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Teaching Social Responsibility Pages 14-19

Measuring Social Responsibility

We can—and should—measure a far broader set of outcomes than just reading and math.

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Teaching students to read, write, and compute are important goals of public education, but near obsession with basic skills testing is crowding out other goals. Socially responsible citizenship has long been an important purpose of school, but teachers and schools have cut back on developing citizenship skills because accountability sanctions now rely solely on academic test scores.

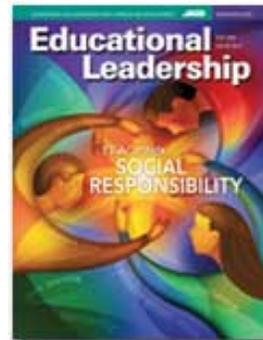
In a 2007 survey, the Center for Education Policy found that accountability for academic achievement works in the sense that it increases instruction in the subjects for which schools are accountable. For example, because of accountability requirements, nearly two-thirds of school districts had increased reading and math time. Increases were greatest in urban districts with disadvantaged students where schools were sanctioned under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) because of low test scores. In these districts, reading and math instruction increased by more than four hours each week.

The center found, however, that to make time for these increases the districts cut instruction in social studies, science, art and music, physical education, and recess. As a result, schools serving disadvantaged students have responded to NCLB by widening the achievement gap in social responsibility and other curricular areas for which the schools are no longer held accountable (McMurrer, 2007, 2008).

A Dangerous Gap

If you doubt the seriousness of this, consider the research of James J. Heckman (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002), a Nobel prize-winning economist at the University of Chicago. From a national longitudinal survey of children and youth, Heckman and his colleagues calculated "antisocial" scores from the frequency of children's dishonest, cruel, noncooperative, violent, or disobedient behavior. The measurements were taken at age 4 and again at age 12. At both ages, children from families at the bottom of the income distribution had, on average, the worst antisocial scores. Those from middle-income families scored better on average; those from the highest-income families scored the best (see Rothstein, 2004).

Accountability policies that concentrate on raising math and reading scores and that create incentives for teachers to ignore issues of social responsibility cannot advance the equity goals



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of U.S. education. The teachers we have interviewed have confirmed this concern.

For example, Shari Adams, an art teacher in a low-income elementary school in Calvert County, Maryland, told us that her lowest-scoring students no longer study art; they are pulled out instead for math and reading remediation. Adams noted that by missing art class, the students missed out on more than just art:

They miss out on learning about tolerance, taking turns, being responsible to clean up and help as a team. They learn as a community, they learn the give and take, the life skills, the self-expression part.

John Perry teaches 4th grade in a low-income school in Tampa, Florida. He used to take students on field trips to the state capital, to make the abstraction of government real for them. They visited the state Supreme Court, watched the House of Representatives in session, and met legislators. Perry said this was "a chance for [students] to make the connection that they might be participating citizens." But as narrow testing in basic skills has increased in importance, these experiences were cut from his school curriculum.

Casey Bilger, a 3rd grade teacher in Phoenix, Arizona, whose students are overwhelmingly low income and Hispanic, told us that because of low math and reading scores, he was required to cut back on social studies and science. According to Bilger, students

aren't learning about government, communities, people, or places. ... In science, they miss out on group work and hands-on learningThey are not learning skills like decision making, independence, or creativity. They don't really get to do art, projects, group work over time, where they have to make decisions together about how to do it. What [school administrators] want you to do instead is cram one standard after another down their throats. [Students] don't understand the NCLB legislation obviously, so to them it's just boring. Boring curriculum becomes behavior problems.

And Missy Beach told us that for her Beaumont, Texas, 1st graders (almost all of whom were low-income minority students) she previously used a classroom management program called Workshop Way. She explained,

It has ... jobs or centers around the room, with certain tasks for which the children get a partner. But when Texas began its standardized test program, we started to have testing every six weeks, and everything got so rigid that we couldn't do any of the neat stuff anymore. ... We don't have time anymore for anything that can't be tested or be put on a Scantron.

In an era of accountability, if it can't be tested, it won't be done. But accountability and teaching social responsibility need not be at odds. Although such assessment would be more expensive than using computerized scan sheets, we *can* determine whether schools are successfully teaching social responsibility.

When NAEP Measured Character

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests samples of students in various academic subjects. NAEP tells us, for example, how the math skills of students in one state compare with the skills of students in another.

But NAEP was much broader when it was first designed 45 years ago. Early NAEP scores reported on how students were developing social responsibility and other citizenship skills and on their character development, emotional and physical health, and basic academic proficiency.

Ralph Tyler led the planning team for NAEP. Tyler had described the importance of assessing a broad range of skills in his 1949 book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. His NAEP design team included survey questions and student observations to assess social responsibility and a variety of other behaviors.

Teamwork and Cooperation

To see whether students were learning to cooperate effectively in small groups, NAEP sent trained observers to present a game to 9-year-olds in sampled schools. In teams of four, the 9-year-olds were offered a prize (such as crayons or yo-yos) to guess what object was hidden in a box. Students could ask yes-or-no questions; two teams competed to see who could identify the toy first. Cooperation was necessary—all team members had to agree on which question to ask, and the role of posing the questions rotated.

Trained NAEP observers rated the students on whether they suggested a new question, gave reasons for their viewpoints, sought additional information that supported the team's work, helped organize the procedure, or otherwise demonstrated cooperative problem-solving skills. Students were also rated on whether they impeded teamwork—for example, by making discouraging or irrelevant comments. NAEP then reported on the percentage of 9-year-olds who were capable of cooperative problem solving (Campbell, Nichols, Ferris, Sawyer, & Bond, 1970).

NAEP assessors also gave a cooperative exercise to 13- and 17-year-olds. Assessors presented groups of eight students with a list of issues about which teenagers typically had strong opinions. Students were asked to reach consensus on the five most important issues and then write a recommendation that the group supported on how to resolve at least two of them.

The list included, for 13-year-olds, such issues as whether they should have a set bedtime, whether they should be allowed to watch movies with adult content, and whether parents should have the right to approve their choices of friends. For 17-year-olds, the list included compulsory school attendance and military service requirements as well as the age eligibility minimums for voting, drinking, and smoking.

As they did with 9-year-olds, NAEP observers rated whether students took clear positions, gave reasons for their points of view, sought additional relevant information, helped organize internal procedures, or defended a group member's right to hold a contrary viewpoint. They also noted whether students demeaned the group's work or did something totally unrelated to the task.

The results of these assessments weren't satisfactory. NAEP's national report showed, for

example, that only 4 percent of 13-year-olds defended the right of another group member to voice a different opinion, and only 6 percent were willing to defend their own viewpoints in the face of opposition.

Civil Liberties and Citizenship

In 1969, the United States was in the throes of a civil rights revolution, so NAEP assessed whether schools were preparing young people for responsible citizenship in this context. NAEP interviewers asked 13- and 17-year-olds what they believed they should do if they saw a public park attendant barring children from entering because of their race. NAEP reported that 82 percent of 13-year-olds and 90 percent of 17-year-olds knew they should do something, such as tell their parents; report it to a public authority or to a civil rights or civil liberties organization; write letters to the newspaper; or take social action, such as picketing or leafleting.

Early NAEP assessed whether 17-year-olds were able to consider alternative viewpoints by asking them to state arguments both for and against one of the most heated public issues of the time—whether students enrolled in college should be drafted. One question asked 9- and 13-year-olds if something might be false, even if it was reported as being true in the newspaper.

NAEP also attempted to determine whether students understood that individuals should be judged on their own merits and not be held responsible for others' misdeeds. Interviewers asked 9- and 13-year-olds whether, if the father of a friend was jailed for theft, they would still invite the friend to their houses to play.

To assess students' commitment to civil liberties, 13- and 17-year-olds were asked if they thought that someone should be permitted to say on television that "Russia is better than the United States," that "Some races of people are better than others," or that "It is not necessary to believe in God." (An interviewer posed these questions to the 13-year-olds, whereas the 17-year-olds answered the questions on a paper-and-pencil test.) NAEP reported that only 3 percent of 13-year-olds and 17 percent of 17-year-olds thought all three statements should be permitted.

Ethical Questions

NAEP assessed social responsibility in more private situations as well. In 1977, 17-year-olds were asked, in a multiple-choice exercise, what they should do if they noticed that their friend's 6-month-old baby had bruises. The correct answer was "Suggest that your friend call her baby's doctor about the bruises." Incorrect choices included "Ignore the bruises because they are none of your business" and "Accuse your friend of beating her child." Follow-up prompts explained that on a subsequent visit, when the baby still appeared to be bruised, the friend said the baby had fallen out of her crib. The prompt asked what you should do next, with the correct answer being, "Call the local child health agency and report your suspicions" (NAEP, 1979).

Certainly, if we used results on questions such as these—and not only math and reading scores

—to evaluate our school systems, incentives would shift. National reporting of low scores on the civil liberties questions, for example, might spur the public to demand that schools do a better job on citizenship. Such pressure might reduce the incentive to drop cooperative learning in favor of test preparation in math and reading.

A Matter of Vision

In the 1970s, Congress cut NAEP's budget in half (Vinovskis, 1998). NAEP ceased observing behavioral outcomes and, with the exception of a 1997 arts and music assessment, became exclusively a pencil-and-paper test. Yet the design of early NAEP challenges the assumption that assessing social responsibility is impossible; it demonstrates that what really stops us from pursuing a balanced accountability system is cost and vision, not capability. Sending trained observers to schools around the United States would cost more than assessments consisting only of machine-scored booklets, but the cost to student learning is far greater when we fail to invest in such a balanced accountability system.

But an accountability system for the broad goals of education could not rely solely on early NAEP-type items, no matter how sophisticated they might be. Results of observational judgments could be reliable at a state level, but most schools are too small to support such sampling. Another accountability component would need to be state-conducted school inspections, designed to determine whether the school was teaching social responsibility and the effect of this program on students.

Fortunately, here we have other precedents. In Great Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and elsewhere, school accountability systems combine testing with school visitation in which inspectors judge a broad range of outcomes.

In England, for example, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) employs a corps of professional inspectors, including an elite group called Her Majesty's Inspectors, composed mostly of retired teachers and principals. The system, which has been in place since 1839, has inspectors visit each school approximately once every three years, with schools in greater need of improvement having more frequent inspections. The inspectors examine test scores; observe student interactions (such as their behavior in the hallways during class changes); and report on, among other student and school characteristics,

- The extent of learners' overall personal development and well-being.
- The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.
- The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles.
- The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community.

To pass inspection, schools must have satisfactory academic test scores, but this is not enough—they must also earn satisfactory ratings on judgments such as these.

Holding schools accountable for social responsibility as well as for academic test scores is not a foreign idea. That youth should learn to accept diversity as a goal of education, for example, did not originate with contemporary affirmative action proponents. George Washington wanted

to create a national public university to bring youths of different backgrounds together to develop a common identity. And when Thomas Jefferson proposed the first universal system of public education, he set forth a few key objectives of schooling. Basic academic skills were included, as was training for citizenship, specifically the ability to make intelligent choices when electing political leaders. Holding schools accountable only for math and reading scores is a modern aberration.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon proposed the creation of a National Institute of Education (now called the Institute of Education Sciences) to help develop an accountability system. He said this system should

pay as much heed to what are called the "immeasurables" of schooling (largely because no one has yet learned to measure them) such as responsibility, wit, and humanity as it does to verbal and mathematical achievement.

Although his call went unheeded, it's not too late to return to this vision. In the wake of widespread recognition of the distortions wrought by NCLB's narrow test-based accountability, this is a good time to insist on accountability of schools for a broad set of outcomes. We know a lot more than we think we do about how to teach and measure social responsibility. We need only apply what we know.

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Authors' note: This article draws on information from our book, coauthored with Tamara Wilder, titled *Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right* (Teachers College Press, 2008).

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