

THE LIST

Personal Qualities NOT Measured by Tests

By Gerald W Bracey

In speeches around the country, I use dozens of transparencies displaying various statistics about the performance of American public schools (much higher than critics would have you believe). Invariably, though, after the talk, people line up to ask for a copy of one in particular. It is the same one that often causes visible changes in audience facial expressions when first shown. The transparency is a list of personal qualities not measure by standardized tests. The looks on the faces often express, “Oh, yeah, we used to talk about those.”

The list was inspired by a paragraph written by Robert Glaser of the University of Pittsburgh for the National Academy of Education in 1987. It occurred in NAE’s critique of a plan to restructure the National Assessment of Educational Progress and simply stated that the human qualities we value most are very difficult to assess, naming a few such qualities. One day, after rereading this passage, I created a list of these qualities that are either not assessed by tests in schools or which cannot be assessed by tests.

The qualities in the list cannot be directly taught. They can, however, be modeled, but only if teachers have sufficient time to model them or to discuss those people whose lives stand out as the qualities’ exemplars. In today’s schools, where educators are, sadly, committing atrocities against children in the name of the high-stakes testing occasioned by No Child Left Behind, there is little time for such modeling and discussion.

But these are the qualities that matter in life.

Here is the passage from the NAE and the list of qualities. The list should by no means be considered exhaustive.

Many of those personal qualities that we hold dear—resilience and courage in the face of stress, a sense of craft in our work, a commitment to justice and caring in our social relationships, a dedication to advancing the public good in communal life—are exceedingly difficult to assess. And so, unfortunately, we are apt to measure what we can, and eventually come to value what is measured over what is left unmeasured. The shift is subtle and occurs gradually.

Robert Glaser and the National Academy of Education.

In Lamar Alexander and H. Thomas James,

The Nation’s Report Card: Improving the Assessment of Student Achievement, 1987.

PERSONAL QUALITIES NOT MEASURED BY TESTS

CREATIVITY

CRITICAL THINKING

RESILIENCE

MOTIVATION

PERSISTENCE

CURIOSITY

QUESTION ASKING

HUMOR

ENDURANCE

RELIABILITY

ENTHUSIASM

CIVIC-MINDEDNESS

SELF AWARENESS

SELF DISCIPLINE

EMPATHY

LEADERSHIP

COMPASSION

COURAGE

COWARDICE

SENSE OF BEAUTY

SENSE OF WONDER

SENSE OF HUMOR

RESOURCEFULNESS

SPONTANEITY

HUMILITY

ARROGANCE

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