



PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Richard Rothstein Lecture Notes

Forum: Sachs Lecture Series

- Date: 3/2/04
- Location: Teachers College
- P21 participant: Susan Saltrick

Speaker: Richard Rothstein

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OBJECTIVES

- Rothstein is the Sachs Lecturer at TC this year, and is giving a series of 3 lectures on *The Achievement Gap: A Half-Century After Brown*. The third of these lectures was on the gap in non-cognitive skills, what we call 21st century skills.

KEY MESSAGES

- Rothstein's core message is that the current policy of expecting schools to close the achievement gap can not succeed until and unless we, as a nation, address the underlying socio-economic disparities
- If we care about the black/white achievement gap in test scores, how can we find out if one exists in non-cognitive skills? Difficult to do so now because: 1) measurement problems and 2) too much focus at present on cognitive tests
- Schools may be preparing students LESS WELL for the future than in the past, because of overemphasis on cognitive skills.
- Recent Gallup poll: 80% of Americans think schools should teach good citizenship, while only 50% think they should focus on producing good test scores
- While most people see schools as teaching important skills & attributes like self-knowledge, increasing one's ability to enjoy art & culture, enhancing one's sense of civic responsibility, and enhancing one's capacity to understand and act upon life choices, but increasingly there is a conflict between what we say we want schools to do and what we actually measure
- Jencks study shows that leadership ability is correlated to years in school (independent of degrees granted). Even if test scores between two individuals are the same, the one who's stayed in school longer is more likely to have higher income
- Some indication that anti-social attitudes tend to correlate with lower socio-economic status, yet test scores on cognitive tests do not always correlate with better social skills.
- Affirmative action studies (for example, Bowen/Bok's *Crossing the River* research) shows that minority student admitted with lower test scores may

actually contribute more to society after graduation than higher scoring “majority” students, as evidenced in volunteer work, donations, choice of profession (medical and teaching professions), etc.

- In Calif, at prestigious UC schools, minority students admitted due to being in top 4% of their high school’s graduating class, but with lower than usual test scores, maintain a higher GPA than students with higher SATs, are more active on the campus, more serious in their studies, are less likely to indulge in binge drinking.
- The Bowen and UC research indicates that the affirmative action debate has been poorly framed. Rather than focusing on performance on test scores, we should be looking at the contribution these students are making to society upon graduation. Overall, affirmative action admittees show greater leadership post-college than their peers with higher test scores
- In terms of correlating cognitive test scores to adult income, the relationship is weak. Test scores can only explain about 20% of income – and even there, it takes a full standard deviation (about 35 point different on a 100 point scale) to gain a 4% increase in salary.
- Research supports the view that by staying in school, students may gain important non-cognitive skills (persistence, patience, self-esteem) that can not be made up by satisfactory performance on GED. Hence, attainment of a HS degree means more than achievement on a GED test. Dropouts lose the opportunity to attain valuable skills not measured through cognitive achievement tests.
- The Army only recently began accepting GED holders, and even then they must pass with a higher test score than the usual pass rate, and must perform satisfactorily on a “motivation” test admin’d by US Army.
- High self-esteem measures in high school yield higher income as adult. Class rank also is a better predictor of adult income than test scores.
- Toyota in Kentucky tests its future employees for 26 hours, only 3 hours of those tests concern cognitive skills. The other 23 hours concern teamwork, communication, problem-solving skills. [We should learn more about this!]
- Rothstein called for creation of alternative assessments – need “performances of understanding” that can demonstrate other skills in addition to academic ones.
- Toronto has just begun issuing “employability certificates” which demonstrate competence in non-cog skills. However, Rothstein notes in dismay that these are awarded as an alternative to the usual academic h.s. degree, not in addition to it.
- Civic Participation among youth has been in steady decline for some years now. Slightly more white youth voted in last pres election than black youth, but test scores show much wider gap. Hence, high test scores don’t correlate with higher rates of civic participation.
- Rothstein calls for formal experiments in education to stimulate civic participation – mandatory service programs now in place, for example, seem to have very little lasting effect on later volunteerism.
- Rothstein calls for more interventions in early childhood to help close the gap. Head Start provides an interesting case: Head Start does provide some academic gains for young children, but these gains tend to erode by 4th grade. However, the non-cognitive gains last for years more. In a well-designed Michigan study, low SES kids participated in an early childhood enrichment program like Head Start.

Their cognitive gains faded by 4th grade, but picked back up again in middle school. These kids were tracked through age 27. In adulthood, they showed significantly fewer social problems than the control group – fewer had out-of-wedlock kids, fewer were on welfare, lower arrest rates, higher incomes.

- Rothstein notes that the SES (socio-econ gap) is established by age 3. Low SES kids enter schools already behind their higher income peers. Until we address issues of social and economic inequity, we cannot expect the schools alone to redress the balance.

FOLLOW UP

- I spoke with Rothstein about P21 after the lecture. He's very interested in learning more. We've set up a meeting post-Tucson to meet.