

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Overview: Monitoring and Assessment

Please visit <http://members.cox.net/tei> for updates on development in various countries. Please note the very positive progress in Venezuela and, tragically for UK children, the disasters that are occurring in the UK.

The main decisions in education in the USA and UK are made by politicians. They are implementing policies that they believe will appeal to voters. In both countries the view prevails that student achievement can be measured by students passing or failing tests based on short term memory recall. There is a place for short term memory recall but to measure student achievement solely on this criteria is simplistic and indicates a lack of vision and insight.

The consequences of this lack of vision and insight retard the development of curricula for the mindsets of present day students. This is because curricula is at present test driven, teachers and schools are disempowered, and we consider that by finding out what an elementary childrens' short term memory capabilities are, we can accurately evaluate where children are academically or even their future prospects. There is a place for monitoring a childrens' progress but it is not the present obsessive current testing.

It would auger well for the future of the USA and UK if we examined the structure of education in countries whose students outperform those of the USA and UK. This forms the first part of this overview. Later, we examine the current situation in the USA and UK. Finally, we give an example of how rubrics can be applied in different teaching situations so that not only a monitoring of a student's progress can occur but also an evaluation of the areas where students need further support.

Introduction

We all want the best for our children. I do not think many of us would argue that the main responsibility for any child is with the parents who brought the child into the world. We all know of the enormous reservoir of love that we give to our children, and we know that without it children would grow up with deep psychological problems. So let us assume that whatever the circumstances, the majority of children grow up knowing they are loved not only by their parents but usually by various family members as well.

Why do I start at this point? Because it is clear that school cannot and should not replace the very close bond between parents and child. Yet the state takes the vast majority of children and has the responsibility of educating them. In one sense, they are gifted to the state by the parents. I believe that is the attitude we should nurture in our approach to children, namely they are a gift from their parents in order that they may be educated.

However, next to the parents and perhaps some other family members, who knows the children best? Yes it is, of course, the teachers who educate the children. It is clear that we need to give these professionals an excellent training and then empower them to carry out the task of educating the children under their care. When we do this, we find that the children learn and achieve. The more power we give teachers the more their children achieve. The less power we give them the less they achieve.

Recent OECD study

Recently an OECD study of student achievement was published. **Finland and New Zealand came first and joint second respectively amongst OECD countries; both the USA and UK performed very badly as they also did in the 2007 UNICEF Report Card 7. Amongst the developed nations, UK was ranked last in education and the worst country in which to raise children, just below the USA.** Therefore, it is worth examining and comparing education in Finland and New Zealand with those of the USA and UK.

We shall also look at why Scotland has now done away with league tables for schools; why Wales will almost certainly remove testing; why each state Minister of Education in Australia has refused to let the national Ministry of Education implement testing which would have led to the ranking of schools; and why teachers in England have voted to boycott testing children.

Education in Finland

The two OECD studies: Knowledge and Skills for Life PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) 2006 (published 4 Dec 2007) and 2003 (published 6 April 2004) showed that **Finnish teenagers are the best readers; and Finnish youth excel in science and mathematics**. All this in a country where per capita income is about two-thirds of the USA (The latest year where comparison can be made is 2001: Finland \$23,260 USA \$35,271 with California and San Diego higher.)

I wonder how much money, time and effort has been used in USA or UK in attempts to get children to start reading as young as possible. The situation is different in Finland where children do not start school until they are seven. **In Finland it is widely accepted that young children will learn more through play and, most importantly, will learn to love learning**. At the age of six, you can send your child to preschool but this is optional. As expected most seven-year-olds, as far as reading proficiency is concerned, are behind children of the same age in other developed countries. They do more than catch up and become competent readers! By the age of fifteen Finnish students are the best readers in the world!

There is a focus on music throughout Finland. It is usual for children to learn to read music before they learn to read words. This devotion to music education results in a national attitude that music is for the wellbeing of all children and adults. Visitors are amazed at the strength of music throughout the length and breadth of the country. Finland possesses twenty-six symphony orchestras; there are five symphony orchestras in Helsinki alone. In a country of 5.2 million, there are twelve opera companies. Over two hundred and fifty operas have been composed by Finnish composers, over two-thirds of these since 1975.

As can be expected Finland produces many world-class conductors. Esa-Pekka Salonen has been artistic director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 1992. His debut in London with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1983, at the age of 25, was an international sensation. Osmo Vanska is the new conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra and there are at least six other world-class conductors. There are also thirty full-time classical composers. All this is because, unlike California, Finnish people believe that music is essential for an individual's wellbeing. This results in outstanding music education for all children. Music education is indispensable for the neurological development of students. As a representative stated, "When you invest in culture, it always comes back, always." Compare this to California where the present curriculum is test driven and narrowly focused.

Education in New Zealand

The Picot Commission was set up by the New Zealand government in 1987 and I happily gave a comprehensive and detailed submission. At that time schools came under different school districts based on different local authority areas, something akin to the USA system. The Picot Commission recommended doing away with this structure.

Each school was to be community based and have its own charter. It was to be run by a Board of Trustees (usually five) each of which had to be a parent of a child attending that particular school together with the Principal and a trustee elected by the school staff. The Board could co-opt other persons to the Board on a temporary basis if they required certain expertise. The Board establishes a Charter, a type of contract where the Board undertakes to the Minister to take all reasonable steps to administer the school in accordance with the purposes contained in the charter. Boards are required to update their charters annually and also to provide annual reports on how well they have achieved against their charter goals and to account for their spending of public money.

Teachers' salaries would still be paid on a national basis through the Ministry of Education. Educational Review Officers (EROs) were established (something akin to Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools in the UK) to oversee the whole system. School districts and numerous layers of administration became superfluous, including about half the Ministry of Education which no longer exists. The savings were given to schools directly for them to spend as they saw fit. For example, they could hire (together with other schools if this was appropriate) whatever consultants they needed on a needs basis. The New Zealand Ministry of Education issues a set of national administration guidelines that provide a framework within which school boards need to operate. It also has a national qualifications system and it was agreed that a national examination structure should still exist for students reaching the end of high school.

Even today, when most of the developed world is obsessed with testing students of all ages, the **New Zealand Ministry of Education fully appreciates that learning patterns can be different.** *“Successful outcomes for all students require a range of learning pathways. One size does not fit all. Children arrive at school with different early childhood experiences and different levels of development. How students learn, the pace at which they learn and their interests vary between individuals. These differences are recognized, to an extent, through the current system. This gives teachers and schools responsibility for organizational and teaching decisions and through provision for immersion learning and designated character schools. However, the current system needs to continually look for ways to provide flexible pathways, especially for learners with diverse needs.”*

Ministry of Education, Statement of Intent, 2003-2008, Building Learning Pathways.

Education in Scotland

Recently the Scottish education minister Peter Peacock publicly declared that league tables belonged to a “past time” and were now “meaningless.” He stated, *“League tables owe their origins to a time past when the political currency was about competition between schools and about designing a system at a time when competition would be one of the main features of education. We are not in that situation now. I believe in universal excellence in schools and we should not have to have a league table to try and choose a school.”* A spokesperson for the Scottish Executive added that the reforms that were being developed would mean the end of current league tables which are based only on higher results, and do not take into account schools’ other achievements. She said, *“Exam results only measure one part of the school’s performance. He [Mr. Peacock] wants to provide more relevant information to parents... He wants to change information available to parents and make it more meaningful.”*

Education in Australia

State education ministers have warned they will block any move to rank schools’ performance, declaring that league tables are “inappropriate” and must be banned. At a political showdown of education ministers in Sydney on 25 April, the states forced federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson to cancel plans to implement tests that would lead to the ranking of schools.

Education in Wales

A study commissioned by the Welsh assembly suggests that the key stage tests at 11 and 14 are counter-productive, with students focusing on passing the tests rather than fully embracing subjects. The study recommends that the tests should be phased out. The devolved assembly has already put a stop to testing at seven. The Scottish parliament has also dropped the tests. Meanwhile, Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said: *“Where Wales has gone, England should follow. Teachers do not need to test children at 11 years of age to know what standards they have achieved or where they need to go next in their learning. England is now the only country in the UK to continue with the path of testing to destruction - it needs to stop and quickly.”*

Professor Richard Daugherty, who was commissioned to undertake the review, said the assessment arrangements in Wales must meet the needs of young learners at *“this crucial stage in their development. What the review group has proposed is to use evidence from assessment to inform key decisions that face individual pupils and their parents. Our proposals would also ensure that we can continue to track trends and patterns of achievement across the system in Wales.”*

The Welsh education minister, Jane Davidson, said: *“The group presents some very important recommendations for dealing with this. I shall be considering the final report with great care, taking account of the advice I have received from ACCAC [The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales] on the review of the national curriculum and assessment more generally. I shall make a full statement on my conclusions before the summer recess.”*

Education in England: Members of Parliament recommend “Change way schools are judged.”

The Government was today urged to immediately overhaul the way it judges the performance of schools. An influential committee of MPs said their ratings would be dramatically altered if they took into account other factors beyond the schools’ control. It said parents would be given a far better picture of a school’s performance if those factors - such as economic and social deprivation - were taken into account; and it called for such information to be made available to parents for all schools next year. When such factors are taken into account some schools move from the bottom of the league table to near the top.

The House of Commons committee of public accounts has looked into the way the Department for Education and Skills measures and reports the performance of maintained secondary schools. The committee said it was not only educational factors that affected schools' performances. The National Audit Office has demonstrated how the impact of external factors can be measured and analyzed to give a clearer indication of the quality of education provided by different schools.

The committee said such information would be valuable to policy-makers and to parents choosing schools for their children. It said the Department for Education and Skills should identify which external factors have a significant bearing on academic achievement and take them into account when assessing the performance of all schools - not just maintained secondaries.

Adjusted performance measures have shown that specialist, faith, beacon and single sex schools outperform others. The committee said the strengths of these schools, such as a strong set of values and ethos, should be promoted across all schools. The schools' inspectorate Ofsted should identify where a school ranks in terms of academic achievement before and after taking account of external factors.

Education in England: Teachers poised to boycott pupil tests

Recently a survey was organized for the main teachers' union by Sean Neill of the Institute of Education at Warwick University. Commenting on a recent international evaluation of testing Neill stated, *"Though the effect of continued testing is to raise test standards, some of this effect can be attributed to increasing familiarity with the test methods by both teachers and learners, increasing emphasis on preparation for the tests, and instruction specifically focused on the predicted outcomes of the tests."* He found that teacher assessment was seen as a viable alternative to tests by 85% of the respondents.

Subsequently the National Union of Teachers (NUT) polled its members in England and Wales (the Scottish system is separate and different.) The survey found that according to teachers, *"Compulsory national tests for schoolchildren are an unnecessary and stressful burden."* Only 6% of teachers thought the tests were a reliable way of evaluating pupils' achievements. There was strong support for a boycott of the tests with teachers preferring to assess pupils themselves.

The NUT's general secretary of the union, Doug McAvoy, said, *"This survey underlines the strong criticisms teachers have of these tests. They narrow education, limit use of professional judgment, place unnecessary stress on pupils and add significantly to the workload of teachers without producing any benefits."*

Some anonymous comments from teachers were included in his report. *"Raising standards can effectively be done in schools with good monitoring and self-evaluation practices,"* said a primary school leader. Another, teaching infants, said tests "rule" all teaching in a school where children come from poor backgrounds. They need enrichment far more than brighter children from more educated families, yet they get less. Save money from SATs and give us support and resources to improve standards."

More than eight in 10 of the 30,500 teachers surveyed for the NUT (91% of primary teachers, and 85% of secondary teacher) felt tests were stressful to children. Some 90% of teachers felt the tests diminished pupils' access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The survey showed substantial support for a ballot by the NUT to boycott the tests. The majority of respondents - 67.9% - had more than 11 years' experience in teaching. Most were in England, 4% in Wales. About 57% were in primary schools.

Conclusion

The situation where students achieve the highest competencies is where teachers are given a good professional training and their teaching is empowered. Perhaps it should be incumbent on administrators to examine student achievement in countries where students outperform those of the USA and which have different administrative systems.

Two countries whose students outperform US and UK students are Finland and New Zealand. Finland whose students come out top as far as performance in problem solving and near the top in nearly every category has rejected the whole idea of standardized testing for all ages except school leavers. New Zealand students who also out-perform those of the USA also does not test pre-high school children at all.

The Situation in the USA

The USA both nationally and statewide has been moving for some considerable time in the opposite direction to those of Finland and New Zealand. This is mainly due to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act but also due to state and even school districts mandates.

The concept of implementing rigid accountability procedures and having nationwide, state or local standard testing might sound good. However, in practice it is the worst socialization of education that has ever occurred in the developed world.

Throughout the developed world the trend, in general, is away from the application of rigid accountability procedures and, in particular, testing. As mentioned previously Scotland is now moving away from league tables, Wales will almost certainly follow, Australia has refused to implement them, and teachers in England are seriously considering boycotting tests.

Such information should provide valuable insights as to the type of structure that is needed in the USA if students here are to achieve at the standards now being achieved by the top OECD countries. Unfortunately, administrators here refuse to widen their perceptions to view this type of research. The following gives some indications of the types of practices that need to be implemented. For example:

- a) teachers need to be empowered;
- b) education to become a cooperative venture between parent and teacher;
- c) schools become community based;
- d) the elimination of tests particularly for pre-high school students;
- e) remove school districts and layers of bureaucracy;
- f) invest in music and art.

These are the ingredients for achievement and for well balanced and attaining adults. Please appreciate this is not about money. Education spending per capita on school age children is as follows: Finland \$4800; New Zealand \$2806; UK \$3329; USA \$6043. **Project fifty years in the future and which countries will be in ascendancy and which in decline? The evidence speaks for itself.**

Our approach does not include the testing of elementary school children although monitoring procedures are an integral part of the teaching process. We recommend the substantial use of rubrics for this. The application of rubrics is non-threatening and unobtrusive for students and the following is an example of how rubrics can be used in order to monitor a student's progress.

Background Information

During the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt the Hyksos (people from Asia) invaded Egypt and set themselves up as pharaohs. The Kushites had become strong breaking their ties with Egypt. A Theban family established an Egyptian kingdom between the two powers. The Egyptians grew stronger and started to challenge their neighbours to the north and south.

The Hyksos and Kushites had an alliance, so that should the Thebans attack either in the north or south, then the other power would attack Theban lands. This would compel the Thebans to fight on two fronts, thus weakening her position. The Thebans began to threaten the Hyksos at the northern border and this story tells of an event that happened at that time.

The topic "Letter Intercepted" tells the story of the interception of a letter by a Theban patrol from a chariot in which a courier was carrying a letter from the Hyksos pharaoh to the Kushite king. (Lesson at: http://members.cox.net/waldorfedu_aol/Kush_PDFs/E4_08EndKermaCulture.pdf).

For Module 1 the assignment Letter Intercepted is identified for assessment purposes. Evidence of the following skills and knowledge should be looked for in the student's completed assignments.

The figures in parentheses refer to the Monitoring and Assessment Matrix - see page 4 of http://members.cox.net/waldorfedu_aol/Kush_PDFs/E4_01TeacherGuideLessonGuidelines1.pdf

Assessment Rubric for Activity 1

The student's report:

- clearly sets out the outcome for all three powers; (1a)
- shows an understanding of the chronology of events; (1a)
- covers both short term and longer term outcomes. (1a)

Assessment Rubric for Activity 2

The student's story:

- consistently interprets the information from the Hyksos' viewpoint; (3c)
- is consistently written from one viewpoint; (3c)
- creates a comprehensive version of the events; (4)
- reconstructs the chronology of events; (4)
- is clearly written, and shows imagination in creating a new viewpoint from given facts. (5e)

Assessment Rubric for Activity 3

- the student shares responsibility within the group and takes part in group discussion; (2b and 5g)
- the student listens responsively to another's viewpoint; (5h)
- the student succeeds in hypothesizing and creating a different outcome from given events; (3d)
- the student's new scenario is convincing and based upon events leading up to the interception of the letter (5d)
- the student's work shows creativity when writing an imagined scenario. (5f)

Final Comments: Arnold Toynbee, a famous historian, said, "*Civilizations decline, not so much because of invasions or other external forces, but because of an internal hardening of ideas.*" Those existing in state education in California and the majority of the rest of the USA are based on inflexible and rigid ideas. What can only be termed the socialization of educational ideas is occurring nationwide. For the USA to evolve to meet the demands of future centuries there needs to exist a considerable amount of freedom for teachers and schools. Models already exist where such freedom is basic in education structures, For example see the model for New Zealand where freedom with responsibility is nationwide. Visit <http://members.cox.net/tei> to view what is happening in other countries.

The public at large realize that there is a crisis. In a recent survey taken by pollster Mark Mellman 40% of likely California voters named elementary and secondary education as the biggest problem facing the state. That is more than the total for the next four issues - crime and drugs, health care, immigration and taxes. Reports such as the one above indicate the severity of the problem. Dr. David L Mollet has experience of education and teacher training on three continents namely Europe, North America and Australasia. He now works as an independent education consultant. He is available for presentations, workshops, seminars and consultancy. In 2007 he visited Ukraine twice and taught in both universities and schools. It is a time of change in Ukraine and he is hopeful that he will be able to make a significant contribution to Ukrainian education similar to his contribution in New Zealand.

A Personal Note

I was a university lecturer in the UK in 1980, and after eight years of trying to make some sort of contribution to change, I knew the politicians hold on education decision making was set in concrete. Sadly, it is even worse today. In 1981 we set up home in California and I found the system even worse. Eventually we moved to New Zealand. I gave a presentation to the District Inspector for South Island two weeks after we arrived. I guess what I said must have made some sort of sense because much to my astonishment she phoned me two weeks later to say she had arranged for me to fly to Wellington to give a presentation to the top officials in the Ministry of Education and possibly to meet the Minister. The presentation went quite well and I thought that was that. This was a time of great change in New Zealand and the next year it was announced that a Commission (the Picot Commission) was to be set up to examine the administrative structure of pre-tertiary education in New Zealand. I made a detailed submission along with hundreds of other people. I guess many of us were on the same wavelength because when the Commission submitted its report to parliament it recommended the changes I have described above. Parliament voted to implement the report and the changes occurred in 1988/89. In essence all school districts and their attached layers of bureaucracy were done away with, and all schools were to be community based and run as a cooperative venture between parents and teachers. Naturally I was very pleased and hopefully I made some sort of contribution to the process. Tragically, in the UK and USA we are damaging a whole generation of children due to the existing hardened ideas. We pay dearly for this current lack of vision and insight.