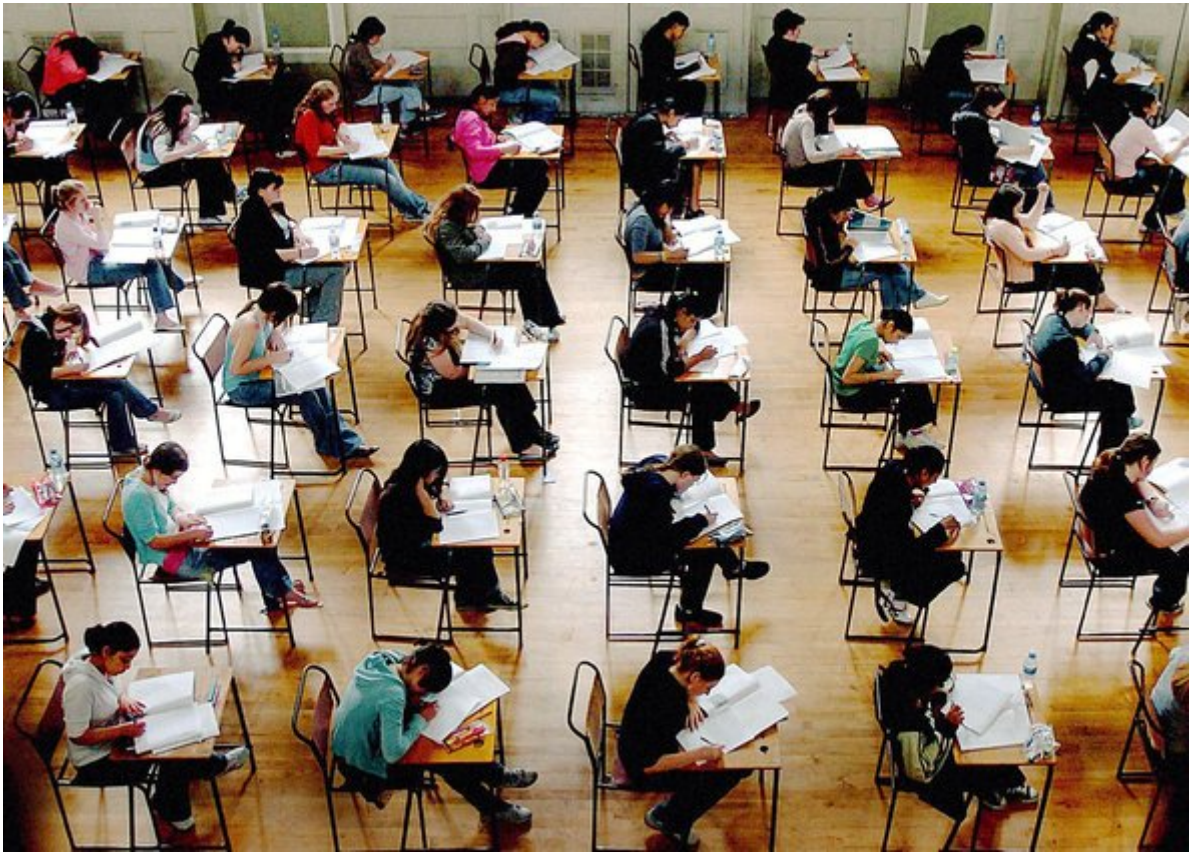


In response to falling test results, teachers' federation proposes ending testing

The teachers are failing; our society is becoming steadily less educated. I suggest a solution: decertify the teachers' unions

by Conrad Black



A correspondent has sent me an extract from the magazine of a branch of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), responding to mathematics test scores from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). What was represented as a potential problem was that the provincial average for Grade 6 math has dropped by seven per cent since 2012/2013. The magazine explained to its readers: "An eruption of panic ensued, and fingers pointed in every direction in an

attempt to assign blame for this apparently devastating deficiency.”

The publication soothingly continued lest any of the unionized teachers in this bargaining unit imagine that such a deterioration might really mean that they weren't doing their jobs well, and that students were learning less about mathematics than had students in the same schools and socioeconomic and cultural background five years before. “This all started about a decade ago with changes to the math curriculum in Ontario, which shifted focus more toward problem-solving and discovery approaches, and less on rote-learning and memorization.”

Here in one sentence is much of the problem inherent in the fact that the collective Intelligence Quotient of the population is declining. The more money is spent on education, the less learned and knowledgeable students become. At first it seems like a tale from Alice in Wonderland: a greater consecration of resources produces a steadily inferior result. What could possibly be more unnatural than that? Do stones fall upwards?

At first it all seems like a tale from Alice in Wonderland

“Problem-solving and discovery approaches” is a neon-lit bureaucratic burst of creative nomenclature for teachers not teaching and students not studying. Students are bored, so they must solve the problem by “discovering” that boredom is alleviated by sleeping, excusing themselves from the class, talking with the person at the next desk, playing on their smartphones, scuffling, chatting loudly, daydreaming, or telling the teacher to get lost. It need hardly be said that actually learning something and committing it to memory, such as two plus two equals four, is a strain, an imposition, a humiliating waste of the student's creative energies, and an oppressive and primitive act. Who knows what pedagogical

barbarism might occur next?

The obfuscation of the teachers' union publication continued: "Soon, a perceived crisis in Ontario education began to emerge when our students began scoring lower on mathematics standardized tests ... First politicians placed the blame for these low test scores on educators." What an outrageous act of scapegoating that was – what would deteriorating academic performance have to do with the quality and competence of teaching? "Money was poured into boosting the math proficiency of teachers ... but the curriculum remained largely unchanged ... Scores continued to decline. It looked like it wasn't the educators after all." To whom came this apparition that absolved the teachers? The answer, of course, is the teacher's union: "Now it was the curriculum's turn to take the blame. Throughout this period of panic over low math scores on standardized tests, some questions have simply not been asked."

"Could the problem be the standardized testing model? Do these tests provide a fair assessment of true student achievement?" Never mind that the tests had not become more difficult, they must be to blame for deteriorating results. If we just do away with tests, we won't get depressing results from them and there will be no more of this unjust criticism of teachers, just because their students learn less, other than by immeasurable "problem-solving and discovery methods."

If we just do away with tests, we will not get depressing results! Nor criticism of teachers!

The reader then learns that "A modern educator does not base a student's final course mark on just one test. Ongoing assessment and evaluation, based on professional judgment and knowledge of students' needs, are integral aspects of the work that teachers and education workers undertake every day." What imbeciles we parents and grandparents have been! We don't need

tests that merely muddy the waters and produce irritating competitiveness, and other stressful complexities for young sensibilities. We must simply have continuing assessments, many of which can be lifted from the over-burdened shoulders of teachers and entrusted to “education workers.” (The identity of these people to whom the tasks of teaching are to be downloaded evades my imagination, but I am prepared to fear the worst.)

It is time to face up to the full gravity of the shortcomings society has inflicted on our martyr-teachers and the “education workers” whom they have deputized to assist them in the crushing task of doing what for several thousand years in all cultures had been mistakenly thought to be the jobs of teachers. “The extraordinary significance that is assigned to standardized test results runs counter to how we educate and evaluate students in the 21st century. Nevertheless, we have real estate companies and conservative think tanks ranking schools and exacerbating socio-economic disparities in communities based solely on EQAO results. Politicians make sweeping pronouncements and call for actions to improve math scores. But none of them talk about actual student achievement. It’s all about the test scores.” Of course, most students do survive to the normal age of matriculation, which is far more important than learning anything or learning how to learn anything. The students are tenacious of life and pursue “discovery methods” that enable them to navigate the treacherous waters of physical survival from the age of 13 to 18, in the fraught ambiance of education workers gently supervised by unionized teachers in Ontario during the McGuinty-Wynne negative economic miracle.

Education helps the young get the best launch they can into the Darwinian existence that awaits them

The logical conclusion emerges like the unbound Prometheus, rampant on commanding heights: “We need to constantly ask” (as

we no longer try to avoid split infinitives) “what value standardized testing serves to students, schools, educators, and communities. Do these tests accomplish anything meaningful beyond dividing communities, disparaging educators, and wasting energy on solutions to problems that may not even exist? We need to ask bluntly if it’s finally time to get rid of” these infernal tests. To pose the question is to answer it – the way to deal with deteriorating test results for students is to stop testing them, and thus to avoid the wrenching divisions that tear apart every community in the land and virtually generate mob violence when students are submitted to tests to determine what they have learned.

These are real and exact quotes from an OSSTF magazine. The teachers are failing; our society is becoming steadily less educated, which is to say more stupid and less intellectually competent. I suggest an alternate solution: that the unions be decertified, that the right to strike in the public sector be abolished, that the teachers be tested and that the local school boards be effectively led by interested parents, and that a redoubled effort be made to teach young people better and incentivize them to learn more. Teachers’ unions have almost destroyed state systems of education throughout the Western world. Quality teaching should be rewarded and our high-school youth should be liberated from the shackles of collectivized mediocrity.

I was a tutor in a U.S. federal prison for more than two years. My students were far from the cream of the American educational crop, but I pointed out that this was the way to outsmart the corrupt system that incarcerated us and for them to return to the world with a chance of earning a livable income without recourse to the activities that had allegedly led to their confinement in the first place. Every one of my lads matriculated. The purpose of education is for the young to get the best launch they can into the Darwinian existence that awaits them as adults, if not before.

The course we are on now is an irresistible march, to use the parlance of the chief justice of Canada and the native leaders, to self-inflicted cultural genocide, compounded by bankruptcy, chaos and universal philistinism.

First published in the