Examinations and Assessments”: Uses and Misuses in 21st Century” of 18 Minutes highlight transcript

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| Dr. Stephen Krashen on Test score, poverty, reading & test prep |
| This is what our research says everywhere. People who read more for pleasure do well in these tests. They can’t help it. They acquire the vocabulary, they acquire the grammatical structure etc. |
| These are all countries, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Italy, Singapore, they did very well on PIRLS, they did spectacularly well, that HK is no. 1 in the world. And these are all countries where poverty seems to be low.  We compare these four countries, to other high scoring low poverty countries, and we found despite the high test scores, people didn’t like to read. The children didn’t like to read, even worse, their parents didn’t like to read.  Our conjecture is this, you get a high PIRL score, the normal way is by reading a lot. Pleasure reading.  But these countries they are taking alternative ways. They are not doing that by self selected reading, they are doing it through required reading and through test preparation. |
| Test preparation is like putting a match, a fire under the thermometer and claiming that you’ve raised the temperature for the room. By givng students strategies for doing well in these tests. By telling them to look out for tricky questions, telling them make sure you don’t turn two pages at once. |
| Study after study over the last three, four decades shows that high poverty means low test scores again and again. |
| No we don’t need more testing, we need better food programmes, we need basic medical care, and we need better libraries. You can have the best teaching in the world and it’s not going to help if the child is hungry, the child is ill… and has nothing to read. |
| Just add one book once a year, closes the gap between the rich and poor anywhere from 25% to 50%. If we do it even a little it’s going to help. |
| Situation in the USA |
| The United States Department of Education has an obsession with competition. We’ve got to win, we’ve got to be number one in everything we do. |
| The Race to the Top increase testing, my estimate, about 20 times what we had before. |
| The effect of taking a standardized test to predict college achievement, the SAT. The SAT added nothing to the prediction. Teachers’ evaluation of students is the best measure we have. |
| A heroic movement called Opt-Out. Opt out was begun by parents, public school teachers and a few university professors on zero budget.  It spread by word of mouth. In New York State last year, 20% of the public school students eligible to take the test, did not take the test. |
| Situation in HK: TSA & PISA |
| Both PISA and TSA are actually system level assessment as I said before, but then during the process we will use this score to identify individual school. So for TSA, the government has individual school ID, so they can really abuse it, not just misuse it, to make school accountable for the percentage correct, report every year to individual schools, but that is not fair, particularly for TSA, because in the primary level, all students are entering their schools by residential criteria, also will have very different family backgrounds.  Actually we have a very comprehensive assessment system if we stop the TSA in this little area, that won’t ruin the whole assessment system. We still have many different kinds of survey to understand the school. |
| In 2014, a group of international scholar including Stephen Ball, Henry Giroux, wrote an open letter to Andrew Schleicher, the leader of PISA since 2000. They said, PISA tests are damaging education worldwide.  While standardized testing has been used in many nations for decades, PISA has been contributing to an escalation in such testing and a dramatically increased reliance on quantitative measures.  This emphasizing a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, take the attention away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives like physical, moral, civic and artistic development, our student self-concept, anxiety, all the non-quantifiable items are less emphasized anymore because every three years, when they report these international results, the media always focus on the ranking.  So this kind of assessment regime is controversial if it’s a continual cycle of global testing, it will harm our children and impoverishes our classroom, and even de-skill the teachers, and then also endanger well-being of students and teachers. |
| I think HK should join the US movement, No Unnecessary Testing, the NUT movement from Stephen, and then really create the space to really nurture the competency, the soft skills, the passion and compassion of our students. And then really review the roles of all kinds of exams and tests on student learning, particularly when the test is hurting children at a very young age, what should we do as responsible adults? These adults are not just about the parents. They include the teachers, school administrators, principals, policy makers and scholars. |
| I think we have a wrong focus because if we want to change the system, we have to work on high stake ones. So in HK in particular, we have to work on the high stake secondary school placement system, which TSA does not serve this purpose. TSA is low stake or no stake system by design. |
| KT just say TSA is a low stake testing according to design. But just according to design. We all know that it has become a very highstake assessment in reality. So that is the problem if we do not face this reality, we miss the point. |
| we don’t want to compare school with factories. But if you have two factories, one has a good output with standard working hours, another one has better output but with a lot of overtime work, which one is the better factory? Which one is more productive. That’s something that we have to put into context. |
| How do they test and assess in Finland? |
| There are no national authorities for testing learning outcomes, nor are there any ranking list. Moreover, there is no school inspector. Evaluation of learning outcomes is based on national surveys. The aims are to produce information for both schools and students to develop. |
| The whole purpose to evalute is to support learning of a student. And I think who does best is the teachers who are very close by, and the other adults and themselves. We have a strong emphasis on self evaluation, and also evaluation by their peers and by their community, because we also engage the families and the parents in participating in the growing of the child. |
| We are not perfect and we have problems being a remote country with a lot of darkness and harsh weather. Life is very hard in Finland too, but maybe in different respect. So may I said we try to keep our school a pleasant place and not add to that pressure in schools. |
| Q&A and answers from HKEAA Director Dr. CS Tong |
| We are seeing kids jumping from buildings killing themselves…Mr. Tang said that the TSA is actually research. I’d like to know, I have my daughter sitting next to me…did you get my consent to use my child as a research subject? |
| I talked about this with scholars, and a professor in Cambridge sent me this article from world psychiatry 2006 global suicide rate among young people aged 15 to 19, in Finland, it’s 9.5 suicide out of 100,000, rank no. 22 in the world, much much higher than Japan, Hong Kong.  So I think when you talk about suicide, please don’t jump to conclusion.  We are looking at the model because Finland has been considered a success in education, and what is that evidence of success? So far I’ve heard it’s doing very well in PISA. But again, if you think about it, an education policy takes time to have an impact. So the fact that Finland has done so well, in fact in ranked no. 1 in the world in the first PISA in 2000 is because of the policies made in the 1980s. But everyone is now rushing to Finland asking the government of Finland what are you doing now, which will not only have an effect 15 years later. So if we look at the Finland model, say, because they are doing so well in PISA, we should learn from it, but by the same token, we have to learn from HK, because we just saw from all those government videos, HK ranks above Finland.  Sometimes we have to understand we don’t cherry pick our statistics, we have to look at the big picture and try to identify things that work for students. Assessment testing can only play a certain role. It is not the panacea for everything. If assessment has its role, then we as educators need to identify that role and try to make as effective use of it as we can but avoid unintended outcomes. That part I fully agree and we have to be very careful. 20016  20034 excuse me, you distorted the statistics, ask you Finnish friend, is the overall suicide rates higher for adults? What’s the suicide rate for 12s and 13s year old, and please answer my question about the research subject.  Like what Prof. Ho has been doing with PISA, although PISA is not tie to schools, but she has been working very hard to try to extract information and learn from it and feedback to schools, feedback to educators, in the same way, we hope to do of course, is to do the same with TSA data. Of course we the HKEAA, as a organisation to implement the TSA, we have not been asked to do any research of the TSA data, that’s so much we can do. but I do agree that if we can make better use of data, that of course, we’ll be able to help teaching even more. But sometimes we have to make a balance. How do we make better use of data. One use is, to have data available to parents. To make data available to students, which is what people do elsewhere. But we have shied away from that, for the fear of another misuse of data. Because if you put data in the hands of parents, who knows what evil that could lead to? |
| Inspiring views from the floor |
| I think it’s just about the culture in Finland…it doesn’t really make any fuss about test.  I think the answer is not inside the classroom but outside the classroom. The system is cultural thing. It’s just education. Education is nothing so spectacular, it’s just like you go to school, you make your scores and you come back home, and then you have some cookies. And that’s it. As Stephen was saying here. You have welfare society, there is no poverty, you have equality. These are basic things, you don’t think about these basic things too much. It’s very interesting that Finland is going down in PISA tests. I also think that’s very natural because our system is so badly build up to this kind of competencies. |
| In 2016, the curriculum that is going to have in Finland, is that they are going to increase the number of hours teachers spend teaching art and craft. So things that children do are now going to be increased in the arts and craft, so although in education covering computer, digitalization etc., actually doing arts and craft. It’s still really really important for developing individuals. 1 |
| Now that I’ve worked in the real world and I realized that my creativity comes from being able to connect different things, and being able to see how synergies are related to each other, but then, when I was a kid I thought that I felt like I failed at a lot of things, because that wasn’t a competency that was tested.    I feel like a lot of these test and assessments really demotivate a lot of the children because it puts you in the silo of what you are expected to be good at.  Is it fair to use the adults’ assessment on what they think the children should be good at? |
| If you are talking about you need 15 years to get to see the results, no, it takes two years. That’s all it takes. Two years for you to actually see when you switch out of this exam based system to actually see the result. There’s no need for a quantitative test to find out whether it works or not. We are talking about quality, we are talking about feelings. All you have to do is to look at the children. |
| Education is happening all the time, everywhere. How can we deal with that within the education system. We’re trying to incorporate that in our school, our programme, and also we’re talking about broad-based competence. It’s not about separate subjects. We’d like to make more real-life learners. And I think pretty much everybody is in favour of these changes. |
| The goals of our lives as some people have said is discover your talent. Schools should help you do that. What is valuable today would not be valuable 5 years from now, 10 years from now. Schools are place to discover who you are and what you are good at. And this testing is categorizing people much too soon, which is why I’m so impressed with the Finnish idea of giving kids time to find out what their interests are. |
| the good thing about diversity is we respect different views. And we want these views to all come out in one platform and we respect each other’s views and try to come to a solution maybe one day, but at least we know at other standpoint and I think it’s very important. So keep the respect, and keep the discussion going on and we hope we have some more discussion like this in the future.  End of Highlight |