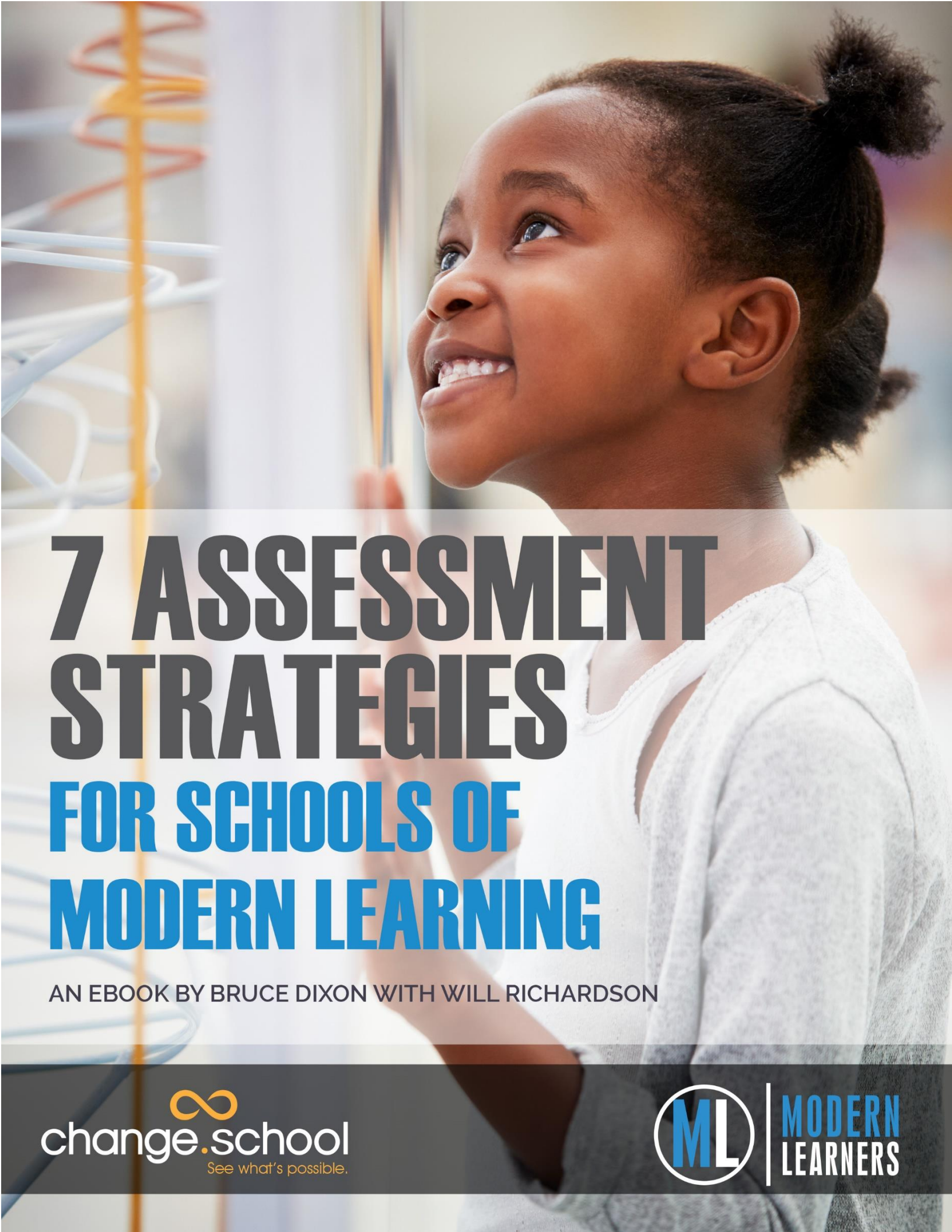


A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing a white shirt, looks out a window with a smile. In the foreground, a spiral notebook with orange and white rings is visible.

# 7 ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS OF MODERN LEARNING

AN EBOOK BY BRUCE DIXON WITH WILL RICHARDSON

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# 7 Assessment Strategies for Schools of Modern Learning

*What if we assessed students' learning by measuring whether it made them want to learn more? ~ **Dennis Littky***



Are we finally seeing the beginning of the end of testing as we know it?

For too long we have tolerated, and sadly by our practice, perpetuated the populist mythology that testing as we know it today supports learning. That is not only dishonest, it's also deceitful because it ignores the irreparable harm being done to learners in schools every day.

If there is a serious lack of reasonable evidence of any significant long-term benefit to support the high stakes, standardized or norm-referenced testing we have today, then isn't it time this absurd attack on learning came to an end?

*"...almost no one has publicly questioned a fundamental assumption — that the tests measure something meaningful or predict something significant beyond themselves.*

*I have reviewed more than 300 studies of K–12 academic tests. **What I have discovered is startling. Most tests used to evaluate students, teachers, and school districts predict almost nothing except the likelihood of achieving similar scores on subsequent tests.***” ~ [Susan Engel](#)

It’s time that we not only expose the deception that has sustained this insidious virus in our schools, but that we put in place strategies to finally end the deceit of standardized testing and the harm it inflicts on both teachers and students.

If this is indeed the beginning of the end, then we need strategies for change. Strategies that will allow schools to make the transition to assessment that matters most; assessment that supports learning.

To do this we are taking a deeper look at the 5<sup>th</sup> principle that was referenced in our earlier [10 Principles for Schools of Modern Learning](#) white paper, which says simply that:

*“Modern schools embrace and emphasize real-world applications and presentation to real audiences as assessment for learning.”*

In many countries, in many schools, educators today feel they are drowning in an ocean of accountability, for not only has learning been attacked, but the testing cancer has spread to attack both teachers and schools.

Taken logically, and with all the evidence available, it’s hard to believe that a system that serves students so poorly could then in any way be considered appropriate to measure teacher evaluations and tenure decisions, let alone schools. To then try and legitimize the whole process by publishing results in ‘league tables’ is delusional. To use student performance as a proxy measure for school quality and rely on standardized measures for that purpose is simply absurd.

However, this paper is not just about calling out the harm and abuse that this test-based accountability movement has caused millions of students, rather it is about taking a rational approach to ending it and importantly allowing the educational professionals in our schools to better support their students’ learning.



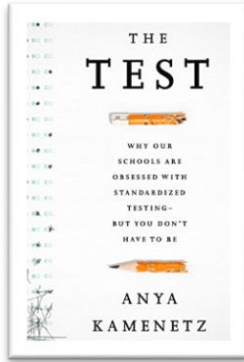
## The Dubious Roots of Testing



You can blame the Prussians or the Russians or any of many turning points in history, but the common thread that connects the disparate and disconnected roots of testing is that it was never an intention to support learning. These tests were developed for militaristic efficiencies, intelligence measurement, racial profiling and competitive ranking. While time might heal the best or worst of intent, when combined with poorly informed assumptions about learning, the door is left wide open for commercial opportunism.

As founder of the first State Board of Education in the US, [Horace Mann](#) played a major role in establishing the traditional military factory school model. His fascination for the Prussian army's disciplined and efficient hierarchical structure which gave them the ability to turn out standardized, predictable and reliable soldiers suggested to him that likewise students should be grouped by age and pretested ability. It was a model that also had obvious appeal for factory work and the expanding manufacturing economy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

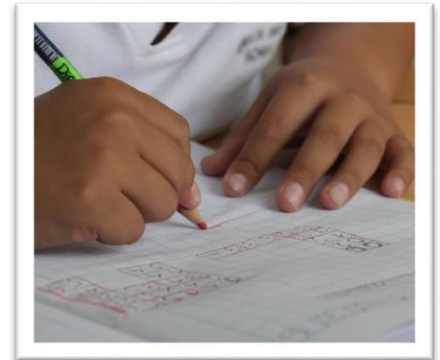
At the same time, psychometricians were eager to embrace their new found status expanding the measurement of IQ to include everything from the recruitment of WWI soldiers and the determination of their mental aptitude to be officers, to the more nefarious use of those same tests for racial profiling.



As Anya Kamenetz outlines in her book, *The Test: Why Our Schools Are Obsessed with Standardized Testing-But, You Don't Have To Be*, one of the leading voices in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century was [Lewis Terman](#), the chair of psychology at Stanford University, who adapted the work of Alfred Binet to create the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. “Terman was a ‘eugenicist,’ an advocate of forced sterilization for the ‘feeble-minded,’ who argued that the low Binet scores of ‘negroes,’ ‘Spanish-Indians,’ and Mexicans were racial characteristics.”

Despite his infamous racist advocacy, the turning point for mass testing in schools came when Terman [proposed](#) that **a properly scientific and calibrated test could be smarter than a teacher**, providing a “*more reliable and more enlightening estimate of the child’s intelligence than most teachers can offer after a year of daily contact in the schoolroom.*” Who said “Big Data” was a new idea?

A quick reflection on the beliefs held about learning at that time reveal how such a revolutionary idea could gain traction and become accepted practice. This was a time when most people believed learning only occurred when a person was taught, that students learned from predefined knowledge that was delivered according to a pre-set curriculum that was dependent on rewards, punishment, and memorization, with controls derivative of factory or military models. It’s what respected writer and educator [Frank Smith](#) called the “[official theory of learning.](#)”



In contrast, we see that learning is natural, self-directed, social, continuous, inquiry-based, often serendipitous and without boundaries. Smith called this “*classic view.*”

---

**We see that learning is natural, self-directed, social, continuous, inquiry-based, often serendipitous and without boundaries.**

As you might expect, the “*official theory*” was strongly endorsed by prominent experimental psychologists at that time who were seeking to make education their proprietorial preserve. In doing so, they advocated learning as a science which was about measurement, about being quantifiable and about *control*, which in

turn appealed to policy makers and politicians.

Before long intelligence tests were being used as proxy measurement of learning, and mass testing had found its way into schools. As Kamenetz outlines in [The Test](#),

*“Right away, standardized intelligence tests became high stakes for individuals. Binet’s and Terman’s tests were meant to determine how educational resources were used—who is placed into a slow class and who into a gifted class, who becomes an engineer and who a car mechanic, who goes to college and who gets invited to leave school.”*

It didn’t take long to convince teachers, learners, and parents that the most important things about education were scores and grades. So when the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957, American schools were the low hanging fruit of blame, with many other Western countries blaming their own schools as well. School accountability became front page news, and despite the flawed premises on which high stakes testing had been established, once again they moved to center stage.

[The Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform](#) followed in 1983 in the US, and the [attack on education by the Thatcher government](#) around the same time in the UK, by which time accountability had become the catch-cry of politicians and policymakers looking for quick answers and votes. As [Edutopia](#) reported,

*“In 1989, Bush convened his education summit at the University of Virginia. Astonishingly, no teachers, professional educators, cognitive scientists, or learning experts were invited. The group that met to shape the future of American education consisted entirely of state governors. Education was too important, it seemed, to leave to educators.”*

Not to be outdone, around the same time the [Guardian](#) reported that Prime Minister Thatcher oversaw a profound change in the ecology of education. Once ministers largely accepted that “the experts” – school teachers and their unions, university lecturers, teacher trainers, local education authority officers – knew best and could be trusted to act. However, from the mid-1980s, ministers behaved as though education were an ailing, near-bankrupt industry. Their role was to challenge, even denigrate the views of “insiders” to demand value for money, to impose performance management, to root out endemic “failure,” and to insist on what they saw as “customer satisfaction.”

The result was an increasing lack of trust for the education professionals and a call for increased external accountability measures. The seeds were well and truly sown for test-driven solutions.

## The Accountability Vacuum

As the demands on schooling have increased dramatically over the past 40 or so years, the importance of universal education has become a foundation for growing economies across the globe, and with that an increased focus on the quality of that education. This, of course, had been rare in previous generations when high school completion meant success and an undergraduate degree a triumph.

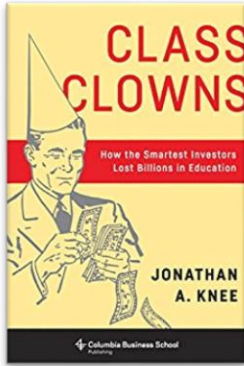


But as reasonable as it was to expect such scrutiny, the education sector appeared poorly prepared to respond. At times, educators were defensive that anyone would challenge their practices and, accordingly, often left the debate to their industrial leadership whose advocacy was first and foremost about conditions and pay. The result was an accountability vacuum. Once a year parent-teacher conferences and annual grade reports ultimately didn't cut the mustard for many parents who were becoming even more focused on their child's education.

When the new millennium came around, education was grabbing a much larger share of both government budgets and parents' pockets and time, and there had been little effort by educational leaders to address the increased focus and concerns of the broader community. This left the door open for commercial opportunism.

Once the Pandora's box of alignment between textbook, tutoring, testing and remediation companies was opened, all hell broke loose, and the commercial opportunities exploded. Add to that online testing and the testing industry became a lobbying master force.





Along the way, billions were squandered, as Jonathan Kee outlines in his book [Class Clowns](#). But if the US testing market alone is worth \$1.4 billion, then what size market does this coalition of standardized test fundamentalists have access to worldwide?

While educators were still trying to mount a stronger public voice, the explosive growth in testing over the past two decades has largely been underwritten by lobbyists representing the testing, textbook and tutoring industries.

So now we understand the false premises on which this delusion was based, and importantly, who is currently invested in sustaining its growth today. Let's look at what is meant for the lead players, our learners, and how we can address the accountability vacuum with alternatives that genuinely support learning.

## The Abused Learner and the Age of Absurdity

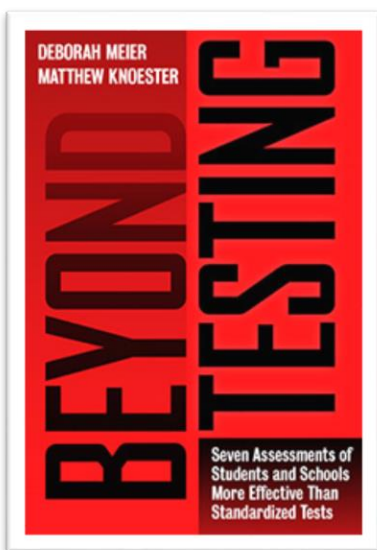


*"The use of high-stakes tests to measure student achievement—is enormously harmful... There is absolutely no need for new research on high-stakes testing! **Sufficient evidence to declare that high-stakes testing does not work already exists.** We think that any fair-minded person, were they impaneled in a jury, could see that high-stakes testing does not work. Based on our findings, **we are compelled to ask for a moratorium on programs of high-stakes testing.**" ~ Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner, [Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools](#)*

The biggest challenge facing educational leaders who want to address the abuse these tests cause learners today is the time it has taken for a comprehensive response. Since the turn of the century, international benchmarking such as [TIMMS](#) and [PISA](#) offered a proxy endorsement to the absurdity of the [No Child Left Behind](#) testing regime introduced into US schools in 2002. The effects of this spread like a plague across the Western world.

One prominent example occurred in 2007 when newly elected Australian Education Minister, Julia Gillard (ex-lawyer) proposed a tough “education revolution” for the country. Gillard traveled to the US where she listened to a glowing description of how New York City schools were performing from the then Chancellor [Joel Klein](#) (ex-lawyer) at a cocktail party in New York. He discussed the use of hard data for assessment as his modus operandi for improved test scores. On return, Gillard introduced the national testing regime of [NAPLAN](#) which [still torments schools across Australia](#) today.

Despite all of this poorly informed intervention in education by politicians, lobbyists, and ex-lawyers, there has been an ongoing guerrilla war raging against the harm done by high stakes, standardized, or norm-referenced tests. This has been led by such prominent minds as Russell Ackoff, Alfie Kohn, Seymour Sarason, Frank Smith and Deborah Meier.



In her most recent book [Beyond Testing](#), Meier suggests that these tests have the effect of narrowing the curriculum and potential for student growth in areas not tested, give students the idea that there is only one right answer, provide “scientific” justification for race and class inequalities, and take away key decisions from school communities, teachers, and students.

[Anya Kamenetz](#) further summarized the case in her recent book, [The Test](#), with her “[10 arguments against high-stakes state standardized tests in math and reading](#).” Throughout the book, Anya offers convincing examples to support each of her points against testing.

## 10 Arguments Against Testing

1. We're testing the wrong things.
2. Tests waste time and money.
3. They are making students hate school and turning parents into preppers.
4. They are making teachers hate teaching.
5. They penalize diversity.
6. They cause teaching to the test.
7. The high stakes tempt cheating.
8. They are gamed by states until they become meaningless.
9. They are full of errors.
10. The next generation of tests will make things even worse.

Standardized testing dampens creativity and entrepreneurship and creates a culture that values a homogenized student body, and as such, it is counter-productive to creating a diverse workforce in which economies can thrive. They simply do not test skills that matter for innovation and success, such as working with people of other cultures or thinking with complexity about global challenges. They bear little, or no, relationship to what is happening in our world today.

[Daniel Koretz](#), Professor of Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education summarizes it well in his just-released book [The Testing Charade: Pretending to Make Schools Better](#),

*“Despite those good intentions, **test-based accountability has failed**. It was predestined to fail because it was based in good measure on a number of unrealistic assumptions. And it’s not only hindsight that allows me to say this. Warning flags about some of these assumptions were hoisted decades ago.”*

Finally, a [recent RAND Corporation study](#) found that on current state tests, only about 2 percent of math items and 20 percent of English language arts items tap higher-order skills.

If all of that isn’t enough, paradoxically one of the hidden curses of standardized testing is the insidious manner in which it actually penalizes diversity. By statistical definition, it ignores the “edges” which include all of those students who have cultural, geographic physical or intellectual disadvantage. Far from helping to “close the gap,” the use of standardized testing has in fact found to be most damaging for low-income and minority students.

**Paradoxically one of the hidden curses of standardized testing is the insidious manner in which it actually penalizes diversity.**

This really is all quite absurd.

## The Urgency for Change

[Russell Ackoff](#) puts the case bluntly,

*“The essential purpose of an educational system is to provide an environment that allows children to develop into successful adults. Replacing that with an educational system that forces children to perform well on a specific set of exams **is nothing less than the end of schooling as a useful tool for society**.*

*...Peter Drucker said,*

*‘There’s a difference between doing things right and doing the right thing.’*

*Doing the right thing is wisdom, and effectiveness. Doing things right is efficiency. **The curious thing is the righter you do the wrong thing the wronger you become.** If you’re doing the wrong thing and you make a mistake and correct it, you become wronger.*



*So it's better to do the right thing wrong than the wrong thing right."*

Take a simple example - grading. The issue is surely not how, but why? As [Welby Ings](#) explains:

*"We change by changing the language. Scaled percentages are replaced by raw marks, which are replaced by grades, that are replaced by levels of merit... but the fundamental premise remains the same: we preoccupy ourselves with measuring the performance of learning..."*

*As a consequence we elevate what can be made explicit and what can be narrated, and somewhere in there we miss the point that learning is not a performance. It is a process."*



So, when are we going to start to see a focus on doing the right thing? Contrary to popular belief, there are places where the focus is different, not the least being [Finland](#), and in recent times several Canadian provinces and New Zealand, to name just a few.

*"Teachers (in Finland) are given autonomy and their focus is on daily monitoring of students to detect any learning difficulties. Teachers enjoy high social status and must have a master's degree; they have the freedom to choose their own textbooks, and bureaucratic intervention is kept to a minimum." ~ Pasi Sahlberg*

## **The Beginning of the End of Testing as We Know It**

### **7 strategies for conversations concerning assessment**

Rather than considering legacy assessment policies and practices as an inevitable and damaging burden for students, what choices should leaders be considering if they are to reimagine assessment within their school or district? We believe any conversations around the topic should include the following strategies.

These suggestions are based on practices and policies that we have seen successfully implemented in schools around the world that we have worked with over the past several years and reflect the changing role of assessment in the modern world. We have detailed each of these strategies on the following pages.

### **7 Strategies to Support Assessment That Supports Learning**

1. Beliefs must drive assessment.
2. Challenge assumptions, biases and orthodoxies that influence assessment practice.
3. Communication beats compliance, every time.
4. Explore status quo-busting assessment solutions to provide more authentic and real-world choices.
5. Let students learn about how they learn.
6. Measure what matters.
7. Invest in TRUST.

# 01

## Beliefs Must Drive Assessment

In what ways can assessment provide support for our beliefs around learning?

*“And what do you mean by learning?”*

~*Seymour Sarason*



In too many schools, assessment is totally removed from the learning process. Some educators justify this as being necessary for objective measurement, without asking why this should be so, while others simply refuse to confront the compromise it presents.

And if beliefs are to drive assessment, the very first step is the process of developing a shared understanding of what you mean by learning. Without this, nothing will change. It's about how you personally define learning, and how it is defined in your school community. Then and only then, when you have clear “principles of learning” that you can gain any value from a discussion around assessment.

## Why This Matters



Start with the simple questions. Why do we assess? What is the purpose, and how can we best do so in a manner that aligns with our beliefs around learning?

Learning is not a competitive sport, so how about we stop treating it that way? Why do we persist in ranking everything and naming and shaming schools by publishing test results like they're sporting scores in league tables? Neither is learning a zero-sum game- as in I learn, you don't, or you learn, I don't. Contrary to the core statistical assumption that standardized tests are built on, we can both learn, and both benefit.

The very nature of high-stakes accountability by definition implies a core focus is to assign a number or grade as a crude and poorly defined measure of a student's ability to recall and apply ideas that have been somewhat arbitrarily labeled "core knowledge." Not only does such high-stakes testing not support learning, but it is detrimental and a distraction from that very process.

As the dubious roots of testing told us, our beliefs about learning set the standardized testing wheels in motion when they reflected the "official theory learning." Now *our beliefs* must drive the shift to assessment that aligns with the "classic" or natural theory

which sees modern learning as self-directed, social, continuous, and inquiry-based, one in which test-based accountabilities have no role.

And as [Scott Looney](#), Head of Cleveland's Hawken School and co-founder of the Mastery Consortium simply stated in a recent [Modern Learners'](#) podcast,

***“There is zero research in the world that supports letter grading. None. It has never existed and didn't exist when grades were launched over 100 years ago.***

*The very first study of grading done in 1908 was published in **Science**, and the conclusion was this is a horrible idea and a horrible failure which we must stop doing immediately... [instead it] took over the world, and it became the primary way we assess achievement. It's never been legitimate.”*

## From Strategy to Action

Modern assessment is authentic and wherever possible connected to real-world problems that might be explored across all subject domain areas. To paraphrase [Tony Wagner](#), the emphasis in modern assessment is no longer focused on what you know, but more particularly, what you can do with what you know. How can that be done?

The assessment choices we have are many and varied, some of which are listed later in this paper, but none of which resemble in any way the current high-stakes tests so prevalent across our schools.

[Russell Ackoff](#) outlines,

*“In the world outside of classrooms, the “real world”, examinations are seldom used to determine the competence of people. Employees are usually evaluated by how well they perform on their jobs.”*

As should be the case in schools. Instead, we have sought to remediate the broken testing system with a variety of metrics, none of which bare any resemblance to reality.

*“Schools use grades because it's one of those things somebody once decided on and now everybody just goes along with it. I don't know where it started, but I know where it stops- in the real world.*



*You don't see supervisors telling their employees, 'Great job, I'm going to give you an A.' Or, 'You really screwed up here; that's a C-.' No, in the real world, **adults get real feedback and indications of where they need improvement.**" ~ **Dennis Littky, *The Big Picture: Education Is Everyone's Business****

Surely what we require for schools, for leaders, for teachers, is to confront the compromise that may exist between their beliefs and their practice. This is a challenging but very necessary first step.

An interesting and to some extent unthreatening place to start the process is with an open discussion around Frank Smith's theories of learning.



**Do colleagues or faculty feel that the official or the classic theories of learning best describe their beliefs around learning and why?**

It's a great discussion starter that can open avenues for deeper discussions. Smith's theories offer simple models that can be used as a reference or even a 'strawman' which can be refined, refuted or developed as discussions progress.

All of this takes time. While it is easy to argue that beliefs around learning should be fundamental to every teacher's practice, the reality is that few teachers ever give themselves enough time to think deeply about it or consult with their colleagues and peers. To some extent, there is a degree of mimicry, habit, and inherited practice that many teachers adopt in their early years teaching which they rarely question.

At the end of it all, the goal is for a shared understanding of what you mean by learning, and how you believe your students learn most deeply and powerfully.

- The next step is to reflect on the extent to which those beliefs about learning are aligned with practice. This can be a tough one and is often best done through a combination of self and peer assessment from observation and review. Following that is the hard conversation about any contradictions or incongruity between personal beliefs and current practice.
- Finally, you are looking to drill down and explore the extent to which beliefs around learning align with assessment practices. As a subset of the previous step, it can again be done by peer observation of questioning techniques or feedback. In the end it's a necessary process if you are to develop coherence or consistency within and across your school community.

### **Questions to Further the Conversation**

- What do we mean when referring to authentic or “effective” assessment?
- What do you see as the role for authentic assessment, and how might that be most effectively implemented?
- Next to your statements of beliefs around learning, list assessment options that support those.
- Do you still grade students' work, and if so, why?

### **Resources**

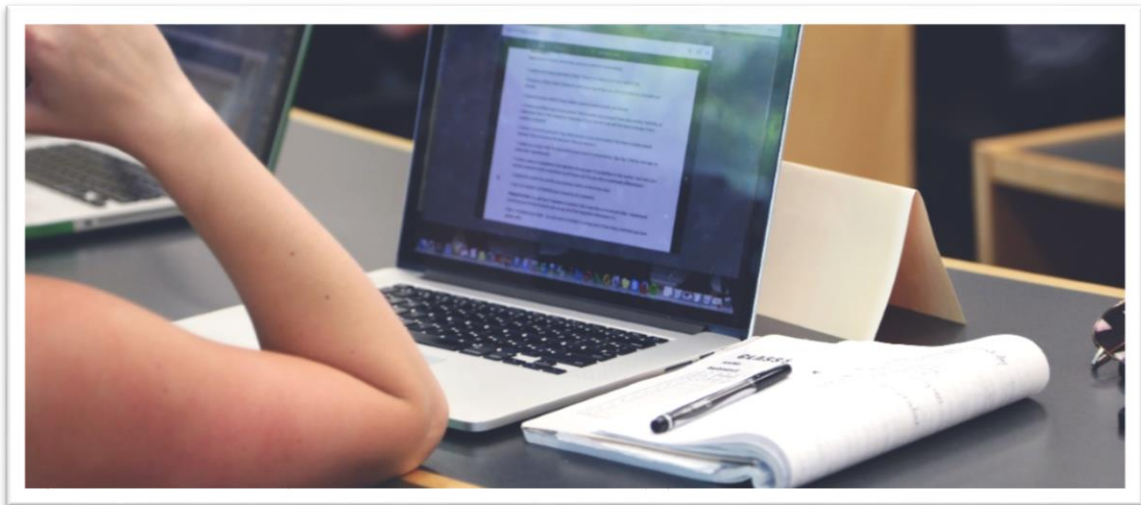
- [Three Key Questions on Measuring Learning](#), Jay McTighe
- [The Book of Learning and Forgetting](#), Frank Smith
- [7 things every kid should master](#), Susan Engel
- [High Stakes Testing](#), Gerald Bracey

# 02

## Challenge Assumptions, Biases and Orthodoxies that Influence Assessment Practice

Why do you do what you do?

*“Like almost all other complex traditional social organizations, the schools will accommodate in ways that require little or no change... The strength of the status quo-its underlying axioms, its patterns of power relationships, its sense of traditions and therefore what seems right, natural, and proper-almost automatically rules out options for change.” ~ Seymour Sarason*



Modern leaders acknowledge the impact and unspoken influence of culture, which can be addressed by understanding the traditions, artifacts and habits that people have about why they have existing practices, including those around assessment, in place. There is sometimes a frequent reference to the role external forces play in this, be they parents or higher authorities, but how often does such reference avoid close examination of the assumptions on which current assessment is based?

## Why This Matters

*“Letting go of existing practice is a challenge for most people in most situations, and for educators, the habits they have developed around existing assessment practices **challenge their competence, creates confusion and causes conflict.**”*

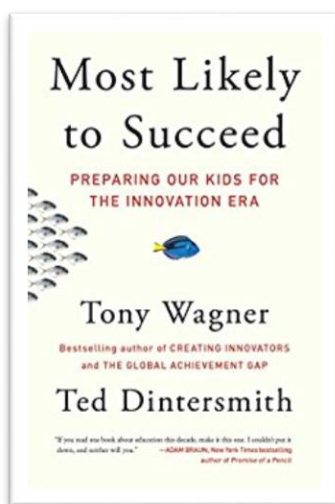
*~ Robert Evans, **The Human Side of School Change***

So much of what we do in schools is based on assumptions which we have inherited, and as critical as they have been in informing existing practice, they are rarely tested.

For example, some justify current testing regimes by assuming **the wider community want tests**. However, as [Alfie Kohn](#) outlines, that is simply not the case:

*“Support for testing seems to grow as you move away from the students, going from teacher to principal to central office administrator to school board member to state board member, state legislator, and governor. Those for whom classroom visits are occasional photo opportunities are most likely to be big fans of testing and to offer self-congratulatory sound bites about the need for ‘tougher standards’ and ‘accountability.’*

*The more that parents and other members of the community learn about these tests, the more critical of them – if not appalled by them – they tend to become.”*



Others might build the case for testing by assuming that **colleges and universities want tests**. [Ted Dintersmith](#), author, and producer of [Most Likely to Succeed](#) sees it differently:

*“In the blink of an eye, academic credentials have become largely irrelevant to innovative software companies, which now tap into online evidence of a candidate’s competence... [for example] an expert can examine someone’s [GitHub](#) code base and make an informed judgment about coding proficiency... Increasingly, employers recruit in the same way you’d want to commission an artist to do a portrait-reviewing portfolios of work instead of interviewing Art History majors from Ivy League colleges.”*

And then, of course, there are those whose test advocacy is based on the assumption that **tests are the best way of objectively and reliably assess students**.

Now, as logical as that appears to some, in practice the relentless pressure to raise test scores ultimately can [corrupt the tests](#), both directly through cheating, as well as narrowing the curriculum and “gaming” the system.

So much of what we take for granted in schools is based on outdated or poorly informed assumptions or orthodoxies. They provide a platform for legacy assessment practice that needs to be reviewed, refuted and in most cases replaced.

### **From Strategy to Action**

The process is as important as the actual content. The awareness of how wrong assumptions have led to poor decisions, and in turn how that leads to “doing the wrong thing right.” Many feel uncomfortable when an examination of assumptions leads to different choices, but the following are just some of the questions that can be explored in any critical conversations you have with faculty, parents, or your wider school community.

- How are students grouped in the school, and to what extent does that influence assessment expectations?
- How often are students assessed? Why?
- How are students graded? Why?
- What choices do students have about what they learn, how they learn, and when they learn? Why?
- Do students have any role in assessment and if not, why not?
- How do you students benefit from the tests they take each year?
- Do you believe standardized tests are designed objectively, without bias?
- Do you believe that standardized tests accurately assess a student’s academic knowledge? Give evidence.
- To what extent does external compliance play a role in assessment carried out at the school? What options do you have?
- Why is your school daily schedule and calendar structured as it is?



These questions include a couple of what [Sarason](#) calls the “regularities” of school culture-patterns, rules and procedures that are mostly unseen and assumed.

Ultimately it comes down to having an open mind to new opportunities. It’s about letting go of old practices and exploring new ideas, and sadly some find it easier to focus on their existing practice that “they know works,” rather than what is “right.”

*“If knowing how? offers us the possibility of more control and predictability, then we may have to sacrifice them to pursue what matters. The choice to worry about why we are doing something more than how we do something is risky business. It is risky for us as individuals, for our organizations, and for society. We live in a culture that lavishes all of its rewards on what works, a culture that seems to **value what works more than it values what matters.**” ~ [Peter Block](#)*

## Questions to Further the Conversation

- Can you describe habits, rituals or behaviors that unquestionably endorse the existing testing practices within your school? What have you stopped doing?
- What are the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by stakeholders across your school community, that operate unconsciously, and that are learned responses that define how the institution is able to solve problems repeatedly and reliably? ([Edgar Schein](#))
- Assumptions can be readily drawn out with “why” questions, as in “why do we... ?” What are the functions and processes of the organizational culture of your school that exert a potent influence over beliefs and behavior to preserve continuity and oppose change?
- New practices involve risk and often failure. To what extent is your school a learning organisation that allows teachers to fail, to question their mental models, and to experiment with new ways of looking at assessment?

## Resources

- [How School Leaders Can Attend to the Emotional Side of Change](#)
- [Fighting the Tests. A Practical Guide to Rescuing Our Schools](#)
- [Why Would a Teacher Cheat?](#) The Atlantic, April 27, 2016
- [Standardization versus Standards](#), Phi Delta Kappan 84(3)
- [The Case Against Grades](#), Alfie Kohn

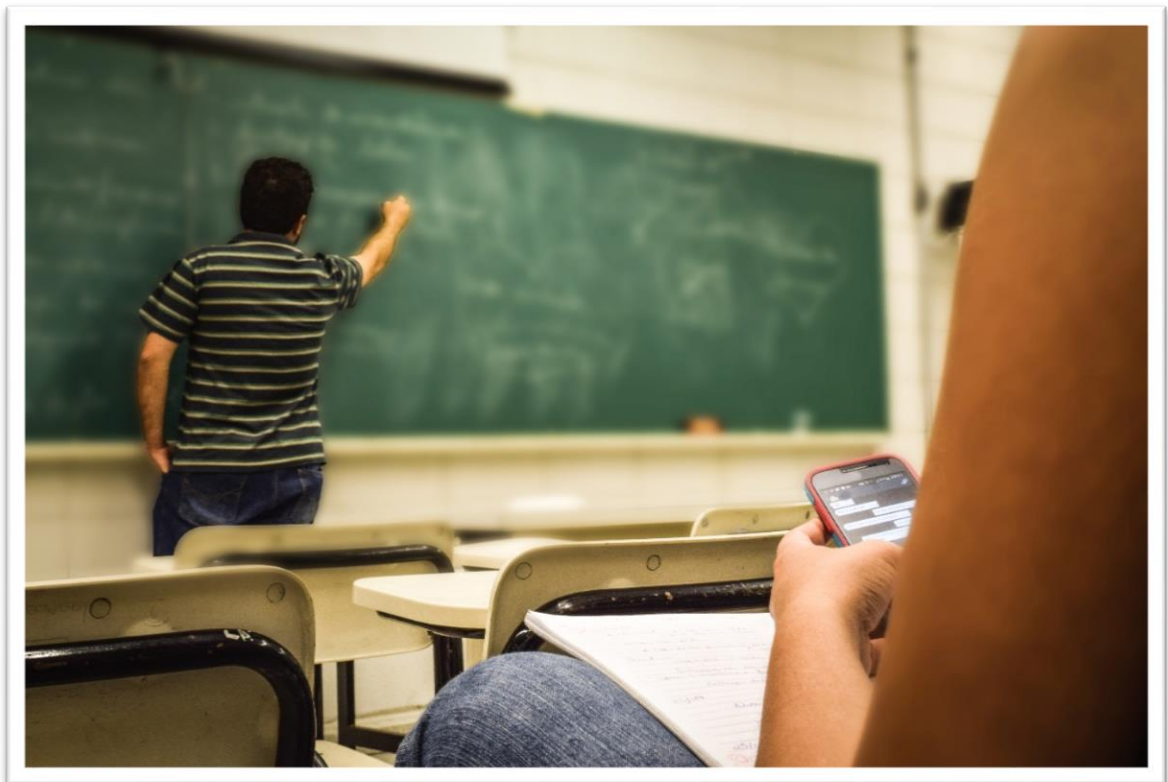
# 03

## Communication Beats Compliance

Is the testing regime in your school the result of conformity or complacency?

*“We bought the lie that we were powerless and, as a result, we became so.”*

~ Welby Ings



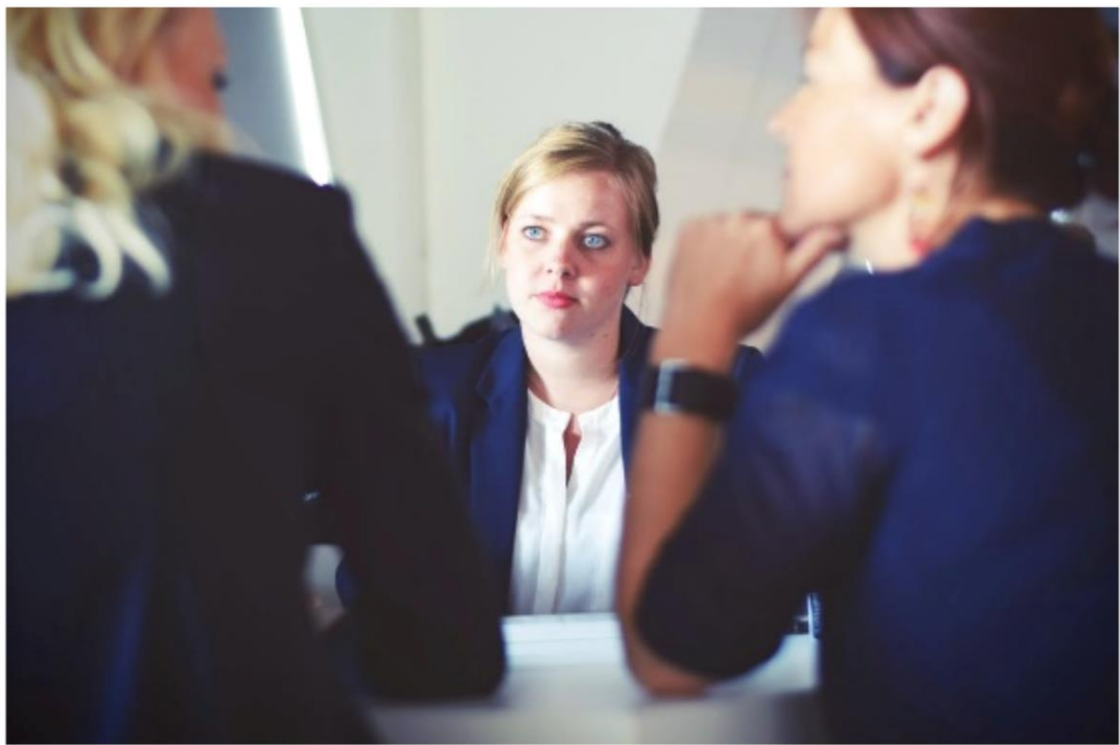
Despite all the evidence and the urgency for change outlined above, some leaders still desperately want to cling to the status quo. For many it's a case of that's what we are told to do, have to do, or are most comfortable doing.

For them, it comes down to some simple questions: If there was no requirement for any high-stakes tests, what would you do? How much of what you believe you should be doing is limited by external factors and what are they?

### Why This Matters

*“When assessment is externally imposed, it frees teachers from responsibility for understanding the thinking of each kid. Such assessment not only doesn’t inform/improve teaching practice, it harms it.” ~ [Gary Stager](#)*

The choice is yours. In most schools, there is a requirement for students to take external “high-stakes” tests, but the extent to which you allow that to dominate the conversation across your school community, the extent to which that influences school culture and hijacks learning across your school is the leader’s responsibility.



For every school leader who allows external compliance requirements to rob their students of learning opportunities, there are others who make better choices. They invest in their community. They take the time to build consensus across all stakeholders of a clear understanding of both the purposes of assessment and the best choices for students.

They invest time in informing parents and sharing research with staff to fully understand the difference between assessment for, and assessment of, learning; and in doing that they commit to standing by their beliefs around learning.

It's ongoing, continuous communication that keeps parents well informed and, above all, sets realistic expectations about the impact of external compliance and absurdities such as public league tables.

Above all, they focus on having a shared voice across their community about which assessments really matter, and are worth doing in support of learning.

Every school has that choice. For every discussion about the challenges and impact of high-stakes testing, there are always school leaders who raise the compliance flag. That said, for every one that does, there are three others who have negotiated compromise solutions that have the full support of their school community.

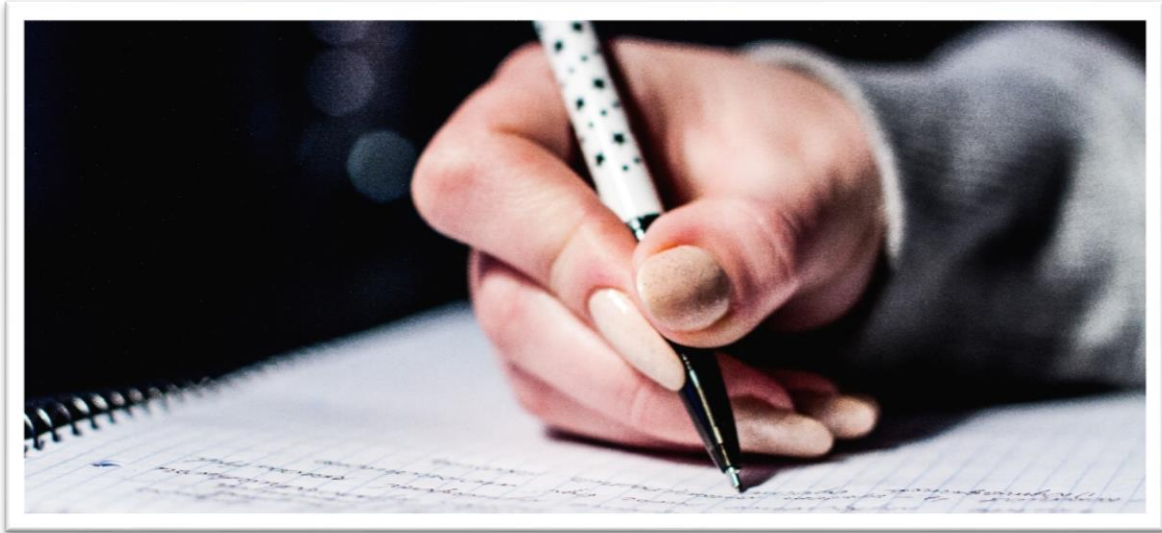
[Princes Hill Primary](#) and [Templestowe College](#) in Victoria, Australia, [High Tech High](#) and [Science Leadership Academy](#) in the US, and [Peel School District](#) in Canada are well known examples of schools and districts that have ongoing commitments to always keep their school communities well informed about their assessment choices, rather than blindly accepting external compliance requirements.

While they know that some compliance requirements are inevitable, they don't accept that they should be treated as significant. In doing that, they ensure minimal impact on students from any external high stakes testing that is required of them by policy, regulation, or law.

However, for some school leaders that can all seem too hard, and the status quo offers a much easier path, with less potential disruption or extensive negotiation required. In particular, for systems that publicly rank school performance by publishing "league tables," the pressure on enrolments can be very real. It requires a long-term commitment to ensuring both existing and new parents fully understand the rationale for making the choices they have.

*"It all comes back to one simple point: Exams do not assess anything significant to the future of children, because no one knows how to assess or measure the key factors to the future success of any person, child or adult."*

*They are a closed system; tests exist for their own sake. They measure the ability of the entire school community — children, parents, teachers, administrators — to focus all their efforts on producing good results on tests! Nothing more, nothing less.” ~ [Russell Ackoff](#)*



## From Strategy to Action

The reality today is that most schools have high-stakes tests, some in forms that are mandated, some more than others. So as [Alfie Kohn outlines](#), they must do their best in the short term to protect students from the worst effects of any given policy around testing. At the same time, they should also be working to support change or eliminate that policy. He gives the following guidance on how to this can be best done:

- First, if you are a teacher, you should **do what is necessary to prepare students for the tests — and then get back to the real learning**. Never forget the difference between these two objectives. Be clear about it in your own mind, and whenever possible, help others to understand that distinction
- Second, **do no more test preparation than is absolutely necessary**. Some experts have argued that a relatively short period of introducing students to the content and format of the tests is sufficient to produce scores equivalent to those obtained by students who have spent the entire year in test-prep mode.
- Third, whatever time *is* spent on **test preparation should be as creative and worthwhile as possible**. Avoid traditional drilling whenever you can... The idea

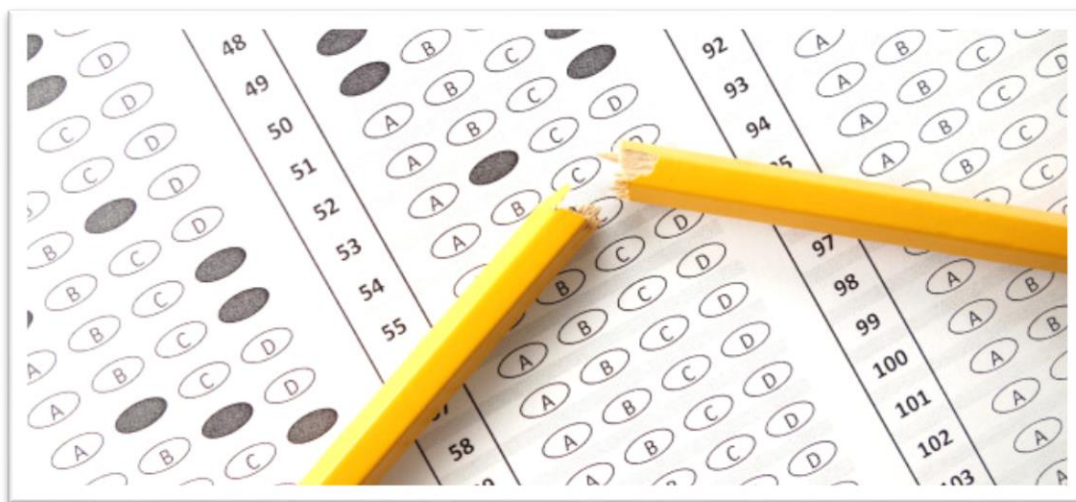


is to help students become adept at the particular skill called test-taking, so they will be able to show what they already know.

- Fourth, **administrators and other school officials should never brag about high (or rising) scores.** To do so is not only misleading; it serves to legitimize the tests.
- Finally, whatever your position on the food chain of education, one of your primary obligations is to be a buffer – to absorb as much pressure as possible from those above you without passing it on to those below... **Try to educate those above you whenever it seems possible to do so, but cushion those below you every day.** Otherwise, you become part of the problem.

Keeping the wider school community well informed around assessment choices and policies must be a communication priority. Decide how this can best be done within your school, and most importantly how it will be *sustained* over the longer term.

Remember, most people in your community only have their own school experience to draw on when making judgments about testing, so it is important that we take time to help them be better informed about the choices we have around assessment. Any time a local official, parent or community member boasts about rising test scores, you should consider responding with the alternatives.



Finally, some communities (largely because of demography) tend to be more proactive than others, and are prepared to take the lead with initiatives such as the “OptOut” movement. According to [the New York Times](#), in 2015 in New York State, [union and parent activism](#) fueled the growth of the anti-testing movement, which was essentially non-existent just two years earlier.

In 440 of the state's 721 districts, at least 165,000 students opted out of one or more tests, based on information from districts and local news reports. That figure was four times the number of pupils who had refused the tests in those districts in the previous year. In at least 60 districts, refusers outnumbered the test-takers.

### Questions to Further the Conversation

- How are your parents kept informed about the assessment practices within your school, both internal and external?
- How much time do external tests take up in your school?
- Which external tests are mandatory?
- What would it take for your school to be able to reduce the time and emphasis that is placed on high stakes tests within your school community?

### Resources

- [Just Say No to Standardized Tests: Why and How to Opt Out](#)
- [Why the school 'accountability movement' based on standardized tests is nothing more than 'a charade.'](#)
- [One Education Does Not Fit All](#), Robert Reich
- [Fighting the Tests: A Practical Guide to Rescuing Our Schools](#)
- [The Joy of Opting Out of Standardized Tests](#)

# 04

## Explore Status Quo-Busting Assessment Solutions to Provide More Authentic and Real-world Choices

How will you decide which assessment alternatives are best for your students' learning needs?

*“Assessment should be an unobtrusive servant of teaching and learning.”*  
~ Alfie Kohn, [What Does it Mean to be Well Educated?](#)



Feedback, narratives, portfolios, exhibitions, demonstrations, and performance are just some of the assessment alternatives that give a far more authentic, balanced and comprehensive view of learning than high-stakes tests. The truth is many are not as familiar, convenient, or easily replicable as those you are currently using. Expediency beats effectiveness when time, resources, and experience are in short supply.

## Why This Matters

Instead of focusing on *how well* learners perform certain usually arbitrarily selected tasks, modern assessment should focus on *what tasks* the learners have opportunities to engage in and their degree of interest and comprehension. The simple task of feedback, when aligned with variety of assessment practices, has previously been overlooked and underrated.

There is considerable research evidence to show that effective feedback, which plays such a key role in so many assessment alternatives, leads to learning gains. [Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam](#) drew together a meta-analysis of more than 250 studies which revealed that feedback produced significant benefits in learning.

To assume *all* students can best express their capabilities and competencies through pen and paper or online tests is simply bizarre. With the diversity of mediums and platforms that are available to all students at little or no cost we can ensure they can express themselves in whatever way they feel is most comfortable and appropriate.

## From Strategy to Action

There are a range of different assessment strategies available that teachers and students can consider that are more authentic and meaningful... and which support learning.

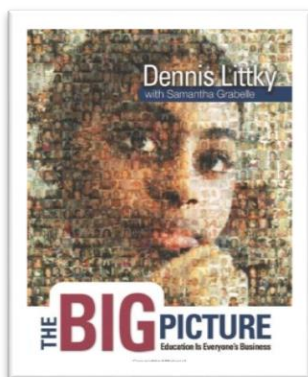
In their recent book, [Beyond Testing: Seven Assessments of Students and Schools More Effective Than Standardized Tests](#), Deborah Meier and Matthew Knoester outline in detail their experiences in observing and implementing powerful alternative assessment, each of which is more effective than standardized tests.

They included:

1. **Teacher observations of students and their work:** Teachers as observers and ethnographers, noticing, collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing thousands of pieces of information about their students as they go about their daily work.
2. **The descriptive review processes:** An organized way of gathering observations and other pieces of evidence together, focusing the evidence around a framing question and discussing the question or a particular piece of work, or the assessment of a child, with a group of adults.
3. **Reading and math interviews:** Assessments of students' reading (and math) comprehension abilities using processes such as running records of students

reading with an adult, followed by comprehension questions by an adult, the assessor.

4. **Portfolios and public defense of student work:** Portfolios of student work, along with the student's public defense of that work, that constitute significant evidence, judged by the panel (generally of teachers, parents, and community members) that the student has met the standards of the institution.



[Big Picture](#) schools, of which there are now more than sixty across the US and more than one hundred across the world, have always been advocates of **public exhibitions** in the belief that it is far more valuable for a child to be able to stand up and show what they have learned rather than attempt to demonstrate learning through the artificiality of a standardized test.

First made popular in 1984 by [Ted Sizer](#) when he made *diploma by exhibition* a core principle of the [Coalition of Essential Schools](#), [Dennis Littky](#) calls exhibitions “*conversations about learning*.” He believes their focus is on the process of learning, not just the end product, and through them, students learn *how to talk about their learning*. Littky sees the following benefits from exhibitions as assessment for learning:

- Exhibitions are a unique opportunity for parent involvement.
- They are also an excellent opportunity for teachers to work together as a team.
- Exhibitions encourage students to go deeper with their learning.
- They provide a platform to include the outside community in education.
- Exhibitions promote rather than inhibit growth.
- They eliminate cheating.
- Exhibitions allow, and require, students to set high standards for themselves.

Another cluster of schools on the east coast of the US [have formed a consortium](#) committed to the use of **performance assessment** as a more authentic alternative to high-stakes tests, while on the west coast, [High Tech High](#) has made extensive use of performance and exhibition as their assessment platforms. Not only are their exhibition evenings a major community event and a showcase of student work of the highest quality, but similarly they proudly [display many of the projects](#) their students complete on their website with details on the processes they followed.



Also, there are some very significant initiatives already underway to break the hold of the traditional end of high school high-stakes examinations and tests. One of the most important is the [Mastery Transcript Consortium](#) under which students gain micro-credits (not grades) for a series of skills such as analytic and creative thinking, leadership and teamwork, global perspective, etc. Micro-credits allow college admission officers to see a more complete picture of a student's strengths

rather than a test score, and better represent the whole child and the complex recipe which makes for a successful student.

### Questions to Further the Conversation

- Should assessment vary by age, grade, or subject domain, and if so, how?
- Make the argument that grades are objective. Now make the counterargument that grades are subjective. Which argument fits best with your other beliefs about learning and education? - [Denis Littky](#)
- What extra time, resources, or professional learning is required to support these new assessment choices?
- What process or criteria should be used in selecting the most appropriate assessment?
- What opportunities does technology now offer for new assessment alternatives (other than online testing)?

### Resources

- [Try These 4 \(Better\) Alternatives To Standardized Assessment](#)
- [Beyond Testing: Seven Assessments of Students and Schools More Effective Than Standardized Tests](#) - Deborah Meier and Matthew Knoester
- [Big Picture Learning](#)
- [Whoever Said There's No Such Thing as a Stupid Question Never Looked Carefully at a Standardized Test](#) - Alfie Kohn



# 05

## Let Students Learn About How They Learn

What does effective learner self-assessment look like?

*“Papert and his mentor Jean Piaget shared a belief that ‘knowledge is a consequence of experience’ and that ‘it is not the role of the teacher to correct the child from the outside, but rather to create the conditions by which a child corrects herself from the inside.’” ~ Gary Stager*



Effective self-assessment allows learners to become as aware of the “how” of their learning as they are of the “what.”

Assessment for learning develops learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing independent learners and they can seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge, and new understandings. They can engage in self-reflection and identify the next steps in their own learning. Teachers should equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment.

## Why This Matters

Student self- and peer-assessment offer a range of benefits:

- Students learn more deeply when they have a sense of ownership of what, and why, they are learning.
- The act of self- assessing is one of the deepest learning experiences.
- Peer assessment allows students to learn from each other's successes.
- Peer assessment allows students to learn from each other's weaknesses.

Students peer-assessing are likely to discover all sorts of mistakes that they did not make themselves. This can be useful for them, as their awareness of "what not to do" increases, and they become much less likely to fall into traps that might otherwise have taken. However, it also important to note that for students who are used to teacher-driven assessments, it can take time for them to adjust to self-assessing and developing their capacity to monitor their own learning. This can often discourage teaching from continuing with this approach, and so should be anticipated.

## From Strategy to Action

*"Student after student held the stage for twenty minutes each, confidently discussing their projects and fielding questions on the steps of the scientific method, background research, the difference between independent and dependent variables, possible sources of bias or error in their experiments, math concepts like median and mean, and real-world applications.*

*Most striking to me was the way the students listened closely and gave each other thoughtful and supportive feedback."* ~ **Anya Kamenetz, *The Test: Why Our Schools are Obsessed with Standardized Testing But You Don't Have to Be***

As the learner is working through a learning activity, they might assess their progress internally. If the learner can discuss or write down some of their self-assessments, the verbalization and clarification of ideas that comes from interaction with others in oral or written form assists learners to remember their learning, and their successful learning strategies.

As Deborah Meier suggests in [Beyond Testing](#), self-assessment provides ways of encouraging students to critically reflect on their own work, using tools or structured occasions, such as family conferences, rubrics, or the collection of reflections called recollections.

It's also worth noting that prompts can assist learners to reflect on their learning. These questions from the [Victorian Department of Education](#) are useful prompts to assist learners to self-assess:

- What did I learn today?
- How do I know I learned this?
- What am I confused about?
- How can I clarify this?
- What do I want to know more about?
- How am I going to find out more?
- What am I going to work on next?
- I was surprised by...
- I was challenged by...
- I was excited when I discovered...

One area that is frequently overlooked is the *role of critique*, a skill that not only students, but adults often have little or no experience with. If students are to become effective at peer assessment then from a very early age, they should be developing skills in critique, so that they can offer other students feedback that support their learning.

At [Two Rivers Charter School](#) in Washington, D.C. students start doing the peer critique protocol in preschool, and they feel at times teachers and parents underestimate the capacity young children have to absorb and use constructive critique. ([Watch Two Rivers Charter School video.](#))

### Questions to Further the Conversation

- How should we give feedback on learning that is self-directed?
- Is it possible to evaluate growth? Why should we care about that?
- How do you measure potential? Should you?

### Resources

- [Ten Principles of Assessment for Learning](#)
- [Developing Assessments for Deeper Learning: a Cost-Benefit Analysis](#) - Linda Darling Hammond and Frank Adamson
- [Formative Assessment Ideas](#) - Edutopia
- [How Students Critiquing One Another's Work Raises The Quality Bar](#) - MindShift

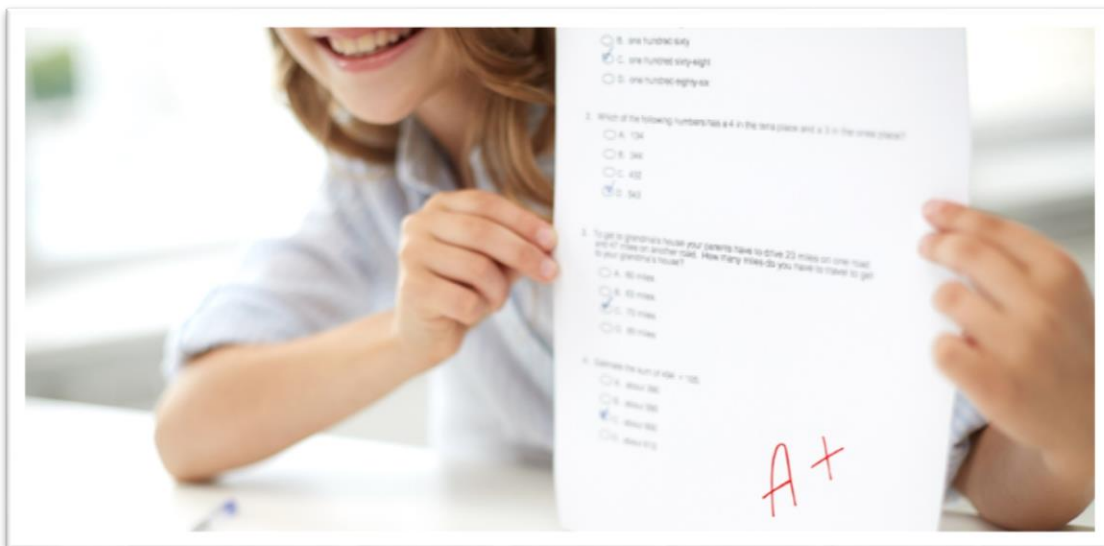
# 06

## Measure what Matters

How do you assess inquiry? Should you? Why?

*“Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils’ learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.*

*Such assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.” ~ Paul Black et al, [Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for Learning in the Classroom](#)*



Formative assessment offers both students and teachers a window into their learning over an extended period of time. A large part of the assessment in schools today is summative. It's about ranking performance against set criteria to sort students. It not only fails to support learning, but it actively undermines it, and for all but the one or two "winners" the result can be demeaning and deflating. It is anti-learning.

Formative assessment is instinctive, continuous, informal, and is totally focused on supporting the learner and their learning.

### Why This Matters

Any instructional activity that allows teachers to uncover the way students think about what is being taught can serve a formative purpose. Any inquiry-based school will have a formative assessment program in place because of the relative importance of the inquiry process rather than simply the end product.

Formative assessment places demands on students to take a more serious approach to learning and to work harder. With formative assessment, issues of reliability and validity are addressed over time, as teachers collect ongoing data about student performance and, as appropriate, make corrections to their previous inferences.

For reference, it's also worthwhile noting that the use of formative assessment is built on a sound theoretical learning framework, around a sociocultural constructivist view of learning through which learners are seen as actively constructing knowledge and understanding through cognitive processes (Piaget, 1954) within a social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978).

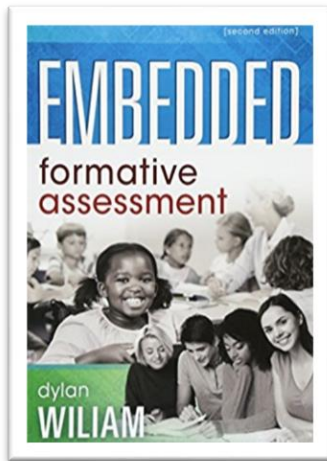
Students are building new knowledge on what they already know (i.e., prior knowledge) (Bransford et al, 2000), and in the process they are developing the metacognitive skills necessary to regulate their own learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Bruner, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978).

To put it more simply, formative assessment also "ticks all the leading learning theorists\* boxes."

(\*All references can be found in the linked article.)



## From Strategy to Action



In his book [Embedded Formative Assessment](#), Dylan Wiliam provides strategies that he has come to believe are the core to successful formative assessment practice in the classroom:

- 1. Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success** – getting the students to really understand what their classroom experience will be and how their success will be measured.
- 2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning** – developing effective classroom instructional strategies that allow for the measurement of success.
- 3. Providing feedback that moves learning forward** – working with students to provide them the information they need to better understand problems and solutions.

It's also important to remember that [good feedback](#) is an essential component of formative assessment as it:

- Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria).
- Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning.
- Delivers high-quality information to students about their learning.
- Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning.
- Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
- Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.
- Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

## Questions to Further the Conversation

- How do you see formative assessment being implemented in your school?
- What resources and support might be needed in your school to implement an effective formative assessment initiative?
- How can formative assessment be used to gain the best possible evidence of student learning?

## Resources

- [Practical Techniques for Implementing Formative Assessment](#) - a free, on-demand webinar by Dylan Wiliam from NWEA
- [Dylan Wiliam & The 5 Formative Assessment Strategies to Improve Student Learning](#)
- [Assessment for Learning-Beyond the Black Box](#)
- [The Ultimate List – 65 Digital Tools and Apps to Support Formative Assessment Practices](#)
- [Formative Assessment: Why, What, and Whether](#) - W. James Popham
- [Understanding Formative Assessment-Insights from Learning Theory](#) - Trumbull and Lash

# 07

## Invest in TRUST

How can professional judgment play a larger role in the assessment of both students and teachers?

*“...attempts to substitute counterfeit science for individual judgment not only lead to failure, and at times major disasters, but also discredit real science, and undermines faith in human reason.” ~ [Isaiah Berlin](#)*

Under the current oppressive testing regime that exists in many schools, the notion of trust and professional judgment seems as far away from reality as is possible. As [Deborah Meier](#) highlights,

*“The increasing use of standardized tests not only undermines achievement but it increases the distrust we have for teachers, students, and our own judgments.”*

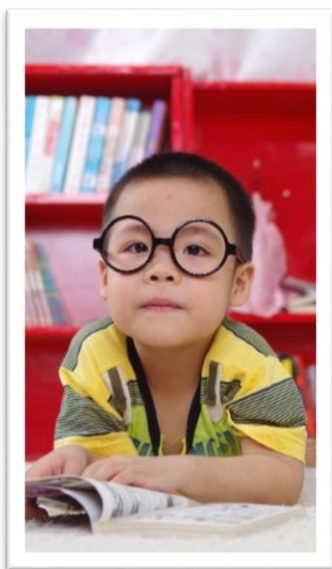


We need a renaissance of professional judgement. There have been times and places where teachers held the respect of their community, and their judgment was held in high esteem. In the medium to longer term, the only answer to this war on learning lies in a partnership between student and teacher, built around their relationship as co-learners seeking to understand, guide and nurture new ideas, capabilities and deeper understandings.

Put simply, we are where we are because a **lack of trust** and our morbidly obese testing regimes have thrived on it. As my colleague Missy Emler so clearly articulated during one of our [Change School](#) discussions:

*“Look at how much money we spend on educator effectiveness systems because we don’t trust teachers. Look at how much we spend on standardized tests because we don’t trust grades. Look at how much we spend on lawyers. How can we invest in trust instead of expensing it?”*

## Why This Matters



No matter how many assessment options you consider, no matter how flexible your use of them is, in the long term the key question is when is the learning professional going to be granted the autonomy to support their students’ learning in the best ways they believe?

Professional autonomy is an oft-quoted, but rarely sited reality. It is not just about the individual, but rather the professional collective working collaboratively and sharing ideas, expertise and experiences. While it is spoken about in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, parts of Australia, Singapore, and of course Finland, the meaning differs from culture to culture.

These are visionary leaders who realize that modern learning is a partnership between teacher and student, and the sole purpose of assessment is to support that learning partnership.

This is about trust on three levels:

1. The student trusts the teacher to guide their learning without the need to external validation.
2. The teacher trusts the student to do their best work.
3. The school and parents trust the teacher to live the values and beliefs expected of a learning professional at all times.

As esoteric and optimistic as that sounds, it's what schools must aspire to if they are ever to be granted the professional autonomy that modern schools require.

### From Strategy to Action

We often talk about student agency, but what about teacher agency? What do we mean by that? What do teachers currently have responsibility for? What *should* teachers have responsibility for? To what extent do *they* have voice and choice?

Given the highly prescriptive climate currently found in a few schools, the way back will be a long one. But that journey can only start when there is trust between all stakeholders.

For most, the journey can start today. While the longer term goal must be policy and systemically driven, each school can and should look to devolve responsibility progressively to teachers as they step up to their role as learning professionals. This is a process that differs from school to school, but it should be a priority, because it takes time to mend the dependencies of legacy practice and to break the bonds of old habits and biases.

While [frequently quoted](#), the journey Finnish schools took should provide optimism for leaders in other countries seeking to bring about a significant shift in the role and responsibilities of their teachers.

*“During the 70s and 80s, there was strict central direction and control over schools, state-prescribed curriculums, external school inspections, and detailed regulation, giving the Finnish government a strong grip on schools and teachers.*

*But a second phase, from the early 90s, consciously set out to create a new culture of education characterised by trust between educational authorities and schools, local control, professionalism and autonomy.*

*Schools became responsible for their own curriculum planning and student assessment, while state inspections were abandoned. This required teachers to have high academic credentials and be treated like professionals.”*

Implied with the granting of professional autonomy, is an imperative that teachers are more open in their practice and ensure transparency so others can help improve practice and provide opportunity to explore new pedagogies for deeper learning.

*“I don’t think that the primary problem in American education is the lack of teacher quality, or that part of the solution would be to find the best and the brightest to become teachers. The quality of an education system can exceed the quality of its teachers **if teaching is seen as a team sport**, not as an individual race.*

*And this is perhaps the most powerful lesson the US can learn from better-performing education systems: **teachers need greater collective professional autonomy and more support to work with one another**. In other words, more freedom from bureaucracy, but less from one another.”~ [Pasi Salberg](#)*

### Questions to Further the Conversation

- Where do trust, judgment and subjectivity intersect?
- How do you find a balance between the learning professional and the teacher?
- What would it take for your school to remove all external assessment?
- How do we create productive contexts for learning in which children may become good at something that matters? - *Gary Stager*

### Resources

- [The Next Generation of Assessments Can—and Must—Be Better](#) - Linda Darling-Hammond and Frank Adamson
- [Ten Obvious Truths You Shouldn’t Be Ignoring](#)
- [Levels of Autonomy and Responsibilities of Teachers in Europe](#)
- [The Myth of Markets in School Education](#)



## And so, the Beginning of the End...

*“A passion for learning ...isn’t something you have to inspire (kids) with; it’s something you have to keep from extinguishing” ~ [Deborah Meier](#)*

Bad things don’t vanish when you look away, and we have all looked away for too long.

So now it’s time to act.

We keep hearing that the education sector is allegedly ruled by “evidence-based practice,” yet we have to ask how is it that we have the most intrusive, divisive, and fraudulent policy initiatives imaginable which have little if any research to support their use.

It’s time to call it out.

At [Modern Learners](#) we *are* calling it out, but more importantly it is about offering some possibilities to accelerate the end of testing as we know it. We know what we need to do, and we now have the opportunity to put in place the strategies we have shared to make school a place of learning not testing, and to seek to provide assessment that genuinely and authentically supports our modern learners.

## Modern Learners Media



**Modern Learners** was founded in 2013 to explore the opportunities and challenges of learning in a ubiquitously connected world where learners are now fully in charge of their own learning. We offer two online solutions to help high level school leaders to find clarity and to put the focus back on learning. Join the movement today.

**For ongoing conversations around learning in the modern world, join us online at:**



**Change School** is an inquiry-driven, interactive experience for educational leaders who are serious about designing and creating relevant, sustainable change in their schools and districts. Change School will push your thinking and your practice and leave you with a unique plan to move your school forward.

**Change.School**



**Modern Learners Community** (MLC) is a collaborative, online learning network that helps educational leaders grow personally and professionally. MLC provides interactions with others committed to change, thought-provoking content, dynamic discussions, and live events.

**[modernlearners.com/mlcommunity](http://modernlearners.com/mlcommunity)**

## About the Authors

**Bruce Dixon**

[bruce@modernlearners.com](mailto:bruce@modernlearners.com)



For the past 40 years Bruce has been an outspoken advocate for what school could and should be, focusing on what's possible, rather than accepting what is.

From his first day of teaching thirty-five ten to sixteen-year-old students, Bruce has challenged the status quo. His move to Principal at an interstate progressive community school several years later was all part of his search for ways of making school a better place for kids.

As a voracious reader, Bruce was inspired by the great educational writers of that time, but in the late '70's it was his earlier career as a developer which enabled him to see the extraordinary learning possibilities computers could offer students. That experience led him to start Australia's first educational software development company in the mid-80's, to explore applications that enabled young learners to have agency over their learning.

Frustrated by the lack of computing access students had at that time, he then partnered with a colleague to form a company which became a world-wide pioneer for what is today referred to as 1 to 1. After selling in the late 90's, he embarked on a twenty-year journey championing the opportunities personal computer access provided for every student, working with policy makers, politicians, and school leaders from more than 40 countries.

To support the work, he co-founded the Anytime Anywhere Learning Foundation, which created resources and workshops to drive the initiative to scale in both developed and developing countries. In the midst of all this he also found time to lead a small research and development team which he established as ideasLAB, continuing his life focus around What's Now Possible?

Over that time, Bruce keynoted numerous international conferences including UNESCO and OECD events, co-authored a number of whitepapers, and wrote several books, most recently [The End of School as We Know It](#) and [#AnytimeAnywhereLearners: A Blueprint for Transforming Where, When, and How Young People Learn](#). In 2012 he teamed up with Will Richardson to start ModernLearners.com. Most recently, Bruce and Will launched [Change.School](#) and the [Modern Learners.Community](#).

**Twitter:** [@bruceadixon](#)

**LinkedIn:** [dixonbruce](#)

## Will Richardson

[will@modernlearners.com](mailto:will@modernlearners.com)



For the last dozen years, Will has developed an international reputation as a speaker, writer, and leading thinker about the intersection of social online learning networks, education, and systemic change. As one of a handful of original education bloggers ([willrichardson.com](http://willrichardson.com)), his work has appeared in numerous journals, newspapers, and magazines such as *Ed Leadership*, *District Administration*, *Education Week*, *The New York Times* and *English Journal*.

Will is an outspoken advocate for change in schools and classrooms in the context of the diverse new learning opportunities that the Web and other technologies now offer, and has spoken to and worked with educators in over 20 countries to understand the opportunities and challenges of learning in the modern world. He has given three TedX Talks in New York, Melbourne, and Vancouver and, in 2017, was named one of 100 global “Changemakers in Education” by the Finnish site [HundrED](http://HundrED), and one of the Top 5 “Edupreneurs to Follow” by [Forbes](http://Forbes).

Will has authored six books including [Why School](#) (2012, TED Conferences) and [From Master Teacher to Master Learner](#) (2015, Solution Tree Press). In total, his books have sold over 250,000 copies worldwide. A former public school educator of 22 years, Will is a co-founder with Bruce Dixon of [ModernLearners.com](http://ModernLearners.com), [Change.School](http://Change.School), and the [Modern Learners.Community](#).

Will lives in rural New Jersey with his wife Wendy and, depending on the day, his children Tess and Tucker.

**Twitter:** [@willrich45](https://twitter.com/willrich45)

**Blog:** [willrichardson.com](http://willrichardson.com)

**Linkedin:** [willrichardsonspeaks](http://willrichardsonspeaks)

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