

4-6-2001

Testing Testing in the Education Wars: Still a Test With No Key

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2001) "Testing Testing in the Education Wars: Still a Test With No Key," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 12 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol10/iss12/4>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Testing Testing in the Education Wars: Still a Test With No Key

Author: Editor

Volume: 10

Issue: 12

Date: 2001-04-06

Keywords: Education, Scholastic Aptitude Test

Abstract. This article describes contentious Issues in the quest to develop human resources in the service of the body politic.

Controversy continues in the United States about optimal methods to identify those students worthy of experiencing various educational opportunities. The most concrete version of this controversy is who should be allowed to attend the most elite colleges and universities. However, the controversy begs at least three other significant Issues.

First, the controversy does not address why the best formal education should not be available to all who desire it. The resulting winners-and-losers mentality ensures that the human capital of a nation or other political collective is only partially mined for the good of each individual and the body politic. Second, the controversy does not address the social, cultural, and political interests that wittingly and unwittingly serve to maintain controversy as controversy as opposed to foster resolution and even revolution. Unfortunately, the power and prestige of a number of individuals and groups are significantly contingent on matters that are not necessarily conducive to the human development of the body politic. Third, and interdependent with the first two Issues, the controversy ricochets within a constrained academic crucible that represents a poverty-stricken approximation of human success. In this regard, various professional and lay experts do battle about various testing approaches--e.g., the scholastic aptitude test--employed to identify the educationally worthy based on predictions about grades awarded in the college and university environment as opposed to life success for the individual and the body politic.

In this last regard, test-score differences between socially constructed racial and ethnic groups are necessarily termed proof of test bias as opposed to test success in identifying the sequelae of racial and ethnic bias within racist and ethnocentric power hierarchies. Moreover, grades are employed as the ultimate criteria of learning, even if the awarding of grades seem to be related to a host of variables and phenomena some directly, some indirectly, some obliquely, and some orthogonally related to learning. And significant research supporting the notion that there are many learning styles--each being compatible with effective learning for different types of individuals--is discounted with the "one-size-fits-all" pedagogy that largely characterizes the environments from which the college and university population comes and within which it resides.

As more and more participants in educational controversy are beginning to advocate, a point of departure for testing testing and all policies of human development within the body politic seems to be a nexus of values positively perceived by all those committed to that body's success--not academic grades per se but combinations of cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral indices. Unfortunately, this nexus is very difficult to agree on--let alone identify. This is because those committed to the body politic come and go and come and go again based on motivational factors, salient life experiences, luck, accident, and fate. In essence, many tune in, turn off, drop out, but then tune in again. Moreover, the nexus of values itself changes through time based on various transient and longer lasting oddities of the historical moment.

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It may well be that the test of testing the test is Sisyphean in nature. And learning this may be the best education for all of us. (See Brownfield, D.L. (1998). Return on cognitive ability in the labor market. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 59(5-A), 1702; Flynn, J.R. (1988). The decline and rise of scholastic aptitude scores. *American Psychologist*, 43, 479-480; Grissmer, D. W. (2000). The continuing use and misuse of SAT scores. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 6, 223-232; Melnick, M. (1997). Methodological errors in the prediction of ability. *American Psychologist*, 52, 74-75; Rothstein, R. (March 28, 2001). Lessons: The SAT debate ought to be broader. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Taylor, J.R. (1994). Equality, school finance, and educational performance in America: Theory and evidence. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 54(10-A), 3868; Zeidner, M. (1988). Cultural fairness in aptitude testing revisited: A cross-cultural parallel. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 19, 257-262.)(Keywords: Education, Scholastic Aptitude Test.)