. Is not this deplorable situation due to the fact that the doctrine is itself merely told? It is preached; it is lectured; it is written about. But it’s enactment into practice requires that the school environment be equipped with agencies for doing.”<sup>1</sup>*  
*Page 184–John Dewey in a striking passage that could have been written this morning rather than 1916.*

#### Moving Beyond Grades

*“Some parents may still fear that their children will be unsuccessful in life if they haven’t been strongly encouraged to bring up (and keep up) their grade point averages in school. After all, most people—notably admissions officers and employers—still care about grades regardless of how useless or destructive they may be.”* Page 188

Does encouraging one’s children to get good grades make them share that concern?

Assume a child comes to share the parents concerns about getting good grades. Does that actually produce good grades?

Assume a student does get good grades. Does that translate into acceptance by a good college?

*“More than two thirds of the high school valedictorians who apply to Princeton University, for example, are rejected.”<sup>23</sup>*  
*Page 188*

*“The more we are apt to take for granted that it’s good to emphasize grades so our kids will be successful, the more important it is to probe each step in the argument. If there is reason to doubt any of these connections, the ostensible advantage of focusing children’s attention on getting A’s*

*maybe outweighed by the demonstrated harms of doing so.”*

*Page 189*

*\*SPECIAL NOTE HERE: please reference the sample letter on page 190 that could be included on a student’s college application outlining the reasons a given high school has chosen not to give letter grades for their students.*

#### **What Replaces Grades**

*“Teachers who based their practice on a constructivist theory of learning are always watching and listening. Everything from the kinds of tasks assigned to the way the classroom is organized has been designed to help the teacher know as much as possible about how the students making sense of things. This kind of informal assessment is continuous, making things like quizzes very nearly superfluous. We might even say that the more a teacher needs formal tests to gauge student achievement, the more something is wrong.<sup>33</sup> (With the direct instruction, of course, the teacher is talking more than listening, so traditional exams would be seen as necessary.) As parents, we should not be worried about teachers who rarely gives test; we should be worried about those who need to give frequent tests because they may have no feel for how their students minds work.” Pages 191 – 192*

Performance assessments

Portfolios

Regular parent - teacher communication

Regular parent - student communication

#### **What Replaces Standardized Tests**

*“Standardized tests are used for two reasons: to collect information about the performance of individual students and to monitor the performance of entire schools or districts. It’s important to distinguish between these purposes as we think about alternatives, because what works for one may not work for the other. It’s equally important to distinguish between testing as a means of collecting information (so that schooling can be improved) and as a means of holding people accountable. It’s hard to get an accurate sense of how children (or schools) are doing by using a test that is also going to be the basis for public judgment. The latter typically leads to a desperate effort to raise scores, thereby providing a skewed picture of what kids can do and where teachers need help.” Page 197*

Performance assessments

Interrater reliability

Learning Record

Work Sampling

***“Well, we need some way to evaluate schools.”<sup>55</sup> Page 200***

“As parents, we already have away: if a kids comes home chattering excitedly about something they figured out in class, if they not only can read but do read (on their own), if they persist in playing with ideas and come to think carefully and deeply about things, then the chances are they attend an excellent school. It’s not that these behaviors correlate with evidence of school success: these behaviors ARE the evidence of school success. Is it hard to quantify such things? Yes. That suggests a limit, not of these indicators, but of quantification itself. Sometimes people who say we need some way of evaluating schools really mean we need some way of reducing schools to numbers, which is not the same thing. To reject the most meaningful criteria because they are qualitative is to put ‘the quest for accurate measurement– and control– above the quest four educationally and morally defensible policies.’”<sup>56</sup> Pages 200 – 201

“Learning takes place in classrooms, not in districts or states. To get a sense of how our schools are doing, we have to start where the learning is and move out from there. That can be done by using the same kind of classroom performance assessments described above and relying on outside readers or validated rating scales to increase our confidence in the teachers’ evaluation of students’ learning. To look at the projects of a number of students (and the evaluations of those projects) is to get a sense of the quality of the school as a whole.”<sup>59</sup> Page 202

“When the traditional approach to education remains unquestioned, it’s likely that the newer assessments will be presented as part of a high-stakes proposal– that is, the test will be used as levers to make teachers change what they do in order to be rewarded or avoid being punished. The assessment is thereby used to manipulate classroom practice rather than to provide information, an idea defended on the grounds that forcing teachers to prepare their students for a more authentic assessment will necessarily improve their teaching.” Page 203

**Pulling the Plug**

*“No amount of evidence about [the effectiveness of standardized testing] (or about the feasibility of other approaches to assessment) counts for anything unless we use that evidence to demand that school superintendents and state legislators steer a different course... the first, at least controversial, step for any community is to conduct a survey to discover the actual impact of standardized testing.” Page 204*

Do the tests improve students’ motivation?  
Do parents understand the results?  
Do teachers think that the tests measure the curriculum fairly?  
Do administrators use the results wisely?  
How much money is spent on assessment and related services?  
How much time do teacher spent preparing students for various tests?  
Do the media reports the data accurately and thoroughly?

*“Our challenge over the long haul is not to accommodate ourselves to what doesn’t make sense but to work together to replace it with something more productive. For every workshop on how to help kids do well on standardized tests, there should be three on how to fight for the abolition of these tests. If many people in our communities are surprised to hear about alternatives, this suggests that the apparently high level of support for, and interest in, such tests may reflect simple ignorance about better ways of evaluating students and schools.” Page 205*

*“This is why it’s so important for us to educate ourselves about the effects of standardized tests and the existence of alternatives –and then to educate our friends and acquaintances, raising questions in the supermarket and the hairdresser’s, at dinner parties and playgrounds.” Page 205*

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## Appendix A: The Hard Evidence

Teaching Young Children

Whole Language: Rethinking the Case Against

Whole Language: Reviewing the Case in Favor

Math Results

Open Classrooms, Progressive High Schools, and Other Experiments

## Appendix B: What to Look for in a Classroom

see chart p. 236-237

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