

***Testing, Motivation and Learning*** (September 2003)

By Judy Arter

The Assessment Reform Group (remember the Black & Wiliam research?) has published a new synthesis of research. This time the subject is the nature of the impact on students of assessment OF learning (both standardized and classroom grading). The authors explore the impact on student motivation and how the impact varies by student characteristics and type of testing. They also examine impact on teachers and teaching and the actions that are likely to imcrease positive impacts.

The researchers found 19 studies that met their requirements for quality and relevance. The bottom line of their conclusions is that “what emerges is strong evidence of the negative impact of testing on pupils’ motivation, though this varied in degree with the pupils’ characteristics and with the conditions of their learning.... At the same time the findings indicate ways to increase the positive impact and to decrease the negative impact on pupils’ motivation for learning” (p. 2).

Here is a sampling of findings:

- ✓ “When tests pervade the ethos of the classroom, test performance is more highly valued than what is being learned.” (p. 4)
- ✓ “When tests become the main criteria by which pupils are judged, and by which they judge themselves, those whose strengths lie outside the subjects tested have a low opinion of their capabilities.” (p. 4)
- ✓ “Low achievers become overwhelmed by assessments and de-motivated by constant evidence of the low achievement. The effect is to increase the gap between low and high achieving pupils.” (p. 4)
- ✓ “How assessment of their learning is reported back to the pupil...affects motivation to learn.... Feedback from the teacher that focuses on how to improve or build on what has been done...is associated with greater interest and effort...” (pp. 5-6)
- ✓ “Pupils who have have some control over their work by being given choices and by being encouraged to evaluate their own work are more likely to value the learning itself rather than to focus only on whether or not it is correct.” (p. 6)
- ✓ “The research shows that the negative impact of tests can be reduced by ceasing to focus teaching on test content. It can also be reduced by ending the practice of ‘training’ pupils in how to pass the tests and by preventing the use of class time for repeated practice tests.” (p. 7)

The authors include a useful set of “do more of this” and “do less of this.”

The full report, databases, and four user reviews can be found at <<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk>>  
The authors are W. Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2002. I based my review on a shorter

summary of the work provided in Testing, Motivation and Learning, Assessment Reform Group, 2002. It's available from the Publications Officer, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2BX for 1.95 pounds (about \$3.13 as of 9/16003